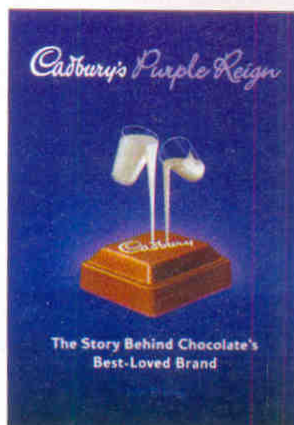


Sweet smell of success



CADBURY'S PURPLE REIGN

By John Bradley
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(Available with Business India Book Club)

Cadbury! The reaction is nothing short of Pavlovian. But back in the early 19th century who had ever heard of mass-produced chocolates. And chocolates weren't the first of Cadbury's merchandise. John Cadbury, in distant Birmingham, sold tea, coffee and some cocoa for a living. He switched over to the manufacture of cocoa. And since then the Cadburys have looked back only with pride.

From Birmingham to Bourneville and to the ends of the earth; through wars that were not only between nations, but where weaponry comprised sagacity and mental agility, the ability to change over methods of production and change over products with strict adherence to values while rivals revelled in adulteration – how else does one sustain a business across every region of the world when that business depends on impulse buying? Purity of inputs, innovative presentations, bold decisions, constantly reinventing oneself...and many more leadership initiatives largely unknown then, general practice now.

And let's not forget that the business goes head-on

against people's ideas of health (waist-line management!), dental hygiene and addiction to... chocolate. In such an *impulse* purchase area (one-little-chocolate-won't-make-a-difference) Cadbury can dare to talk of consumer loyalty as a key part of its success!

But, with a fun subject like chocolates to tackle, one would have expected to see something of a coffee table book, a glossy presentation choc a bloc (pun intended) with the company's numerous mouth-watering varieties. But John Bradley chooses the more serious path – chocolates, like cartooning, is apparently serious business.

With his racy conversational style he handles this 'insider's perspective' with the right dash of nostalgia mixed with a not so dispassionate account of the phenomenal rise of the *purple* pledge of purity. We see the company rise through the stages of adopting the factory system without exploiting young children or creating urban slums (yes, it's that old!), the speedy acceptance of labour saving machines – manual at first, then operated by electricity, setting up the

Cadbury World.

The last of which was an attempt to show the public – and its customers – the ultra-hygienic conditions in which their favourite chocolate was produced at Bourneville; an attempt that proved hugely successful.

We see the foresight of the early Cadbury leaders in moving to Bourneville, setting up infrastructure aligned with the facilities available in the nearest ports, and planning for expansions which could scarcely be anticipated at that time. The company's relentless brand management programme, to the point of becoming a household name and beyond, is perhaps the most insightful part of this book.

It is interesting to note that Bradley touches (just barely) on the controversy

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over the worms found in some of their chocolate bars in India. The furore over worms in chocolates and pesticides in the colas seems to have arisen almost simultaneously towards the end of 2003 – and died equally suddenly.

John Bradley refers to the situation as 'insect grubs' found in 'a handful of the 30 million bars of Dairy Milk bought in India'. He tries to dismiss it as an 'occupational hazard in the chocolate industry... almost always caused by poor storage conditions in retail outlets'.

But in October 2003 a Cadbury spokesman is reported to have said, "We believe that by and large retailers follow our operating instructions and adhere to the required storage conditions." And of course Amitabh Bachchan was called in to clear the air of the worms! The question is not that worms were found. The improvements made by the manufacturer to retain/regain its market share after this are important – the company's response by way of heat-sealed foils and an extra layer of sealed packaging for some of its items proved their commitment to quality and retention of customers.

While speaking of India again he refers to the model (Shimona) who danced on to the cricket pitch, getting the Campaign of the Century award in Indian advertising for Cadbury. But if one is permitted a touch of

nostalgia, one misses the mention of Hamid Sayani who for years (as it seemed then) was the virtual standard-bearer for Cadbury. His 'Goodness of Milk in Every Block!' resounds to this day recalling those heady beginnings of the Bournvita Quiz Contest.

Bradley ends the 340-page narrative on a philosophically wistful note. The past boldness, standards and values, he says, if they are adhered to, Cadbury will continue to grow. A chocolate cheer to that!

♦ STANLEY COUTINHO