

*With mankind today desperately seeking a viable and sustainable blueprint for the future, one of the spotlights is currently on managing the monumental quantum of 'waste' generated by human society that has been rapidly industrialising for the past two centuries. 'Waste management' has thus become one of the key catchphrases of late, on which the very future of healthy living for humankind and its myriad co-travellers on this blue marble of our planet pivots upon. It was indeed time we looked upon ways and means of utilising our accumulated 'trash' as a rather 'un-natural' resource. Drivers for this are diminishing resources, environmental fallouts of new products and 'green' legislation, particularly in the automotive, electronic and packaging sectors. Finding value in human-created materials like end-of-life plastics, some pioneers have evolved a global trade in such materials in recent years. One such global enterprise trading in recycled plastics is Gemini Corporation. It's founder and President, Surendra Borad Patawari, an Indian, is a leading figure in solid-waste management. NRI Achievers profiles him, his inspirational work and his personality facets in Dossier this issue ...*

Surendra Borad Patawari was born in a small village that goes by the name of Momasar, near the old city of Bikaner in Rajasthan, where his life until the age of 10 was spent. At a later age he went to Kolkata from where he completed his education, and entered the sphere of productivity as a spanking new Chartered Accountant. After working at it for some years, he moved to Europe, and in the year 1989, finding value in converting industrial and other waste into reusable material, he took the plunge and founded his own company in Antwerp, Belgium. His company, and established under the name of Gemini Corporation, began dealing with the sourcing, processing and logistics of recyclable raw materials. In its first month, the company shipped just one container of plastic scrap. Today, some 5000 containers of steel, plastic, rubber and other industrial grade scrap that come from all across the world are shipped by it from over 100 seaports every month.

Gradually, over the years, this fledgeling company which began as an initiative of four farsighted people under Borad's vision and leadership, grew exponentially. This growth saw a network of warehousing facilities, processing units and re-manufacturing plants sprouting across three continents – in Europe, Asia, and North America. Today, Gemini Corporation is an employer of more than 200 professionals, and has emerged as a global organisation with offices in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, India, China, Vietnam, the United States, Germany and Sweden, becoming one of the world's largest plastic scrap traders. Gemini also has significant trading operations in steel and rubber scrap, and it's uncompromising adherence to its avowed principles of commitment, integrity and trust has seen the achievement of a turnover approximating over Euro 500 million. Not at all surprising that Gemini Corporation was awarded well-deserved recognition by the Antwerp Chamber of Commerce, which deemed it fit to bestow the company with it's "Excellent Enterprise Award 2012" for 'exceptional growth,' a distinction and it bestows upon companies from the district Antwerp traditionally every 3 years. Surendra Patawari, Gemini's Chairperson, has also gone on become one of the key contributors to the European Parliament on policy-making related to the European recycling industry. He is also the Chairperson of the Plastics Committee at the Bureau of International Recycling, an association with a worldwide membership of over 700 enterprises.

Having been brought up in true Jaina tradition, Surendra Patawari tells us that modesty is very important in life, and that nobody in his enterprise will be modest, if he is not setting an example of modest living and diligent working himself. His modesty did come right up to the surface when we quizzed him about the key ingredients that made Gemini a success story, when he avers that the success of his enterprise hinges not merely on his merit alone, but on his being blessed with an extraordinary team to work with that has an innovating and dynamic approach to their work, and possessing a really strong work motivation. The only dictats he puts in, he says, are some adherence to his Jaina principles like having no leather use at the workplace, et al.

According to him, the vows chosen by oneself as a self-adopted 'code of conduct' are small things, but small things do change the world, he believes, for example when one decides not to resort to any dishonorable means in conducting business, or not cut any trees unnecessarily. When asked to elaborate, he tells us a story. The story of a fisherman and his son, where both of them were once walking along the beach, where many small fishes were stranded and struggled for their lives. The son bent down, put one of them back into the sea, and the small fish quickly swam away. His father says: "But there are millions of them for whom nothing will change!" The son replies: "Yes father – you are so right. But everything for *that* fish is changed ." And he leaves it at that.

Talking about the waste reprocessing and recycling industry worldwide, he is of the view that the policy stance adopted by several countries in the developing world, as well as emergent economies like India and China, has brought a pall of gloom over this new industry. According to him, the currently unpromising market for plastics et al., could quite possibly be improved through a number of measures, including preferential VAT regimes, and a fresher look at the larger picture the world today is facing on the front of proliferating non-biodegradable matter.

Patawari calls for a reduction in the legislative and administrative burden on non-hazardous recyclables, as he is of the view that if not done so, prospects for the plastics recycling sector were "not very promising" at present. "For any business, the real driver is of a financial nature – and unfortunately on that front it is not working well. The market is 'rethinking' recycling because being green is costing so much money." Talking of India, he adds: "Customers in India ask why they should buy and use recycled plastics when cheaper virgin materials are available. Why should they take the hassles of compliance when there is not much difficulty in getting prime? Even some Chinese customers have changed their business. The scenario in Europe is not that promising either. This is a wake-up call." Calling attention to the dire necessity – the do-or-die nature of recycling, he urges:

- Higher landfill taxes
- Lower or zero VAT on goods produced from recycled materials
- Reduced regulation for non-hazardous scrap such as non-complex plastics and recovered paper
- Improved consumer awareness

After painting this bit of gloom, to sum up he ends on an optimistic and positive note quoting an International Solid Waste Association assessment that commodity prices and demand would increase.

Towards the end, we asked Surendra Borad Patawari if he is into philanthropy and giving. With a smile he replies that his upbringing makes it an integral part of life. Asked about his interests, he mentions offhand the adoption of five villages in India for their complete medical needs, his taking it upon himself to build and operate two schools, and being supportive of the plantation and maintenance of over a 100,000 trees.