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Mr. Harsh Mariwala, Chairman & Managing Director, Marico Ltd. & Founder Member, Marico Innovation Foundation

Anil Mascarenhas / 15:49 , Mar 28, 2012



Mr. Harsh Mariwala, Chairman & Managing Director, Marico Ltd. & Founder Member, Marico Innovation Foundation, founded the company in 1990 and transformed a traditional commodity driven business into a leading Consumer Products & Services Company, in the Beauty and Wellness space. Mr. Harsh Mariwala's entrepreneurial drive and passion for Innovation, enthused him to establish the Marico Innovation Foundation in 2003. Under the stewardship of an eminent Board, the Foundation acts as a catalyst to fuel innovation in India. In addition, Mr. Harsh Mariwala also mentors a group of young and upcoming entrepreneurs, in association with TIE – The Indus Entrepreneurs - a part of TIE's Mentor Programme. In March 2011, Mr. Harsh Mariwala was elected as the President of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). He is also on the Board of Cadbury India Limited. In the past, he has held several positions as the FMCG Committee Chairman of FICCI and CII. Mr. Harsh Mariwala is also a part of the Young President Organization (YPO) and World Presidents Organization (WPO) and has held the position of YPO Education, Membership and Chapter Chair.

Marico Ltd is one of India's leading Consumer Products & Services companies, in the Beauty and Wellness space. During 2010-11, Marico recorded a turnover of Rs. 31.3 bn through its products and services sold in India and over 25 overseas countries. Marico touches the lives of 1 out of every 4 Indians, through its portfolio of brands such as Parachute, Saffola, Hair & Care, Nihar, Mediker and Revive. Marico's international portfolio includes brands like Fiancée, Haircode, Camelia, Aromatic, Caivil, Hercules, Black Chic, Code 10, Ingwe, X-Men, L'Ovite and Thuan Phat. It is also present in the Skin Care Solutions segment through Kaya Skin Clinics in India, Middle East and Bangladesh and Derma Rx in Singapore. Marico's focus on sustainable profitable growth is manifest through its consistent financial performance.



The 4th Marico Innovation Foundation awards take place on March 30. In an interaction with **Anil Mascarenhas** of **IIFL**, Mr. Mariwala says, "Innovation must help us achieve real breakthroughs – that changes lives in India and are recognized as new ways of thinking globally."

Innovation in India has often been given various names including jugaad. How does Marico Innovation Foundation look at innovation in India?

At MIF, we believe that Innovation is a crucial tool that can help leapfrog India into the center stage of global leadership, across Business, Public and the Civil Sectors. While Jugaad is an intrinsic element of India's local enterprise – Jugaad by itself is not sufficient to achieve large scale impact and global recognition.

Innovation must help us achieve real breakthroughs – that changes lives in India and are recognized as new ways of thinking globally. Examples such as the Tata Nano, Arvind Eye Hospital, ITC eChoupal, DIHAR's work in Leh & Ladakh are all examples of how innovation creates both impact on the ground and a new way to think about a problem.

The Foundation plays the role of a catalyst and works towards creating an innovation eco-system through cutting edge research, knowledge creation & dissemination – which can enable breakthrough innovations of this kind.

Who are the key people involved with this initiative and what do they bring to the table?

Behind the significant work of the Foundation sits an eminent expert body as its Governing Council. The role of the Council is to constantly steer the Foundation in line with its objective of fuelling Innovation in India. While Dr. R.A. Mashelkar chairs the Governing Board, other visionaries such as Anu Aga, Sam Balsara, Ashwin Dani, Ranjan Kapur, Prof. Prasad Kaipa, Prof. Sujata Ramadorai, R Gopalkrishnan, KV Mariwala, Dr Naushad Forbes, Ravi Venkatesan, Kishore Biyani and Dorab Sopariwala form the Council.

Highlight some of the research you have developed and what kind of inspiration has it triggered among individuals so far?

MIF's Research activities include cases studies and manifestos that are created through discovery and research. These include researches on Product Innovations, Challenger Series and Social Innovations. One of the recent researches resulted in a best seller publication "11 mission biographies -'Making Breakthrough Innovation Happen: 11 Indians who pulled off the impossible". This initiative is a culmination of a six-year joint discovery effort to identifying genuine breakthrough innovations from within India and then uncover cutting edge insights into 'what did these innovations do differently to make the impossible happen?'

Through research and its dissemination we believe that we are able to share best practices and create a multiplier effect. We are able to create an innovation ecosystem by putting together this knowledge. The fact that the publication "11 mission biographies" has sold 45,000 copies so far is an endorsement of inspiration that is being triggered.

What are some developments taking place in Social Innovation. What is the Marico Innovation Foundation doing in this space?

India is considered an emerging market and a rapidly developing economy. But with over 400 million Indians living on very limited resources, it is imperative that innovation be applied to social issues – in a way that a significant number of people can benefit from products and services that improves lives.

To this effect we have initiated a Program called Guiding Social Innovations – an incubation and acceleration program where we apply innovation as a tool and actively help organizations working in social issues to leapfrog the scale of their impact.

In 2011, we incubated two organizations in the domains of Employability and Waste Management and this program was implemented by our Knowledge partners Innovation Alchemy. Based on the results from this initiative, we are increasing the incubation support to 8-10 organizations in 2012.

As I mentioned earlier – at MIF we believe in applying innovation thinking to create real impact – and we are very serious about investing CSR money in a strategic manner that can truly demonstrate social innovation.

Our core focus areas for support in the next two years will be Employability, Health and Waste Management – as I believe that these are national level issues – and need social innovation to create rapid impact. Our Council members are excited about this direction and have given us a go ahead for further work in this area.

The Innovation for India Awards for Business, Social, Public Service Innovations are underway. What are some of the new initiatives this year?

This year we have looked at actively building an Innovation Community across India in addition to recognizing and awarding breakthrough innovations. Our Blog is very active, we held practitioner sessions across four cities to connect with and enable interactions with Innovators and we brought together several of the Award winners to share their learnings on an accessible platform across four cities – making it easy to discuss, debate and dialogue on the need for innovation.

These are all ways for us to really get involved in catalyzing innovation – not just recognizing it through awards. The Book 'Breakthrough Innovations' has been a best seller and that indicates that people do wish to learn from the stories of the people and organizations we are awarding. We plan to continue on those lines in the next 2 years.

Cite some of the innovations which have been recognized and what impact has it had?

In 2006 we institutionalised the **Innovation for India Awards**. These Awards acknowledge & foster leadership with innovative focus in various Business & Social sectors. From 2010, a new category - Public Governance has been introduced to recognize innovations where the Central or State government or any wing of the Government, including Public-Private partnership has innovated. The intent of the Awards is to reward projects and businesses that make a real difference to India and community at large. Based on the criteria of uniqueness, impact & scalability, 'India's Best Innovations' are declared bi-annually.

Since 2006, 32 innovators have been recognized which included organisations like Kirloskar Brothers, BOSCH MICO, Su-Kam, Titan, Azim Premji Foundation, Trichy Police, ITC IBD, Reliance KGD6, Tutor Vista, Goonj, PRS Legislative, Tata Chemicals and TERI, Gujarat Government's Jyoti gram Yojana and Defence Institute of High Altitude Research (DIHAR). Bharti Airtel and Tata Nano were recognized as Global Game Changers for their spirit of Innovation.

There is no dearth of innovators in our country. What is missing is often the catalyst. What are your views?

I agree. We are intrinsically enterprising people and there are a lot of innovators, innovative ideas and budding entrepreneurs in India. This pool of innovators and entrepreneurs is in many ways the real demographic dividend of our country. However, without a supportive ecosystem and the right kind of catalysts we are losing the opportunity to build and develop a lot of innovative solutions. My hope is that through our work at MIF we can be a strong catalyst and also encourage other Businesses to invest their CSR funds in a powerful catalytic manner – such that we can all, together, build the necessary ecosystem for innovation to flourish and grow in India.

If you were to cite some innovations in India, which are the ones you would hold in high esteem and consider a gamechanger?

Kirloskar Brothers, BOSCH MICO, Su-Kam, Titan, Azim Premji Foundation, Trichy Police, ITC IBD, Reliance KGD6, Tutor Vista, Goonj, PRS Legislative, Tata Chemicals and TERI, Gujarat Government's Jyoti gram Yojana and Defence Institute of High Altitude Research (DIHAR) among others. Bharti Airtel and Tata Nano as Global Game Changers for their spirit of Innovation are also good examples.

Three things you would recommend to entrepreneurs.

My sincere advice to budding entrepreneurs is to invest in innovative methods and people. If you have this combination right, you are on your way to building a highly successful and profitable venture in the long run. It is important to be open to change, it's only then that we will know what consumers really want and look for better ways to deliver it to them.