

Amarjit & Gunita Singh
Intec Group

Building a dream factory

They started out making fans in a rented shed, battling a cash crisis, some 20 years ago. Today, they own a Rs 170-crore business. Here's the extraordinary tale of a resilient couple.



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As an assistant in his brother's shop inside the bustling Karol Bagh market in Delhi, Amarjit Singh sold electrical appliances. But whipping up conversations with customers was just not

enough for him. There was a simmering aggression inside him that Amarjit knew had to be set free. That was the eighties.

A few years later, he walked out of the family business after differences with his elder brother. With little to call their own, Amarjit and his wife, Gunita, borrowed Rs 1 lakh from an uncle of his to set up Intec Electricals. The couple rented out a small shed in Faridabad for Rs 2,500 a month, and started churning out exhaust fans for another company.

Amarjit

I sold a TV to Gunita's father, which kept breaking down. So, one day, she came to the shop to give us a yelling. I was very impressed with her convent English.

Gunita

As a wife, of course, you have to work to make your own space. But, fortunately there was no ego between us. And, he has always treated me as an equal, at home, at work, and in front of people.

They billed their first consignment in January 1990, but Gunita never forgets those early days of trying to keep their heads above water. Sometimes, they would even run short of basic household items. On most accounts, Amarjit, now the 45-year-old chairman and managing director of Intec Group, knows it would not have been possible without his wife.

"I have always wanted to start something of my own, but without her support and her belief, this wouldn't have happened," says he, of Gunita.

The Rs 170-crore company the two have built now occupies a dominant position as an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) of consumer durables, such as air conditioners, colour televisions and water heaters for top brands—think, Samsung, Bajaj, Kenstar and Onida.

The story, however, got worse before it got better. Just as the fan business began rolling to a slow, but stable rhythm, the 1992 Mandal Commission riots happened. The truck containing their shipment of fans was set afire in Mumbai. Moreover, the accountant had forgotten to renew the company's insurance. "Our entire capital was eroded. Whatever we had managed to build by then, just vanished," says Gunita.

"I stayed in Bombay for 15 days, repairing each fan myself to minimise the damage. To save money, my engineer and I stayed with his daughter," says Amarjit.

"There were days I would reverse my car after reaching office because the vendors had flocked there for payments. Thankfully, there were no mobiles then, so it wasn't so easy to be tracked," laughs Amarjit, adding that his deep faith in God kept him going.

Along with divine intervention, Amarjit and Gunita needed cash to keep the business afloat, but no bank was willing to lend money to start grounds up. A relative's introduction to a senior officer at GEC, Rajasthan, turned things around. The senior manager asked them to make pumps for cooler units, and also agreed to pay in cash, in the first year, to bail out Intec. Over the next three years, Intec did a business of nearly Rs 3 crore with GEC.

"I would sit with engineers on the shop

floor and test each pump," says Gunita, who as a student of English literature at the upmarket Jesus & Mary College in Delhi, could not have envisaged such a career move. They finally turned the corner in 1996 when they began manufacturing the small, one-litre Bajaj geyser, making more than 50,000 pieces from their rented factory in Naraina in Delhi.

It's a partnership founded on complementary strengths. Amarjit works on areas related to products, infrastructure and relationships, while Gunita handles ISO certifications for Intec. "She is a natural leader and has an uncanny ability to get what she wants. Nobody refuses her. She can just walk into a chairman's office," says a rather proud husband.

Although she does not involve herself with the daily running of the business, Gunita says she is still on top of every issue. She holds fort at office, whenever Amarjit is out travelling for business.

While the business is doing well, and they have seven factories running across the country, Amarjit and Gunita are confident that an even brighter future beckons Intec—a turnover of Rs 500 crore in the next few years. The couple's banking on their new 15-acre factory in Chennai's Sriperumbudur industrial zone to deliver this growth. Partially operational, it has been set up at an estimated cost of Rs 35 crore to manufacture colour TVs, monitors, air conditioners and white goods appliances for several leading brands.

There's similar action at the corporate headquarters in Delhi's Naraina Industrial area, where Amarjit's busy hiring professionals and management trainees from well-known business schools. He's also gearing up to meet the demands of the new generation. His 21-year-old daughter is keen to join the Intec Group. But, she wants to major in finance and work for a couple of years in larger companies before joining her own.

"She has told me that she will join the company when it has enough liquidity to pay off its debts," says her father, deeply aware of how different his journey might have been had financing been available in the early days of his struggle. ●

