

Title: From Home to Market: Journey of Bombay's Kitchen Brands

Author: Dr. Sagar Murlidhar Karkhanis

Name of the Publication: Transarea Journal

ISSN: 3107-7080 (Online)

Website: <https://transareajournal.org/en>

Volume Number: II

Issue Number: 1

Month and Year: Spring Issue (March), 2026

Page Number: 26–43

Publisher: Somaiya Vidyavihar University

From Home to Market: Journey of Bombay's Kitchen Brands

Dr. Sagar Murlidhar Karkhanis

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous
College, Mumbai

Abstract

Mumbai, the main hub of India's economic activities, has always encouraged entrepreneurship and has provided individuals several business opportunities. The city is the birthplace of many brands that have established themselves not only at local but also at national and international levels. Mumbai based brands like Bedekar, Kubal, Lijjat have a unique place in the masala, pickles, and papad segment of the fast-moving consumer goods market whereas Parle-G has become the world's most popular biscuit.

Making masala, pickles, and papad during the summer season is a culinary practice prevalent in almost all the regions of India. These food items were prepared at home in hygienic conditions thus the purity of ingredients and the final product could be ensured. With the advent of British rule, there was a significant change in the Indian dietary practices, especially in the urban centers. Socio-economic changes brought about by the colonial rule even impacted practices such as the preparation of masala, and papad at home. The breakup of the joint family system and, the entry of women into the workforce resulted in increasing demands for readymade masala, papad, and pickles. Preparing these items at home became time-consuming. The founders of the now iconic brands like Bedekar, Kubal, and Lijjat saw an opportunity in this situation and entered the market. Their traditional method of preparation, authentic taste, and assurance of quality attracted consumers.

The food industries in India are broadly divided into two segments—basic food industries like masala, pickles, and papads and processed food industries like bakery and confectionary. Biscuits, cakes, and cookies were foreign to Indian palate. Initially, these food items were imported from Western countries for European consumers. Gradually Indians too started enjoying them. Taking note of this increasing demand from Indian consumers, few enterprising Indians entered this segment as well. Among them was the city-based Parle Products, popularly known for their Parle G biscuits. This research paper is a modest attempt to trace the journey of these brands and their contribution to the socio-economic and culinary history of Mumbai.

Keywords: Masala, Mumbai, pickle, food, brand, biscuits

Introduction

The evolution of Mumbai as a commercial metropolis is deeply intertwined with the rise of its indigenous food brands, which not only thrived within the city's socio-economic fabric but also contributed to its identity. Manufacturers of masala (spice mixes) and papad (thin crispy wafers) such as Bedekar, Kubal, Khamkar, and Lijjat, along with the bakery giant—Parle, emerged from Bombay's unique economic and social situation. These brands were shaped by the city's entrepreneurial spirit, access to markets, and dense residential networks, which provided both the consumer base and the production ecosystems—often informal, home-based, and cooperative in nature.

As the brands grew in terms of their scale and popularity, they helped define Mumbai's image as a city of industriousness and self-made success. Lijjat's papad making cooperative, run entirely by women, exemplified the city's capacity to foster grassroots economic inclusion. Bedekar and Kubal channeled regional spice making traditions into branded masala that resonated across the city's diverse communities. Parle's mass-produced biscuits became symbols of affordable nutrition during in a period marked by financial constraints. Together, these enterprises not only found their footing in Mumbai but also contributed to its cultural and economic landscape, shaping the city as much as they were shaped by it.

Masala and Papad Brands

The onset of industrialisation in Mumbai during the latter half of the nineteenth century represents a pivotal phase in India's economic, as well as social and cultural history. The establishment and expansion of textile mills, along with ancillary industries such as dyeing, thread-making, spool production, shuttle manufacturing, and spinning, led to significant transformations in Mumbai's economic landscape and urban infrastructure. The resulting growth in employment opportunities and improvements in transport and communication infrastructure further contributed to these structural changes.

Notably, employment within the mills was not restricted to men; women also in an effort to support household income, entered the workforce in these industrial settings. The increasing burden of domestic responsibilities, combined with the demands of wage labor, prompted women to adopt time-saving consumables, though in limited quantities. Chief among these were food items that were traditionally labor-intensive and required meticulous preparation, such as masala, papads and pickles. Recognising the growing need of society, manufacturer such as Bedekar, Kubal, Khamkar and Lijjat entered the market. These enterprises gained consumer trust and loyalty by adhering to traditional methods of production and maintaining the authenticity of flavor and quality. As a result, they succeeded not only in capturing the domestic market but also in establishing a presence on the international stage.

Bedekar Masalewale: Spicing Tradition with Innovation

Among the prominent brands in the masala industry, not only in Mumbai but across the state of Maharashtra, V. P. Bedekar and Sons Private Limited, popularly known as Bedekar Masalewale, holds a distinguished position. The brand earned widespread recognition, often captured in the phrase: “*Utkrusht Masale Banvanyat Pahila Number Tumcha Dusara Matra Bedekarancha*” (homemakers are number one in making excellent masala, but Bedekar is certainly the second).

In 1910, Mr. Vishwanath Parsharam Bedekar migrated to Mumbai from a village named Goval in Ratnagiri district, in search of better livelihood opportunities. Upon arriving in Mumbai, he opened a grocery store in October 1910 on a partnership basis in the Shantaram Chawl located in Girgaon’s Mughhat area. Within two years, the partnership dissolved, and in 1912, Bedekar relocated the store to Bohri Chawl in Sadashiv Galli. His daily routine included visiting customers’ homes to note down their grocery requirements in the morning, delivering the items, and heading to the market in the afternoon to purchase stock—tasks that left the shop closed for long hours. Moreover, the customer footfall in Sadashiv Galli was low, and cash sales were minimal. Consequently, in July 1913, after seven or eight months, he moved the store back to Shantaram Chawl (Bedekar 1961, 16–17).

Around this time, Vishwanath’s son, Vasudev Bedekar, began assisting in the family business. Vasudev was inherently ambitious and possessed sharp business acumen. Increasing financial responsibilities made Vasudev realise that simply selling groceries wasn’t enough to ensure business growth or increase profit margins. Mumbai, a city that fostered creativity and innovation, provided fertile ground for Vasudev’s entrepreneurial ideas. At the time, it was customary for households to prepare masala annually according to their needs. There were many *khanavalis* (common mess/eateries) operated in chawls to feed migrant workers. However, the preparation of large quantities of masala was laborious and time-consuming for owners of these eateries. Moreover, the masalas available in the market at that time were of inferior quality, and often adulterated, which discouraged customers from purchasing them. Observing this, Vasudev conceived the idea of manufacturing and selling ready-made masalas, consequently establishing a new business which made the Bedekars a well-known brand.

Procuring high-quality ingredients such as chillies, turmeric, coriander, cumin, and garam masala, Vasudev began preparing masala at home and sold them at the rate of four annas per *sher* (an old unit of weight measuring approximately 932.80 grams) (Bedekar 1961, 23). The superior quality and flavour soon attracted customers. Thus, by 1917–18, the Bedekar masala enterprise had formally commenced. However, the idea of manufacturing and selling masala did not appeal to Vishwanath Bedekar, who viewed it as an undignified profession. Hence, Vasudev had to run this business discreetly in his father’s absence.

In 1921, when Vishwanath Bedekar returned to his native village, Vasudev could freely continue the masala manufacturing business. As the demand increased, he procured a crusher to finely shred coconut and installed two machines for grinding. As the business grew, the need for

a larger space arose. Therefore, he shifted the production to Jayram Kanji Chawl in Mughbat Cross Lane, where grinding mill and a small disintegrator were installed. In 1930, the operation was relocated to a lane near Panjarapol to accommodate expansion. As demand continued to grow, even this facility became inadequate, prompting the establishment of a second factory in Ghodapdeo, near Mazgaon (Bedekar 1961, 71).



Figure 1. Bedekar's Pickle advertisement.

Source: YouTube,

<https://youtu.be/Ken5VQPbk2c?feature=shared>

While engaged in the sale of masala, Vasudev took a further entrepreneurial step by initiating the production of papad as a means of business expansion. With the assistance of one of his employees, Vasudev initially produced a maximum of two *paili* (an old unit of weight measuring approximately 7.5 kg) of papad per day (Bedekar 1961, 33). In the early stages, he used dry flour to roll the papad, which, upon drying, would become twisted. Consequently, storing just two *paili* of papad required five to six containers—an arrangement that proved inconvenient from the storage point of view. Recognising this limitation, Vasudev modified the process by utilising oil in place of dry flour for rolling the papads, a change that helped maintain their shape.

Bedekar's entry into the pickle business, however, occurred rather accidentally. In 1921, Vasudev fell ill with a fever, which caused a loss of taste and appetite. He developed a craving for sour pickles, and at that time, family friend Mr. Bhikajipant Dabke brought him a small quantity of lemon pickle. This sparked a thought in Vasudev's mind: what if someone wished to eat such pickle but had no means to obtain it? Although pickles were available in the market the

quality was generally substandard. This led to yet another venture for the Bedekar's namely making pickles.

Initially, he procured 200 lemons and prepared lemon pickles. After four to six months of pickling the product was ready for sale. The Bedekar lemon pickle quickly gained popularity among customers. Priced at two *paise* per lemon, the first batch sold out swiftly (Bedekar 1961, 72). Encouraged by this success, Vasudev prepared a second batch using another 200 lemons. In an attempt to accelerate the maturation process, he experimented with blanching the lemons briefly in boiling water before pickling them. However, the resulting taste did not match that of naturally matured pickle. Determined not to compromise on taste or quality, Vasudev decided to produce pickle in larger quantities and adhere strictly to traditional preparation methods. In 1922, he introduced mango pickles in the market. Much like the lemon pickle, the mango pickle was well received by consumers. That year, he processed approximately two *maunds* (around 74 kg) of mangoes into pickle (Bedekar 1961, 72).

Understanding that product quality alone was not enough for commercial success, Bedekar undertook effective marketing strategies. He advertised his products through various weeklies, periodicals, magazines and newspapers. Slogans like '*Bedekar Masalewale... Lonchyat Murlele an Masalyat Gajalele*' (Bedekar masala makers... renowned in pickles and spices) resonated with homemakers. Equal attention was given to packaging and storage. Initially, Bedekar's masalas were sold in paper packets before transitioning to tin containers. Similarly, pickles, which were originally sold in leaf bowls, were eventually packaged in mechanically sealed bottles.

By 1961, Bedekar had significantly expanded its product range beyond masalas and pickles, catering to discerning Maharashtrian consumers. The diversified offerings included traditional items such as *metkut* (mixture of blended pulses and spices), *bhajani* (multigrain flour mix), and *bhaji* flour (a ready-made mix for fritters), as well as mango chutney and preserves made from mango, *bael* fruit (wood apple), and *amla* (gooseberry). Additionally, *gulkand* (a sweet preserve made from rose petals) was introduced as part of the product line. For consumers interested in preparing pickles at home, Bedekar introduced spice mixes for mango, chilli, and lemon pickles. Their range of papads—made from poha (flattened rice), *matki* (moth bean), and potatoes—also gained popularity. Today, instant mixes of items such as *gulab jamun* and *besan laddoo*, alongside Diwali snacks and frozen *ukadiche modak*, are packaged using modern techniques and distributed globally.

Bedekar's business success was anchored in superior quality, exceptional taste achieved through premium raw materials, traditional and home-style production processes, and attractive packaging. Vasudev Bedekar never compromised on product quality. His meticulous approach to pickle preparation—avoiding the use of seeds in mango pickles and preserving them without chemical additives—was akin to that of a dedicated homemaker, garnering widespread appreciation. His innovative spirit was consistently recognized and appreciated by both

consumers and the business community. In 1931, Bedekar's masala received a gold medal at the 'Mumbai's Classified Trades Exhibition' held in Mysore. Later, in July 1959, at the second All India Mango Exhibition in Delhi, Bedekar's mango pickle won the first prize. V. P. Bedekar and Sons continues to thrive in the era of globalisation, upheld by a commitment to superior quality, business integrity, and customer satisfaction.

Kubal Masale: A Distinct Identity in the World of Spices and Pickles

Like the renowned Bedekar brand, another name that has carved out a unique identity in the production of spices and pickles is Messrs. K. T. Kubal & Co. , popularly known as Kubal Masale. The enterprise was founded in 1926 by Mr. Krishnaji Tukaram Kubal, who had migrated to Mumbai from Vengurla for employment. Initially, Mr. Kubal began his business in Mumbai Central, dealing in tin or metal containers and barrels. However, with the advent of plastic barrels in the market, the demand for metal containers declined, prompting him to consider an alternative line of business (Kubal 2025). Mr. Kubal possessed sharp insight into consumer behaviour and the foresight to predict future market trends. He reasoned that "although, at the time, most housewives prepared pickles and masala at home using their traditional methods, the growing need for women to work outside the home would eventually create a market for ready-made food products to save time. This would, in turn, lead to increased demand for pre-prepared pickles and masala" (K T Kubal n.d.).

Acting on this vision, Kubal entered the pickle and masala production business. He introduced mango, chilli, and mixed pickles to the market. In addition to offering traditional masala, he also made available spice mixes specifically for pickles. His primary customer base comprised the working-class Konkani and Malvani labourers employed in Mumbai's textile mills. To cater to their work schedules, Kubal ensured his store remained open at two specific times during the day (Kubal 2025).

At that time, masala was primarily prepared manually using wooden mortar and pestles. A long log, mounted like a seesaw over a pit, was operated by workers using foot to crush the spices. This traditional method was highly labour-intensive and time-consuming, which in turn made the final product relatively expensive. The introduction of the *chakki* (grinding mill) significantly reduced the time and effort required, thereby decreasing production costs. Nevertheless, some customers continued to favour the traditional approach, believing that mechanical grinding caused the natural oils in the spices to overheat, resulting in a loss of flavour. To accommodate these preferences, both methods, the traditional hand-pounding and the modern machine-grinding were practiced by the Kubal.

Kubal promoted his products with taglines such as: "*Kubal Masala Tar Swayampak Changala*" (Kubal Masala, for delicious cooking) (*Navakal*, January 8, 1961, 1) and "*Maharashtrachya Rajdhanit Gruhininchi Uttam Soy Mhanjech Shuddh-Swadisht va Ruchakar Kubal Masale*" (in Maharashtra's capital, the best option for homemakers—pure, flavourful, and

tasty Kubal Masale) (*Vrindawan* 1960, 95). These advertisements were published in leading newspapers and magazines of the time.



Figure 2. Kubal Masala advertisement.
Source: Navakal, January 8, 1961.

With growing customer demand, the Kubal Masala business expanded into multiple branches. By 1960, in addition to its main outlet at Foras Road, Kubal opened branches in Lalbaug, Golpitha, Dadar, Naigaon, Parel, Tardeo, Worli, and Satrasta; these areas were home to a large number of blue-collar workers back then. For over six decades, Kubal has remained committed to maintaining the highest quality in its pickles and spices through continuous research and innovation. Kubal has its own dedicated marketing division, staffed with experienced professionals to meet the evolving needs of a growing consumer base. As a result, they have developed specialised blends such as special meat masala, biryani masala, chicken masala to catered non vegetarian consumers. To maintain their relevance in the international market, they consistently upgrade their packaging and presentation to match contemporary standards.

Khamkar Masale: A Legacy of Entrepreneurship and Tradition

The Mumbai-based brand Ashok Khamkar Masale, known for its enduring presence in the spice industry, operates under the impactful taglines: “*AK Mhanje Ek Number*” (AK means Number One) and “*Ajoba Ajine Ubharala, Aamhi te Jopasala*” (Built by our grandparents, nurtured by us).

The origins of this enterprise trace back to 1935, when Mr. Raghunath Bhikaji Khamkar migrated from his native village of Argaon in Lanja Taluka, Ratnagiri district, to Tardeo in Mumbai. In the beginning, he worked in different jobs for a few days. However, since Mr. Khamkar had come to Mumbai with the intention of starting a business, he soon left his job and began selling dried coconuts.

He initially sourced dried coconuts from the wholesale market at Masjid Bunder and sold them in Lalbaug (Khamkar 2025). Back then, Masjid Bunder was a hub for household commodities (Madgaonkar 2011, 72). Boats, especially those carrying coconuts from Cochin, used to arrive at Masjid Bunder. Eventually, Mr. Khamkar began dealing directly in bulk boatloads of coconuts (Khamkar 2025). As his business grew, he purchased a plot in Lalbaug and built a two-unit retail outlet dedicated solely to the coconut trade. He soon became the primary supplier of dried coconuts in the entire Lalbaug market. Following the success of his coconut business, he diversified into the trading of whole spices. As his business expanded, Mr. Khamkar invited his four brothers—Pundalik Bhikaji Khamkar, Bhau Bhikaji Khamkar, Tanu Bhikaji Khamkar, and Vaman Bhikaji Khamkar—from their village to Mumbai. He acquired additional shops for them, thereby expanding the family's enterprise.

The customer base largely comprised individuals from the Ghats and Konkan regions who had settled in the Lalbaug–Delisle Road area. Given that most textile mills operated in three shifts (7 AM, 3:30 PM, and midnight), the store opened accordingly at 5 AM and 3 PM to cater to mill workers. During this period, the Khamkars dealt exclusively in whole spices. Customers would procure whole spices according to their individual requirements for preparing masala. In 1978, Mr. Jagdish Khamkar (son of Pundalik Bhikaji Khamkar) diversified a business by establishing a masala factory in Vashi (Khamkar 2025).

Following Mr. Raghunath Khamkar's footsteps, his eldest son, Mr. Shantaram Khamkar, significantly expanded the business by opening 13 shops across Mumbai. However, due to personal reasons, he eventually returned to his native village, creating a leadership void in the business. The flourishing enterprise, built by Raghunath and expanded by Shantaram, entered a period of decline and fell into financial distress. In 1992, the Khamkar enterprise was formally divided among the four brothers. The original shop—laden with approximately ₹3.5 lakhs in outstanding debt—was inherited by Mr. Ashok Khamkar, the youngest brother of Shantaram. From this point onward, Ashok Khamkar Masale (also known as AK Masale) began its independent journey.



Figure 3. AK Khamkar Masale Shop, Lalbaug
 Source: Photograph by author, in author's possession.

Despite the challenges, Ashok Khamkar continued the business of selling whole spices and revived it in a short span. Unlike Bedekar and Kubal, the Khamkar Masale did not rely on print advertisements to promote their products. Instead, they excelled in direct marketing, word-of-mouth promotion, and building strong customer relationships. During the 1992 Mumbai riots, while the city was under curfew, Ashok displayed exceptional humanitarian commitment by travelling from Andheri to Lalbaug on a scooter to open the shop and ensure availability of essential commodities to the public. Today, the third generation of the Khamkar family is successfully carrying forward the legacy. Reflecting on their journey, Mr. Amar Ashok Khamkar notes:

“Success in entrepreneurship is not merely driven by finances but equally by the value of humanity. The empathy we showed, and the response it evoked, is what helped us sustain even during times of loss.” (Khamkar 2025).

When Ashok Khamkar started the spice business independently, he did not possess any processing units. However, a pivotal moment occurred when a customer approached Amar Khamkar with a request for masala devoid of any added salt (often added as a preservative). Salt-less masala was not readily available in the market. This prompted Mr. Ashok’s son Amar to open a factory in Airoli (Navi Mumbai) to prepare readymade masalas. Here, they use high-quality spices that are first roasted and then sun-dried for a day. Instead of using grinding mills, the traditional *danking* method of pounding masala is used which helps to retain the flavour and aroma of the spices.

Another unique feature of AK Khamkar's is customisation of masalas according to individual customer preferences. With a sense of pride, they often say, "You bring your mother's recipe (for masala preparation), and we will prepare it for you." (Khamkar 2025). This personalised approach has been instrumental in cultivating a loyal customer base, which has been sustained across three generations.

Today, AK Khamkar Masale has cultivated a strong reputation in the spice industry through accurate understanding of customer needs, high product quality, non-adulterated materials, hygienic packaging, competitive pricing, a robust distribution network, timely deliveries, and professional labelling (Ashok Khamkar Masala. n.d.). As a result, Khamkar spices are not only preferred for domestic cooking but are also widely used in various restaurants.

Lijjat: The Pioneering Indian Brand of Papad

Lijjat, the iconic brand established by Shri Mahila Griha Udyog group, stands as a remarkable example of women's empowerment in India, offering a pathway to economic independence and dignity for countless women. The origins of this enterprise date back to March 15, 1959, when seven women—Jaswantiben Jamnadas Popat, Parvatiben Ramdas Thodani, Ujamben Narandas Kundalia, Banuben N. Tanna, Laguben Amritlal Gokani, Jayaben V. Vithalani, and Diwaliben Lukka—began a humble papad-making venture on the rooftop of Lohana Niwas building in Girgaon, Mumbai (Rathi 2016).

These women, all belonging to the Lohana community of Gujarat, led ordinary lives as housewives but aspired to contribute to their households financially by leveraging their culinary skills. With a loan of just Rs. 80, they started rolling papads and produced four packets on the first day, which they sold through shopkeepers in the Bhuleshwar market (Ramanathan 2004, 1689). Right from the start, they adopted a clear principle: they would never accept charity or external financial aid, even in the face of losses—the business would grow solely through self-reliance (*Basic Philosophy and Practices of Our Organization* 2012, 5–6). Their efforts quickly bore fruit. Within three months, the group expanded from seven to twenty-five members, and in two years, over 150 women had joined. The first-year sales amounted to Rs. 6,196 (*In Quest of Sarvodaya* 2012, 2).

Initially they encountered several challenges but overcame them through innovative solutions. One major obstacle was drying papads during the monsoon season. To address this challenge, they developed innovative drying methods by investing in cots and stoves to facilitate indoor drying. This approach not only resolved the problem but also helped standardise production and significantly reduced drying time to just 15 minutes. As sales increased, they rented eight additional rooms in their building; however, space limitations remained a challenge. To overcome this, they implemented a decentralised production model by distributing pre-kneaded dough to women allowing them to roll papads at home and return them the next day.



Figure 4. Lijjat symbol.

Source: <https://www.lijjat.com/about-us>

However, the business remained nameless until 1962. To suggest a brand name, a competition was organised among the members, with a cash prize of Rs. 5 for the winning suggestion. The name 'Lijjat' (meaning tasty in Gujarati) was selected. It was proposed by Dhirajben Ruparel and it captured the essence of the product and resonated well with both the makers and the consumers. The organisation was officially named 'Shri Mahila Griha Udyog, Lijjat Papad' with 'Shri' symbolising the goddess Lakshmi, representing prosperity and womanhood. The logo featured a lotus-bearing female hand, symbolising the women at the heart of the enterprise.

In its early years, Lijjat operated without formal registration or a written constitution, relying solely on mutual trust and collaboration. Realising the value of formal recognition, the founders sought affiliation with the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). Shri U. N. Dhebar, then chairman of KVIC, helped Lijjat to draft their constitution and register under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. In July 1966 the business was formally recognised as a 'Village Industry' under the 'Processing of Cereals and Pulses' category of the Khadi and Village Industries Act of 1960. KVIC also sanctioned Rs. 800,000 as working capital and granted various subsidies. Subsequently, Lijjat was registered as a public trust under the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950 (*In Quest of Sarvodaya* 2012, 4). At a general meeting, the members unanimously adopted a written constitution, marking the organisation's formal structure in its seventh year.

Advertising efforts began early on, using regional newspapers and radio to increase brand visibility. In 1978-79, Appi Umrani, mentor of the ladies, requested Ramdas Padhye, a ventriloquist, to direct a TV advertisement for Lijjat. Mr. Padhye introduced the idea of creating an advertisement centred around a fluffy rabbit puppet (Padhye 1987, 94). Accompanying the visuals was a distinct jingle featuring the lyrics which emphasised the flavour and versatility of seven varieties of Lijjat Papad. This advertisement also suggested that Lijjat papad is not only best eaten with meals, but it can also be consumed as a snack along with tea or coffee while chatting

with friends and family. The use of puppetry, familial themes, and a catchy soundtrack contributed to the uniqueness and memorability of the campaign. The rabbit puppet eventually became so synonymous with the brand that it was featured on Lijjat's packaging. It became an example of how even an unconventional brand element can significantly enhance brand recognition and emotional appeal.



Figure 5. Lijjat Papad advertisement.

Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/FQRPH6MCgo65nX8M7>

Though most businesses are established for profit, Lijjat transcends this purpose by fostering financial stability, confidence, and self-respect among women. The institution has maintained Sarvodaya Philosophy and cooperative principle as its ideal. Membership is open to all women irrespective of their caste, race, religion, or colour. Every woman working within the organisation is referred as a 'sister,' is considered a co-owner and collectively shares in both the profits and losses of the enterprise (*Basic Philosophy and Practices of Our Organization* 2012; *Magic Behind Success Story* 2023; Jain 1980, 127–29.).

Lijjat's steadfast dedication to quality is largely responsible for its broad consumer acceptance. Initially, the organisation produced both premium and lower-grade papads, the latter catering to restaurants. However, following the guidance of their mentor, Chhaganlal Karamashi Parekh, also known as Chhaganbappa—a social activist from the Lohana community who emphasised the importance of maintaining consistent quality—the lower-grade variant was discontinued.

This strategic move enhanced the brand's reputation for maintaining uniformity in product standards. Lijjat has never regretted this decision. The manufacturing process is transparent and open to scrutiny. The sister members strictly adhere to established standards for taste, color, and size, and they ensure that only the finest ingredients and raw materials are used. Quality checks are embedded throughout production, ensuring that substandard products are

never sold in the market. This rigorous approach to quality control has positioned Lijjat Papad as a leading product in both domestic and international markets.

Lijjat Papad enjoys a strong global presence, with demand continuing to grow across various countries. Currently, approximately 30–35 percent of production is exported to regions including the United Kingdom, United States, France, Italy, Germany, the Middle East, Singapore, Hong Kong, Europe, and Japan. Lijjat has demonstrated consistent excellence in its operations and has been the recipient of numerous prestigious awards in recognition of its contributions. Notable among these are the ‘Best Village Industry’ award conferred by the KVIC for the consecutive years 1998–1999 to 2000–2001, the ‘Businesswoman of the Year 2001–02 for Corporate Excellence’ by The Economic Times, the ‘Brand Equity Award’ in 2005, the ‘Global Economic Award’ in 2017, along with several others.

Throughout its journey, the organisation has remained committed to its social responsibility, standing as a beacon of cooperative success and women-led entrepreneurship. Rooted in the Gandhian principle of trusteeship, Lijjat has cultivated a culture of social responsibility, whereby its sister members actively contribute to community welfare by giving back a portion of their earnings. For instance, back then, Lijjat donated Rs. 1000/- to Matushri Kanbai Lalbai Balika Griha, a well-known educational institution located in Vile Parle. Monetary help and awards are given in recognition of excellence in examinations in schools and colleges. Lijjat offers scholarships annually to the children of sister members who successfully pass the SSC and HSC examinations. Lijjat also voluntarily contributes to social causes within their capacity, such as constructing homes for earthquake victims in Chincholi-Jogan (Latur) and Bhujpur (Kutch) (*In Quest of Sarvodaya* 2012, 6), as well as providing relief to flood-affected populations.

Building on the success of its papads, Lijjat diversified its products to include *khakhra* (a thin and crunchy flat bread) in 1974, masalas in 1976, and subsequently *vadi* (small dumplings made from different dal), wheat flour, and bakery items in 1979. In 1988, Lijjat entered in the soap and detergent market with the launch of the ‘Sasa’ brand. Moreover, in 1999, the Mumbai unit of Lijjat began selling chapatis at multiple locations thereby expanding its range of ready-to-eat food items. Currently, the organisation operates 83 branches and 31 divisions across 16 Indian states (*Women Power Behind a Success Story* 2023, 1), providing self-employment opportunities to over 45,000 women nationwide.

Parle-G: Popular Biscuit Brand

The arrival of European colonial powers—the Portuguese and the British—brought about notable transformations in India’s traditional dietary practices. Indian society was introduced to a range of previously unfamiliar food items such as bread, biscuits, cakes, and cookies, as well as beverages like tea, coffee, and cocoa. The term biscuit originates from the French *bis cuit*, which itself has roots in the Latin *panis biscotus*, meaning ‘twice-baked bread.’ In the early stages, biscuits were imported from England for Europeans consumers. However, they soon gained

popularity among Indian consumers as well. With the increasing demand for the biscuit among Indian consumers, several Indian entrepreneurs entered this industry. Among the most prominent brands that emerged was the iconic Parle-G biscuit.

The Swadeshi Movement, which gained momentum in the early twentieth century, played a crucial role in shaping India's economic independence by promoting the use of locally produced goods and reducing reliance on foreign imports. This movement significantly impacted Indian entrepreneurs, including Mohanlal Dayal Chauhan, a Mumbai-based textile businessman. Motivated by the *Swadeshi* ideology, Chauhan grew increasingly concerned about his dependence on imported silk, which was a key material in his textile trade. Seeking to align with the nationalistic spirit of self-reliance, he, along with his family, decided to enter the confectionery business. After studying the process of candy manufacturing, the family imported the necessary machinery from Germany to begin production (Lala and Tiwari 2022, 36).

In 1929, the Chauhan family set up a modest manufacturing unit in the Parle suburb of Mumbai. With limited resources and a team of 12 workers, they began producing sweets and candies. In their dedication to the enterprise, the founders neglected to give a formal name to the brand. The business eventually became known as Parle, taking its name from the locality where it was established. The company's first product was orange-flavoured candy, which was soon followed by a range of other confections and toffees. This marked the beginning of Parle as India's first domestically owned confectionery brand, reflecting the broader ethos of the Swadeshi Movement and setting a precedent for Indian entrepreneurship in the food industry.

A decade later, the company diversified its production by entering the biscuit segment. At the time, biscuits were perceived with cultural and religious skepticism by many Indians, as they were considered foreign and associated with Western dietary practices. Despite this resistance, a significant section of Indian society was beginning to adopt select aspects of British lifestyle. Gradually, biscuits gained acceptance, after people realised that consuming them did not compromise their religious or cultural identity.

In response to this changing attitude, Parle made a strategic decision in 1939 to introduce a line of energy-rich and affordable biscuits under the name *Parle Gluco*. This initiative aimed to offer a local alternative to imported brands, notably the British brands that dominated the market such as Jacob's Cream Crackers, Huntly & Palmers, Glaxo. Parle received a good response from the Indian customers as it was made in India and intended for the Indian palate. During World War II, it was also in demand by the British Indian Army. Following India's independence in 1947, Parle capitalised on the patriotic sentiment by marketing its biscuits as a homegrown and nourishing substitute for British products. This messaging strongly resonated with the public, and *Parle Gluco* became deeply embedded in Indian consumer culture.



Figure 6. Parle Gluco and Parle G biscuit advertisement.

Source: <https://www.parleproducts.com/brands/parle-g>

By the 1980s, the Parle Gluco brand had become synonymous with Glucose biscuits, and competitors began adopting the word Gluco at the end of their biscuit names to capitalise on Parle Gluco's success. Parle was unable to obtain a patent for the term Gluco. Therefore, the company renamed its product as 'Parle-G' to create its own distinct identity and underscored this change with a memorable television advertisement in which a grandfather and his grandchildren sang the jingle, "*Swaad Bhare, Shakti Bhare, Parle-G.*" The biscuit's packaging—featuring a yellow background and the image of a young girl—became an iconic and widely recognised symbol, specifically designed to appeal to children and homemakers. The original packaging, made of wax paper, was eventually replaced with plastic to increase its shelf life.

Over the years, Parle-G introduced several highly successful marketing campaigns. Parle-G was the first brand to advertise on suburban railway compartments which helped greatly to expand its visibility. In the late 1990s, the brand adopted the superhero character Shaktimaan—from a telly series of the same name, a favorite among Indian children—as its brand ambassador. Subsequent campaigns such as "*G maane Genius*" and "*Roko Mat, Toko Mat*" were launched to resonate with the younger generation, emphasizing a link between intelligence and biscuit consumption. These initiatives further strengthened the brand's emotional connection with Indian consumers.

Over the time, Parle-G has expanded its product line by introducing Parle-G Gold, Parle-G Chhota Bheem, Parle-G Oats & Berries, Parle-G Kismi Cinnamon, Parle-G Royal, Parle-G Cookies, and Parle-G Dark, thereby broadening the brand's appeal and market presence. While

marketing efforts contributed to its popularity, the brand's enduring success is largely attributed to the trust and familiarity it cultivated over decades. The Rs. 5 pack, in particular, emerged as a top-selling item and played a key role in making Parle-G the world's leading glucose biscuit by sales (Lakhangaonkar et al. 2022, 1236). Interestingly, one survey noted that approximately 4,000 to 5,000 people around the globe consume Parle-G every minute, a testament to its vast reach and enduring popularity.

Parle-G has successfully penetrated every stratum of the Indian society. Its affordability, compatibility with tea, and versatile utility have ensured its dominance despite the influx of competing glucose biscuits in the market. Often referred to as the "common man's biscuit," Parle-G seamlessly combines nutritional value with economic accessibility, reinforcing its enduring appeal across generations. It has received recognition for its consistent and consistent quality. Parle-G became the first Indian food company to receive the prestigious Monde Selection Award in 1971. As its distinctive taste gained popularity worldwide, the brand was recognised by Nielsen, a global ratings and consumer data analytics firm, as the world's best-selling biscuit (Singh 2021, 61).

Conclusion

The entrepreneurial journeys of Bedekar, Kubal, Khamkar, Lijjat, and Parle-G represent far more than mere business success; they embody a complex interplay of cultural preservation, social empowerment, and economic innovation. These brands emerged from diverse backgrounds—some preserving culinary traditions, others adapting to colonial influences like biscuits—yet collectively they democratised access to packaged foods by blending affordability with quality, catering to a wide range of consumers across class and region, and in the process, became vehicles of social mobility and community empowerment.

Economically, these enterprises played a pivotal role in establishing Mumbai as a major centre of India's food processing industry, generating employment and building extensive distribution networks. Culturally, they nurtured a sense of identity and pride by offering distinctly Indian flavours in accessible, convenient formats. The enthusiastic response of discerning Mumbaikars to new culinary experiments and innovations created an environment ripe for entrepreneurial success and business expansion.

Traditionally, masalas have held a strong cultural identity, often associated with specific communities. Homemakers take great pride in preparing these masalas, and the recipes are well kept secret—rarely shared, even within the families. Masala entrepreneurs played a key role in disbursing culinary knowledge that had long been confined to particular social groups. Homemakers began adding masalas from different communities into their daily cooking, thereby sharing and enriching the city's diverse culinary heritage.

At a time when Mumbai's commercial landscape was dominated by Gujarati, Marwari, and Sindhi communities—and business held limited prestige within the Marathi population—

Bedekar set a notable precedent for successful Marathi entrepreneurship. By responding to community needs and integrating ethical labour practices such as minimum wages, bonuses, provident funds, and retirement benefits, Bedekar inspired a shift in local economic aspirations, emphasising workers' welfare as central to sustainable business growth. Lijjat further advanced this legacy by establishing a pioneering example of women's empowerment through cooperative enterprise. On other hand, Parle emerged not just as a commercial success, but as a symbol of national self-reliance as it positioned itself as an Indian-made alternative to foreign goods, aligning with the broader *Swadeshi* spirit. Its popularity reflected a growing sense of national identity through everyday consumption, making it a quiet but powerful force in shaping post-independence consumer culture.

Ultimately, the stories of Bedekar, Kubal, Khamkar, Lijjat, and Parle-G illustrate how small-scale, community-rooted enterprises have been foundational in shaping Mumbai's economic and cultural identity. Emerging from domestic spaces, cooperative efforts, and localised knowledge, these ventures reflect the ingenuity, resilience, and adaptive spirit of Mumbai's working and middle classes. They are not merely business successes but integral to the city's narrative, exemplifying how Mumbai's growth has been driven as much by grassroots entrepreneurs. The shaping of Mumbai's identity and growth has not been solely the result of contributions from educationalists, political leaders, social reformers, and major industrialists. Equally significant—though often less acknowledged—is the role played by local entrepreneurs. They, too, are the 'Makers of Mumbai.'

References

- Ashok Khamkar Masala. n.d. "About Ashok Khamkar Masala." Accessed April 18, 2025. <https://khamkar.co.in/pages/about-us>.
- Bedekar, Vasudev. 1961. *Bedekar Jeevan Vrutant*. Mumbai: Shyamla Prakashan.
- Bedekar, Ajit. 2021. "The Story of Bedekar." YouTube video, 3:15. Accessed April 10, 2025. <https://youtu.be/Ken5VQPbk2c?feature=shared>.
- Basic Philosophy and Practices of Our Organization*. August 2012. Mumbai: Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, Lijjat Press.
- In Quest of Sarvodaya*. August 2012. Mumbai: Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, Lijjat Press.
- Jain, Devaki. 1980. *Women's Quest for Power: Five Case Studies*. Sahibabad: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
- Kubal. "Kubal Masala Tar Swayampak Changala." Navakal. January 8, 1961. Advertisement.
- . "Maharashtrachya Rajdhanit Gruhininchi Uttam Soy Mhanjech Shuddh-Swadisht va Ruchakar Kubal Masale." Vrindawan. edited by Manorama Chaphekar, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1960). Mumbai. Advertisement.
- K T Kubal. n.d. "About Kubal." Accessed April 20, 2025. <https://www.ktkubal.com/about.php>.
- Kubal, Shivjeet. Interview by the author. April 2025. Transcript available on request.
- Khamkar, Amar. Interview by the author. April 2025. Transcript available on request.
- Lala, Anurag, and Kanishkaa Tiwari. 2022. *Brand Voyage: The Journey of Brands*. Ghaziabad: Anurag Lala.
- Lakhangaonkar, Supriya, Shweta Kishore, and Kavita Kamath. 2022. "From Biscuits to Hand Sanitizers: India's Largest Biscuit and Confectionary Brand—Parle's Diversification." *Journal of*

- Information and Optimization Sciences* 43, no. 6: 1233–42.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02522667.2022.2117325>.
- Lijjat. n.d. “About Lijjat.” Accessed May 10, 2025. <https://www.lijjat.com/about-us>.
- Madgaonkar, G. N. 2011. *Mumbaiche Varnan*. Pune: Saket Prakashan.
- Magic Behind Success Story*. August 2023. Mumbai: Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, Lijjat Press.
- Padhye, Ramdas. 1987. *Bolvita Dhani Veglachi*. Mumbai: Granthghar Prakashan.
- Rathi, Jugalkishore. 2016. *Lijjatchi Yashogatha*. Nagpur: Nachiket Prakashan.
- Parle Products. n.d. “Parle Products Brand Parle G.” Accessed May 16, 2025. <https://www.parleproducts.com/brands/parle-g>
- Ramanathan, Malathi. 2004. “Women and Empowerment: Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 17: 1689–97. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4414928>.
- Singh, Ritu. 2021. *A History of Indian Advertising in Ten-and-a-half Chapters*, Gurgaon: Hachette Book Publishing India Pvt. Ltd.
- Women Power Behind a Success Story*. April 2023. Mumbai: Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, Lijjat Press.