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“**L**eaders of Tomorrow felicitated by Home Minister P Chidambaram”—flashed the morning newspapers. It was a great moment for the electronics industry, particularly the security and surveillance domain, when Sanjeev Sehgal, managing director, Sparsh walked onto the stage to accept ET Now Indiamart ‘Leaders of Tomorrow’ Award 2010 for the electrical and electronics category, on December 3, 2010.

Recognising Sparsh’s inspiring journey towards innovation and an aptitude for converging with newer technology, this award has created a new benchmark for the entire security solutions fraternity. Sehgal emerged victorious from among several nominations in the category. It was recognition for his outstanding achievements in the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) space.

The award was dedicated to MSME to encourage their contributions in creating long term sustainability with regard to creating employment and GDP growth. The award, that initially received more than 10,000 nominations, had gone through an extensive round of selection at various stages, before the finalists were shortlisted. The jury had interactive sessions with the top five nominees of each category before arriving at its final decision. Sparsh was selected for the award based on its hi-tech vision for the security industry.

Recognising Sparsh’s fast growth and Sehgal’s dedicated work, *Electronics Bazaar* retraces the journey covered by this hardworking and dedicated entrepreneur, who has a brave vision for the future.



## A VICTORY FOR THE ‘MADE IN INDIA’ MAN

Building up a company or a brand from scratch seems to be his forte. With sheer determination and hard work, Sanjeev Sehgal, managing director, Samridhi Automations, better known as Sparsh, has overcome all failures and hurdles that came his way. Riding on the accolades he received through the ‘Leaders of Tomorrow’ Award, this entrepreneur is proceeding on a new journey. Meet the man who personifies entrepreneurial zeal, to whom no challenge is an obstacle, and who is surging ahead with an aim to do something different and to turn every challenge into a success story...

By Srabani Sen

Years of dedicated work has gone into making Samriddhi Automations, popularly known as Sparsh, a popular name in the security solutions domain. Today, it is one of the fastest growing security solutions brand. This award is a significant achievement for our company, and I believe this will further strengthen our brand and improve our market position. This is a recognition and vote of confidence for a 'made in India' brand and the Indian security industry, as a whole. With such a team effort, we are exploring many opportunities to further enhance the possibilities of putting India on the global map," Sehgal starts off to narrate his story over a cup of coffee.

"My story can inspire people to think big. They will realise that anything is possible in life and it is they who can change their own lives. If you have the passion, focus and the zeal to grow, no obstacle can hold you back."

Read on, for the full story on Sparsh, in Sehgal's own words...

### **Innovation is my passion**

Spurring innovations is my passion. With foresight and a clear vision about innovation, I made Sparsh a pioneer in the Indian security and surveillance industry, offering technologically advanced products to meet customer needs. Sparsh, with its Indian heart and global outlook, has not only leveraged the Indian manufacturing sector to catapult itself onto a global platform but has also enhanced international collaboration to produce state-of-the-art security solutions. Sparsh has revolutionised the security market in India by being India's first firm to focus on indigenous designs to manufacture technologically advanced electronic security devices.

The jury recognised my passion for business and innovation, and saw my ability to be a 'leader of tomorrow'. Currently, there's not enough recognition in this sector. An award like this will certainly add more prestige to the MSME

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**I was the first person to introduce an indigenously manufactured caller ID telephone. Today, it is a common feature in most telecommunication equipment, but 10 years back it was very unique.**

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sector and more companies will get inspired to join it. I'm sure these awards will recognise the best SMEs in India and inspire many more to take an entrepreneurial leap.

### **I always was a responsible child**

I was born in 1970 in a lower middle class family and have seen all the hardships in life. Like many families, my grandparents were uprooted from their home in Pakistan and had to move to India at the time of Partition. Leaving everything behind, they had to start anew. The brunt of the Partition was borne by all—my father had to take on the responsibility of the family very early and start working immediately after high school. Yet, he went to college and finished his studies. Currently working as the director of personnel at Sparsh, he is the former CEO of the Fertilizer Corporation of India.

My parents had to sacrifice a lot to ensure that my younger brother and I got the best education. Everybody was just struggling to survive; that made me a very responsible child and motivated me to focus on my education and do well in life. Our tough and turbulent life made me serious quite early in life. In fact, my childhood turned out to be the strongest foundation for me to build my life—on





the solid ground that I stand on today.

### I cherish my college days

My schooling started in New Delhi at New Green Field Public School. With my father's transfer to Lucknow, I finished my schooling in City Montessori School in Lucknow. I was an above-average student in school and have always loved maths and physics.

College days were very enjoyable; it was one of the best periods of my life and; the best learning platform as well. I did everything I wanted to do in that short span of four years. In the first year itself, I took on the responsibility of managing the hostel mess that served over 1000 students. I was the president of the students union in the final year. I was also active in sports and was part of the college football and table tennis teams. I even participated in various college and university level events. In a nutshell, my college days gave me a variety of experiences in handling events and it developed my leadership and technical skills. Apart from this, I formed

some lifelong friendships, too.

There were some good professors—my favourite was Tapas Guha, professor of microcontrollers. I got my B E Electronics from MIET, Gondia, a private college in Nagpur University, passing out with flying colours.

My younger brother Rajeev Sehgal was also a good student. He is a B Tech Computer Service from IIT BHU and holds an MBA degree from Pittsburg University, USA. Today, he is the executive director of one of the leading bio-medical firms in the US.

I loved sports and played all types of games—from gilli danda to cricket. Music was my *favourite pastime*; it was like an energy booster. My friends used to be astonished to hear me listening to music at full blast—in order to concentrate on my studies!

I had always been a leader in organising events—from developing cricket teams to organising tournaments, and Diwali melas, to managing the hostel mess with a budget of over Rs 400,000. These experiences helped me to develop my leadership

and management skills, which I am putting to use now.

### I tasted failure early in life

I graduated with a larger than life dream, which was shattered in a very short time. I learnt the harsh reality of life when I discovered that finding a job was not as easy as I thought. First, I tested myself as a sales professional with a startup, which I got with my father's recommendation. I was asked to sell electronic instruments but I did not find the job rewarding, so I left it and joined an office automation company, Dyanavox Electronic, which was then Canon's partner in India. Here my job profile was to generate orders, which did not motivate me much either. However, during this job I started showing technical skills, and in less than nine months I was heading a new division for EPABX and KTS.

My next job was with a Japanese company, where I sold computerised knitting machines. This job changed my vision completely and I learnt business skills from my boss,



Ashwani Behl. I generated business worth Rs 50 million in the first year and it changed my way of thinking—I started believing in myself and my marketing skills. It was a turning point in my life and I decided to start my own business.

My first business was in partnership with a college friend. We started manufacturing push button telephones. At the time, Beetel (present day Airtel) was amongst the few companies manufacturing them in India. We started with a small investment of Rs 60,000. Business did very well for a while, but cheap Chinese imports squeezed our profit margins significantly and pushed us out of this business. I then tried my hands in the EPABX industry, and in three years, the company 'Swift' (a partnership firm) was a leading player in the EPABX market, with a network across India. Unfortunately, the partnership didn't work out and I had to move out of the venture.

I was the first person to introduce an indigenously manufactured caller ID telephone. Today, it is a common feature in most telecommunication equipment, but 10 years back it was very unique. Yet, a number of early failures taught me how to keep myself grounded, how to focus on customers, how to handle crises, and how to run a business. I moved on. But the uncertain future stared hard at me. In fact, I take failures as challenges and challenges give me a boost. Every time I face failure, I emerge stronger. There were many hardships in my life which I now view as good learning processes.

Now is the time, I thought, to give shape to my dream. I started a business related to security devices, with no technical knowledge about device. People around me warned me that it would not work, but I sported a 'can do' attitude and was audacious enough to take risks.

### My wife is my strength

I got married in February 1996. My wife, Sapna, holds a degree in architecture and is an architectural and vastu consultant. She has been a strong pillar in my life, the biggest support through all ups and downs. She has understood me and has given me my space during my days of struggle. Her positive attitude and liveliness set her apart. We inspire each other to do well in our careers.

I'm gifted with two daughters—Sparsh and Samridhi—both are in school. I put no pressure on my daughters to do extraordinarily well in studies and will leave it to them to decide their future.

Parents have to make themselves the role models for their kids. So teaching them about the right direction in life can be done by walking on the right path ourselves.

### My strengths and weaknesses

I'm a simple person and like to believe in people. As a result, many a time, people have duped me. Many people have made big commitments to me and I have believed them. It's only at the end of the day that I realise that they were fooling me. I have lost time, money and also faith. And yet, I like to believe in people and I feel that's my strength. By believing in people I can ingrain confidence in them.

I realise my strengths and am confident about my abilities. I can spot opportunities and take advantage of them. I take a lot of pride in bringing out 'made in India' products. My strong brand management capabilities and ability to build partnerships helped me in my business. However, I probably work too much. Instead, I should take out more time for my family, whom I love spending time with.

I also enjoy spending time with my friends and the company of children; watching cricket and movies; and listening to music.

### I am passionate about my business

With my security and surveillance business, I started on a successful journey in 2002. I left no stone unturned and capitalised on every opportunity I got with grit, determination and a vision to succeed. As a result of my focus on innovation and quality control, Sony Electronics picked me to manufacture CCD board cameras for the first time in India.

Eight years back, there was no scope for security devices in India, but I thought ahead and started a company that traded in security equipment, particularly CCTV cameras—we bought products from the local market and resold them. While setting up some security cameras for a client, we did a very crude installation—where a number of cameras had to be controlled by a manually operated switcher. The customer was astonished and asked me, "If a TV can be operated by a remote controller, then why not this switcher?"

Eureka! It gave me an idea. I started manufacturing remote controlled switchers and that's how Sparsh was born. That was another innovation in the security and surveillance space. We were the first to manufacture this in India. In fact, we introduced the concept of remote controlled switchers in India and soon added some more models to offer a range of options.

After two years, we began manufacturing matrix switchers, which were being imported at that time. But our 'made in India' model was 1/20th the cost of the product being imported. So that was another technological breakthrough.

Soon, we realised that if we manufactured only accessories, no one would recognise us as a brand. My vision was to manufacture all types of security equipment. So, in 2004, we started assembling CCTV cameras and selling them with our own brand name. We added more equipment to

our kitty like intruder alarms, audio and video door phones, guard supervisors, etc. Within three years, we had all the different equipment that is required for the security vertical.

At that time, the security market was totally unorganised. But we were working in an organised manner, so it was very difficult to compete with the unorganised market and against imported products. In our Noida facility, we were paying a lot of tax and other duties for manufacturing. I decided to start another facility in Haridwar—a special economic zone—where we were given a five-year excise and IT holiday. People discouraged me from taking this step, but as I said, I can look ahead. I knew I was making the right move.

Soon we came in contact with Sony. It was looking for a player in India to manufacture board cameras—the main optic part that makes the picture in a CCTV camera. It is basically the heart of any security camera. At that time, board cameras were being imported from Taiwan, Korea and China. Sony wanted to bring this project to India and approached almost all the players in the security space, but nobody showed any interest. At an exhibition, I met the people from Sony and expressed my desire to manufacture the board camera as per their design. Those at Sony were astonished but after a number of meetings, even with their executives from Singapore, they were convinced and gave us six month's time to finish the project. We completed it in just 45 days. Sony was so impressed with our work that its divisional managing director came to India to launch this project in July 2008 at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

With this development, the whole scenario of the security industry changed. It was not that any rocket science went into it, but nobody thought that it could be financially viable. We followed Sony's original design and brought it to the market at such a competitive price that we could compete with China. Within two years we did many innovations to the original design and today we have 250 models

of board cameras. We moved ahead fast—from 440 to 480 and on to 540 TVL with OSD. This brought about a revolution in the security industry.

### Creating benchmarks

If I look back, I can see a number of contributions that I made to the industry. I started indigenous manufacturing in the security domain. We played a major role in organising this industry—the earlier players only did assembly work. We were the first to start manufacturing in an organised manner. Starting manufacturing in an SEZ was another calculated move. Again, we were the first to manufacture green products—all our products are RoHS compliant. We also have a technological edge over others. We were the first to invest in R&D—enabling us to introduce a new design and a new model every fourth day.

We always think beyond others and look for new opportunities in the market. We always look for the small gaps that we can fill and create a benchmark for the industry. For the last three years, we have grown by more than 80 per cent, and till December 2010, we have already grown by more than 30 per cent. We are hopeful to grow more than 100 per cent by the financial year end.

Today, we have expertise in market analysis, strategic planning, team building and strategic alliances. This has paved the way for Sparsh to have technical associations with global corporations like Sony, Singapore; Sharp, Singapore; Texas Instruments, USA; and OmniVision Technologies Inc, USA.

### Professional achievements

In my own small way, I try to contribute to this industry. I am the founding director of the International Institute of Security and Safety Management (IISSM), NCR chapter, and a permanent invitee to the board of governors as a trainer and consultant. I am a regular faculty member at IISSM.

Sparsh has been awarded the Elcina-Dun & Bradstreet Award for 'Entrepreneurial Excellence'; I have received the 'Self Made Industrialist'

These are a few of my favourite things...

- Favourite past time:** Spending time with my family
- Favourite hobby:** Playing and watching cricket
- Favourite music:** Old Hindi romantic songs
- Favourite food:** Home made food
- Favourite vacation destination:** Anywhere with the kids and family
- Favourite possession:** Cars
- Favourite health booster:** Drinking more water and drinking lukewarm water in winter
- If not an entrepreneur:** A cricketer
- Things I want to change about myself:** Not to trust everyone
- Three values I would like to incorporate in my children:** Honesty, hardwork and value for money
- Message to other entrepreneurs:** Hard work always pays off and take pride in the 'made in India' brand

award from the Institute of Trade & Industrial Development; our firm has earned Frost and Sullivan's 'The Entrepreneurial Company of the Year, 2007' title, and now we have won the 'Leaders of Tomorrow' award'.

### Five years down the line

Five years down the line, I would like to see this industry become a manufacturing hub, and Sparsh a name to reckon with. My vision is to put India on the global map for designing and manufacturing high quality and technologically advanced electronic security equipment.

As for Sparsh, we are expanding fast—in February our second facility will open in Noida to manufacture security equipment. We aim to grow by 100 per cent YoY for the next three years, and hope to capture 25 per cent of the market within two years. However, despite growing by 100 per cent, I do not take any profits home—for the last 10 years I have been living in a two room flat built by my father. Yet, I am happy and content as materialistic things do not stir me. ☐☐