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ONE OF THE HIGHEST EXPORTERS IN INDIA



Viraj Profiles Ltd. based in India, is an exceptional company, **ranked second in the world in stainless steel long products, and one of the highest exporters in India.** Mr. Neeraj R. Kochhar, Chairman and Managing Director of the company, speaks with the editors of AIM Global and describes the history, growth and current operations of Viraj Profiles Ltd.

Celebrating 20 Years Of Successful Exports To More Than 90 Countries Spread Across 6 Continents

Describing the history of the company, and tracing its growth from a modest company to a world leader, Mr. Kochhar says, “Viraj Profiles set out its journey in the year 1990 with a modest strength of 150 employees, manufacturing utensil grade of steel. The company began its first melting shop in 1991. In the two decades we spent in the market, we gained experience and began extending our product lines. We also began backward integration along our supply chain in order to achieve maximum efficiency.”

The company soon had a robust product line. Mr. Kochhar says, “In the year 1995 we started manufacturing Stainless Steel. In the same year we commissioned our Flanges division and Bright Bar division and started exporting Bright Bars. Among our products were what is known as “Profiles”. Profiles are complex structural steel, which are designed in various shapes such as I-beams, equal and un-equal angles, flat, tapered channels and non-tapered channels. We judged that 99% of the total Profiles products that we manufactured were being exported. As demand grew, in the year 2000, we established our Profiles division predominantly catering to overseas clients. These profiles are used in construction industry because of its durability, used in hoarding and billboards due to its non-corrosive properties, used in transmission and communication towers due to its longevity, strength and stainless property. Profiles are also used in ship building industry because of its strength and corrosion resistance property. In the year 2001, Viraj Profiles Ltd. established a new division for producing wire, followed by a wire rod mill and

fastener division in 2006. Today, Viraj Profiles Ltd. has a diverse product catalogue, including stainless steel products like wire, wire rods, fasteners, flanges, bright bars and profiles in various sizes and grades. Our product portfolio comprises of more than 50,000 SKUs spread across these verticals.”

In 2008, Viraj was ranked 3rd largest producer of Stainless Steel Long products in the world and by 2011, moved to 2nd rank. (Stainless steel long products include any stainless steels obtained from the hot rolling of blooms and ingots to produce semis, bars and wire.)

The company has come a long way in 20 years, from manufacturing the utensil grade of steel to manufacturing specialized Engineering products in stainless steel for various industries like Petrochemicals, Ship Building, Defense sector, Automobile sector, Architecture and construction segment etc. Viraj Profiles is now one of the largest producers of stainless steel Long Products in the world and actively exports its products to nearly 90 countries spread across six Continents. The company that began with 150 employees has grown multi fold touching a figure of more than 9000 employees. Today Viraj is one of the largest manufacturer and exporter of stainless steel long products in India.

Explaining how the company’s values have helped in the company’s rapid transition from a small domestic supplier to a leading global producer of stainless steel long products, Mr Neeraj R Kochhar, CMD, Viraj Profiles told Aim Global, “I attribute this success to our organizational values, and the commitment towards quality and our zest for technological up-gradation. Viraj is an Indian company, but we have always endeavoured to keep ourselves at par with global market standards, offering the best quality products. I believe it is because of this ethos that our products enjoy leadership position in several product categories across the globe. More than 90% of our total products are already being exported to more than 90 countries.”

He further added, “Our ability to react quickly to market changes and customer requirements has always helped us to stay ahead of our competitors. Also our integrated manufacturing system, having all the processes in-house, makes us less dependent on external factors. Finally, quality is what characterises all our products and today I can proudly say that Viraj has carved a niche for itself based solely on quality. Today, we are celebrating 20 years of our successful exports to more than 90 countries spread across 6 continents”

Major Article @aimglobalmag

Quality

Speaking about the quality control that Viraj Profiles has in place, Mr. Kochhar says, "All our plants are ISO certified. Viraj has established a stringent quality system with more than 90 approvals / certificates till date in accordance with various specific requirements and applications. These approvals and certifications enable our customers to supply Viraj flanges and other products to major end users across a variety of industries. Some of the main industries where our flanges are being used are - Pipeline engineering, Oil & gas (upstream & downstream), Mechanical & Plant engineering, Marine, Waste water, Chemical & Petrochemical, Power Industries (nuclear, natural gas, wind, solar), Aerospace, Food processing etc."

"All our plants are ISO certified. Viraj has established a stringent quality system with more than 90 approvals / certificates"



The Human Touch

Since a company's greatest assets are the employees who work for it, Mr. Kochhar is especially enthusiastic in speaking of Viraj's people. "At present we have a workforce of more than 9000 employees working at different levels. At Viraj, each individual is responsible for their duties and empowered to do the right thing. Passion, ownership and transparency are the backbone of our work culture. For an organization to prosper it is imperative to continually hone the skills of their workforce and to take care of their developmental needs. To get an edge over others in the prevailing competitive world, Viraj strives its best to keep our employees aligned with recurring issues, changes and on-going developments in organization by giving them continuous trainings. Regular training sessions are conducted covering various aspects of our employees' work such as behavioural aspects, technical knowledge enhancements, developing leadership qualities, team spirit, self-development and management programmes among others. We hold regular workshops and training sessions to ensure our employees are equipped to add value to their own careers, as well as to the progress of the organization as a whole."



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Clients and Markets

The company so far has focused primarily on the export market. Around 90% of Viraj's products are exported to more than 90 countries. And all this achieved in a time span of 20 years is a remarkable achievement. With India's growth in recent years, a new demand has come forth, and the company has also started focusing on the domestic market. Mr Neeraj R Kochhar shared, "Domestic consumption of stainless steel has grown manifold over the past couple of years. Important growth sectors in India include infrastructural and architectural applications such as the modernization of airports, metro railways, modernized bus shelters, stainless steel wall cladding, household applications like stainless steel modular kitchens, furniture, outdoor application, transportations etc. What is very encouraging is the fact that government institutions have also now realised the long term benefits of using stainless steel. The potential growth of stainless steel in India is huge, considering the fact that per capita consumption at 1.9 kg is much lower than the global average of 4.85 kg".

A similar picture is apparent when it comes to production. Whilst China may dominate global production of stainless steel, the Indian market has also witnessed a healthy increase in its share of the total pie, and is currently ranked as the 4th largest producer after China, Europe and Japan. Mr Neeraj R Kochhar did, however, indicate that future growth would not necessarily be totally unproblematic. "In order to fully expand its production capacity, the country needs to take care of certain issues like resistance to the use of stainless steel due to high initial cost, endemic power shortages, high price volatility of nickel, an unrecognised sector producing cheap quality products and not enough availability of scrap in the country."

Around 90% of Viraj's products are exported to more than 90 countries





Facilities

Viraj Profiles Ltd. manufactures a wide range of products using austenitic, ferritic, martensitic and duplex stainless steel grades. Among the products they produce are wire rods, wires, fasteners, flanges & fittings, bright bars. The company considers each product category as equally important, and find an equal demand for them across different countries. However some of the products have specific applications in a particular industry while others have a universal demand. Viraj Profiles predominantly serves the Automobiles, Marine, Ship Building, Defence, Architecture and Construction segments. Their products have a variety of applications in a diverse range of sectors from petrochemical plants, oil pipelines, ship buildings, structural designs, high tensile cables and springs, boilers, pressure vessels, liquid storage terminals to liquid cargo ships and surgical instruments. Because of the range of their product line and the high demand from their clients, the company has established several different plants, with high production values in each. They include a Stainless Steel Wires Plant with a production capacity of 50,000 Tons per annum (TPA), Stainless Steel Fasteners Plant with 70,000 TPA, Stainless Steel Bright Bars Plant with 90,000 TPA, Stainless Steel Profiles Plant with 60,000 TPA, Stainless Steel Flanges Plant with 30,000 TPA, Stainless Steel Wire rod plant with 192,000 TPA and an SRM Plant with 180,000 TPA production capacity. The company manufactures more than 50,000 SKUs in Austenitic, Ferritic, Martensitic, Austenitic-Ferritic (Duplex) and special stainless steel grades.

Speaking of the equipment and technologies with which their facilities are equipped, Mr. Kochhar says, “Our Steel Melting Shop is well equipped with five induction furnaces, three AOD converters, two continuous billet casters and has melting capacity of 5,28,000 tons per annum. We have recently installed 3 Hi-Powered Induction Furnaces from ABP, Germany. Our melting shop is equipped with Mechanized Scrap charging system, Mechanized Slag Skimming system, Mechanized Dismantling of AOD & Ladle lining.”

Emphasizing the use of technology in their plants, Mr. Kochhar says, “As Innovation is important to us, we are continuously working on technological up-gradation, new product development and quality improvement of our products so that we can serve our customers better. Our Research & Development team is constantly working towards scanning the customers’ needs across different industries and developing new products to satisfy them. As of now we are focusing on our existing product lines and strengthening ourselves with the required technological up-gradation to keep pace with the dynamism of the industry.” Viraj Profiles continuously upgrades its manufacturing process by introducing new machineries and adopting latest technologies into its manufacturing plants. Shedding light on their recent efforts at adopting new technologies, Mr. Kochhar says, “The company has recently installed three high power induction furnaces from ABP Induction Systems in Germany – the first of its kind in the industry. We have also recently installed FEHR cassette rack system for Automatic storage & retrieval and for smooth storage of materials. This system is one of its kind and is quite unique in the way, it operates. The system is completely controlled with the help of a computer system and helps a lot in saving time and energy in properly storing the bars and in dispatch of the same. Additionally, we have recently commissioned our fully automatic section rolling mill, which is the first of its kind in India in terms of scale and the range of products. The new plant with annual capacity of 180,000 tons per annum, is equipped to manufacture more than 700 different shapes and sizes of angles, flats and other profiles. The plant is quite unique in terms of Online Pickling facilities, Automatic Labelling and Inter-alia Packaging line. The Plant complies with the high environmental standards of modern Stainless Steel manufacturing and has Level - 2 Automation processes. This new facility has several advantages in terms of its location. The nearest railway track is merely 8 KMs from the production site and the nearest Port is around 170 KMs only. Our company has its own in-house Inland Container Depot (ICD) to ensure smooth logistical support to its clients. The combination of the specific design and fully automated process coupled with smooth Logistics arrangement allows for a reliable and consistent production and supply of high quality products at optimum operational economy. The new facility will help Viraj to serve current and future markets in a more efficient manner.”



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CSR

As the company that has seen great growth in the last two decades, Viraj Profiles believes that society is one of their key stakeholders and believes in doing business in a way that provides social, economic and environmental benefits to the communities and geographies in which they operate. At Viraj, CSR is not just one of the functions rather it is something which is driven by the top management of the company directly. This particular department is very close to the heart of Mrs Renu Kochhar, Managing Director, Viraj Profiles who also happens to head the Sales and Marketing department of all product verticals and who also wears the hat of CSR head along with looking at other departments like Corporate Communication and HR.

Mr. Kochhar says, “Our CSR activities aim at reaching out to the poor and under-privileged section of the society and helping them to shape a better and more sustainable society. To educate local children, we have constructed a school in our premises at Kurgaon, Viraj Shri Ram Centennial School. The school maintains international standards of training and education, and has been rated as one of the top emerging schools in Mumbai as per the recent survey conducted by Times of India, the leading newspaper of India. We also support education by providing infrastructural support, materials and scholarships to local government schools. We have recently begun an initiative to increase adult literacy and create technical advancement in rural areas by proposing a polytechnic college. We have also worked for the empowerment of women in rural areas by offering them

free vocational training and support so that they may become financially independent and self-sufficient. Our CSR training centre has been able to bring a remarkable change into the lives of more than 300 women in last two years by providing them free training and also helping them in securing a job. We have also established a free computer training centre near one of our plants to impart free computer education to the students from nearby villages who were otherwise unable to afford the coaching institutes. Apart from these activities, we regularly provide infrastructural support to local schools, parks, government hospitals, temples etc. To improve the health of people in nearby villages, we are also planning to establish a world class medical facility at Tarapur. As of now we conduct regular health camps in the villages and distributes the spectacles and medicines free of cost to the villagers.”

Future Plans

As for the future, Mr Neeraj R Kochhar concluded: “As far as our product portfolio is concerned, we are going to keep offering the same product categories, but yes, we are working on developing new sizes and specifications for some of our products. These developments are being done keeping in mind the requirement of our customers and they are being developed in constant consultation with them.” It would seem that the Viraj story has not yet come to an end. The company does not currently have any plans to launch new products or to invest in new ventures. But it is certainly not ruling this out in the future. Mr Neeraj R Kochhar says “In the future we would surely explore other options considering market trends and demand patterns.”