

# Survival of the Fittest

CW traces the journey of Mumbai-based Narsi & Associates from size zero to becoming a size ₹6.50 billion company.

In his early youth, Narsi Kularia set foot in the city of dreams to fulfil his own. Hailing from a small village near Nokha in Bikaner, Rajasthan, with a Grade 10 degree in hand, he slowly and meticulously constructed from scratch the ₹6.50 billion empire he leads today. In 1981, when he set out on his career path, India's interior industry was at a primitive stage; it was the big oil companies that could afford large-scale designing and interior decoration. This is where Kularia polished his skills to deliver what only a few could, at that time. In 1983, he got the opportunity to work on a project in Oman, where he was introduced to the more efficient, reliant and timebound side of the carpentry world. Inspired, he returned with newer ideas and a stronger base.

Kularia's first project in India was a Lubrizol plant in Navi Mumbai, and he soon began taking on big projects one after the other. Around 1994, he secured his first furnishing and design projects with IDBI and ICICI in Mumbai. He also bagged the opportunity to work with the likes of the State Bank of India, Standard Chartered Bank and the National Stock Exchange in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Goa. The **Managing**

**Director of Narsi Associates** shares more on his journey, challenges and professional principles with CW.

- **The ₹6.50 billion journey:** While I started at a young age with only carpentry skills at hand, there was a lot to learn and explore. I started off by offering my skills initially as a service to architects and designers with the help of a few relatives. After finishing a few sites on contract basis, I secured work owing to the quality accomplished and timely completion. I then got the opportunity to work overseas with a leading architect; I worked with skilled craftsmen and woodworking experts from

Germany, Italy and the UK. Hence, from offering services to small-scale sites to now building self-made manufacturing facilities and executing big-ticket projects for Amazon, Infosys, TCS and Google, this journey has helped me form the basic principles Narsi thrives on. The principles we swear by – like our uncompromising commitment to quality and timely execution of projects – have resulted in success. And, fortunately, my team has constantly strived to convert my vision for Narsi into reality. The support of my family plays a huge role, especially my son Jagdish Kularia, who heads the infrastructure arm and supports me in managing the company with newer perspectives and ways.

- **Areas of challenge:** Coming to Mumbai from Bikaner, Rajasthan, with just carpentry skills inherited from my ancestors, every aspect of professional and personal life was a challenge. The only strategy I knew was the 'survival of the fittest' in this bustling metropolis and so I did everything that was required to build this business – within ethical boundaries. Fortunately, when I started Narsi, the Indian economy was booming and so was the interiors industry. There were opportunities to build offices for banking and the IT sectors. The primary challenges faced here were dearth of skilled labour and unavailability of



adequate technology to execute these projects. To overcome these, I travelled abroad to bring in the latest technology and took it on myself to train labour to work on advanced machineries. We made the best efforts to manage our finances and stay in the black while executing all the projects we worked for – the key being working with the right clients for the right projects and partnering with the right vendors.

- **Achievements aplenty:**

We have achieved multiple milestones through our three-decade journey. The latest is our manufacturing facility in Turbhe, Navi Mumbai, spread across 100,000 sq ft. This state-of-the-art facility serves as our designing and experience centre as well as a production facility. Another noteworthy milestone was when Narsi entered the *India Book of Records* for its vital role in the conceptualisation and creation of the 'Largest Cancer Care Hospital Built in the Least Time by a Philanthropic Organisation' for the Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya Cancer Care Centre in Varanasi. Narsi Interior Infrastructures contributed to this venture by Sir Ratan Tata Trust's Cancer Care Initiative, delivering the interior infrastructure for this 352-bed advanced healthcare facility spread across 5.86 lakh sq ft within record time, at the highest competitive standards.

- **The 'Make in India' approach:**

I am a firm believer in the 'Make in India' ideology. At our facility in Turbhe, we aim at manufacturing world-class, quality products with the help of top-end and advanced Italian and German machines. When I started this business, I noticed interior designers and architects importing furniture and décor



Spread across 100,000 sq ft, the company's facility in Navi Mumbai serves as a design and experience centre, as well as a production facility.

elements to meet quality and service requirements and I would wonder why we did not manufacture similar quality products here by investing in advanced technology and the process required to meet these demands. Since then, we started investing in technology and better manufacturing processes and trained our workers to create the finest and best quality products.

- **Skill crunch:** The issue of unskilled labour is a challenge our nation should strive to resolve. At Narsi, we train unskilled labour to become independent entrepreneurs and extend employment opportunities to them. To be able to do this on a larger scale and reach these workers remotely, we have tied up with the government's Skill India initiative. We take pride in training and certifying close to 300-400 workers every quarter within our dedicated 2,000 sq ft of space for skill development at the manufacturing facility at Turbhe. So far, we have successfully trained over 4,000 aspiring labourers.

- **Role model:** My father, from whom I inherited my carpentry skills, has always been my inspiration. My ancestors belonged to the Suthar community, the members of which demonstrated their woodworking skills not only in the palaces and mansions of kings and rich landowners but in construction and fitting, utilitarian and decorative products for many generations. My father, the late Sant Dularamji Kularia, was one of them. I grew up with these time-tested skills and aspired to learn and grow from the experiences he kept sharing with me.
- **Principles to success:** The principles I have applied in my personal and professional life include timely delivery of quality products and services as promised; undertaking ethical business policies; and taking care of employees. If you do this, your employees will take care of you and your business and you will have a healthy work-life balance.

– SHRIYAL SETHUMADHAVAN | CW |

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