

Sudip Dutta, 39Chairman and MD,
Ess Dee Aluminium**Business:** Aluminium
packaging foils**Year of starting:** 2004**₹707 cr**
Revenues**Net profit:** ₹118 crore**Employees:** 2,000**He takes
personal
interest in clients,
perhaps due to his
humble beginnings****PC GODHA***Managing director, IPCA Labs*

The Turnaround Kid

Two unconventional acquisitions done in two vastly diverse phases in his entrepreneurial life, sum up Sudip Dutta's remarkable journey so far. Dutta, the 39-year old chairman of Ess Dee Aluminium, a foils maker, bought out Vedanta Group's India Foils (then a BIFR case) in 2008. He has since wiped out accumulated losses of ₹300 crore. India Foils last year recorded a profit of ₹2 crore.

The other acquisition, Dutta's first, happened many years ago when he was only 17. He had just left Durgapur in West Bengal the day after he wrote his 12th grade exams — driven by the hunger and poverty of a family without a father. He left when his mother was no longer able to feed him. In Mumbai, he worked as a courier boy in a firm that made pouches for pharma companies, earning, ₹15 a day. Extra work — packing medicine and loading them onto trucks — fetched him some more. Homeless in the big city, he would sleep in the factory. Two years later, when his employer slipped deep into debt, he negotiated his first buyout — he promised to pay the owners whatever was left af-

ter paying salaries to the workers and taking ₹5,000 a month for himself. He made the company debt-free in two years.

That very business has today morphed into the ₹707-crore Ess Dee Aluminium (the first alphabets of his name spelt phonetically). It has an annual production capacity of 36,000 tonnes, almost three times that of its nearest rival — Aditya Birla group's flagship Hindalco, and double of what it had five years ago when the company raised capital from its initial share sale. It enjoys a 12% share of the market and is growing at 25% CAGR. "He is the undisputed leader in the aluminium foils business," says PC Godha, Managing director of IPCA Laboratories, a big buyer of aluminium foils. "He takes personal care in servicing clients. It may be because of his humble beginning that he gives due importance to clients."

"The acquisition and subsequent turnaround of India Foils is my biggest achievement," says Dutta, sitting in his spacious cabin that's double the size of his initial home in Durgapur. He now lives in a 7,500 square-feet, twin duplex flat in

Andheri, Mumbai.

His growth plans are as grand as his new home. He wants to turn the recently-launched Housefoils into a ₹500-crore brand, exporting it to Europe, Africa and Latin America. Dutta is confident that his company will be able to maintain its leadership.

Weak share prices are a worry though. The stock, which was sold for ₹225 through an initial share sale in 2006, has now been hovering around 130. Over the past five years, his stock lost 49% while the broader sensex gained 15%.

Dutta argues that investors failed to understand the rationale for his acquisition of India Foils from Anil Agarwal's Vedanta group. He has no regrets though, except that he never managed to attend college. He wants to make up by helping poor kids study: he is in talks to open an institution for MBA and MCA studies wherein poor students will get free education, but with the condition that they work with his company for three years. A foundation, named after him, already supports education of employees' children.