

Lifestyle



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Let's Talk: Amit Jatia and Rishi Khiani

The man who brought fast food to Mumbai, and the guy who made fast delivery successful, Amit Jatia and Rishi Khiani discuss the success of McDonald's and Scootsy, while dissing the theory that the city's F&B scene is saturated

KRUTIKA BEHRAWALA

mailbag@mid-day.com

Rishi Khiani has given Amit Jatia business. Not as a food entrepreneur, but customer. As a young man in his 20s, he queued up outside the Linking Road outlet of McDonald's for a portion of McNuggets.

Jatia, 52, vice-chairperson of Westlife Development Ltd, operates a chain of McDonald's outlets in west and south India through its wholly owned subsidiary Hardcastle Restaurants Pvt Ltd. As early as 1996, he offered customers an alternative to pav bhaji and pani puri. French fries and burgers were available to them for as cheap as ₹20. Over the years, the QSR's Golden Arches (89 outlets in Mumbai) have not only adapted to the city's changing foodscape but also pioneered a few shifts, like introducing the McAlloo Tikki burger customised to placate the Indian palate.

Some 15 years after Jatia saw success, Khiani, 44, revolutionised the manner in which food arrived to you by launching the intra-city delivery platform Scootsy. By offering to drop off at your door step not only eatables but also electronics and books within 60 minutes, the start-up changed Mumbai's ordering pattern. The CEO and MD of Antfarm Business Incubator Pvt Ltd, Khiani is a seasoned entrepreneur with over 20 years of experience in media, consumer tech and enterprise. Last year, he moved from Scootsy after it was acquired by Swiggy to

focus on his other ventures, ad-tech firm Fork Media and health food brand Hello Green.

Over brunch where they tuck into Provençale-style tartine, taka-luchi alur dom and maachher paturi at Worl's French-Bengali restaurant Mustard, the entrepreneurs share notes on being market disruptors.

Globally, consolidation is the norm [on Swiggy acquiring Scootsy to increase footprint]. Aquisitions are great if you have the cash flow and vision. If your reason for acquiring is only to kill competition, it may not work

Rishi Khiani

mid-day: Rishi, you were among those who lined up outside McDonald's when it opened, we hear.

Rishi: Of course. I would head to the one in Bandra and later, to the CST outlet. It was a family thing, actually. The idea was that the whole family could sit together and enjoy a meal. And everyone at home had their favourites. As a kid, when I'd go to London, I would wait to visit McDonald's and tuck into the chicken McNuggets and filet-o-fish. The flavours were etched in my memory. McDonald's would create a false scarcity around its menu. We'd wait for phone alerts about the McRib burger being available. There would be a queue outside the outlets and it would always be sold out.

Amit: I remember that [laughs].

mid-day: What do you remember about the eating out scene from the '90s?

Amit: The only QSR-type of restaurant I remember was Open House in Bandra. As young boys living in south Mumbai, we'd rush to try the food there.

Rishi: Me too. Their pizzas and burgers were favourites. Under The Over at Altamora Road was another haunt. Other than, we'd head to an uduppi. **Amit:** I grew up eating at Samarkand at the Oberoi, Tanjore at Taj, and at Copp Chimney. The options were limited. And, the frequency eating out was low.

mid-day: Then, what changed?

Amit: Malls and multiplexes became catalysts for a change. People began to step out more often and once they they'd head to a restaurant. Previously, we would eat out only on weekends. But it's [the frequency] still lower than cities like Jakarta and Bangkok, where people eat out roughly 20-plus and 44 times a month respectively.