

Bringing Doughnuts to India

Tejas Kapadia (CAS'99) finds success making a distinctly American food, and will soon send profits to charities

WHEN TEJAS KAPADIA — armed with a law degree, several years of courtroom experience, and no history of working in the food industry or running a business — decided to introduce doughnuts to the Indian market, he wasn't exactly prepared for dealing with the challenges that quickly arose. But three years after he founded Mumbai's American Donut Shoppe, Kapadia is poised to meet his original goals: franchising the operation, channeling the profits to philanthropic organizations in India, and returning to his law career in the United States.

Such a move was not on Kapadia's radar when he graduated from BU with a dual major in biology and philosophy. But at the age of twenty-nine, he decided to take a risk. "If it works out, I can help a tremendous number of people," says Kapadia (CAS'99). "If it fails, at least I tried."

Born and raised in New Jersey, Kapadia had been coming to India with his family every two years from childhood into adulthood. He thought that starting a business in India seemed like a hands-on way to generate revenue for charity projects.

"Tejas isn't the type to ask someone for something," says his brother Hemish, a partner in the business, who handles the accounting and finances from his home in the United States. "He'd rather start it on his own."

During several of his visits, Kapadia noticed the growing popularity of Western food in India. "Pizza was already here," he says. "Subway was already here, and there were some other established brands. My idea was to develop a novel Western food concept."

Doughnuts were definitely new territory, and they lent themselves to mechanized production. After completing a month-long pastry-making course in New York and visiting trade fairs across the United States, Kapadia purchased a doughnut machine and brought it to India.

After a rocky few months — Kapadia grappled with recalcitrant property managers, licensing issues, and a fire — his first shop opened in early 2007 in Mumbai, but without much success. Initially, customers thought the doughnuts were *medu vada*, a savory, south Indian snack that also happens to be doughnut-shaped. They were disappointed to learn that the morsels were something new and different.

What changed things, Kapadia thinks, was the influence of Indians who had been to the United States or who were otherwise familiar with the concept of doughnuts. Kapadia had tinkered with the American recipe, making all of his doughnuts without eggs. A large segment of the Indian population is vegetarian, and many avoid eggs as well as meat.

Now Kapadia is set to expand from his current four outlets, all in malls around Mumbai, to as many as twenty-five locations around the city. "There's no such thing as a typical day," he says.

The next stage for Kapadia is researching the organizations that would best benefit from his contributions. He has identified two areas: development of a bone marrow registry for India and South Asia, his brother's primary interest, and education projects, his own focus.

"The problems of India stem from lack of education," Kapadia says. "When kids become adults, they don't have

the educational background necessary to pull themselves out of the situation their parents are in. If we can improve education here, it's possible that people can slowly improve their circumstances and break the circle of poverty."

Kapadia says he will likely resume his legal practice in the United States within the next two years. He's realized there's a big difference between working toward the ultimate goal of social uplift and the day-to-day hands-on work of a legal practice.

"When you do charity and are making donations, no one is necessarily coming up to you and asking for your assistance," he notes. "But in the law, when a client approaches you, their stress is palpable, and you can alleviate it. It's a satisfying feeling. I genuinely miss it." DAN PACKEL



Tejas Kapadia had no experience in business or in the food industry when he founded Mumbai's American Donut Shoppe.

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