

The Turnaround Man

SUNIL KATARIA, CEO - INDIA AND SAARC,

GODREJ CONSUMER PRODUCTS LIMITED (GCPL)

COVID-19, the unprecedented health crisis that rocked the world in 2020, has scarred the lives of many and left its impact on their mental health. No one has been spared from the fear of it. "Mental health support is a very big personal learning for me. I reconnected with an old passion during the pandemic. I started writing

poetry," says Sunil Kataria, Chief Executive Officer - India and SAARC, Godrej Consumer Products Limited (GCPL). When we were all stuck at home, I sent out an email to all employees which says, "While we stay in our homes, we live in our minds." To deal with the crisis, the company officially came up with a support plan, where

employees can reach out to any psychologist or any consultant. "Being the CEO, I think such challenges bring out the best out of everyone. I have seen that in every leader of our team. Keeping in mind the mental health aspect of our employees, while working from home we did a lot of last mile connectivity."

Kataria joined GCPL in 2011 and has played a critical role in the

the project has become a cultural phenomenon. It is now in its eighth year. In the last six years, we have moved our EBITDA margin from 16 per cent to 26 per cent. This is one of the most fundamental growths a company can achieve."

In the last one year, there has been a fundamental shift in consumer behavior. "Most FMCG companies that I am aware of are digitized. The consumer is becoming omnichannel, where they are searching for a product in one place, getting the information and buying it from another place. You could be searching online and buying it from a kirana store. This has become a multi-dimensional journey," he says.

"There is a lot of insight which has come through ecommerce channels about online consumer data. There is a new world out there, so we thought we will create ecommerce separately. We have been running it for the last three years and it has been fruitful. Now, 5 per cent of our business comes through e-commerce."

On the growth aspect the CEO says the company will continue to dig deeper into innovation. "I think the core lies at developing the online channel."

The CEO also emphasises that the company will expand its rural base. "We will continue to expand our business in the rural areas. Interestingly, in the last 18 months of the pandemic, our teams have improved our distribution in the toughest points. The distribution rate has gone up to 50 per cent."



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transformation of GCPL's India and SAARC business. He has diverse work experience across the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and consumer services sectors in sales, marketing and business roles. "When I took over as the CEO of the India and South Asia Business, it was the largest regional cluster that gave us the highest annual turnover. The profit rate was at 16 per cent, which was pretty healthy. In 2014, we had undertaken an exercise of cost optimization, with the help of an external consulting partner and they had helped us look at our cost pool through projects. We called it Profit Improvement (PI) and it became very successful. We were able to take out a margin of 1.5 per cent. The figure was around INR 80 crore. Now,