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MILKING PROFITS: AAMIR RAZA'S CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE*

Every 30 seconds a baby dies because it was not breastfed. One such bottle baby death occurred in Sialkot, Pakistan in March 1997. When the doctor returned from attending the child and informing the parents, he found Syed Aamir Raza, a Nestlé medical delegate, still waiting in his office. "Why did this child die?" Aamir asked the doctor. "Because of people like you" replied the doctor. So began a crisis of conscience which led to a young man taking on the world's largest food company. It is a story of institutionalised malpractice and Aamir struggle to be heard.

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"Be the Best"

Syed Aamir Raza joined Nestlé Milkpak as a Medical Delegate in December 1994 at the age of 24. It was a dream come true to work for a multinational company and he was quickly indoctrinated with Nestlé's "Be the Best" slogan.

Aamir was responsible for promoting breastmilk substitutes and infant cereals. One of his first tasks was to run a baby show, already organised by the Area Detailing Executive. Baby shows were popular with health workers and mothers and provided an opportunity for marketing staff to make direct contact with both and to display the company's range of breastmilk substitutes and discuss them. Such activities are banned by Article 5.5 of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and by Nestlé's own "Charter".

Nestlé's "Charter"

Aamir says he received no training from Nestlé on the Code. But in December 1996 he did receive a copy of Nestlé's weak version of it - its "Charter". He adds,

I was confused when I read the 'Charter'. It said Nestlé does not give gifts to doctors, but we did this. My bosses signed the cheques. It said we did not make direct contact with mothers, but we held baby shows and in clinics we used Cerelac samples as a way of striking up conversations to push the milks. The 'Charter' says Nestlé does not pay staff by incentives, but my salary revisions signed by Nestlé's Marketing Manager include incentives. Infant formula received the most points in the scheme. My bosses told me to do all these things which the 'Charter' says we do not do.

Crisis of conscience

Several months after first seeing the "Charter" Aamir was visiting one of the 200 doctors on his circuit. This doctor was one of the very few who refused the gifts offered by Nestlé. The doctor was called from his office to attend a sick child, a child he could not save. "This is the result of marketing by people like you," he told Aamir when he returned to his office. He explained that the child had been breastfed for just one month and then a doctor had prescribed infant formula. Two months later the child was sick with diarrhoea. A month after that he was dead.

Aamir says that during training he had been told to quickly say "breast is best" before launching into his sales pitch, but the risks associated with bottle feeding had not been explained. Leaving the doctor's clinic, Aamir understood that unsafe bottle feeding could kill - had killed the child of the distraught parents he saw grieving outside the office.

Aamir returned home to his 2 year old son and pregnant wife and began to think about what had happened. He was in a dilemma - on the one hand, leaving his well-paying job entailed critical risks especially with a young child and a pregnant wife. On the other hand, he could not continue selling death.

Legal Notice

Six months after his resignation, Aamir issued his former employers a Legal Notice (dated 12/11/1997), attaching nearly 80 pages of evidence of the company's unethical marketing practices.

Advised by his father in view of his legal experience, Aamir demanded in his Legal Notice that the company

“stop its business of infant food manufacturing in Pakistan and withdraw all its infant food products from the Pakistani market within 15 days of receiving this legal notice”. He also directed the company to “terminate the services of staff involved in non-professional and unethical practices of promoting and selling infant formulas within the same period of 15 days.”

Documentary evidence

The evidence contained in the Legal Notice and Aamar’s other files, is damning and substantiates the findings of monitoring conducted in 33 cities by a group in the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) - The Network, Association for Rational Use of Medication in Pakistan - published as the *Feeding Fiasco* in March 1998. The Network has reproduced some of Aamar’s evidence in the new report *Milking Profits*. Here we summarise the evidence presented in the report.

Impress money - bribes to doctors

“All the supports are with you as usual,” reads a handwritten note signed by Aamar’s immediate supervisor, the Area Detailing Executive. “Supports” including cash for gifts. Every month Aamar received “promotional expenses” or “impress money.”

“This budget is used to fulfill the demands of doctors,” Aamar explains, which could include lunches and air tickets. Nurses were usually given lipstick and perfume. Aamar was required to keep receipts of this expenditure and submit them to the accounts department. If sales were good in his area, he would be given larger sums of money, in amounts which were two or three times his own salary.

Doctors’ details were recorded on Contact Data Cards, which include entries for date of birth and wedding anniversary, reminding Medical Delegates when to give special gifts to the doctor.

At the end of the fasting month is the festival of Eid. Aamar’s supervisor provided him with gift packs for doctors, made up of Nestlé food products. Class A doctors received a more generous pack than those of lesser rank.

Authorisation required

Larger expenditure had to be specifically approved by Aamar’s superiors beforehand. When a doctor asked for an air conditioner, Aamar wrote to his supervisor, seeking guidance, who consulted the Group Brand Manager at the national headquarters. The Group Brand Manager authorised part payment and wrote “Aamar, OK. But *Nan* and *AI-1 10* sales should go up.”

Pressure to perform

Monthly, brand-by-brand target sheets are prepared by the Area Detailing Executive for the Medical Delegates (for breastmilk substitutes *Lactogen 1 & 2*, *AI-1 10*, *Nan*, *Pre-Nan* as well as complementary foods *Cerelac*, *Neslac* and *Nestum*). The sales team is continuously reminded of these targets and the importance of meeting them. They are under pressure to perform. A notice from Aamar’s supervisor informs him, “Please receive your last quarter achievements report against target. Your small towns need a lot of improvement in all products and special emphasis is needed in Sialkot...” Another time, Aamar was informed, “Your most concern area is *Cerelac* [a complementary food] as well as *Nan* [an infant formula] also specially in Sialkot. Also start taking Rx of

AI-1 10 also.” *AI-1 10* is an infant formula for use for the rare condition of lactose intolerance, but even with this product Nestlé set sales targets. The minutes of an Annual Delegates Meeting, signed by the Group Brand Manager, state that “Targets of *AI-110* must be rationalised according to the real potentiality of the towns.”

Fruits of their labour

A letter from the Marketing Manager of Nestlé Milkpak provides the break up of Aamar’s salary. The letter informs Aamar he “will also continue to be entitled to participate in the Performance Incentive Scheme... Please remember your actual performance is regarded to be of key importance and has therefore been duly considered when revising your salary.”

Aamar’s pay-slips show the “Incentive to Salesman” payments, which vary from slip to slip but are sometimes nearly as much as the fixed pay. On later slips, where fixed pay is broken down into basic pay and various allowances, the incentive to salesmen is sometimes more than double the basic pay.

The minutes of an Annual Delegates Meeting reveal that infant formulas receive the most points in the “sales incentive scheme” and Delegates receive an extra bonus for hitting all their targets. Like the promotional activities already discussed, incentives and sales quotas are banned by the Code. Interestingly, Aamar’s pay slips are marked “strictly CONFIDENTIAL.”

“Well done tigers”

The entire sales team was invited to the annual sales conferences at the luxurious hotel, Pearl Continental Bhurban. The invitation letter informs the winners of the

Tiger Cup that they will receive their award during this event. Awards are given to the “Medical Delegate of the Year”. Winners receive plaques and cash awards of as much as Rs 25,000. Winners are determined by their sales performance.

Aamir did not win an award, but he received a special commendation for his work in “crushing” the competition, Japanese company, Morinaga, in CMH Military Hospital Sialkot.

A military doctor, who will be referred to as “The Colonel”, wrote to the Group Brand Manager, an old friend, asking for two air conditioners “for my two clinics (one at CMH and the other at my residence). I am sure that these air conditioners will keep on reminding me of the efforts your company makes for the improvement of patient and health care services in Pakistan.”

Aamir was told that The Colonel had to first show what he could do for the company. The Colonel issued a circular to staff stating that only Nestlé products could be used in the hospital. He then received two air conditioners.

Free supplies

Aamir’s evidence contains forms for providing free supplies. The measures adopted by the World Health Assembly state that there should be no free supplies in “any part of the health care system.”

When Aamir forwarded one doctor’s request for 10 packs of *Lactogen 1* for free, he was advised by the Group Brand Manager to buy the stock from his impress money for the doctor.

Aamir arrived at The Colonel’s office to find his former superiors there. He says:

The Group Brand Manager said Nestlé was such a giant company that I could not harm it. He asked me to withdraw the legal notice and said that if the company’s interests were damaged with legal action, I would suffer serious consequences. Nestlé is a multinational company, he reminded me, and has money to do anything to me. My Area Detailing Executive offered me any amount of money I like. The Group Brand Manager said that if I continued to be stubborn, the company would file cases against me in many different cities. They said anyone from my family could be kidnapped, or I could even be killed. They said there are lots of gangsters in Karachi and Lahore ready to kill for money. I told them to go ahead and do what they wanted to do and I would do what I wanted to do.

To escape the office and the three men, Aamir said he would discuss the matter with his family. He did not return, but sent a letter to Nestlé saying the 15 day period in the Legal Notice had expired and he would take action. It was a brave move, but one Aamir realised he could not pursue alone. Accordingly he wrote to the World Health Organisation office and contacted the IBFAN group, known as The Network.

WHO says no

WHO wrote back saying it had only an advisory role and could not take any action against Nestlé. It forwarded Aamir’s letter to the District Health Officer, without Aamir’s permission.

Soon after Aamir says he received a call to visit The Colonel, who said he was interested in some pharmaceutical products Aamir was then selling, but again there were threats and offers of money. “After that

meeting I told The Colonel I was dropping the issue. Then I made sure to keep everything very secret.”

IBFAN agrees to help

By March 1998 Aamir had shown his evidence to The Network, who said they would publish a report if he decided he wanted to go public. He also wrote a review for the *Feeding Fiasco* report.

The Network contacted other groups in IBFAN, first to evaluate Aamir’s documentary evidence and then to prepare a media strategy. Baby Milk Action and the German group, AGB, played key roles in this, putting Aamir in contact with Stern Magazine and ZDF television in Germany, who spent nearly a year putting together stories.

Milking Profits was launched on 9th December 1999 in Berlin and on 15th February 2000 in London.

Later developments

Aamir presented his evidence to a meeting at the House of Commons on 29th February. Shortly before his family in Pakistan received an anonymous threatening letter telling him to end his campaign and on 27th February shots were fired at his house. Nestlé was asked to condemn the attack, but instead distributed a report claiming the attack did not happen. Baby Milk Action has evidence of the attack and has forwarded this with Nestlé’s report to Pakistan’s anticorruption body which is investigating Aamir’s evidence.

On 13th April Nestlé announced it had commissioned an external audit of its Pakistan operation.

Orders from the top

Aamir's documentary evidence leaves no doubt where the blame lies for these promotional activities. According to him, when he asked for company policy after receiving a request for an air conditioner from a doctor, the Group Brand Manager instructed him to go ahead, but added that sales of Nestlé infant formulas must go up as a result of the gift - making it a clear inducement to promote products - banned by Article 8.1 of the Code. National Executives were implicated by other documents and the auditing methods of Nestlé's Swiss HQ exposed as either inadequate or culpable. Nestlé CEO Peter Brabeck was ultimately responsible and claims: "I personally review any hint of wrongdoings that the auditors uncover."

Aamir's first action was to resign from his well paid and prestigious job with Nestlé. He returned his motorbike, but he kept copies of the documents relating to his job. These had been gathered following instructions from his superiors. He had been instructed to maintain records of incentives to doctors so that he could later use them to pressure the doctor into prescribing more Nestlé products. He also had to keep copies of the instructions he had been issued. Aamir realised that he held irrefutable proof that Nestlé was systematically breaking the *International Code* and its own "Charter." It was not enough to resign his job, he had to do more to stop the unnecessary death and suffering to which Nestlé contributed by such activities.

Nestlé uses its influence

Nestlé's bribes to doctors give it an influence beyond simply promoting products. For example, when The Colonel wrote to the Group Brand Manager, an old friend, requesting two air conditioners he said:

"MAY ALLAH THE MERCIFUL bless you and your team with health honour and peace of mind, with this short but sincere prayer I beg leave of you by assuring you of my strong commitment to any services professional or otherwise which you may consider me able to perform."

Mr. Perroud's offensive

Nestlé's Corporate Communications Director, Francois Perroud, is the man putting Nestlé's side of the story to journalists. His tactics include accusing Aamir of presenting false qualifications (Aamir responds: "I was good enough an employee to get 'Well done' remarks during my three-year job. These are blatant lies and only started after my legal notice to Nestlé."), and of attempting to blackmail the company (Aamir responds: "I did not attempt to blackmail Nestlé. They threatened me and offered me money.")

While Mr. Perroud claims to have proof of his allegations, he has ignored requests from Aamir and Baby Milk Action for copies. Indeed, Baby Milk Action has been asking Nestlé to substantiate its blackmail allegation for the past year.

Mr. Perroud has also been reluctant to put his so-called evidence into the public domain. In a television interview in Germany (still to be broadcast) he flashed an envelope at the interviewer, but refused to hand it over. The interview was terminated as a result and Mr. Perroud stormed out. We have asked Nestlé to respond to the evidence of marketing malpractice and to release its last audit of Nestlé Pakistan. We are still waiting.

INFACT Canada adds,

While Aamir Raza was in England to expose the corporation's actions, two men fired six shots through the window of his family's home in Pakistan. He sought refugee status in Canada, and has not seen his family since. While in the country he has missed the funerals of both his parents.

The Immigration and Refugee Board recently denied his plea for refugee status, pending appeal, claiming he was on a "personal crusade against [the] Nestlé company". The ruling also stated that "The panel seriously questions the plausibility that a multinational company would send out goons to go after the claimant in a shooting incident". Unfortunately, past experience shows that large multinational corporations are more than capable of committing violence against those who oppose them. A lawsuit has been brought against Coca-cola in Columbia for their open relationships with anti-labour death squads, and Nestlé itself has been accused of using violent intimidation to control its workforce in the same country. Raza is facing deportation is hopeful his appeal will be heard and he will be permitted to stay in the country. If he has taken up a "personal crusade", it is against injustice and greed, and it is a cause that all people should enthusiastically support. Please visit his website at www.supportaamirraza.org and sign his petition to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.



An old photograph of Aamir Raza with his wife and children

