



L to R: Viraf Pocha, Director, Landmark Productions in a conversation with Ronald Silvan D'Souza, Founder and Executive Director, Leksa Lighting, Manoj Lobo, National Head, Canara Lighting, Koy Neminathan, Business Development Director, Elation Professional, and Arvind Singh, Founder, Giant Truss

Exploring India's Potential in High-Tech Stage Lighting

A Panel Discussion on Manufacturing Lighting in India - A New Horizon

*In a world where India has established itself as a powerhouse in manufacturing everything from cars to high-tech gadgets, one question remains: Why not stage lighting? This was the central theme of a recent panel discussion featuring industry leaders and innovators in the field. The panel included seasoned professionals from India's lighting industry who aimed to address why producing advanced lighting solutions locally could be both feasible and beneficial, with insights from **Ronald Silvan D'Souza**, Founder and Executive Director of **Leksa Lighting**, **Manoj Lobo**, National Head of **Canara Lighting**, **Koy Neminathan**, Business Development Director from **Elation Professional** **Arvind Singh**, Founder of **Giant Truss**, and **Viraf Pocha**, Director of **Landmark Productions Ltd**, who moderated the session. Their perspectives highlighted the unique opportunities and challenges of 'Make in India' in the field of high-tech stage lighting.*

Viraf Pocha, Director, Landmark Productions Ltd, began the session by questioning why India, a country capable of manufacturing various advanced goods, couldn't also excel in stage lighting. The session's panelists take the conversations forward sharing their experiences and perspectives, shedding light on the complexities and potential of this sector.

The Challenges of Early Entrepreneurship: Arvind Singh's Journey

Arvind Singh's foray into the manufacturing world began in 2014 with

aluminium truss manufacturing. The journey was arduous, illustrating the challenges faced by new entrepreneurs in this sector. Coming from a small city near Delhi, Singh encountered significant hurdles, particularly in dealing with the complexities of aluminium welding. "Many people think welding is simple, but it's quite complex," he observed. This was especially true in a region where local expertise in handling aluminium was scarce.

Despite these challenges, Singh's determination and strategic vision played a crucial role in his success. "Our initial investment came from a gold loan of ₹1.5 lakh," he explained. Inspired by Prime Minister Modi's "Make in India"

initiative, Singh and his brother started their business with limited resources but a clear focus. They began in a modest 20-square-yard space, and their journey has seen their factory expand to 20 acres with a covered area of 1.5 lakh square feet, employing approximately 400-500 people. Today, their company's valuation exceeds ₹300 crore, a testament to their success and growth. The technique and materials required are not commonplace in India. Singh's efforts have opened the door for other manufacturers of niche products such as trusses.

Singh emphasized the ongoing challenge of competing with cheaper imports, particularly from China. "Cost is a major challenge," he noted. "Because China is hitting us very hard in terms of costing and every buyer in the market has the Indian mindset, 'Oh, I want cheap. Your price is high, I want cheap. This I can get from China in this many rupees; your price is little higher.' This mindset is not the right mindset for this country. This task of manufacturing in India, it's not the job of one company or two companies or five companies, it's a job of the entire nation. The users, the traders, dealers out there. They are also, you know, Indian mindset again." To address this, he stressed the importance of innovation, efficient cost management, and maintaining high-quality standards. This focus on quality is crucial, especially when competing against global players who often leverage lower production costs to dominate the market. Singh reiterates that a solid understanding of costing, business principles, and quality standards is foundational for any successful venture. "You have to think on larger scales and if you have a smaller budget, you can find some partners you can go for the bank loan. Do something, try to do something big with good motivation, high confidence. Just do it. It will happen eventually." Singh encourages.

Balancing Quality with Innovation: Insights from Ronald Silvan D'Souza

Ronald Silvan D'Souza of Leksa Lighting offered a different perspective on the importance of quality and innovation. Leksa Lighting is known for its architectural and façade lighting solutions, and D'Souza highlighted the company's commitment to quality control. "Our focus on quality and a thorough understanding of our products have ensured that our projects, even those involving large-scale lighting solutions, remain trouble-free over time," D'Souza explained.

Maintenance is a big challenge in India. A drain on running costs, maintenance is neglected or compromised upon, and the initial investment begins to lose its value.

Leksa Lighting's success in delivering on high-profile projects where others have failed underscores the significance of maintaining rigorous quality standards. D'Souza detailed how Leksa tackled challenges that others couldn't, particularly with large projects requiring reliable and innovative solutions. This commitment is reflected in the longevity and durability of their products, which sets them apart from competitors who have faced similar difficulties. D'Souza highlights the importance of integrating quality into every aspect of the product lifecycle. "Actually, in my case or in Leksa's case our servicing is just 0.02%, that is where built-in quality comes into picture. 'Jidoka' comes into picture," he explains. The concept of 'Jidoka,' or 'automation with a human touch,' reiterates the company's dedication to ensuring that quality is embedded from the initial stages of product design through to final delivery.

Leksa's approach to architectural lighting shows how a commitment to quality, coupled with thorough research and development, can lead to success. D'Souza's insights into the company's practices highlight the importance of embedding quality into the product design and development process. While cost remains a consideration, it is the ability to deliver reliable, well-engineered products that ultimately defines Leksa's success in the competitive lighting industry.

End-to-End Quality Assurance: Manoj Lobo's Perspective

Manoj Lobo from Canara Lighting also provided valuable insights into the role of quality and customer support. As a leading manufacturer in specialized lighting, Canara Lighting's philosophy revolves around delivering high-quality products and providing excellent support. "Our products are designed to last, and we back them with lifetime support," Manoj Lobo stated. This commitment to quality is evident in the longevity of Canara's products, which often

remains operational for decades without the need for service.

Canara Lighting's dedication to customer satisfaction continues long after the sale. "Canara Lighting doesn't just sell. We sell it for a lifetime, so when we sell our product, we buy the customer," Manoj Lobo explains with confidence. This philosophy is evident in the company's comprehensive service network across India.

With offices in all major metropolitan areas, Canara Lighting ensures that service and support are always within reach. "At any given point of time, if you look today, all over India we have our offices in all metropolitans. We have our sales engineers and service engineers deployed in that particular region who can take care of that particular city," Manoj Lobo adds.

This extensive network allows Canara Lighting to provide prompt and efficient service, addressing any issues that may arise with minimal disruption. Despite having a central manufacturing facility, the company has strategically placed registered offices across India to handle service needs effectively.

Canara Lighting's 35,000 square meter factory in Mangalore, Karnataka, serves as a hub of technological advancement and innovation. "We have more than 300 people working here," Manoj Lobo points out, emphasizing the scale and capability of their operations.

The company's focus on continuous improvement drives the development of new, innovative products designed to endure. "There's a lot of technology advancement, a lot of innovation going behind it because every time we think of something different," Manoj Lobo says. This dedication to innovation ensures that Canara Lighting remains at the forefront of the industry, consistently delivering high-quality, long-lasting products.

The Critical Role of Education: Koy Neminathan's Input on Gaps in The Industry

As industry expert **Neminathan** puts it, "Education is King." This principle must be applied strategically, focusing not only on university students but also on younger, school-aged children and their parents. Neminathan highlights a critical gap in the current educational approach: "In Europe, all the companies will target the university students. That's too late; they've already made a decision in what they're undertaking as an undergraduate." By the time students reach university, many have already chosen their career paths, potentially missing out on opportunities within the lighting industry.

To address this, Neminathan advocates for earlier intervention: "We need to go below; we need to get to the school level." At this formative stage, children often dream about becoming stars on stage, envisioning themselves as performers. Neminathan believes that exposing them to the backstage world is equally important: "What we need to show them is how cool it is backstage Front of House (FOH)."

The challenge also involves shifting entrenched perceptions among parents, many of whom view careers in technical fields like lighting as less prestigious or viable compared to more traditional vocations. Neminathan notes, "We've got to overcome that; we've got to ensure that there is a career in our industry." Bridging this perception gap requires highlighting the diverse and rewarding career opportunities available in lighting. By highlighting successful professionals and demonstrating both the creative and technical aspects of the field, the industry can reshape public perception and attract young talent.

The struggle to find skilled professionals in the lighting industry can be traced back to inadequate foundational work. "Right now, we're struggling to find the right people in our industry. Why? Because we didn't lay the foundations properly," Neminathan explains. This underscores the urgency of addressing the issue early on. The industry must take proactive steps to engage students at a younger age and build interest in the field. This includes developing educational programs, school partnerships, and outreach initiatives that introduce children to the possibilities within the industry.

Once interest is established, continuous training and development become crucial. As Neminathan suggests, it is the industry's duty to "ensure that we look at the kids and bring them up and train them." By creating pathways from early education through to professional development, the industry can build a pipeline of skilled workers ready to meet future demands.

The Role of R&D in Lighting

The distinction between lighting and other products, such as trusses, lies in the complexity of the technology involved. D'Souza points out that while

trusses might require less Research & Development (R&D), lighting demands extensive R&D to meet both local and international standards. "When it comes to lighting, we have to look into a lot of R&D aspects wherein for the customer for the desired level we have to manufacture those products which is required for the local as well as for international requirements and we were able to do it."

This focus on R&D enables Leksa to create products that not only meet but exceed industry expectations. By investing in research and development, the company ensures that its products are both innovative and well-suited to diverse applications, enhancing their appeal to a global market.

Singh agreed, noting that while truss manufacturing is relatively straightforward, lighting involves complex technology and requires a highly skilled workforce. "Lighting is a complex product that demands a well-trained force for every component," he said. The complexity of lighting technology means that developing effective solutions requires collaboration among multiple companies and a significant investment in training.

Manoj Lobo highlights the rapid technological advancements of the past decade, noting that these changes are driven by evolving customer needs. "We have a lot of seminars, and we give a lot of training sessions to a lot of seasoned people in the industry," Lobo explains. As a manufacturer, the company's core strengths lie in design and R&D. "Our strength lies in designing, our strength lies in R&D," he emphasizes. Reflecting on their product development, he notes the importance of adapting to technological requirements, mentioning that their products cater to diverse needs, such as those of YouTube channels and short-term DOPs. Manoj Lobo highlighted the launch of the **Palm Size Light** specifically such creators to accommodate their budgets and requirements. He reiterates that PALM Expo has been a great platform for OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) like himself to introduce new products to the industry. Viraf Pocha quipped, "Wow, PALM Expo, Palm light!" earning a round of applause at Canara's innovation. Lobo also points to global innovations in places like Singapore and the Netherlands as sources of inspiration. "There is a huge scope for development, and we are learning on a continuous basis," he concludes.

Government Support and Financial Challenges

The role of government support in fostering local manufacturing was another key topic. D'Souza expressed frustration with the limited assistance he received. "It's been six years since I started my company, and apart from a few income tax rebates, I haven't received significant help," he stated. Despite this, D'Souza acknowledged that the 'Make in India' sentiment has been beneficial, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In contrast, Singh highlighted several supportive measures available to new businesses. "The government offers various schemes, such as subsidies on testing equipment and marketing assistance for MSMEs," he explained. Arvind also benefited from unsecured loans, which were crucial for his business's early growth. "These schemes have been valuable in supporting our expansion," he noted.

Manoj Lobo discusses the significant support from the Indian government, highlighting its impact on the industry. "We have got the best support, I must say," Lobo states, praising departments such as CPWD (Central Public Works Department), PWD (Public Works Department), NBCC (National Buildings Construction Corporation), and ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) for their impressive projects across the country. He points to notable achievements, such as Canara Lighting's involvement in lighting one of India's largest convention centres in Dwarka, Delhi, **Yashobhomi**, which features a 6,100-seat auditorium. Lobo notes that Indian companies have been instrumental in these developments, emphasizing the support for 'Make in India' initiatives. He adds, "We have got tremendous support. The first thing they look for is Make in India. There's a lot of weightage in that and as a Make in India company, there are a lot of opportunities and chances given to us." According to Manoj Lobo, the government's backing is vital, as it positions Indian firms as reliable support systems, reducing reliance on foreign entities and bolstering domestic capabilities.

Government initiatives like the CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises) scheme, which offers unsecured loans up to ₹5 crore, are designed to assist new businesses in overcoming financial barriers. These programs aim to support the growth of local manufacturing by provid-

ing financial resources and reducing the burden of initial investments.

As India strives to enhance its manufacturing sector, the panellists discussed the importance of continued development and collaboration. Neminathan emphasized that while India has the resources to compete globally, it requires a strategic approach. "China started in a similar position, and with time, it became a global leader. India has the potential to follow a similar path," he said. The journey from being a nascent player to a global leader involves leveraging existing resources and pursuing strategic initiatives to build a competitive edge.

Singh echoed this sentiment, expressing optimism about India's future. "True 'Make in India' involves manufacturing here and selling globally," he stated. His company's participation in international exhibitions, such as Pro Light and Sound in Frankfurt and Pro Light China, exemplifies this global ambition. "We aim to be a leading player in the international market, showcasing the strength of Indian manufacturing," Singh added.

The Future of India's Lighting Industry

Looking ahead, the future of India's lighting industry appears promising, but it requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders. The industry's potential for growth is significant, driven by a combination of local talent, government support, and strategic investments. The key to realizing this potential lies in addressing existing challenges and leveraging opportunities for advancement.

Singh's company, Giant Truss is actively participating in major international exhibitions to showcase its products and capabilities. "We have already started this journey. For the last 2 years we are participating in the Pro Light and Sound Frankfurt exhibition. We are having a booth in Pro Light China." This global presence underscores the company's commitment to reaching international markets and demonstrates the practical application of the "Make in India" ethos.

Viraf Pocha observes that while Chinese products have a cost advantage. "The advantage comes with a few technical shortcomings that become evident at a later stage. For example, the nature of Lighting Fixtures dimming with an uneven arc within a theatre environment. Starting from Zero – a cheaper product will burst to 50% intensity instantly thereby destroying the 'moment' theatre requires as the lights are faded on or off. Canara's lighting fixtures addresses these issues and so their fixtures are popular in the theatre," he quotes.

As the industry continues to evolve, the experiences and insights of leaders like Arvind Singh, Ronald Silvan D'Souza, Manoj Lobo, and Koy Neminathan provide valuable guidance. Their commitment to quality, innovation, and collaboration underscores the potential for India to become a global leader in high-tech manufacturing. By focusing on education, technological advancements, and effective support systems, India can build a robust and competitive lighting industry that stands on par with international players.

The panel concluded by saying India's lighting industry is at a pivotal moment, with significant opportunities for growth and innovation. While challenges such as cost competition, technology gaps, and workforce training remain, the industry's leaders are making strides toward overcoming these obstacles. The collective efforts of industry leaders, supported by government initiatives and a commitment to excellence, will be crucial in shaping India's future in the global manufacturing arena.

Arvind Singh's ambitious vision, Ronald Silvan D'Souza's commitment to quality, Manoj Lobo's focus on customer support, and Neminathan's emphasis on education and collaboration all contribute to an all-round approach to advancing the lighting industry. As India continues to embrace the 'Make in India' initiative, the insights from these industry leaders provide a roadmap for achieving success in a competitive global market. The discussion concluded on a positive note, highlighting the ongoing efforts and aspirations of Indian companies to align with global standards while promoting domestic excellence. As the industry continues to evolve, the integration of international best practices and the expansion into global markets will be crucial for realizing the full potential of the 'Make in India' initiative.

To view the full conference session, visit the link -<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg2GqYCqTGs&t=81>

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