

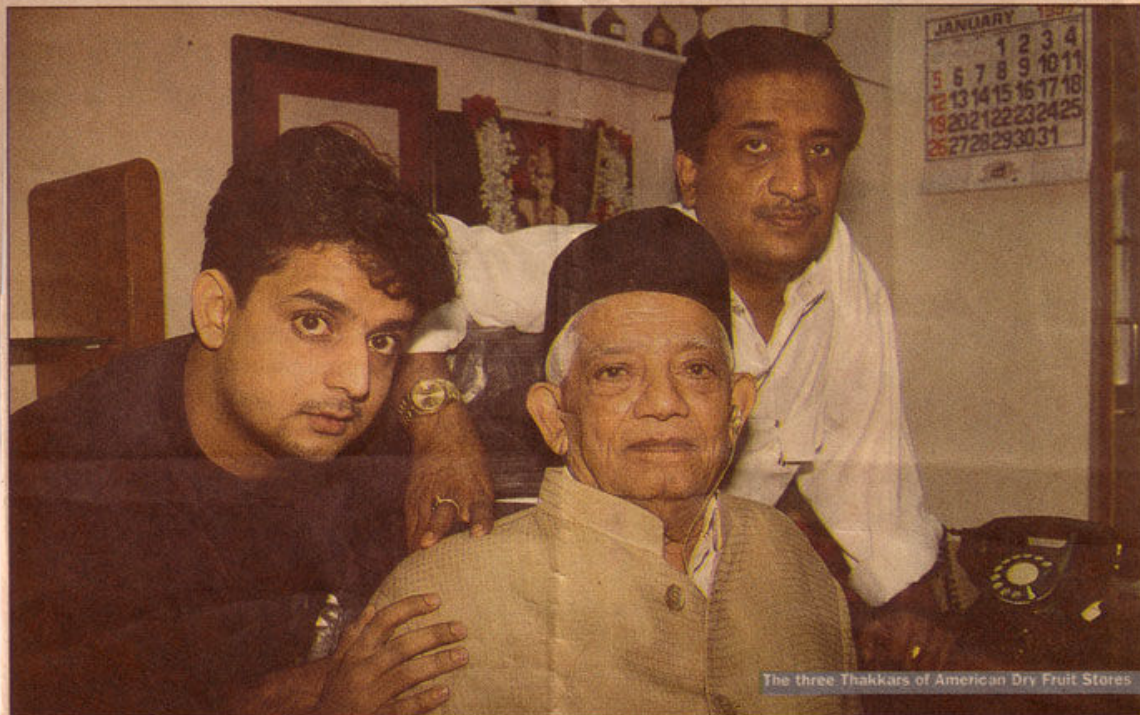
**F**OR an octogenarian, Hariram J. Thakkar, founder of one of Mumbai's most famous dry fruits retail outlets—American Dry Fruit Stores—is remarkably sprightly and cheerful. Little did he realise in 1932 when he set up his shop on 200 sq. ft (now 400 sq. ft) of space in Bani Building, Flora Fountain that one day he would go on to become the Chairman of American Dry Fruits Ltd. Reminisces Hariram in a ringing nostalgic tone but with a firmness befitting his advanced age of 82, "Beside our store was a watch repairs shop and Pyrites restaurant. Where American Express Bank stands today opposite our store, there used to be Chartered Bank. The Britishers

especially the cantonment soldiers—were my biggest customers in the pre-independence days. Besides, the numerous Irani restaurants that dotted the Flora Fountain area always stocked my goodies for these soldiers."

Incidentally, Hariram had served his apprenticeship under his brother who owned Fountain Dry Fruit Stores. In those days, Hariram's shop only sold dry fruits, snacks and a special soft Choco-bar called

Survival. All the fruits like prunes, apricots and other varieties were imported from Afghanistan, Iran and US. Gradually after Independence Panis formed a major chunk of Hariram's clientele most of whom had heard of the store through word of mouth. Soon American Dry Fruits

## City Lights



The three Thakkars of American Dry Fruit Stores

stores started selling sweetmeats like anjeer barfi, rose green pista, mango, apricot, pickles, masalas, spices etc to an ever increasing clientele.

Gushes Ashok Thakkar, Hariram's son, "My father has always been particular about quality, efficiency and courtesy in service. No wonder today, we successfully export a whole range of foodstuffs like masalas, papads, sweetmeats, pickles and spices to the US, UK, Australia, Canada, the Middle East and the Far-East. American Dry Fruits Ltd. which

was incorporated as a public limited company in 1992 is a Rs. 100 crore company today. "Chips in Hariram's cherubic-faced grandson Manoj (the third generation of the Thakkar family tree) "Quality consciousness is a way of life at our company. Recently, our Nadiad plant in Gujarat bagged the ISO-9002 certificate, "Hariram sporting a Gandhi cap and a spotless white dhoti casts an approving glance towards his grandson marking him out as the only one in the family to have finished his graduation. Though Bhavesh 24, the other grandson after dropping out from S.Y.B.Com in Jai Hind College completed a six-month MBA program in finance from New York University. Today, while Manoj manages the store along with his father Dilip, Bhavesh holds the post of Vice-President (finance) in the com-

# Nutty Delights

In 1932, Hariram J Thakkar started **American Dry Fruit Stores** at Flora Fountain. Today, in the capable hands of the third generation, it continues to be a highly popular store. **Pallab Dutta** met the trio

pany overlooking financial matters of the company.

Hariram admits that his sons and grandsons have played a major role in expanding his business besides lending a finesse to company operations. "After extensive travelling to foreign countries to promote our products, I managed to pick up the finer points of the English language which is such a necessity today," claims the patriarchal figure modestly. With disarming candour, he recounts his humble origins as a farmer's son in Kutch, Gujarat. He attributes his healthy life-style to the fact that he has never touched alcohol, cigarettes or even tea in his entire life spanning more than eight decades.

Reverting back to his business, Hariram says that he still visits his factory at Sewree for four hours in

the afternoon everyday. Adds Bhavesh, "Grandpa is always there to guide us and advice us. After all, his years of experience is still invaluable for our company's continued progress. We are amazed at his youthful exuberance and his zest for work." "We kutchis in whatever business we take up have always been known for our hard work and determination. Actually I am also proud of the Indians who are doing so well in the States and UK," says Hariram.

The company prides itself on its branded products some of which like the Mother's Recipe range of pickles and masalas are market leaders. Processed foods and mithais are exported to several countries. Ashok claims that they have received plenty of offers to open mithai shops abroad especially in the Middle East. The company's success can be testified to, by the fact that it has won a string of national awards for export performance. "In fact, we have also won a lot of awards at food shows all over the country. Our main room is crammed with such awards and certificates and frankly speaking, we simply don't have any more space to stock them," informs Hariram proudly.

Manoj throws more light on the heavy rush at American Dry Fruit Stores during festivals and how they cope with the incessant demand. "A month in advance of every festival period we hire part time workers at our factory who work on a 24-hour shift instead of the normal 9-10 hour shift. Our state-of-the-art factories in Nadiad and Nasik also work around

the dock. We always pack the dry fruits in silver glass and bowls, golden fancy boxes, special packs etc. We have also maintained a careful data base of 2500 of our most valued corporate clients."

Says Ashok, "Virtually every major corporate house in India is our customer. The Tatas, the Birlas, L&T, The Rahejas, the Mittals, the Bakhtawars and various shipping companies have all been our clients. We also customise orders from certain corporate houses who tend to order in bulk. Besides, we take orders for weddings, birthday parties, anniversaries too."

"Why we sell kilos of pedas and ladoos during the time examination results are declared. Victorious politicians too splurge a lot of money during celebrations," enthuses Hariram.

The company as well as the store has a very dedicated workforce with the store itself employing around 20 loyal people consisting of Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Bengalis (to prepare the succulent Bengali Sweets) and UP-ites. All workers and sales staff are trained vigorously for three months. "We have always believed in employee welfare. As a result, most of our old employees are still with us as we feed them, clothe them and pay them very good salaries. Any customer will testify to the friendliness of our staff," says Ashok.

To be in sync with the changing times, the brat pack of Manoj and Bhavesh want to set up a home page each for American Dry Fruits Stores and American Dry Fruits Ltd. on the Internet in a few months time. The Thakkar legacy is surely in safe hands even as grandpa Hariram basks in reflected glory.

Hariram still wakes up early in the morning to go for a walk and a swim in the Taj Swimming Pool - faithfully sticking to a time-tested regimen which has kept him healthy and fit all these years. Till today American Dry Fruits Stores with its pristine environs stands as a landmark at Fountain.