

Walchandnagar at the forefront of technology & engineering excellence

When GSLV Mark III blasted off the other day from Sriharikota, adding yet another dimension to India's space mission, it certainly made every Indian proud. But the workforce at Walchandnagar had special reasons to get goose pimples, mainly because some of the critical components that went into the making of this spacecraft were the handiwork of Walchandnagar workmen! Yes, a century seasoned engineering enterprise, Walchandnagar Industries Ltd (WIL for short) is into heavy engineering, high-tech manufacturing and turnkey project execution, making a significant contribution to nation-building. In keeping with the vision of the founder, Late Seth Walchand Hirachand, WIL is emerging as a world leader in high-tech manufacturing as also in providing turnkey engineering solutions to the priority sector. **Mr. P.K. Balasubramanian** speaks to **Mr. G.K. Pillai, Managing Director and CEO**, WIL to know more about the legacy of engineering excellence and engineering prowess of this home-grown enterprise which is pushing back the frontiers of technology, while partaking in the national endeavour. Excerpts:



Mr. G.K. Pillai, Managing Director & CEO,
Walchandnagar Industries Ltd.

Q. WIL is at the forefront of technology. Your comments?

Yes, today we are at the forefront of technology and engineering excellence. To get more insights into our present, one should also look into our past. We have a legacy of 106 years of engineering excellence. Our founder, who, in the words of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, 'was a true patriotic industrialist', believed that India had the potential to become a world lead-

er one day, and he strived to make India self-sufficient and self-reliant through various industrial and business ventures. He established India's first modern shipyard (Hindustan Shipyard), aircraft factory (HAL), and car factory (PAL). He also pioneered maritime shipping and organized farming. He always set his sights where India lacked. He started off with heavy engineering and building infrastructure. So traditionally we are in various modes of transportation: road, sea and air. And now we are also into space & submarine. We are undoubtedly into high-tech areas. And we are into nation-building.

Q. What are your core strengths?

A strong mechanical engineering base with a state-of-the-art manufacturing set-up, a proven engineering acumen, technical expertise in engineering, and a tradition of engineering excellence spanning over a century – These are our core strengths.

Q. Over the years you have expanded your core competencies, enhanced your capabilities and sized up your infrastructure. Could you elaborate these?

We started off with sugar machinery



Manufacturing excellence: WIL's Heavy Machine Shop and Gear Cutting Machines Section

manufacture and then forayed into setting up sugar plants offering end-to-end turnkey solutions. Our boiler manufacturing capabilities helped us to set up cogeneration & captive power plants, and our expertise in making cement machinery led us to setting up cement plants. Along side, we started making nuclear equipment like calandrias, heat exchangers and end shields and extended our capabilities to manufacture critical components required by the defence, aerospace and missile sectors.

In order to serve the strategic sector, you need immaculate engineering skills, relentless commitment to high standards of quality, and a large manufacturing capacity with facilities to handle gigantic jobs. Over the years we developed all these. Our Gear business also grew from strength to strength. Today we make Industrial Gears for naval ships, and planetary gear boxes for sugar mills. So it is our knowledge, experience and manufacturing capability that have helped to graduate us to high-tech manufacturing.

Q. Which are your major business lines?

As I said, we are into manufacturing Engineered products like gear boxes, process instruments, process equipment and foundry products; we are

into EPC & Turnkey Projects serving sectors like sugar, cement, power plants, boiler and mining & metals; and into High-tech manufacturing, designing developing and making critical components for nuclear, aerospace and defence & missiles applications.

Q. Could you give some idea of your manufacturing facilities?

We have a sound base and a sprawling infrastructure for mechanical engineering. The manufacturing process involves metal cutting, joining, forming, assembling, etc. We also use exotic metals for fabrication wherever required. We are known for our heavy engineering set-up where we can handle large size jobs. In fact we are called 'Metal Men'.

We have three plants. Our Walchandnagar plant is the Heavy Engineering facility fully equipped with modern production equipment, sophisticated automatic welding systems, dust-free halls for precision

welding and critical assembly. The plant also has large handling capacities. Our Satara plant houses our Foundry which has the capacity to make castings of 12T in one phase. The third plant in Dharwad makes precision instruments.

Q. What are your capabilities in EPC and which are the recent major projects you have executed on a turnkey basis?

We offer an entire spectrum of services including design, engineering, manufacturing, erection of plants and machinery for sugar, boiler, cement and mining industries. We have access to internationally acclaimed process licensors and their advanced technologies. We are a solutions provider with a perfect amalgamation of superior technical expertise, sound project management capabilities and a relentless commitment to timely project execution.

We have executed some 600 plus projects in a span of 40 years in three continents and over 20 countries. Some of our on-going projects are:

- Twelve sugar plants and 12 cogeneration plants in various stages of completion for Tamil



WIL's Manufacturing Facility at Walchandnagar dedicated to Aerospace

Nadu Electricity Board

- A 13,000 TCD sugar & cogen plant in final stages in Ethiopia
- A boiler plant in La Cabana, Colombia
- A boiler plant in Providencia, Colombia
- A dairy project in New Zealand.

Q. You are indeed making a notable contribution towards nation-building. Please tell us something about your contribution to defence programs.

Sugar is an important commodity one needs everyday. So we started off with sugar plants, which was considered very high tech those days. Over the years, many players came into sugar manufacturing plants even in the unorganized sector. So we slowly graduated from sugar and cement to high tech manufacture.

Convinced of our engineering capabilities, defence establishments like DRDO, R & DE, VSSC, ISRO, etc. gave us orders for manufacture of critical components for their satellites, missiles or weapon systems as the case maybe. Today, we are a trusted partner for all these establishments for manufacture of hardware going into these strategic equipment. The latest in the league is the GSLV Mark-III launched on 18th Dec.

Q. Who are your major customers?

For sugar plants, we have a whole lot of sugar co-operatives as well as private players as our customers. We also have customers in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Algeria, Nepal, Malaysia, etc. In the cement segment, ACC is a major client among others. In the defence sector, we are working with DRDO, Indian Navy, Bharat Dynamics, MDL, GRSE, ISRO, NPC(I)L, Bhavini, BARC, etc. Our customer list is ever-expanding.

Q. Which are your ongoing technology tie-ups and how do they help in your engineering excellence?

We have on-going tie-ups for calandrias, gear boxes, etc. But as sugar, cement and other segments are losing the novelty, we want to step out or add new challenging technology areas with a JV or technology transfer. We shall soon decide on our focus, our strategy and the route to be taken, harnessing high-tech. In the days to come, Railways will also be a thrust area for us.

Q. What is your manpower strength & what have you to say about the quality of your people and their resourcefulness?

We have on our roll 1200 plus

employees including workmen and management staff. You know we are making highly engineered, critical equipment which go into the nuclear reactors, spaceships, weapons for defence and so on. They have to be of impeccable quality. And these products just cannot fail.

The onus of making these critical, failsafe products is on our people. This requires knowledge, skill and commitment. We have a dedicated team with an unwavering commitment to quality and timely execution. It is a highly motivated team who has a bigger picture and goal in mind while working. I have a continuous dialogue with my people who thrive on challenges and who feel proud of our achievements both as a part of the company and as a nation.

Q. As a major fabricator in the country, you must be experimenting with and using all modern welding processes, products & automated systems.

We are using all grades of steel and even exotic materials for our fabrication. And we are using modern processes, consumables, equipment and automated systems to ensure weld quality and productivity. We have a Welding Development Section itself which keeps itself abreast of the



Testimony to WIL's EPC capability: A 2,500 TPD Cement Plant in A.P



WIL sponsors the Under 16 Boys and Girls National Series Tennis Tournament

latest technologies in metallurgy and metal joining.

Q. What are the core factors that have contributed to your excellence?

The foremost factor is the vision of our promoters to unleash the full potential of our country to make us a world leader. We have a strong foundation. And all our activities are, in one way or the other, contributive to nation-building.

Human resources are our major asset - People with a sense of belonging, dedication and commitment. We have an expansive, well-equipped infrastructure and an enviable knowledge base. Quality and excellence are in our DNA.

Q. You have several milestones. Among them, which is the most memorable one?

We have been participating in the space program of the country by developing and supplying critical components required for the satellites. Our role in the launch of MANGALYAAN is by far the most memorable milestone, considering the challenges posed. It gave us a lot of inner satisfaction.

Q. What are the challenges ahead for you?

We are in the 'brick and mortar' industry so to say. And our plants are also in interior parts of the State. Getting good, competent people to work there and retaining them is a major challenge. Of course, we take care of the welfare of our people. In our own way we keep them motivated and make them resourceful and happy.

Q. 'Make in India' is a national agenda today. Have you not been silently propagating this all these years?

Yes, of course. We have not only been propagating but also practising. The Govt. has been vocal in different forums saying 30% of the defence purchases should be from India. This includes design, engineering, software, etc. We would say that 30% should come from manufacturing alone.

This would give the required impetus to the manufacturing sector. You know it does not stop there. Once you make something in India, you also make spares and you also provide services. So the share increases automatically.

Q. How do you look at the future of Indian engineering vis-à-vis of WIL?

We have the knowledge, experience, expertise, wherewithal and the fire to excel. We are poised to be one of the major global players in engineering & manufacturing. In order to succeed in this mission, we need the Govt. backing.

Now that the new Govt. is committed to giving 'Manufacturing' the impetus it deserves, we can look ahead for a glorious period. Indian engineering is recognized by the world. Business here should mean 'Manufacturing in India'.

Q. A word about your management style?

Mr. Chakor Doshi is our Chairman and Mr. Chirag Doshi is our Managing Director. Our Board comprises eminent people and the best brains in the country. The Board has given me full operational freedom to manage the affairs professionally. This means quite a responsibility to steer the company ahead. I enjoy it.

Q. Finally, some glimpses of your CSR activities that complete the spectrum?

The welfare of our people as well as of society is always closer to our heart. In keeping with the philanthropic ways of our promoters, we have initiated a number of CSR activities. We have developed townships, have set up schools and colleges not only for employees' children but also for the entire community.

We have exclusive reading rooms, bhajan halls and gardens for the aged. We have healthcare, youth programs, sports and other recreational activities for the welfare of the people – just to mention a few. ■