

# Vichaara

An International Journal of Management

Volume:5

October 2018

Number:1

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For Indian authors:	For foreign authors:
Single author: Rs.1500 Two or more authors: Rs. 1000 per author	Single author: USD 75 Two or more authors: USD 50 per author

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Indian Members	INR 1000/ year	INR 500/ issue
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# VIKING ESWARAN-THE WIZARD OF GARMENT MAKING

*A Success story of Mr A.C.Eswaran, Chairman, Viking and Anand International Brands*

## SUCCESS STORY AND CASE RESEARCH

### VIKING –Its Evolution and Image

Tiruppur in Tamilnadu is a major hosiery manufacturing hub. It has large concentration of hosiery units, catering both to domestic market and overseas market.

Viking is a widely popular undergarments brand located in Tiruppur. It was established in 1976 as a tiny unit which has attained a spectacular growth from a family owned business to a professional manufacturing unit. The product range of Viking include knitted undergarments such as vests, briefs, camisoles, panties, kid's undergarments besides specialized garments likes brassieres and leggings. Viking also deals in woven garments such as Dhoties, Shirts and casual wears like Denim and Bermudas. Viking brand is the brainchild of Mr.A.C.Eswaran, an extraordinary entrepreneur, who has transformed himself into a wizard in the garment industry of Tiruppur. Indomitable passion, courage of conviction and tireless hard work are the unique qualities of Mr.Eswaran which made him a miracle maker. A decade before launching the VIKING brand, Mr.Eswaran started Anand hosieries, his first venture in 1964, in a small way and entered into the production of innerwears.

By Mr.Eswaran's relentless pursuit and sheer hard-work the company created a name for itself and ANAND brand become familiar in south India as well as in a few pockets of north India. ANAND had distributive network all-over South India. Mr.Eswaran thought a complementary brand will enable greater reach and launched the 'VIKING' brand in 1976 'VIKING'and'ANAND 'are the twin leading brands of Tiruppur. Viking has become a vertically integrated composite manufacturing units ranging from fiber to finished products, with end to end production facilities integrating all stages in the garment manufacturing process. The ace entrepreneur, Mr.Eswaran popularly known as Viking Eswaran, evidently made himself a brand.

### **Mr.Eswaran The legendary Leader**

The saga of success of Mr.Eswaran is inspiring .In his early days, he traversed an untrodden path which was inhospitable, and hostile. Childhood poverty is considered to be the worst of all sufferings as it deprives everything to the unfortunate children-the education, happiness, hope and livelihood.

Hailing from a village in the vicinity of Tiruppur and born in a farming family with tiny landholding ,often affected by drought condition, early life was miserable for Mr.Eswaran .Being a school drop out in the early age, the only option for him was to work as a labourer. After spending hard time in farm and non-farm works, ultimately he landed as an worker in a small hosiery unit in 1953.As an unskilled labourer he had a miserable experience ,walking 10kms twice a day, working for 12 hours a day and earning a pittance wage of 2 ¼ rupees a week. After 5 years of intense labour and untold sufferings he moved to another company on a weekly wage of Rs 13½ rupees which went up to Rs 25.When a businessman offered to buy his father's two acres of dry land, he was persuaded to part with his land for a *quid pro quo* of a job in the mill proposed to be constructed by the buyer of the land. This ended as an unkept promise when the mill started working. The mill owner refused to engage him and insulted him by offering a mean job. He felt humiliated and insulted, which left a deep scar in his mind.

At this point of time he identified a spark of fire in him, which made him to think seriously about creating his own enterprise.

**The first venture** he made was the cycle shop he set up in his village with the moral and resource support of his grandmother. Subsequently he started a hosiery unit in a hired shed in association with a partner who had good experience in hosiery marketing with a meager capital of Rs 2000/-. The unit encountered all the teething troubles any new enterprise normally face, particularly finance and marketing.

With great perseverance and with the guidance of the knowledgeable partner, he established contact with buyers in Mumbai; and through personal visit, with great excitement and optimism he clinched his first big order by demonstrating the quality of the product. When he tasted the first success, he got another big blow, when the partner defrauded him and escaped with cash and bank balances. The unit was stopped and Mr.Eswaran's dream was shattered and he was in despair. Overcome by grief and sorrow he decided to end his life and contemplated throughout the night. But the destiny willed otherwise.

At last he regained the confidence and courage to convert the negative depression in his mind into positive energy and resolved to fight again. It was a great turning point. When Mr.Eswaran recollects this moment, he says; "I wanted to commit suicide at a time when God was about to crown me a king".  
(J.J.Gnanavel)

In the **Second Effort** also his grandmother was the motivator and mentor, who encouraged him and supported him to revive the unit in 1964. By this time experience taught him a few valuable lessons in hosiery business, and he did not have to depend on anybody. Though uneducated, he explored the market in the neighbouring states like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, which yielded him good results. His dedication, commitment to quality and dependable customer care, the 'Anand Brand' he adopted become well known in the market as a result of ten years of strenuous work. In the ten years of intense work, he became well versed in every aspect of Hosiery industry, namely spinning, weaving, knitting, dyeing and marketing.

More than skill acquisition, dedicated work has man-making ability. Mr.Eswaran express vividly, this aspect of self development.

*"I realized that problems dissolved with hard work. Customers wanted quality products. I needed orders. I realized English may be useful in business but not essential and I managed well without it .I slept in railway stations. I ate at every street food stall in India. I travelled on the rooftops of busses. My only dream was to collect orders. My dreams made all my hardships bearable."*(J.J.Gnanavel )

Mr.Eswaran's venture was no bed of roses rather it was thorny, but the success he made is lasting and the gratification he got is wholesome.

The **Third Phase** of his growth started when Mr.Eswaran launched another brand 'Viking' in 1976 with view to tapping the market with different product varieties and market segments. The market expansion took place on a large scale. Agencies were appointed throughout India which led to large

scale production and sale. After consolidating the market Mr.Eswaran added every stage in the verticals of hosiery manufacturing .First he started Viking Processing for bleaching and dyeing. Thereafter the yarn scarcity led to the starting of Viking Textiles Private Ltd in 1996 followed by Anand Textiles in 2004.Branded shirts and Dhoties were added to the ‘Viking’ brand.

Mr.Eswaran is emotionally charged when he recalls the event when he was humiliated and ridiculed by the watchman when he tried to enter ‘ Tiruppur Club’ to have a look at the cars parked there, and destiny made him the president of the same Tiruppur Club within a span of 40 years. He also become the president of SIHMA (South Indian Hosiery Manufactures Association) in the year 2010.It is an interesting coincidence that the club was started in 1956,almost at a time when Eswaran joined as a labourer in a hosiery unit.

Luck and fortune are for those who accept failure and give up effort; and not for those who do not give up hope, do not succumb to failures and those who have the fighting spirit. Ill-luck or misfortunes are the excuses of the weak to justify their failures. Mr.Eswaran is first among such men of mettle. The story of Mr.Eswaran is imbued with twists and turns; yet the spark of fire in him provided energy to conquer. The vivid portrayal of his story conveys valuable lessons for life. Mr.Eswaran convincingly advocates a few success ingredients for the benefit of younger generations.

Untiring effort and hard work alone are the fundamentals of success. Even if one has all kinds of disadvantages such of lack of education, lack of resources lack of institutional support or lack of bank finance, one can achieve the destination if one has determination and resolve.

Goal oriented action, backed by inspiration and burning desire will certainly be the propelling factors for progress.

Quality is the essence of customer satisfaction and building a dependable customer base. The producer should have commitment for quality at every stage in the entire production process.

Imitating the competitors without assessing one’s own strength and weakness will not produce desired results. For instance conscious decision was taken by Mr.Eswaran, not to enter the export market and concentrate on domestic market and the marketing strategy yielded positive results for him.

Branding is a powerful tool and according to Mr.Eswaran Brand gives value to the product. Brand building is a vital task in marketing. Finally, Mr Eswaran does not believe in linear growth without sustainability. Stabilization of growth is the better part of success. Therefore consolidation and stabilization are the essential aspects of sustained growth.

For the development of Hosiery Industry in Tiruppur Mr.Eswaran has a novel idea. He suggests that, *“the Tamilnadu Government has to necessarily consider setting up of “mini” textile parks with all*

*manufacturing facilities in villages within 10-20 km around Tiruppur. Besides allaying fears about lack of accommodation, this would also mean an increase in employment opportunities in the villages to boost the development of the Tiruppur textile cluster”(M.K.Prabhakar)*

The experience shared by Mr.Eswaran is intense and deep, impact made by the events-failures and success are reflected in his strong views and expressions, extremities he witnessed in his life-poverty and riches-has brought a high degree of emotional balance in him, and the humiliation and insults he encountered in his early age has made him empathetic with humanism and love for the less privileged. His entrepreneurial achievements gives hope and inspires the youth who are less endowed and less privileged with “you can win” feeling.

### **Sources**

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