



## THE SAFETY DANCE

How and why is Hamam making the leap from being a herbal skin care soap to a martial arts instructor among other things?

By Ravi Balakrishnan

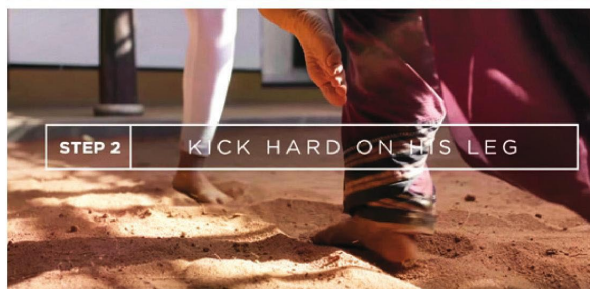
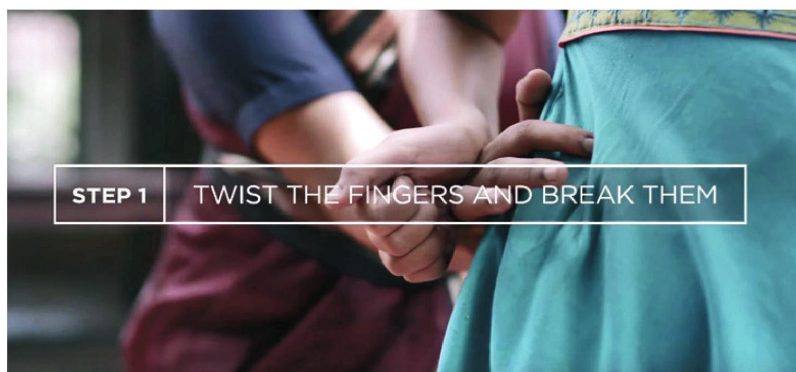
**H**amam is probably Hindustan Unilever's best kept secret. Launched in 1931, with a 'desi' sounding name as opposed to other flagships like Lux and Lifebuoy, it's a brand that many people don't associate with the MNC, and imagine to be totally indigenous, a situation that footwear maker Bata is also intimately familiar with. And so it doesn't seem like a coincidence that HUL is choosing to restage this ancient brand. We are, after all, in an age where products that claim a strong herbal heritage are en vogue and at a time when Babas rail against MNCs as they push a Swadeshi (narrowly defined as their own homegrown brand) agenda.

For the bulk of its existence, Hamam has been a strong regional player. According to HUL, it is the largest skin cleansing brand in Tamil Nadu used by 8 out of 10 households. Its other key markets are Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra. Hamam's advertising has traditionally been strictly boilerplate, featuring popular tropes of soap marketing like happy families and tots enjoying a good wash — ads that could comfortably have run in the 1970s. Even one of its recent films on Pongal was stuffed to bursting with such imagery.

And so the new online film, featuring a mother right out of the Bournvita school of tough love, taking her daughter to learn martial arts instead of merely chauffeuring her around to keep her safe, counts as a clean break. Through the course of the film, the child learns *silambam*, a martial art native to Tamil Nadu, so that she can, as the brand's hashtag puts it #Go Safe Outside.

The approach evolved via conversations with consumers. Says Suresh Nayak, chief creative officer—Ogilvy West, "As a product, it was deeply rooted in skin safety and *neem*. But what also came out was this need. And so we discussed the possibility and opportunity to have the product benefit mean something more to the consumer."

The brand's not satisfied merely with an



"Brands are trying to get friendlier than they used to be with real people. Can they prepare people to take on the world is the question: I think Hamam is trying just that." However, purpose is also something brands merely dabble with. Asked if he believes #Go Safe Outside

online film. A HUL spokesperson says, the plans include a series of self-defence tutorials on digital mediums, an outdoor campaign to create safety zones in unsafe spots via CCTV-enabled billboards and even self defence training for school kids.

Another key change is *silambam* lessons on the packs. Nayak explains, "It meant a lot of work but we believed even a soap pack must mean something to whoever picks it up." HUL intends taking the message to 1.8 crore households.

Speaking about the reasons for the restaging, the HUL spokesperson cites an increasingly unsafe world, where apart from pollution, heat, dust, and other adverse environmental factors, external aggressors are a key source of tension. "Hamam's ambition is to help people feel safe, so that they live brave. It was a natural step to extend the safety protection by emboldening people through self-defence," says the spokesperson.

Purpose driven is a good place to be, believes brand consultant Harish Bijoor.

has legs, Bijoor points out that brands typically have a mass media message about beauty and allure and a different message for niche media like digital. "I wonder if the brand is talking in a forked tongue as many brands do," he says. What he'd like is something sustainable, long term and engrained

### HAMAM'S NEW FILM IS A CLEAN BREAK, FEATURING A MOTHER WHO BELIEVES IN TOUGH LOVE AND MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING

in the DNA of the brand, like Tata Tea and Jaago Re, for instance. Ogilvy's Nayak admits #Go Safe Outside is a very large platform, with a positioning bigger than just one execution. He's candid enough to admit that longevity will depend entirely on the consumer reaction. "We'd love to make it a big platform," he says.

Considering even a casual glance at our newspapers and TV shows, indicates a country that's quite far from being entirely Safe Outside (or even Safe Inside), any brand that takes on such a plank has its work cut out. But if it rings true with the consumers, in even a limited way, maybe it will be the cue for Hamam to Go Safe Outside of its traditional southern stronghold.

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