

# *Amul's India: Based on 50 Years of Amul Advertising*

Rahul Swami

***Several Contributors (2012). Amul's India: Based on 50 Years of Amul Advertising, Harper Collins India, Price Rs. 299, Pages 224, ISSN: 9789350291498.***

The little girl in polka dotted dress in the much anticipated Amul butter hoardings has been the toast of the nation for over 50 years and the cover photo of the lovable lassie immediately draws the reader towards this book. Based on 50 years of Amul Advertising by DaCunha Communications, the affordable paperback tribute, happily accessible to a large audience, is conceptualized, designed and co-ordinated by DYWorks and published by Harper Collins India. In line with Amul ideologies, proceeds from the sale of this book are used to honour deserving Class X and XII students of India under the Amul Vidyashree and Amul Vidyabhushan Award schemes.

Positioned as a "celebration that would be of enormous interest to an observer of contemporary India, be it a brand manager, a management student or a fan of Amul or just somebody who wants a rollicking good time", the book delivers a surprisingly heavy punch. This laudable effort captures many different essences, aspects and viewpoints deeply enmeshed and integrated in the wide scenario of India's fascinating post-independence journey, quirky advertising word, Amul products, gritty corporate details and the adorable little cartoon girl. The title of the book and the cover photo of the pony tail in the all too familiar polka dotted bow clearly signifies what the book intended to deliver originally, a tribute to India's most iconic brand ambassador in the famous Amul campaigns and India through eyes of the moppet. Refreshingly, several celebrities and famous personalities contributed by adding their personal favourites, moments and utterly butterly delicious Amul experiences along with the story behind the birth of Amul and its moppet, and the analysis of the popularity of the campaigns. A brainchild of Alpana Parida,

President, DYWorks, this book showcases an interesting cornucopia of a long, eventful and sometimes controversial journey of Amul advertising campaigns over the years. It is indeed a worthy tribute because undoubtedly for 50 years India has connected with the cute little Amul girl in polka dots and pony tail as the faithful chronicler and spokesperson of their sentiments as well as face of the most trusted food brand in the country.

The book starts with a foreword from Mr. R.S. Sodhi, Managing Director of Gujarat Co-Operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd (GCMMF) about Amul, its products and the moppet and an introduction from Ms. Parida about the story behind the book. It speeds up and gets juicier in the next three chapters in which the birth and journey of Amul is chronicled, Dr Kurien's personal thoughts on the popular campaigns are mentioned and the co-creator of Amul butter hoarding, Sylvester DeCunha's own words tell us the story of how the Amul girl and the famous "Utterly Butterly Delicious" tagline came into being. Sylvester DeCunha takes us step by step into this fascinating journey and gives interesting insights into the world of Amul butter hoardings, one of the longest running outdoor campaign in the world. The chapter discusses the DeCunha creative team recognizing the product, the requirement and hunting for an appropriate tagline to highlight its uniqueness. It is followed by the need and importance of an appropriate spokesperson, connecting the tagline with the brand, thus, Amul girl coming to life, deciding on the theme and mode of the campaign, to meeting deadlines of putting up nearly three wildly popular hoardings in one week for 50 years. An impressive story of brilliant partnership and trust between Dr. Kurien

and DeCunha Communications, creativity, understanding the pulse of the country and astute representations of the brand qualities, it is a benchmark in the world of advertising.

After the initial introduction to a very complex concept, Mr. Santosh Desai, managing director of Future Brands and the main writer of the book, helpfully breaks down the campaign chronologically, socially and genre wise to help the reader understand the reason as to why the little girl still tugs the heart of every Indian. He points out to the transition and changes in the moppet's much loved witty punch lines at par with the political times and social pace of the country and how from the elite middle class's darling who jibed only in English she evolved into a Hinglish speaking very Indian belle avatar. The guest writers also contribute to the delightful flavor of the book by giving us a peek of the Amul girl's influence to their lives. It was interesting to read about Amitabh Bachchan's hobby of collecting every Amul advertisement showcasing him; Cyrus Broacha's guilty free giveaway about coining the famous line "Lara ne Kya Mara" and Harsha Bhogle's brilliant take on Amul celebrating India along with the viewpoints of Rahul Dravid, Sania Mirza, Rajdeep Sardesai, Milind Deora, Alyque Padamsee, to name a few. Each added his/her own personal touch to the aura of this delightful campaign giving more dimensions in its celebration of Amul products and India. Only firebrand writer Shobha De's "feminist" article seemed discomfitingly non linear with the theme of the adorably naughty, "LITTLE" Amul girl who comments "innocently" (which adds to her charm as much emphasized by other writers). Although Amul has always been pro women empowerment by giving preference to female dairy farmers more than their male counterparts and saluting celebrated women across the world as pointed out by the writer, there is a distinct sense of discomfort and confusion about the little pony tailed girl being "one of India's pioneering feminist". Ms. De's viewpoints on Page 88, "Whether she (the Amul girl) was taking a stand on Mayawati or Jayalalitha, the 'voice, was consistently pro-women" and the bit on "Whether these billboards featured.....powerful about being female" on Page 91 might also come across as contradictory to the campaign

which spoofed Jayalalitha's jail term on Page 34 of Santosh Desai's piece. She added her own personal flair to the Amul girl story by dedicating the moppet's famous jibes to Nisha DeCunha, co-creator Sylvester DeCunha's wife (another human perspective of the wildly popular icon). Each writer and contributor dedicated their words in revealing different aspects and personal dimensions to the success of the hugely popular Amul campaign. "Amul's India" claiming to be based on 50 years of Amul advertising thus focuses mostly on the success story of the enduring Amul butter campaign with a brief mention by film director Shyam Benegal of Amul baby food revolution and incredibly successful Amul "Manthan" documentaries. It also speaks volumes of the vision and legendary achievements of Dr V Kurien, Operation Flood and the purity of its products and the strong motto of Amul Work Model. A thoroughly interesting read, the main attraction of the book however lies in the pictorial evolution of Amul butter campaigns handpicked from its 50 years of publicity. That is why "Amul's India" is a collector's item, because of the treasure of its best hoardings along with the personal favorites of the contributors generously distributed in its pages.

However apart from the caricatures and interesting anecdotes, the book is too intricate, complex and at times repetitive for a casual reader to grasp easily. As aptly mentioned by Ms Alpana Parida on Page 2," It became obvious that we needed a book that captured many viewpoints" Amul's India indeed encompasses too many ideas. The subject (Amul's India) is historically too vast and too varied to be condensed in a few pages effectively because of its multifaceted nature. A combination of two very complex subjects Amul and India along with the required offshoots of their amalgamation, India's history, social scenario, public interest and advertising, it demands more time, pages and sharper editing. While, only one of the two main topics can prove to be a test of a mature reader's sense of understanding and concentration, the mesh of both along with the off shoots requires serious scholastic interest. Strangely though, this fantastic tribute delivers a rollicking good time, it somehow stands inadequate as a light hearted read or an efficient management/ advertising case study. Alyque Padamsee in his article

goes too passionately deep into the nuances of advertising (linking too many other brands) and brand imaging while Shyam Benegal repeats the already mentioned story of Amul's evolution in great details thus somewhere making it tedious. Alpana Parida too delivers a heartfelt yet somewhat repetitive article on the Amul girl's success story by deconstructing it in layers and adding an interesting socio-mythological viewpoint of India's deep symbolic bond with cows and milk products and its association with children, deities and purity. Too many writers, too many topics and too many professional details and viewpoints in 211 pages give the distinct feeling of too many cooks spoiling the broth, especially towards the end of the book.

The finale of the book is however very interesting as it portrays visually "the complex process of creativity" and the homage paid in the Amul campaigns to popular late celebrities all over the globe. Streamlining of events, articles and genres, clearer segregation of topics rather than tumbling into one after another and tidier

compilation of the chapters (even the pictorial ones seemed haphazardly scattered among articles thus breaking the attention span) would have helped the reader enjoy the utterly butterly delicious Amul campaign better.

In spite of everything, this book is a collector's item and an apt tribute to the success of Amul and its iconic mouthpiece, India's most endearing as well as enduring moppet. The creative team of Amul India and all its contributors deserve a round of applause for delivering a proper "Toast to the Nation".

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Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life - think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success.

– *Swami Vivekananda*