

From the Editor

I am a tiny speck in a sea of brands, buffeted by colour, geometry and neon, a *homo brandus* furiously rowing his flimsy coracle as it is carried inexorably towards the lethal rapids of consumerism. "Brand" has interesting etymology. We say something "brands itself on our consciousness" or that our latest purchase is "brand new". When Naomi Klein's "No Logo" was published in December 1999, its readers saw it as a courageous protest (and its critics as a diatribe) against the evils of globalisation. Klein argued that many global brands had moved far beyond the products they originally stood for, in callous pursuit of profits.

But a brand-less world would be neutral, insipid and sterile. I would be hard put to pick my favourite tea, chocolate, ice cream, shirt, soap or headache pill. Brands mark our journey through life, and brand loyalties set at the family breakfast table endure for a lifetime. Brands fascinate us at *Business Today*. When we write about companies, and the men and women who work for them and run them, we are also indirectly writing about their brands, which are inextricably tied to their corporate identities. Until the mid-1990s a cover story like this fortnight's would not even have been imaginable. Our homes, shop shelves and advertisements were dominated by Indian brands. But as trade has become freer and the aura around *phoren* brands has dissipated, we have actually seen some Indian brands quietly fade away while their global

competitors have become more and more entrenched. Not always, though: we are such a vast nation that in our cities, towns and villages there are dozens of brands that flourish and grow without multibillion-rupee marketing budgets. Many of them are beginning to be national brands. It is not true, though, that geography hems in these brands. N. Chandramouli, CEO of Trust Research Advisory which publishes an annual brands survey, says it is the comfort that brands enjoy in their local environments. Products like Priya biscuits in Kolkata, or Medimix soaps in Kerala are powerful local brands, and even "national" brands have to compete with them by adapting to their marketing and sales strategies. The interesting thing is that many of the "rurban" brands are run with the entrepreneurial zest of start-ups,

and that vitality is key to their success. Senior Editor Shamni Pande travelled to Ahmedabad to sample the hugely popular Wagh Bakri tea, which traces its roots back to Mahatma Gandhi's South African days and boasts a quirky trademark of a tiger and a goat drinking tea from the same trough. Back in Delhi, she also met the Kochhar family which owns the Vi-John line of personal-care products. Other members of the *BT* team brought back a collection of equally nice stories: Surat's Sosyo "faux alcohol", Thrissur's K.P. Namboodiri tooth powder, Haridwar's Hingange "cooling hair oil", Panchgani's Mapro fruit products, Ahmedabad's Havmor ice cream, Erode's Sakthi Masala, and Virudhunagar's Kalimark bottled drinks. There are many more stories like these across India, but you can start on your explorations with our cover package starting on page 44.

School vacations are on across the nation, and this is as good a time as any for our entertainment industry to try and cash in on young audiences. For a country with so much creative talent, India is woefully backward in animation. Two movies are releasing in May: *Chhota Bheem And The Curse of Danyaan* and *Arjun: The Warrior Prince*. *Chhota Bheem* is riding on the popularity of the television serial, and *Arjun* packs the power of the Disney-UTV combine; but the dice are loaded against box-office success, as you will read in Associate Editor E. Kumar Sharma's narration from page 80.

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