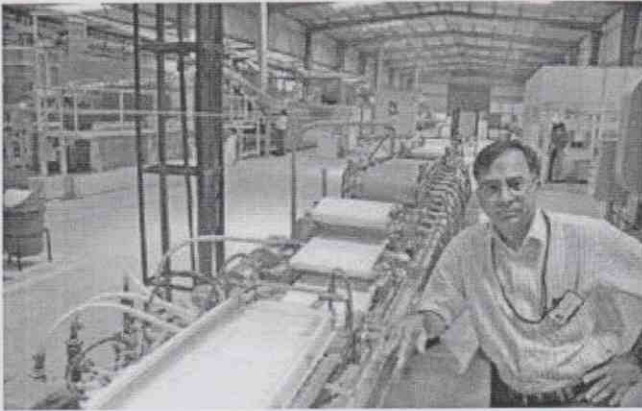


THE HINDU Business Line

Raman effect in enterprise

A business model based on scientific curiosity and specialised innovations..



Aroon Raman at his Bangalore-based company, Raman FibreScience, where R&D and product development

Raman pursued an education in management. But innovation and research had

Swetha Kannan

K. Giriprakash

To take scientific curiosity a step further and develop a business model out of it i attempted. Aroon Raman of Raman FibreScience is among the daring few who h into a field that is rare, highly specialised and calls for immense research and de

Ever heard of 'wet-laid composites'? Well, listening to Raman talk passionately a that his story was as much about lesser-known Indian companies sitting on cutti potential as it was about the complex composites themselves.

Bangalore-based research and innovation company, Raman FibreScience sells te specialised segment called wet-laid composites, which is rather similar to paperr are much "more exotic compared to the conventional wood pulp or agro-based fi carbon, glass, ceramic and polyester are innovatively combined with other chemi high-performance composites for customised use.

Unrelated interests

With its R&D facility in Mysore, the company offers end-to-end solutions — from manufacturing. "Many companies have approached us for solutions even where ' their industry. This is lateral innovation: ideas that come from unrelated experie

With a degree in Economics (a far cry from R&D, he exclaims), Raman pursued innovation and research had always interested him. The urge to innovate was so strong that he set up a small innovation centre in 1991 that later became Raman Boards and was in business. Even as it fared well against competition, the niche business was always finally bought out by ABB, Switzerland, in 2007. This proved a blessing in disguise as it gave him the resources to pursue his passion. He separated the innovation centre from the rest of his new company, Raman FibreScience.

Breakthrough products

From air and liquid filtration, thermal insulation, fuel cells, separators for lead-acid batteries, special sealing requirements to special materials for the footwear industry, the company has

It has invented a non-polymer battery separator with versatile applications. “Alkaline batteries use polyethylene (PE) separators and we are the first to offer a non-PE separator for continuous battery lines. The material has generated excellent response, and even been accepted by several major customers. We are now taking the product to international markets.”

The HEPA, or High Efficiency Particulate Air, filter developed by his team is used in pharmaceuticals, pharma, biotech, healthcare and nuclear industries. The special impregnated paper is another achievement.

“We will build a profitable business in the wet-laid composite area with cutting-edge technology. We will also develop as a research and innovation partner to global companies which see innovation as a key to trying hard to build an open innovation culture. At our company, the R&D team focuses on product development and expects the production team to deliver; rather, the whole process is highly collaborative,” he says, outlining the company's vision for the future.

Scientific and enterprising?

Having been an entrepreneur pretty much all his life, Raman says that while passion is important, it is real and aware of financial and market risks. “Second, getting the right people for the job and power is always a huge challenge — especially when the market build-up gets deluged with competition. Never give up, but if the venture looks fundamentally unviable, give it up. Persistence will win in the end...”

The journey towards establishing an enterprise, creating a team driven by a single vision and global standards of excellence has been rewarding for him. However, Raman, who is a member of the CII Karnataka State Council, cautions: “One can claim only partial success on a lifelong journey and, as the saying goes, sometimes it is as fulfilling to travel as to reach the destination.”

So what prevents young minds from taking up science as a mainstream career? “The situation in our country is alarming. We might boast of the odd centres of scientific excellence such as IITs and national laboratories, but for a country of more than one billion people, this is woefully inadequate.”

Attracting young talent

“Teaching has suffered over the last decades and simply does not attract the best socioeconomic reality that has materially rewarded ‘professional’ qualifications in pure science.”

But he still sees enough room for hope. “Globalisation has unleashed a wave of innovation in India. Some of the biggest companies in the world have set up research facilities here that has suddenly grown exponentially. Compensation has also moved up significantly in a career in science. It remains to address the shortfall in good teachers, who are in short incubation. India is therefore at a cusp... The next decade will be absolutely crucial.”

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