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Kolkata's comeback brands

Brands grow, mature, decline, die – and sometimes get reborn too – a tale of a few **rebirths from Kolkata.**

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When they were at their peak, people loved them. When they dropped off their perch people felt sorry. And some yearned for them. Well, there's good news for the yearners. Some of the iconic eastern Indian brands are back for their "second innings".

The spotlight on brand revivals has been turned on by the recent relaunch of Aramusk soap, the country's first male deodorant soap. It was introduced by Calcutta Chemicals nearly three decades ago, lost its lather over the years, but is back in foaming form after Wipro Consumer Care and Lighting picked it up.

But Kolkata has been home to other brand rebirths too – Ayurvedic product brand Hi-



Himani Boroplus and Keo Karpin are some of the Kolkata brands still going strong.

– SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

mani, pharmaceutical shop Frank Ross and Bharat Shoes have not only obtained a fresh lease of life, they are also out to compete with the new kids on the block.

So why do some brands refuse to follow their natural lifecycle of growth, maturity, decline and death and resurface all over again?

Well, in the cases of Aramusk, Himani and Frank Ross, acquisition, professional management, creating brand salience by infusing a contemporary touch have breathed new life into old brands left to die on the pavement. And in the case of Bharat Shoes, a renewed interest by family members has led to a revival.

A SOAP OPERA

Aramusk's rebirth reads like a soap opera. The once premium Aramusk was a trendsetter in the male deodorant soap category, long before the launch of brands such as Denim. But its fortunes dipped with the fate of its owners, as it kept changing hands. Calcutta Chemicals sold off Aramusk to Shaw Wallace, which in turn sold it off to Henkel, before Wipro finally picked it up from VVF Ltd in June 2011.

It's now back on the shelves after a gap of 10 years. For Wipro, which follows a "something for everyone" strategy in its soaps business, the Aramusk buy fulfils a need gap. It already has a beauty soap (Santoor), an Ayurvedic soap (Chandrika), a baby soap (Wipro baby soap), a shikakai soap (Wipro Shikakai), and now with Aramusk it gains a foothold in the exciting men's soap category, where Godrej's Cinthol rules the roost. Of course, Wipro could have launched a new soap of its own, but decided to bank on the male equity that Aramusk still enjoys in the eastern region. The men's personal wash category is estimated to be in the range of Rs 500 crore - Rs 600 crore and is growing at 16 per cent every year.

THE RIGHT POSITIONING

Much like the Aramusk saga, it was acquisition that helped inject life into the century-old Himani and Frank Ross brands. But finding the right positioning for these ailing brands also helped.

Himani had been running aground when, in 1973, Emami acquired it. The Emami strategy for Himani was to discontinue the original line of products manufactured by the brand, and refresh it with a new range of Ayurvedic toiletries and healthcare products. Boroplus, the antiseptic cream, was a runaway success, taking on rival Boroline. "The company chose to brand it as Himani Boroplus to align it with the Ayurveda lineage," explains Krishna Mohan, Chief Executive Officer - Sales, Supply Chain & Human Capital, Emami.

Today, more than 60 per cent of the company's sales turnover comes from Himani

brands. Other than India, Boroplus has made its presence felt in Russia, Ukraine, and Nepal. The success of Himani spurred the hunger for further acquisition in Emami.

Frank Ross's revival is also a case of finding the right niche. In 1993, the promoters of Emami had acquired the iconic 100-year-old pharmaceutical company, which had its own patent medicines such as pertussian cough mixture, tooth ache medicines and various tailor-made syrups and ointments.

From a manufacturing player, Emami changed it into a retailing success story. The new Frank Ross is now a classy air-conditioned pharmaceutical retail chain. "Frank Ross was at the time of acquisition an allopathic medicine manufacturing unit and often made tinctures and spirituous products used for making mixtures prescribed by doctors. Following the acquisition, the new management shifted the focus towards pharma retailing which was a huge fragmented market," recalls Gautam Jatia, chief executive officer, Emami Frank Ross.

Today Frank Ross has 70 outlets spread across major cities such as Kolkata and Howrah, Ahmedabad, and Bangalore.

GETTING A LEG UP

In Bharat Shoes' case, the revival has been crafted by its own original family members. The shoe retailing brand has been reborn as Touristor - a name change forced by circumstances, when in 2002, the company failed to get the name "Bharat Shoes" registered.

"I still use the name Bharat Shoes on my visiting card. The brand has a huge recall and some people still recognise us by that name only," says Ved Vyas Chhabra, pointing to his visiting card. Bharat Shoes still exists (one shop in Kolkata), but currently, Touristor appears to be the focus area of the Chhabras.

Set up in 1952, Bharat Shoes tasted blood in the East during the pre-Sreeleathers and Khadim's days. After an initial fragmentation amongst family members around the Seventies, the four Chhabra brothers - Vijay, Ashoke, Chandra Mohan and Ved Vyas - decided to consolidate the existing business, and focus on one shop in Central Kolkata.

"Each one of us now looks after a division with the next generation helping us out in building the business," Chhabra says, adding that plans are afoot to grow the Rs 18-crore 'Touristor' brand to other parts of the country. The three male heirs of the family are already assisting their parents.

Following its re-entry through the sprouting malls in the region, stores on the high street are the next step. "In terms of marketing and ad-spends, we look to grow through the Touristor brand now," he added.

They may have been faded, but these brands were certainly not jaded - perhaps that also explains their second lease of life. Now to see how their second innings' pan out.