

**Kantipudi  
Kulasekhar**

**Allaparthi  
Durga Prasad**

A project by  
  
**MILROC**

# MILROC The road less travelled

Two determined men have braved everything stacked against them and have taken the straight path in recasting their definition of business success writes HARSHVARDHAN BHATKULY

**W**hat odds would you have bet in favour of two Andhra lads who decided to make a living as real estate developers in the Goa of the late 1980s? Not a chance you would say. But looking back at the 26 years of 'walking the straight line,' as one of them chooses to define their journey, they haven't done too badly for themselves.

Allaparthi Durga Prasad and Kantipudi Kulasekhar (Sekhar) came from different backgrounds, but struck up a friendship when Prasad, who had started business as a civil contractor, got the job to construct a house for Sekhar's father. This was in 1986. "I moved to Goa from Hyderabad when I was in my 7th standard with my father K. Chandra Mohan, who was a gemologist running his Own Diamond Cutting & Polishing Unit 'Twin Cities Lapidaries' in Hyderabad. My father came to Goa in 1979 to set up a diamond processing company for a Bombay based company. When the time came to go back, my siblings and I expressed our desire to stay put in Goa. My father agreed. And here we are," says Sekhar with a smile. For many years, the family had lived in a rented house at Miramar and when it was time to root themselves even stronger in Goa, the family decided to build a house at Dona Paula. Sekhar, by then, was in the final year of Diploma in Mechanical Engineering at the Government Polytechnic, Altinho. After completion of the house, K. Chandra Mohan gave another

job to Prasad to construct a house for their cousin. It also happened to be a time when Sekhar was mulling over his career plans. His father suggested "Why not try out the real estate business?" Sekhar and Prasad decided to team up and bought a small plot of 500m2 at Dona Paula. They built their first project – a duplex bungalow in 1989. "Our first purchaser was Pramod Rane, a travel and tourism entrepreneur. I was barely 24 years old. With absolutely little experience of how businesses are run. Even today, I feel that I should have worked someplace for a couple of years and then entered into business. But some things in life happen without a plan," says Sekhar.

There is also an interesting story behind the brand name Milroc. The name, as many think,

is the opposite of Corlim – the place where Sekhar's father managed a company. But the origin of the brand name lies in the contraction of 'millions of rocs' – diamond rocs. "The original idea was conceptualized for a jewellery firm, but it had not materialized. So we christened our real estate company 'Milroc', and over the years, created a brand out of it," Sekhar adds with pride.

Prasad and Sekhar started their operations from an apartment located opposite Don Bosco High School in 1989. "The apartment in which we started our office belonged to my grandmother. And the knowledge that our 'landlady' would not harass us for rent was the only comfort that we had," says Sekhar laughing heartily. With a capital of Rupees One

Lakh, Milroc landed its first development project in 1989, when they constructed a duplex bungalow in Dona Paula. Later on they built an apartment complex 'Milroc Heights' opposite Villa Sol Hotel in Dona Paula.

Their next project would keep them busy for well over a decade. 'Milroc Ribandar Retreat' was an audacious gamble for youngsters who were just coming to grips with their development business. 45 thousand square metres of pristine land at Ribandar, the Panjim side of Kadamba Plateau was purchased outright by Milroc by raising funds through debt. "As absolute upstarts, we had embarked on a plan to construct 360 apartments, undeterred by the scale or magnanimity of the project at Ribandar. The one smart thing that we did was to engage the





Milroc's First Project

services of Firdaus Dadabhoy – an architect experienced in building townships for the Tatas at Jamshedpur. He was an expert in building a complex for large communities and his expertise remains a hallmark of the project. Even today, people compliment us for the large open spaces, big trees and the spacious character of Milroc Ribandar Retreat,” says Prasad proudly.

However, the initial phase of the project was far from rosy. It was difficult for prospective customers to sign up with a young and unknown entity. That too, with unfamiliar surnames in Goa! There were other home grown builders who were ruling the market. Milroc's arduous

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journey at Ribandar had just begun. However, the company was advised by a friend to look at markets in the Gulf. Sekhar went to Dubai and stayed at a hotel and released advertisements in the local Khaleej Times. There was interest shown by the Goan diaspora and slowly around 22 customers signed up. Later,



Milroc Woods

Sekhar and Prasad went to other locations like Kuwait, Muscat, Bahrain in search of Goans working there. The project was totally sold out and delivered only in 2001.

In the meanwhile, the company created other landmarks in North Goa – ‘Milroc Clement Residency’ at Mapusa, ‘Milroc Woods’ at Corlim, ‘Milroc Temple Towers’ at Mercas, ‘Milroc Vista Do Mar’ luxury villas at Reis Magos, ‘Milroc Lar Menezes’ at Panaji – where their corporate office operates from today; and Milroc Neurekar Pride, in the heart of Panaji city.

In 2008, Milroc took up yet another ambitious project on their drawing board – ‘Milroc

Kadamba’ would become the cynosure of their attention. This flagship project was planned on a land, part of which once was a laterite quarry. The topography of the area was retained and used uniquely to many advantages by Milroc – chief among them, to create Rainwater Storage Tanks, Groundwater Recharge pits and of course, the Sunken Gardens. “At Milroc Kadamba, we brought together all our experience that we had gained in over two decades of our work. We focused on several energy and resource conserving ideas like solar water heaters, solar lighting and a unique facet of the project that we are extremely proud about – Rainwater Harvesting. We have



Milroc Vista do Mar



Dr. Muriel, Sekhar and Prasad cheer as Param Kannampilly inaugurates Fern Kadamba

a capacity of saving upto 6 lakh litres of water and during the monsoons, we are totally self reliant. It is truly a very innovative system. We have also installed a very efficient sewage treatment plant (STP) that helps the project recycle water that is used for gardening and flushing. This is indeed a planning marvel," says Prasad.

"When we took up Milroc Kadamba, we had to virtually plan out a whole township and we wanted to add to the lifestyle of the people who would be living there. So we planned gardens, driveways, walkways, shopping arcades, entertainment spaces, basketball and tennis courts and a five-star hotel and spa as well," adds Sekhar.

Recently, Milroc entered the hospitality space by inaugurating a 48-room Hotel. 'The Fern Kadamba' is owned by Milroc and will be operated by Concept Hospitality Pvt. Ltd., a company well known for operating hotels, resorts and service apartments across India. The company focuses on managing medium-sized hotels and is led by Param Kannampilly, who is the Chairman & Managing Director of Concept Hospitality.

"The hotel has a swanky and modern feel to it. Business travellers to Kundaim, Corlim, Ponda and pilgrims travelling to Old Goa, Mangueshi, Mardol and other temple locations in and around Ponda did not have

any five-star property catering to them. They always had to drop anchor at Panaji. With the launching of Fern Kadamba, we have managed to bridge that gap," says Sekhar.

The Fern Kadamba is a modern hospitality property with two restaurants, billiards room, squash court, cards room and other trappings of five-star luxury. There is also 'The Fern Kadamba Club' offering membership to the residents of Milroc Kadamba, who can enjoy the facilities at discounted rates right within their neighbourhood. "Had we considered getting into hospitality earlier, we may never have considered starting a hotel at the Kadamba location.

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But then, our corporate DNA is such that we end up venturing into locations that no one has considered before. We take the road less travelled; and make it a highway," adds Sekhar with a flourish.

What then means success and size to the duo? "To put it frankly, we could have easily been twice or thrice our size, had we pushed it. But to put it simply, even today, we enjoy our work and love coming to office or going to the site. We have focused on quality and service. There have been instances of us maintaining projects long after

the contract has ended with our buyers. We cherish this work-life balance and are proud of the brand that we have created – which embodies trust, warmth and transparency," quips Prasad.

"We are certainly one of the best that you can get in the market," adds Sekhar. "We have measured ourselves on strict parameters and have always walked the straight path – with our customers, suppliers and authorities. It is easier said than done in today's world. But we derive our strength and are proud of this attribute of our company," Sekhar adds.

The next step for the group has got to do with sharing their strengths with society. "We have often been asked if we could create a sub 30 lakh home. Although that looks very difficult given the current cost of land and material, we are confident of delivering a sub 40 lakh home soon," promises Sekhar.

Knowing Milroc's reputation to walk the talk, one can be sure that affordable housing and retirement homes that the company plans to develop in the near future will have the imprint that Milroc has been known for over 25 years now. And although there has been a steep departure from creating a convoy of millions of diamond rocs, Prasad and Sekhar have a million reasons to celebrate 25 years of their company. ■

## Legacy: The Bookstore with a Soul



When you walk into Sekhar's cabin, it is virtually like being in a book store. "I started reading pretty late in life. It was in my 12th standard that my teacher and neighbour, the famous theatre

artiste Isabel Santa Rita Vas gifted me a copy of Paulo Coelho's 'The Alchemist'. It has been a special bond with books since then. Later, when my appetite for reading grew, there was always dearth of good books in

Goa. Book Fair at The Mandovi was the only place where one could get good books.

So along with my wife Muriel, I started 'Legacy – The Book Store with a Soul'. There

was no business motive in setting up the store.

It was for the pure love of reading and providing good books for book lovers. Very often, we would buy books during our travels to Bombay, Delhi and abroad and sell them with a tiny mark-up. People loved the bookstore.

Not having a proper business plan and due to time constraints, Legacy had to fold after about 7 years.

My retirement plan is to start a book store along with café and library" says Sekhar with a twinkle in his eyes. ■