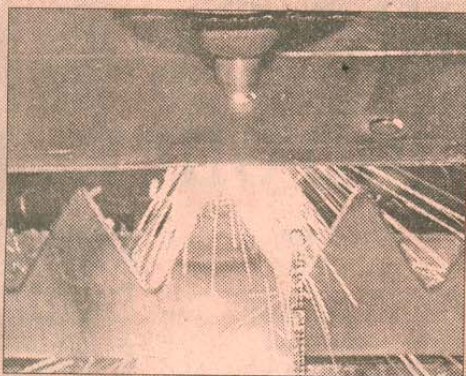


Behind the Glitter

Surat's diamond industry gets a facelift, thanks to Sahajanand's laser cutting machine, the first of its kind in India

HIS fascination for technology has revolutionised Surat's Rs 45,000 crore diamond industry. But Arvind Patel, MD of Sahajanand Laser Technology Pvt. Ltd. is now on an even bigger mission. "I want to make hybrid solar power equipment that will eliminate the need for electricity," he says. And he may well dream big. The Rs 80 crore company is the first in India to launch laser machines for the diamond industry. In fact, Patel has been credited with introducing the first diamond cutting laser machine in India at a cost of Rs 30 lakh, as opposed to the Swiss-made alternative, which was priced at a whopping Rs 55 lakh.



Patel's amazing story started in 1990 when he visited a diamond processing unit and saw a worker struggling to extract a diamond out of a rough stone. Moved by the man's efforts, he imported a laser machine from a Swiss firm and re-engineered it to make three more machines. In 1992, he set up a base factory in Gandhinagar to manufacture laser cutting machines. "I sold one machine and kept two for further research and development," reminisces Patel. His first indigenous voice-based machine was developed in 1996, under the brand hallmark 007, and was priced between Rs 15 and 20 lakh. So far, Sahajanand has sold over 5,000 machines to buyers from Surat and Mumbai and boasts the lion's share of the Indian market today.

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Soon after its success in diamond sector, Sahajanand started making laser machines for the auto sector in early 2000. The company's clientele for auto laser machines include Tata Motors, Usha, Timken and NBC bearings, among others. Today, Sahajanand

exports more than 27 products to 17 countries under various brands. In 2004, it entered into the business of medical instruments and has today become one of the biggest players in the category.

For the coming year, Sahajanand has bagged orders worth Rs 100 crore for various products. Innovation and expansion have been at the core of its strategy. The company has obtained six different patents in Israel, Europe, China, Africa, Germany and the US for laser-based technologies. "We manufacture products with which we can monopolise the market," says Patel. Sahajanand has also acquired 20,000 sq mtrs of land near Gandhinagar and Surat and set up a 30,000 sq. mtrs manufacturing facility again in Gandhinagar, in addition to a diamond cutting and polishing unit in the gems and jewellery park at Gongzhou SEZ in China. To expand its footprint in the European market, Sahajanand has acquired German-based laser major ELS GmbH four months ago.

The company has been honoured by the Government of India for its technology and research & development (R&D) activities. Patel, 49, now aims to make Sahajanand a Rs 600-crore company—and the world's biggest laser machine manufacturer—by 2010. However, he refuses to be labelled a pioneer or genius and maintains that his technology and business acumen have been acquired by him from his father and grandfather. He also believes that as a young electronics engineer, his stint with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) tremendously enhanced his knowledge on laser technology applications.