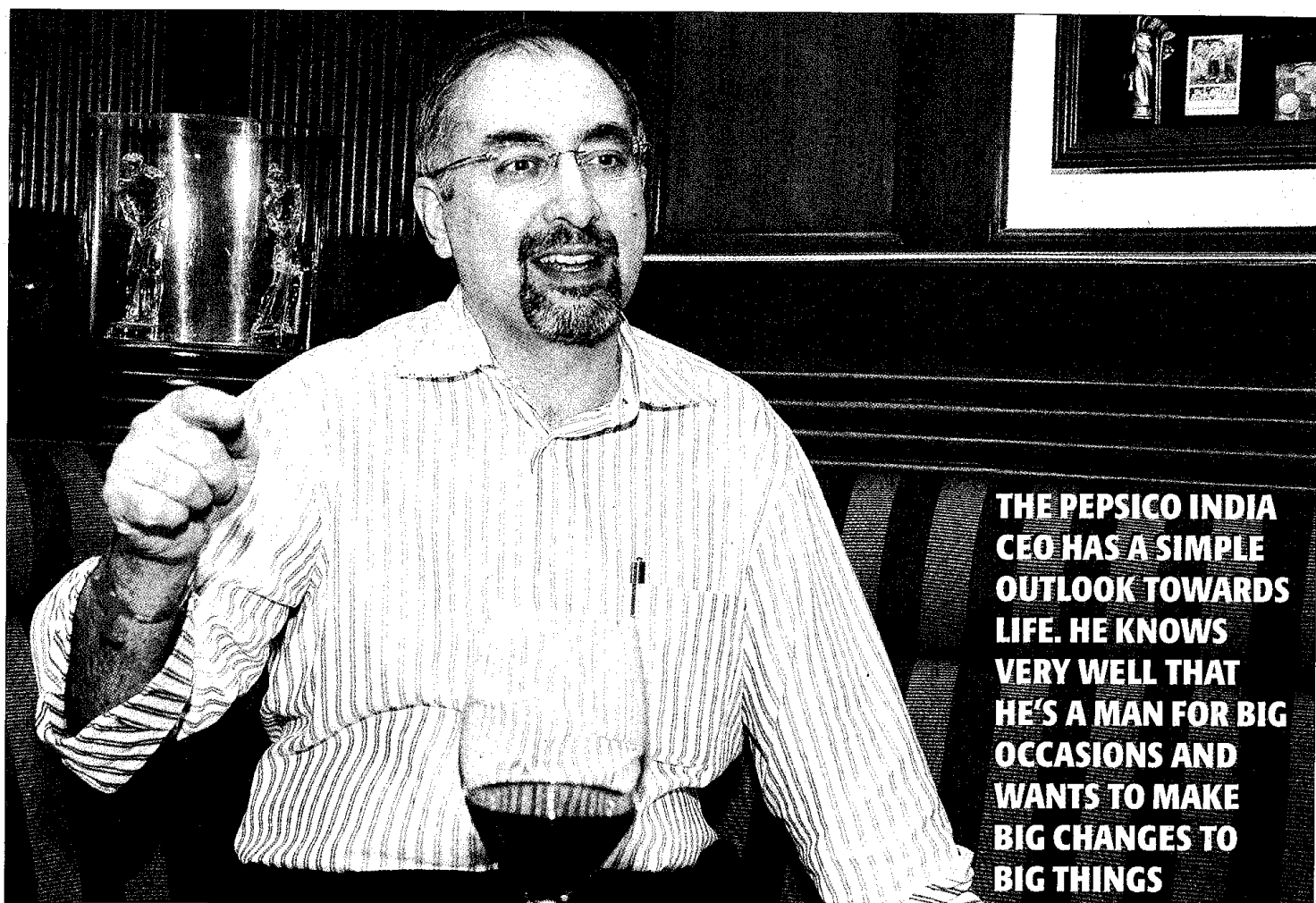


THE ECONOMIC TIMES

SUNDOWNER WITH SANJEEV CHADHA



**THE PEPSICO INDIA
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Photo: AMRENDRA JHA

THE MAN OF THE HOUR

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He's a self-confessed wine lover, as much for health reasons as for taste. So what else could it be for the PepsiCo India CEO, Sanjeev Chadha, other than a Cabernet Sauvignon to start an evening tête-à-tête with ET at the Golf Bar in Delhi's ITC Maurya hotel. As the 47-year-old Chadha makes himself comfortable in the corner couch of the dimly-lit bar that's just about starting to get packed with people and voices, Chadha recalls another time and another taste.

"I used to be an avid white spirits drinker, vodka and tonic being my staple drink, but then I somehow acquired a taste for wine. That doesn't mean that I am in anyway qualified to being a wine connoisseur though," he chuckles. "I like the fact that wine doesn't give you a hang-over besides being healthy!"

Talking about wine and its intricacies, this Pepsi veteran (almost 16 years in the cola major) narrates an anecdote about how an obscure Australian label called Yellow Tail became the hottest selling wine in the US in the 1990s. "Their strategy was to dismantle the complexity that surrounds wine drinking. It's a great case study in itself," he says. Chadha, a firm endorser of the Blue Ocean strategy, in business and in other walks of life, believes in taking the uncharted territories, just the way Yellow Tail did. "The mantra is in being simple!" vouches the man who took over the reins at Pepsi India from Rajeev Bakshi only in January this year.

Simplicity reigns supreme in Chadha's life; and he has three bare adjectives to define himself— Fewer, Bigger and Better. Maybe that's the reason he wasn't even aware of the brand of clothes he was wearing. "I am not a brand specific person at all. In fact, am more an informal kind of guy," he adds. Hugo Boss, Canali and Ralph Lauren are his preferences in casual and formal dressing, besides the Tag Heuer watch that he wears, gifted by his advertising professional-turned-writer wife Radha.

As our drinks are served, we begin by asking him, an obvious one — how does it feel like to be back in India after so long? Having been away from India, primarily in south-east Asia, for more

than a decade, it's a different India Chadha is coming back to. "Things have changed so much. Look at the Delhi Metro," he says. "It is redefining the city. India has immense opportunities to offer."

But travelling started pretty early for the Pepsi top boss, courtesy his father's Army background where transfers were a way of life in his growing years. When asked what school he attended, Chadha joked that he couldn't remember, considering the number of schools he studied in! But it was in 1976, that he finally finished from Delhi Public School, RK Puram, the other significant years being spent at St Xavier's school in Calcutta besides some years in the Northeast.

Remembering his days in Calcutta and the bike rides in the city, he reminisces about his hidden desire of owning a bike one day. After school, Chadha graduated from Hindu College in Delhi University before entering IIM Ahmedabad in 1979. But the real journey for Chadha started only once he passed out of IIM and got his first job in sales & marketing with Brooke Bond which was later merged with Hindustan Lever.

"It was an awesome training ground for me as I learnt so much while being on the job," recalling his days when travelling to small and obscure places was part of his work. Having spent days in places that were in the back of beyond — such as Champa and Raigarh — and being involved in every aspect of the work be it loading up of stocks to settling the accounts made Chadha understand the business better.

"Reading theories from management books is not everything. It's a different ball game altogether when you work at the grassroots level. That's where you understand the business. My job at Brooke Bond involved selling everything from tea, coffee, blades and even condoms," he recounts. But the frequent moving from one location to another slowly took a toll on him after his marriage in 1982. "My wife and I spent more time flying than being together as our jobs were in different cities," says the father of two.

So in 1983, Chadha left the FMCG industry and made a shift to clients servicing in the advertising agency J Walter Thompson in Delhi. In fact, Chadha landed up in Pepsi during its initial Indian foray in 1990 while being part of the JWT team which won the Pepsi contract

for the agency. So it wasn't really surprising that the cola major roped him in as one of its first crop of employees in India. After seven years in PepsiCo India as part of the sales & marketing team, Chadha headed the Western region bottling operations.

Recalling his early years at Pepsi, Chadha talks about how they were extremely enjoyable for him. In fact, he was instrumental in Pepsi's acquisition of Duke's and the takeover of the Gujarat Bottling Company along with turning the Mumbai market for Pepsi, as it had been a traditional bastion of Thums Up. That done, he headed to Manila in 1996. "Those years were very satisfying with a young and vibrant team in place," he says.

Things are different this time around for Chadha with the pesticide issue impacting soft-drink sales and a general sense of sluggishness in the industry. In his second coming, Chadha seems to be on a mission to make an impact; to make a difference, as he puts it. "I want to make big changes to big things. My job is a great one with so much of excitement here. And India becoming a high priority market for Pepsi, I have lots to prove. It seems I am being paid to make a difference!" he says. As the company shifts focus towards health issues, providing safe water and extending its product portfolio, Chadha is upbeat about Pepsi's prospects in India.

But distances still continue to play a pivotal role in his life with his family spread out between Hong Kong, Delhi and the US. "Family is a big passion, but with me returning to India, the four of us are in three different corners of the world," he says with a smile. "But coming back to India has made me renew contacts with so many friends that I am really enjoying it this time on the personal front. In fact, I didn't realise I knew so many people!"

So how does the family of four get to spend time together? "With my wife and daughter in Hong Kong and my son in the US, we take at least two weeks out in a year and get together," says Chadha. And when he's out with his kids, it is all about adventure, be it hiking in Hong Kong or skiing in New Zealand or Switzerland. "Thanks to my kids, I have started to tolerate skiing now," he says.

Clearly this is one cola boss with a real fizz for life!
SAMDHA SHARMA & SHUBHAM MUKHERJEE