

# Flavour of India

For 25 years now, Tata Salt has held the trust of Indian consumers by consistently delivering on its promise of purity and health

It is the most common thing on every dining table and yet it is the most important. To the richest and the poorest, salt provides saltiness and basic taste to food; and if it is Tata Salt it also provides the requisite daily dose of iodine.

Launched in 1983, Tata Salt pioneered packaged iodised salt in India. It offered millions of housewives an opportunity to move away from the loose, unbranded salt of suspect quality to the reassurance of clean, pure salt, guaranteed by India's most trusted business house. Today, Tata Salt touches the lives of 40 million households in India and is one of the two Tata brands (the other is Tata Indicom) which directly impact a large part of the Indian population. Tata Salt enjoys market leadership in the branded salt category with a 44 per cent market share. As a brand, it is extremely popular, enjoying 100-per cent awareness among customers, the highest for any food brand tracked in various studies. The trust that consumers have in the brand is reflected by the fact that since 2003, it has been consistently ranked the number one food brand (except in 2007 when

it was at number 2) by The Economic Times Brand Equity 'most trusted brands' survey.

Quite an impressive achievement, especially when one considers that Tata Chemicals — the company which manufactures Tata Salt — had no experience in marketing consumer products. It was essentially a company producing soda ash. And salt was merely a by-product of using steam to make soda ash, at the company's Mithapur plant in Gujarat, India.

The decision to brand and sell this by-product as iodised table salt was adventitious. It so happened that in early 1980s the Indian government identified iodised salt as the most effective vehicle to deal with iodine deficiency diseases rampant among the masses. Concerned with the widespread health problem, then industry minister ND Tiwari approached Darbari Seth, the then managing director of Tata Chemicals, to find a solution. It was a worthwhile cause and Mr Seth decided to support the government's health campaign to eradicate iodine deficiency disorders through iodised salt. So, *desh ka namak* (salt of the nation) is not just a marketing slogan; Tata Salt actually came into existence to serve a national need.

However, for a company focused on bulk manufacturing, the move to consumer products was not easy. Tata Chemicals had to learn lessons in packaging, distribution, branding and marketing. It also had to face the challenge posed by loose, unbranded salt, which dominated the market then. Added to this was the reluctance of consumers to pay more for a commodity as common as salt. With no knowledge of how the market would work or respond but with the intention of helping the Indian government in its cause, Tata Chemicals went ahead with the launch of Tata Salt in 1983, pioneering the cause of iodisation in India.

The product was revolutionary by all standards. It was branded. It was iodised. And it was vacuum evaporated — a technology never used before for making salt in India. Plus, because of the



technology used, it was white, pure and consistent, and free from any extraneous matter unlike the solar salts in general use then. As awareness of health issues has grown and consumers have become more discerning, the Tata Salt brand has also grown from strength to strength.

In the food business, where companies spend a fortune on brand building, this is no mean feat. So what's the secret? Ashvini Hiran, head, consumer products business, explains: "The word Tata lends the value of trust and quality to Tata Salt. The functional benefits and unmatched quality, coupled with the emotional connect

the brand has with the people of India, has positioned it as the most trusted food brand of India."

Tata Salt clicked with the consumers from the beginning. The purity positioning, supported by the government campaign to promote iodised salt, established it as a favourite with housewives in no time. It was only in 1990 that other players joined the fray and Tata Salt had competition. Captain Cook, with its promise of a "free flowing" salt that doesn't become soggy, swamped the market. In 1996, Hindustan Unilever (then Hindustan Lever) launched Annapurna salt, positioning it on the health and iodine platform. Other brands such as Nirma and Dandi followed.

This competition was something new for Tata Salt, so used to being the sole brand in the market. To combat this sudden onslaught on its supremacy in the market, a revolutionary new strategy was needed. So, in 2001, moving beyond the 'health' and 'purity' platform, Tata Salt launched the highly emotional *desh ka namak* campaign, which reinforced its leadership position in the marketplace and the consumer's mind and elevated the brand forever from the mundane to the sublime. This strong connect with the national good remains, to date, the key differentiator between Tata Salt and other brands.

The latest ad campaign *ghul mil ke*, carries the 'salt of the nation' positioning forward by establishing a connect between salt and the way Indians celebrate festivals, putting aside religious and cultural differences.

## I-Shakti

I-Shakti, the solar refined salt brand of Tata Chemicals (TCL), brings the goodness of iodine to the masses at an affordable price. For the extremely budget-conscious housewives in rural and semi-urban areas, it provided an opportunity to upgrade from loose, coarse, unbranded salt to the benefits of good quality, free-flowing iodised salt. Launched in October 2006, I-Shakti reaches 20 million households, has an

annual consumption of 150,000 metric tonnes and is the second biggest salt brand in the country after Tata Salt with a market share of 14 per cent in the branded salt category according to the Nielsen Retail Audit, August 2009.

TCL has laid down stringent quality specifications for I-Shakti. This has resulted in good manufacturing practices at facilities and improvement in solar salt quality. Each packet of I-Shakti is endorsed by the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders for containing an adequate quantity of iodine.

I-Shakti conducts several consumer activation programmes around the *iodine sahi to dimag tez* (roughly translated it means adequate quantity of iodine results in an intelligent mind) campaign to spread awareness about the goodness of iodine and its health benefits. I-Shakti has helped in spreading iodisation from 50 per cent of the population to 65 per cent.



### Quality matters

*Desh ka namak* was a masterstroke. But this campaign could not have worked and that too in such a sustained manner, if the quality of the product had not been so unimpeachable. At Tata Salt's Mithapur plant, the stringent quality checks at every stage of the production process ensure that Tata Salt keeps to its promise of purity, whiteness, consistency, adequate iodisation and consistent saltiness. The 27 centres spread all over India that package the salt for distribution maintain the strictest hygiene, even though they are not owned by Tata Chemicals. "Ensuring quality right through the supply chain is extremely important for us," explains Mr Hiran, "that is why we have deputed senior managers to supervise the process."

Each pack of Tata Salt is Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) certified, which is the most respected food grade certification globally. To consumers it means that they get safe, pure and hygienic salt in every pack of Tata Salt. Interestingly, the HACCP certification for food safety is not a requirement for salt, and probably nowhere in the world do companies HACCP-certify their salt. Then why does Tata Chemicals do it? "Because," says Mr Hiran, "we go the extra mile to ensure quality. And because we want to be future ready."

### On the 'lite'er side

That the company is forward looking, modern and innovative is evident in other areas too. It conducts regular research to identify new segments, new products and new markets. Take for instance, Tata Salt Lite, launched in October 2007. Lite was the result of research studies which indicated that 40 per cent of the urban adult population suffers from hypertension and that salt could play an important role in its management. After extensive research, Tata Salt Lite was launched as a healthier option for consumers wanting to manage their weight and blood pressure.

Lite aims at wellness and is packed with the triple goodness of 15 per cent less sodium (good for management of hypertension and heart-related diseases), potassium enrichment (good for maintaining the potassium-sodium balance in the body) and iodisation (to counter iodine deficiency and related problems). Since its launch, Lite has grown four times that of its nearest competitor. The challenge for the marketing team now, according to Mr Hiran, is to "make Tata Salt Lite as big as Tata Salt". Wellness is the new focus for Tata Chemicals and its research efforts are directed towards developing products that have far-reaching health benefits for the masses.



arpan (dedicated to the nation) programme in 2002. Every January (to coincide with India's Republic Day) and August (to coincide with India's Independence Day), Tata Chemicals contributes a part of its sales revenues to the nation through organisations involved in working to improve the lives of underprivileged children, thereby providing millions of Tata Salt users an opportunity to participate in a worthy cause.

For the last two years the programme has extended educational support to 1,500 underprivileged girl children through the Nanhi Kali project. The 2009-10 programme funds and supports four hostels run by the Cohesion Foundation Trust for the children of salt pan workers in Gandhidham, a major salt hub in Gujarat. The seasonal hostels ensure the kids stay back and continue with their education, even when their parents migrate in search of a livelihood.

Looking ahead, Mr Hiran is confident that Tata Salt will continue to innovate and to contribute to the public health of India. In a market flooded with branded salt, innovation does seem to be the best bet to keep ahead. However, the need to innovate for Tata Salt is not driven by competition. Mr Hiran explains: "Most salt brands in the market are solar salts and compete with I-Shakti (Tata Chemicals' solar refined salt brand for the rural and semi-urban markets). Tata Salt is on a different platform." Competition or challenge, if any, is to keep the brand modern with new, healthy offerings for the nation. He adds: "Tata Salt will remain the umbrella brand and in the coming years we hope to bring more variants, each with a story of its own." ●

*Shubha Madhukar*

### The salt of the earth

In keeping with the Tata tradition of giving back to society and in recognition of consumers' loyalty towards the brand, Tata Salt introduced the *Desh ko*

## How Tata Salt is made

Turning the waters of the Arabian Sea into Tata Salt using vacuum evaporation technology is a fascinating process. It all begins at Charkala Saltworks, some 45km away from the Tata Salt plant, where sea water is pumped into solar pans. The location is so environment friendly that scores of migratory birds from Europe and elsewhere fly in to nest. It is here that the sea water is concentrated by natural evaporation. This concentrated sea brine is brought to the Mithapur plant by two pipelines where the sand and foreign particles are first

removed and then fed into steam-heated vacuum evaporators.

The heating process creates a solid-liquid mix which is pumped into decanters for the first level of separation. In the second stage, the settled solids are pumped into a centrifuge to separate the moist salt. Once separated, it is dried and iodised, making it ready for use. Salt is then packed in 50-kg bags and despatched via rail and road to 27 HACCP-certified salt-packing centres across India, where it is packed into 1kg retail packs.