Our first footsteps in defence avionics space were via tie-up with DRDO

SAMTEL Avionics is a key Indian player in high-technology rugged military systems and products for the armed forces. It offers a complete range of systems for high-end applications including airborne electronic systems, EW systems & packages for complete upgrade of armoured vehicles including day/night sights, Fire Control Systems, Ballistic Computer, smart computers with displays. Puneet Kaura, MD and CEO, Samtel Avionics, talks about company’s expansion & diversification and how it is helping in Skill India and MII initiatives, with Huma Siddiqui. Excerpts:

When did you decide to expand and move from display to other technologies? Briefly give details about your expansion plans.

Samtel has always believed that constant renovation or rather - re-innovation – is the key to a successful and healthy future. Since our inception, we have been constantly discovering new areas, traversing uncharted terrains, and rediscovering our hidden potential. Our first footsteps in defence avionics space were through a tie-up with DRDO to develop rugged displays for airborne platforms for use by Indian Air Force. Over the last few years, we have successfully deployed this technology to supply indigenously manufactured rugged displays to not just the Indian Air Force and Indian Army, but have also helped place India on the global avionics map through supplies to countries such as US, UK and France. Going forward, it was a natural progression for us to expand into the domains of Optronics, Electronic Warfare and Military Electronics. It was in 2013 that we changed our name from Samtel Display Systems to Samtel Avionics, thus formalising the move from a display manufacturing company to a multiple-product, high-end technology company. The company has a strong division in Opto-electronics where we see a lot of thrust going forward, through our partner Thales. Recently, we have also collaborated with Hanwha Systems of Korea for growing our footprint in Electronic Warfare and Military Electronics domain.

How would your tie-up with a South Korean company help in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s MII initiative?

We have recently announced our collaboration with Korea’s leading defense electronics company, Hanwha Systems. The new partnership is aimed at bringing in synergies of both the companies for Guided Missile, EOIR and Laser Guided Bomb (LGB). It will provide total solutions for ground, naval and air command. Control, Communication, Computer & Intelligence (C4I), guided weapon, Electronic Warfare (EW) and future combat systems. Based on technical development capabilities and know-how for radar, optronic, command and fire control system products in the ground systems domain, Hanwha has integrated solutions available for its customers. This collaboration is a great example of how India is now drawing attention from global players who wish to tie-up with Indian companies under the ‘Make in India’ initiative. The ‘Make in India’ campaign is designed to improve and strengthen manufacturing capabilities in India and also act as a strong mandate to foreign players to develop manufacturing units in India. Samtel’s tie-up with Hanwha Systems is not yet a JV, but an MoU to collaborate on multiple technologies in the field of EW and Missile Electronics, which is the first step towards formulating a JV in the near future. There is a plan to have some work-share under the ‘Make in India’ umbrella along with transfer of technology to manufacture products for Indian and global markets. However, this collaboration is at a very nascent stage and details are still being worked out.

You have been in aerospace for a while. Are there any plans to move into Army, Navy and space?

Through the past few years we have supplied 19” rugged displays to BEL for the Battlefield Surveillance System (BSS) for Indian Army. These displays were required inside the command and control shelters to display a variety of information. My company has also supplied SATI units to BEL for their Taranj programme. These units are meant for Radar and Missile warning receiver systems which will be integrated on multiple Indian platforms. Samtel will also be supplying wearable and handheld displays in sizes 2.8” and 7” to BEL for the Indian Army. As far as Navy and Space are concerned, as of now there are no active projects that we are working on currently.

How is your company contributing towards Skill India?

You can say that Samtel is a shining example of Prime Minister’s ‘Skill India’ campaign. While focusing on the development of the Indian manufacturing industry, the ‘Make in India’ campaign also stands to benefit the existing human resource pool by creating high-technology job opportunities, as well as helping them refine their skill set. PM’s ‘Skill India’ initiative has found support in the form of companies like Samtel which, in order to cater to the burgeoning order book, are hiring and training the technical resources on high tech programmes requiring sophisticated skills. Lack of adequate domain knowledge and practical exposure, are key for low employability in core job roles. Especially in the area of the aviation and defence manufacturing, challenges are significant, as India lacks on the specialised courses in defence and aviation manufacturing. These companies like Samtel play a significant role in hiring technicians and engineers from engineering colleges and ITIs at various levels and provide them specific training in aerospace and defence manufacturing technologies. At Samtel, you will find many examples of technical resources that had joined as a trainee, had extensive training in this niche domain and are now leading their own teams and training the new inductees. Innovation combined with R&D has led to the positive spin-offs in their economy. Therefore, learning by example, innovations in the Indian defence industry can also transform the economy because of its multiplier effect – leading to job creation and revenue generation in many folds.