

# A 'Brief' Story

From a small hosiery store in Kolkata, the Agarwala brothers have become one of the hosiery majors in the country.

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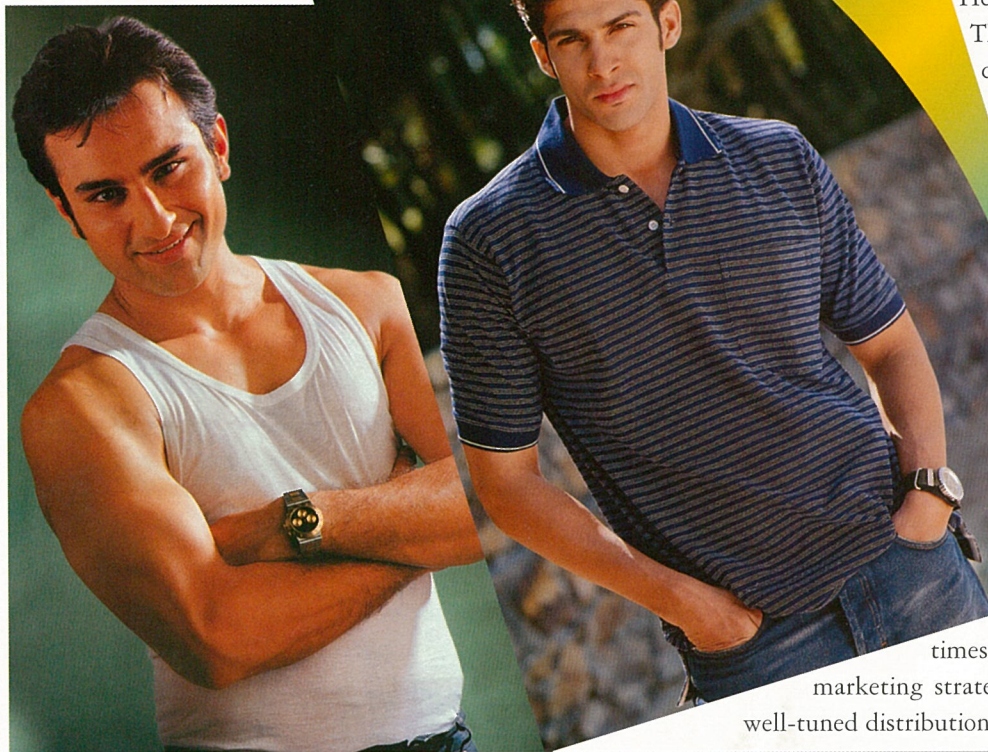
**RUPA®**



There used to be a popular joke doing the rounds that went like this: One man tells another, "*Rupa ki baniyaan pehno*", and the other man crisply retorts, "*Pbir Rupa kya pehnegi?*" Today, no one is likely to mistake Rupa for anything but a top quality brand of innerwear. Heavy-duty advertisement campaigns with the likes of actor Govinda endorsing Rupa & Co. as 'Hero no. 1', have ensured that the company is synonymous with quality vests and briefs.

#### ZERO TO HERO

The Rs 180-crore hosiery major today holds 15 per cent of the marketshare in the organized sector, and has come a long way from the days when it used to be a small hosiery store, on Harrison Road



They began 'Binod Hosiery' in 1968 and soon realised that the hosiery industry was a rather complacent one, with a number of local brands that produced mediocre products. The hosiery industry is worth Rs 5,000 crore, of which Rs 4,000 crore comes from the unorganized sector.

"We decided to delve deep into the possibilities of creating a brand that would revolutionise the hosiery market with quality that not only sells, but excels," says Prahlad Agarwal. Rupa & Co. Ltd. was started in 1995, and this led to the birth of the brand name 'Rupa', a somewhat surprising name for a product for men. But there's a reason for that. "We decided to go with 'Rupa' as it meant, silver, in Bengali and was a short and sweet name." It also made good marketing sense since competing brands called themselves Asli Heera and Asli Sona!

The company recorded a turnover of Rs180 crore in 2000-2001, a big leap from the Rs 151.50 crore in the previous financial year. The secret of this smoothly run organisation, says Kunj Behari Agarwala with pride, is "we three brothers who run the show. But the captain of the ship is undoubtedly our eldest brother, Prahlad Agarwala." The three brothers (Ghanshyam Agarwala is the third brother) took over the running of the company after their father passed away.

#### MARKET MOVERS

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**The business has moved with the times. The Agarwalas make use of aggressive marketing strategies: celebrity-centred advertising and a well-tuned distribution system. Hence the high-profile advertising campaigns which have featured actors Govinda and Saif Ali Khan. Their advertising budget is a cool Rs 13 crore a year!**

North Kolkata. It was here that the Agarwalas began their tryst with destiny. Says Prahlad Agarwala, the company's chairman, "My father, Bajinath Agarwala started this shop in partnership with G. R. Todi. In those days we retained our surname 'Sobhasariya', after our village, but in course of time we switched to the standard Agarwala."

other hosiery players and wanted to make an impact with good-looking models," says K. Agarwala, managing director. Hence the high-profile advertising campaigns which have featured actors Govinda and Saif Ali Khan and now, Zulfi Syed. Their advertising budget is a cool Rs 13 crore a year.

Technology has been upgraded too. German knitting and dyeing



machines are used for the manufacturing process and special Swiss machines for the finishing process. The high quality that the machines deliver has enabled them to retain their clientele and become a brand to be reckoned with, even in a city like

segment in India.

#### TRAINING GEN-NEXT

Since it is still very much a family-run business, the next generation is waiting in the wings to take over responsibilities.



*Shri G P Agarwala, Vice Chairman*



*Mr P R Agarwala, Chairman*



*Shri K B Agarwala, Managing Director*

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Kolkata, which some businessmen say is a dying city. “We’ve had some problems in Kolkata, like the recent advertisement that showed model Zulfi wearing our briefs and sporting lipstick marks. But we believe in solutions and do not harp on problems,” says the chairman. The expanding and upgrading process is continuous. The company recently set up a modern plant at Domjur in Howrah to produce more than 150 tonnes of dyed and knitted fabrics every month. The other manufacturing units are in New Delhi, Tirupur and Kolkata. These units produce eight different types of briefs, a similar variety of vests and five styles of ladies innerwear. The ladies’ range is called ‘Softline’ and ‘Bruno for Her’. They also have ranges called ‘Bumchums’ (casual wear), ‘Footline’ (socks) and ‘Thermocot’ (winter wear). Within India the company is gearing up to face competition from multinationals. The company, however, produces hosiery garments for two top French brands and an American company, at an exclusive facility for exports. The ‘Rupa’ brand is exported mainly to West Asian countries. The company is now on the lookout for a suitable foreign brand to introduce in the premium

But things are very different for them. “We used to even clean the shop ourselves. Our sons, however, have trained in some of the best institutions in the world.”

Inducting them into the business follows a pattern. “Each son is assigned a particular brand. This minimises friction and gives them all a fair chance to grow.” And what do they have planned for their daughters? “They are all happily married off,” comes the reply in unison.

Generous in their success, the Agarwalas have started an engineering college in their native village of Sobhasar. All three brothers pay visits to the institution by rotation. They have also constructed a *dharamsala* and a temple in their village.

In Kolkata they are actively involved with the The Heritage School, the West Bengal Hosiery Association, the Merchant Chamber of Commerce and the Calcutta Stock Exchange among others.

As the company readies to cross the Rs 200-crore mark this year and increase export earnings to Rs 20 crore, one can truly say that the story of their success is far from brief!

