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# SME WORLD

*The Next Level*

e-Edition

## Visionary Entrepreneur who Encashed Pandemic to Launch Startup



Muralidharan Thoykkat

**AI Digitally Enabling Small Business**

**Future of Education Industry**

**What You Must Know About Joint Life Policy**

**More Students Opting For Built Environment Courses**

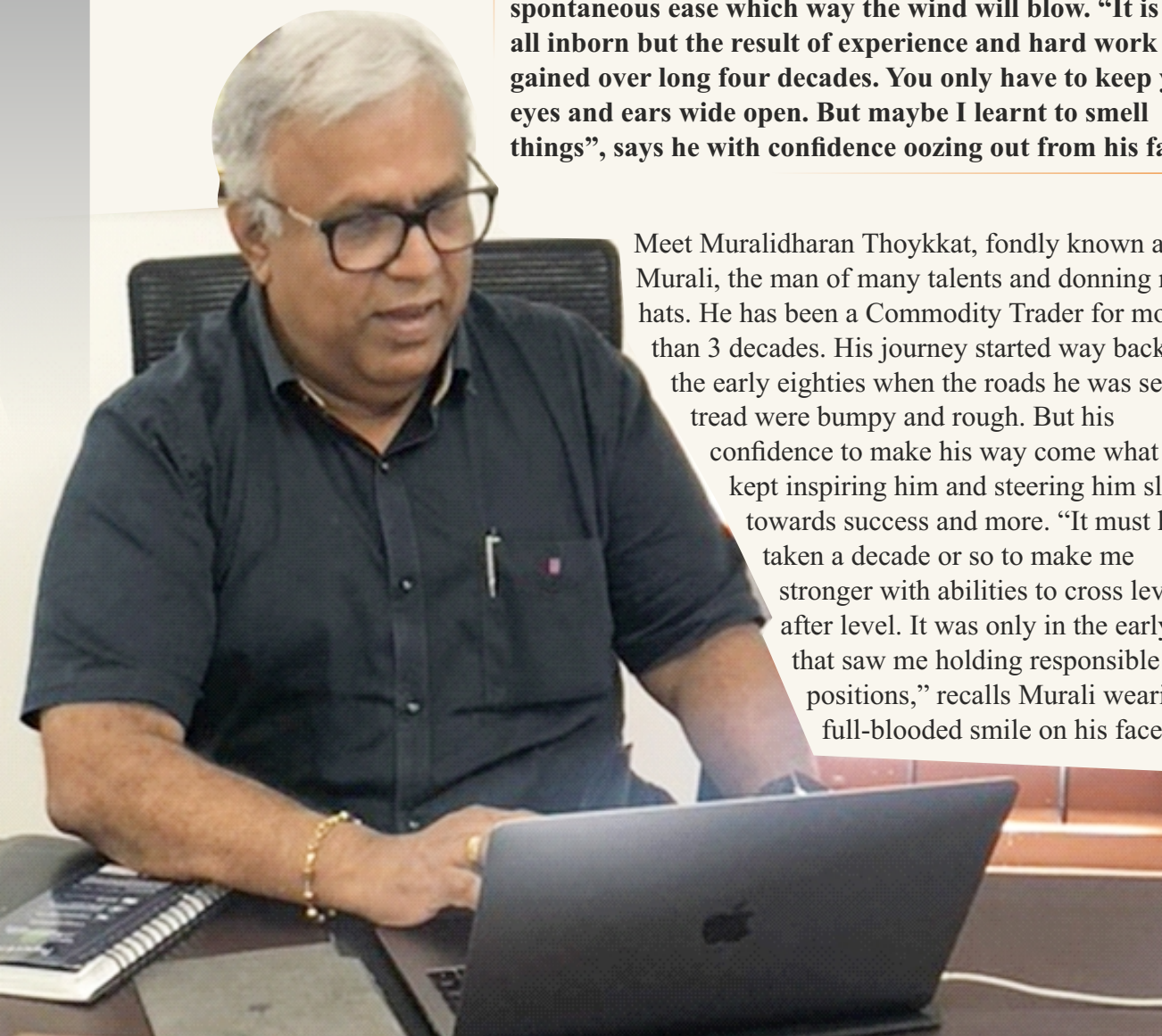
**The Changing World of Work**

In Pandemic he saw opportunities and went on to Set up Successful Business.

## The Entrepreneurial Journey of Muralidharan Thoykkat's Grit and Determination

**H**is story is the story of growth and guts, of sweat and blood, progress and perseverance which won him laurels speaking of his uncanny abilities. He knows the pulse of the commodities and can predict with spontaneous ease which way the wind will blow. "It is not all inborn but the result of experience and hard work gained over long four decades. You only have to keep your eyes and ears wide open. But maybe I learnt to smell things", says he with confidence oozing out from his face.

Meet Muralidharan Thoykkat, fondly known as Murali, the man of many talents and donning many hats. He has been a Commodity Trader for more than 3 decades. His journey started way back in the early eighties when the roads he was set to tread were bumpy and rough. But his confidence to make his way come what may kept inspiring him and steering him slowly towards success and more. "It must have taken a decade or so to make me stronger with abilities to cross level after level. It was only in the early 90s that saw me holding responsible positions," recalls Murali wearing full-blooded smile on his face.



*Muralidharan Thoykkat, Managing Director & CEO of Caravan Resources Pvt Ltd.,*

*The door of opportunities flung open for Murali. He has since worked with large corporate and conglomerates in steel and steel raw materials, producers of solid fuels and multi-billion trading companies as a profit-center head.*

## Door of opportunities

When the door of opportunities flung open for Murali, he didn't look back and immersed himself in work and harder work. He has since worked with large corporate and conglomerates in steel and steel raw materials, producers of solid fuels and multi-billion trading companies as a profit-center head. Murali is currently heading a large Bauxite Mining Company from Gujarat as CEO and Managing Director in addition to trading of other commodities such as Steel, Steel Raw Materials etc. However, marketing of coal is his forte, as he has to date sold and exported millions of tons of coal to India, China and Thailand.

**My entrepreneurial journey has been quite eventful. As recent as the last three years I was working on a senior position in Singapore as CEO of a large trading company- a 100% owned by a public listed in main board Singapore Stock Exchange.**

Presently, he is in an independent leadership role as Managing Director & CEO of Caravan Resources Pvt Ltd., an international marketing and trading company in India. After China almost left with surmounting aversion of exporting of Bauxite from India to China, Murali smelled the opportunity got into interlocutory role and started the export of Bauxite following his meaningful dialogues with the stakeholders and presentations at Asian Metal Conference in Jinan in 2018.

Acknowledging Murali's remarkable abilities and mastery, the banking and financial institutions including index

rating companies for solid fuels and agro commodities made it a point to often turn to Murali for his expert advice on pricing formulation and price movements of these commodities. No wonder, banking institutions have often taken a weekly update from him on these commodities in a tribute to Murali's position as a standalone adviser of a high credibility.

He has been conferred with the prestigious Award - Entrepreneur of the Year 2020 in 'Recognition of Outstanding Professional Achievement & Inspiring Social Contributions' by the Indian Achievers' Forum, New Delhi.

### **Muralidharan Thoykkat in an email interaction with SME WORLD:**

**You have been into the business for over 4 decades with a varied experience; what changes you have witnessed in the business ecosystem?**

Yes, I have been business for almost 4 decades which afforded me varied experience. I started as a backup marketing management, business development and moved up the ladder over a period of time. The changes in the 4 decades have been very enormous as much as that I would like to describe it from "typewriter & telex" era to palmtop or mobile app-oriented technology. This transition speaks volumes on the businesses then and now. The opportunities we get now are far more superior and advanced than the snail pace and anxiety we witnessed 20-30 years ago. I always felt when I started my career, government restrictions and opportunities for doing business with ease was on a difficult wicket. Right now, the liberalization has taken a fast forward approach and doing business has attained new dimensions.

**How has been your experience in dealing with the corporate?**

I have never felt any uneasiness to deal with the corporate in as much as that mingling with them for almost 4 decades. In my case, I developed cordial relationships with the strong and the mighty. This cult stemmed out my sheer sincerity in dealing with them in various forums and faculties from time to time.

### **Kindly describe your entrepreneurial journey over the years?**

My entrepreneurial journey has been quite eventful. As recent as the last three years I was working on a senior position in Singapore as CEO of a large trading company- a 100% owned by a public listed in the main board Singapore Stock Exchange. However, a wish was slowly simmering within to come back to India to do something of my own with the kind of knowledge I gained over a period of decades-long working.

My first venture Caravan Resources Pvt Ltd was formed as an international commodity trading company for Steel and Steel raw materials, Aluminium and Aluminium raw materials, Cement and Cement raw materials, Fertilisers and Fertilisers raw materials, Coal, minerals and ores. We are associated with large corporate conglomerates such as Tata Steel, Vedanta Ltd, Murugappa groups, Zuari Cements, Dalmia India Ltd. and others like CellMark India Pvt Ltd, Swedan, Maadan Aluminium, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Harrison Malayalam Ltd. and internally we have excellent client deal having worked with them for several years.

During the time when Covid-19 was getting into peak and when survival for many enterprises was difficult especially startups, mine was a different story altogether. Covid-19 did never frighten me because I began to saw opportunities in the difficult times as my confidence remained unshaken.



**Selling in India and exporting overseas has a different navigational procedure. However, I have always felt bringing foreign exchange to our country is always good. For selling in India one needs an extremely price sensitiveness while for export it is more on the quality to meet the international standards.**

Due to some family compulsions I had to come home in Kerala in February 2021 and got locked up. It was time when international markets almost reached a standstill process and the only alternative was to do business in India. That is the reason I thought of forming a company for domestic trade thereby floating a new company namely Caravan Unisafe Pvt. Ltd. I was always under a strong impression and belief that the construction industry will definitely move up because of:

- a) Older and dilapidated buildings will need to be replaced.
- b) With population expansion happening in India, new hutments and infrastructure will take place thereby throwing opportunities for any entrepreneur getting into construction raw materials.
- c) Infrastructure development by the Government of India will get underway.

That is how I thought I should create a company which should be one stop shop for all construction raw materials. This company is now representing:

1. Tata Steel Ltd for Tata steel Doors and Windows
2. Heidelberg's Zuari Cement Ltd
3. ARS for steel rebars
4. TI macho for Steel rebars from INR329 billion Murugappa Group conglomerate.
5. Berger paints
6. Dalmia India Bharath

In addition to this we are also focused in Merger and acquisition (M&A).

What are major challenges you faced along the way and how did you overcome these?

The major challenge I could see is that the banks not coming forward to give finance to any new project in India. This culture needs to change and the cumbersome and tough

procedure always discourage a new entrepreneur and the new enterprise making their journey thorny and difficult. Banks need to adopt liberal attitude and must become industry-friendly affording the much needed impetus to the entrepreneurs' journey.

**What is smooth and easier- selling to India or exporting overseas? Kindly explain.**

Selling in India and exporting overseas has a different navigational procedure. However, I have always felt bringing foreign exchange to our country is always good. For selling in India one needs an extremely price sensitiveness while for export it is more on the quality to meet the international standards.

**As a professional with achievements, what made you change platform in quick succession- from working with corporate to exporting coal to heading company in Singapore to mining?**

The professional achievements working in different areas such as working with corporate and trading of commodities including Coal, minerals and ores based in Singapore, for meticulous meritocracy in centralizing and shipping where as heading a mining company is needed to put in a lot of management thinking to a level of heading a manufacturing unit. Trading a commodity, one has to be very careful with pricing Index and any sudden upward momentum can bring in heavy losses in commodity, physical trading. When trade happens in Singapore it's all rule book oriented and one cannot bend or break any rules.

Admiralty, shipping trade and commerce need to move ahead with great disciplines and ease in Singapore.

**What are your views on the fresh breed of professionals being churned out by B-schools in India and overseas looking for fat packages for settling down in big companies rather than choosing entrepreneurship?**

I always feel the top 10% layers of professionals churned out from business schools from India and overseas are definitely



**My advice to young professionals would be that they should keep up at optimum levels of their patience and perseverance so as to succeed in their mission. They should glide and navigate seeing the wealth forecast of the global trade. They generally see what comes out first and probably miss out what is coming in the final stage.**

successful and can take over the positions and succeed.

The young breed of professionals is no doubt fast in their approach but most of them are invariably in a hurry to make fast buck. They easily lack patience or perseverance. They believe in '2-miniute- noodles' management. Earning degrees from plus institutions is one thing while facing life and livelihood is another.

**What will be your advice to the young professionals in a hurry to embrace success and make quick bucks?**

My advice to young professionals would be that they should keep up at optimum levels of their patience and perseverance so as to succeed in their mission. They should glide and navigate seeing the wealth forecast of the global trade. They generally see what comes out first and probably miss out what is coming in the final stage.

**The pandemic has changed the entire business ecosystem across globe; how will you describe the colossal loss suffered by enterprises and suggest measure to revive?**

Of course, pandemic has badly hit the main fulcrum of the growth process of industries, trade and commerce. But there are business personalities who proved there can be advantages in the most disadvantageous position. I got locked up with my family in Kochi when the covid started but I went on to stay in Kerala and started a new organization namely "Caravan Unisafe Pvt Ltd" dedicated exclusive

*The desire to succeed in life was there from my childhood! The inhibitions and intuitions always sintered my thought process to elongate myself, adjust to situations and amalgamate success!*

for construction and construction raw materials. We would like to make our organization as 'One-Stop- Shop' for all construction raw materials. In fact, I would like to tell you our covid baby is doing exceedingly well based out of Cochin in Kerala.

Finally, I would like to opine that it is high time we need to start respecting this global ecology to safeguard the eco-system.

**Describe the story of 'Murali' in a few words.**

The desire to succeed in life was there from my childhood! The inhibitions and intuitions always sintered my thought process to elongate myself, adjust to situations and amalgamate success! The leadership quality I imbibed having got an opportunity to work with great Management practitioners, administrators, business personalities. Born in a small village namely Ramassery, Palakkad in Kerala State, I studied throughout in village government school. I always had the eagerness to be watchful of

situations and had high observing power since my childhood itself. The muddy road outside my house used to become high flowing river during high monsoons. I used to make small paper boats and keep it flowing along with rainy water. I used to flow my paper boat until it vanished or crushed inside big potholes on the road naturally created in the monsoon rains during her flow along on the temporary river on the road created by sudden downpouring of monsoons!!! Those were the moments that nurtured within me a desire to engage in shipping, trade and commerce and as the fate would have it, the business of shipping trade in reality would become my forte.

I feel lucky with my family, my wife Pushpa, a simple housewife but a qualified jewelry designer. My only child, my son Nitin is a Senior Creative Producer and Director of one of the top 3 Television Broadcasting Channels!

**Life is good. Almighty has been kind.** ■

## **Industry leaders urge Textile Minister to come up with ECLGS-like scheme for MSMEs in knitwear sector**

**T**he industry leaders from Textile sector have urged the Union Textile Minister Piyush Goyal to launch ECLGS-like scheme for MSMEs to help units in knitwear sector to overcome liquidity crisis.

A delegation comprising of chiefs of Tirupur Exporters' Association, CITI, TEXPROCIL, AEPC and SIMA met Textile Minister Goyal in an attempt to bring the government's attention to the struggles being faced by the Indian textile and apparel industry due to rapidly increasing raw material prices.

The delegation is of the view that the fortune of the textile industry is highly linked with fortune of cotton farmers and unfortunately, the game played by the cotton traders is disturbing the entire textile industry, accessories, dyes and chemical suppliers, exports and employment including banks. ■