

Flashback: Ramu Kaka, Babloo, and "JALEBI"



BE traces some of the lesser-known stories behind the 20-year-old iconic Dhara Jalebi ad. By Shephali Bhatt

Ajay Gahlaut, Ogilvy's ECD, has nothing to do with the making of Dhara's jalebi commercial. Yet, it's the one ad he revisits, every time his faith in advertising dwindles. The 20-year-old ad that came from Mudra (now DDB Mudra) Ahmedabad, still gives fodder to creative writers. TVF used the 'Jalebi' routine for its recent video inspired by the news of Arnab Goswami's exit from Times Now. (The news anchor in the video changes his mind about leaving when he hears Natasha at the office has made jalebi)

Despite its iconic status, the people behind this ad never got the media attention that say Piyush Pandey received for his landmark campaigns for Fevicol, Asian Paints, and Cadbury. Jagdish Acharya, founder of Cut The Crap, who was branch head of Mudra Ahmedabad then, explains: "The Ahmedabad branch was quite low key." Besides, ad filmmakers — Namita Roy Ghose and Subir Chatterjee of White Light Moving Pictures — were two reticent Bengalis, as Ghose herself points out.

And so now, perhaps for the first time, we bring you the compelling behind-the-scenes story, a tale of *kachoris*, jalebis, runaways and a marketer with "balls of steel":

The ad was an outcome of the client saying 'Tumse Na Ho Payega'

Dhara was launched and distributed by NDDB (National Dairy Development Board). In the 80s, it was subsidised which made it the largest selling edible oil brand.

By the early 90s subsidies were withdrawn. Dhara acquired the image of a 'ration' oil. Nobody wanted to pay more. There was tremendous pressure on Mudra Ahmedabad. "We tried different creative routes year after year. 'Dhara Dhara, Shuddh Dhara' was born. We communicated purity through one ad and that it was 'largest selling' through another. It did bugger all."

Soon, the latter claim didn't hold true as sales plummeted from a lakh tons to 30,000 tons. The agency was on verge of getting fired. Acharya

was brought on the account at this stage. He concluded Dhara needed an emotional hook to make people forget its budget background.

He wrote a script that was aired a month before the Jalebi ad rolled out, about a young girl eager to go on a school trip but worried if her father will allow her. With the magic of Dhara, pa even offers his camera. NDDB loved it but wanted one more.

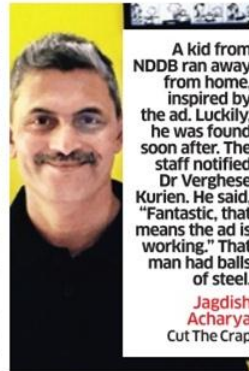
"Maa ke haath ka commercial"

"There were four elements Acharya zeroed in on: a child, a mother, food, and an emotional bond securing these together. However at the time (and even today) children were in practically every ad. "Someone wrote the kid gets angry, his mother makes *kachoris*; he's happy again. Someone added, let him leave the house. (Adman turned scriptwriter) Kamlesh Pandey who was consulting on the project said, 'let him go to the bus stand'. Namita felt a railway station would be more romantic. But something was missing."

Acharya finally narrated the script to his mother (mothers tend to be Indian advertising's best qualified critic and most compelling sounding board, if many stories we hear are to be believed). "She said it was nice, but the kid won't come back for *kachori* since children don't like spicy food and besides, south India doesn't relate to *kachoris*. Give the kid a jalebi, she suggested."

Parzaan: A replacement, not first choice

The ad was not done just yet. Acharya



A kid from NDDB ran away from home, inspired by the ad. Luckily, he was found soon after. The staff notified Dr Verghese Kurien. He said, "Fantastic, that means the ad is working." That man had balls of steel.

Jagdish Acharya
Cut The Crap

The Jalebi Boy



SOURJAYIT NANDY

Babloo aka Parzaan Dastur is 24 now. He's taller, his face has matured. But he claims to have the same twinkle in his eyes every time he hears someone say, "jalebi." Parsis enjoy a larger and thicker variety of the said sweet, says Dastur who still remembers the rainy day in July when he got into his car to go to Kamalistan studio for the Dhara shoot.

Dastur met Sam Kerawalla (his trusted Ramu Kaka from the ad) at a family function last year. "We were meeting after a very long time. He couldn't recognise me at first. Then I smiled and said: 'Ramu Kaka, you forgot me?' And he instantly warmed up."

The jalebi ad paved Dastur's way into Bollywood. His next famous appearance (*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, 1998) was as a cute and quiet little sardarji whose

words (*Tussi jaa rahe ho, tussi na jao*) melted countless hearts, and continue to do so.

Dastur has been an assistant director on big ticket movies like *Student Of The Year*, *Gori Tere Pyaar Mein*, and *Fitoor*. He has also acted in movies like *Parzanla* (2005) and *Sikandar* (2009). He now plans to seriously pursue his acting career. Does it worry him that people won't be able to detach the image of an innocent boy from his current image when they see him on screen? "Of course it does. But every time I think about it, I remind myself of what Abhishek Kapoor (director of *Fitoor*) told me while I was assisting him: 'You have to learn to use the fact that you were a successful child artist. Don't make it a hindrance. That changes my perspective.'

says, "The child artist for the film fell ill on the day of the shoot." Taking Parzaan Dastur (who played Babloo) was a last minute decision.

Ghose, however, has a different story: "The boy we initially cast was slightly older. We shot with him the whole day but realised it wasn't working. We explained it to his parents. We had got Parzaan for a child's voice recording earlier. It was a stroke of genius to think of him. When you said 'jalebi', the glint in his eyes would light up the whole world." Turns out the sweet was a personal favourite with Dastur (See: *The Jalebi Boy*). "There were around 38 takes to get the entire scene right. He gave the same excited reaction every single time," recalls Acharya.

Surprisingly enough, the client approved a longer 60 second cut of the ad and it ran on TV for five years straight. Every year, Mudra would present a new script. The client (the late Dr Verghese Kurien) would say "But then I won't get to see this kid so let's continue with this ad itself." Besides, the objective had been met and people had forgotten Dhara's humble origins.

ASCI blues and other crises

Within a week of going on air, the ad came under the ASCI scanner "We were scared of that," admits Acharya, that the ad could be held responsible for misguiding kids. RS Sodhi, Amul's MD (then a part of the marketing team at NDDB),

says it was the work of a few jealous competitors. Nonetheless, the agency and client sent an explanation to ASCI. "A month later, they overruled the ban, much to our relief," says Acharya. But the relief was short-lived. Inspired by the ad, a child genuinely ran away from home. To make things worse, he belonged to a family associated with NDDB. "Someone spotted him at Ratlam station and got him back, thankfully. The staff felt it needed to be told to the chairman. But Mr Kurien shocked everyone by saying, 'Fantastic. That means the ad is working.' That man really had balls of steel," Acharya concludes.

The key aspects of the story: bravado, innocence, and madness - were built into the characters, says Chatterjee of White Light: "Those were different times. The product pay off wasn't germane to the TVC, which explains why you saw the brand for less than two seconds in a 60 second."

Today, the edible oil market is extremely competitive and Dhara relegated to a niche brand. But the mother brand (Dhara oil's several variants) registered a turnover of ₹891.15 crore in the year 2015-16. It has been growing at a CAGR of 21% since 2011, the brand claims. And even in the times of Fortune Oil's *daadi maa* winning the internet with a 4-minute long ad, the jalebi commercial holds a steady place of its own. As Sodhi concludes: "Jalebi wahi hai, *bacheche wahi hain, aur emotions bhi.*"

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