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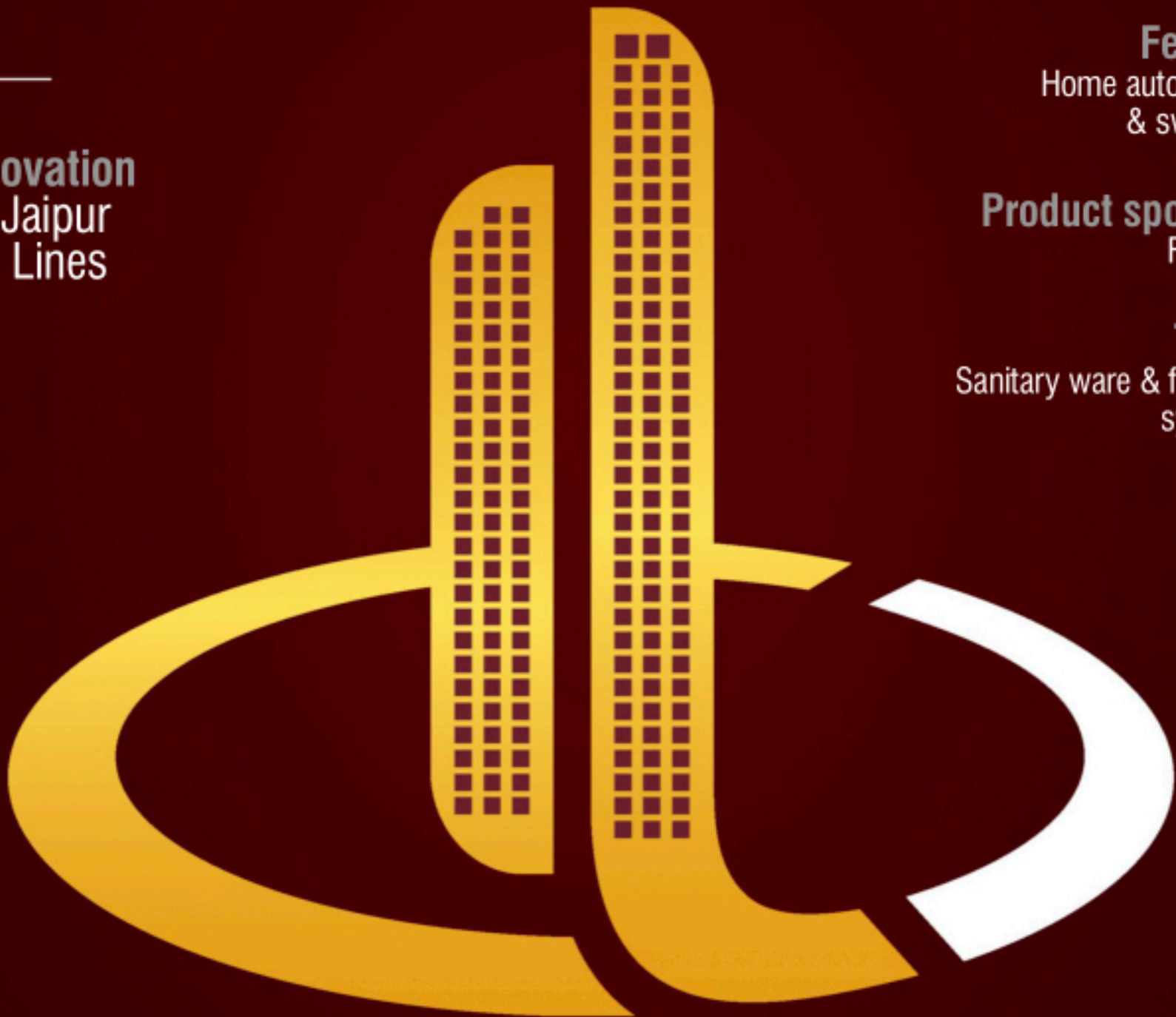


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SWITCH TO TECHNOLOGY

DRIVEN BY OUR DEPENDENCE ON THE CONVENIENCE OF TECHNOLOGY, HI-TECH SWITCHES AND HOME AUTOMATION ARE BECOMING INEXTRICABLE PARTS OF A MODERN LIFESTYLE

BY CAROL FERRAO



Luxury has become a way of life in recent times. As technology – whether it’s Alexa or Google Home – becomes more accessible and affordable, we have begun to see conveniences like automated lighting controls and avant-garde switches with seamless surfaces and features such as USB points as necessary comforts for everyday life. Manufacturers are tapping into this demand with a spectrum of products and solutions, both high-end and mainstream. From surveillance cameras to Wi-Fi enabled fixtures, the market has something for everyone and for every budget.



The Indian market over the years has evolved, agrees Sameer Saxena, director marketing, Legrand (Group) India. “Advanced version of products are available for the end consumer which cater to the increasing need for safety and aesthetics,” says Saxena, adding that the popular trends today include modular USB charger, fan speed regulations with infrared technology, switch plates in champagne, bronze and magnesium colours, switch plates with wood, glass, brushed finishes in stainless steel, IoT (Internet of Things) based switches and wireless charging solutions.

It is the exposure to international designs that are driving these trends according to Kishan Jain, director, Goldmedal Electricals. “Customers are showing a distinct preference for minimalistic designs in colours that are more understated and restrained,” Jain shares. Whether it is switches or cover plates, LEDs, doorbells or electrical accessories, customers are looking for more options to choose from. “They want something that not only matches their exact needs but also their aesthetic sense at a price point that they are comfortable with,” he adds further.

As one of the largest consumer markets in the world, the country witnesses constant evolution and changes in its socio-economic environment which is largely impacting the consumer choices. Dinesh Aggarwal, joint managing director, Panasonic Life Solutions, says, “In the Indian

1-4. Anchor by Panasonic has given the switches and home automation category an avant-garde upgrade with designs that are not only sleek, but also technologically advanced.

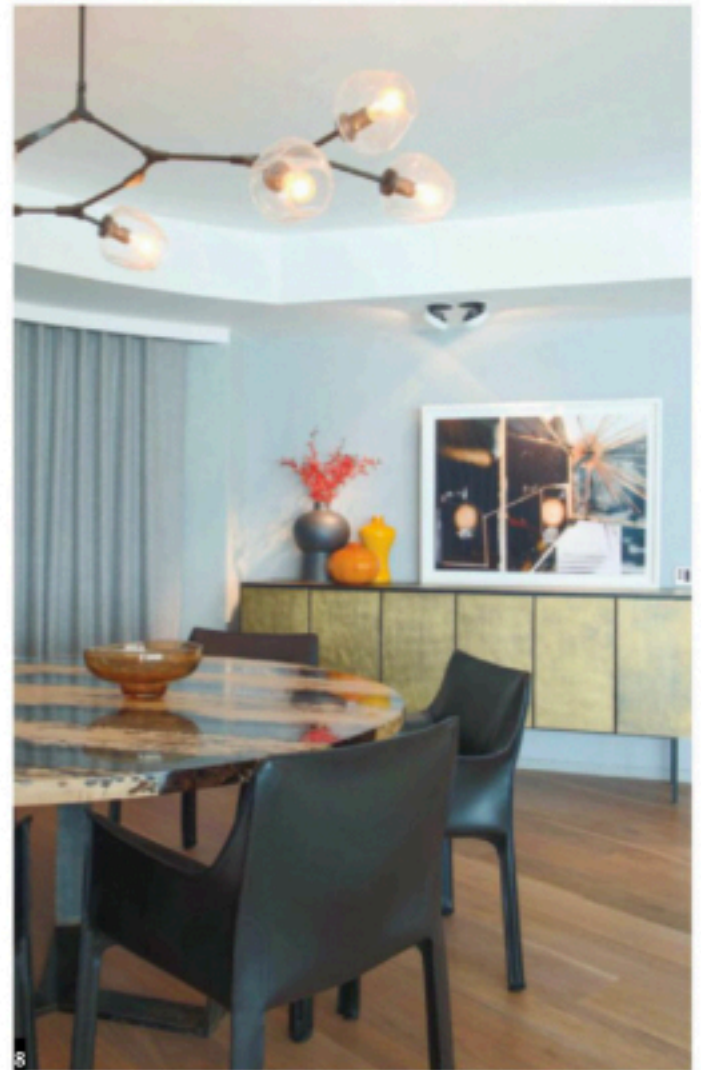
5. Dinesh Aggarwal, joint MD, Panasonic Life Solutions.



market, popular products are those that assist in enhancing the aesthetics and overall décor of the home by giving the consumer a sophisticated experience and pride in owning the house." According to Aggarwal, the market loves technologies such as KNX (Konnex) because it gives buyers flexibility of choosing from 400 manufacturers and 10,000 products. Smart products – such as the IoT Vetaar Smart Plug unveiled by Panasonic Life Solutions – also point out how the Home Automation category is making its way into the affordable category.

"Basic automation comprising lighting controls and shade controls is becoming extremely popular in the residential sector, especially new houses," confirms Alok Hada, director, Anusha Technovision. Meanwhile, projectors with bigger screen size were always a must in automated homes, noticed Hada, but found that factors such as the demand of a dedicated home theatre, price and the space requirements restricted the widespread use of these as compared to the television. "Companies like LG are coming out with lower budget short throw projectors in high resolution; the projectors could make a strong comeback in the home entertainment segment," informs the expert in home automation sector.

Security concerns are also driving the automation market. "Home owners are increasingly getting serious about the security of their families and valuables. Customers are moving away from conventional and alternative solutions that are less secure and are exploring various digital options," notes Mehernosh Pithawalla, vice president and group head, Godrej Security Solutions, adding that India, for the longest time, has had an abysmal adoption rate of home security solutions. However, with changing consumer preferences, awareness about the availability of trustworthy security solutions and higher disposable incomes along with the rising concern of theft and burglary,



companies like Godrej Security are observing a change in customer behaviour. Consumers today are slowly willing to invest in solutions which will make them feel absolutely safe, adds Pithawalla.

6. The USP of projects like Avighna One (Mumbai) comes from unique home automation features fitted by Anusha Technovision.

7. Alok Hada, director, Anusha Technovision.

8. Comprehensive automation solutions by Anusha Technovision enables this private residence in Mumbai to seamlessly control lights, sound and visual devices.

CASE STUDY: REDDY RESIDENCE, HYDERABAD



Located in one of Hyderabad's posh neighbourhoods, this lavish penthouse draws inspiration from the movie 'A Single Man' by Tom Ford. The luxurious pad is equipped with Lutron lighting controls, combined with motorised shades controlled along with a number of home entertainment systems on a custom designed user interface, all brought together by Anusha Technovision Private Limited. Unappealing switchboards have been replaced by a sleek and smart Palladium keypad, which makes lighting regulation convenient for the user. All light fixtures in the residence can be easily adjusted to the desired lux levels, while ambient lighting can be regulated by the click of a button. Sivoia QS Drapery track and regulate daylight ingress in the house and can be operated at will, its smooth movement accentuates the look and feel of the interiors. Lutron system communicates with the Crestron CP3 processor for a hassle-free execution of commands. All control is through a customised Graphics User Interface designed by ATPL on customer's iPad/iPhone using Crestron application, while the AC is controlled via a third party 'cool master' device. Alexa is used for voice command of control system in four areas of the house. All in all, it is a fully integrated user experience for the homeowner. The game changing impact of IoT has made possible advancement in smart home technology, ensuring safety, security, comfort and luxury through intelligent connected devices and systems.



9. Mehernosh Pithawalla, VP and group head, Godrej Security Solutions.

10. Wi-Fi controlled home cameras by Godrej Security are easy to install.

11. Honeywell smart wiring devices can be integrated with a smartphone app.

SMART WIRING DEVICES

Both technology and aesthetics drive the trends in the switches category. Take, for instance, the Lyncus range of wiring devices by Legrand designed for modern homes. "The sleek minimalist look is perfectly in sync with the technology that sets the Lyncus range apart. It is a unique rocker design, inspired by the bold lines (aerodynamic shape) of a modern sports car and the plate design is in sync with contemporary gadgets," Saxena points out. The range extends from touch-enabled switches, regulators, dimmers, plug-free USB for A and C type charging and wireless induction charger. The mechanisms are available in two colours – white and grey – while the plates are available in six international colours – Alu Sunset, Matt Silver, Champagne, Chic Grey, White and Brushed. It offers a rich choice of finishes that are innovative, refined, modern, classical and contemporary.

Smart technology products is another category that is becoming increasingly popular owing to its ability to simplify and improve lives. Smart wearables and voice-activated devices like Amazon Alexa have found their way in almost every Indian home lately. "At Gold-medal, we have witnessed that our customers have an inclination towards our smart switch range that can be operated through



a mobile app, RF remote and voice commands. In terms of design, there is a preference for minimalistic and elegant design," explains Jain. In keeping with this market demand, Goldmedal offers the i-Touch Wi-Fi 6 Module switch, its latest entrant in the home automation portfolio. "Through the launch of our i-Touch Wi-Fi 6 Module smart switch, we are providing consumers with the ability to control all the electrical appliances in their home through the touch of a button or voice command," mentions the director of the company. A single unit of the product consists of six switches, a fan regulator, two USB sockets and an international socket that can be controlled in multiple ways, including voice assists and a mobile app. The best part of the module is that it can fit into a regular junction box without the need to change any wiring, making it a perfect retrofit solution.

Combining intelligent automation, advanced analytics and data visualization, the Honeywell smart wiring devices, too, respond to the contemporary demands of modern consumers. The system features simple, intuitive displays to enhance experience and comfort, and can be easily integrated with a smartphone app and an IT network. Anupam Mathur, sales director, New Business – Connected Living Solutions, Honeywell Building Technologies, India, points out, "The range has been designed to keep the ease of use and implementation in mind. They do not require any structural and electrical overhaul because of its modular design, and we are confident that the range will resonate well with the industry." The system, available in three series – Harmony, Expression and Prestige – can learn a user's behavior over a period of time and offer predictive analytics through artificial intelligence.

SECURITY

Wi-fi-based home cameras and CCTVs have seen the largest adoption rate among the plethora of security solutions available in the market. "DIY and Wi-Fi-based solutions as well as solutions which can be remotely controlled through mobile devices, automation hubs or voice commands through smart speakers are also in great demand," says Pithawalla, adding that home security alarm systems and fire alarms are other popular choices in the market currently. Conventional solutions are being replaced with digital solutions like the new

video door phone 'See Thru Pro' that caters to all the needs of a modern home. A digital upgrade from traditional peep-holes, it is enabled with high resolution feature, automatic and manual recording which accommodates a micro SD Card. The See Thru Pro is available in six variants catering to different needs of home and office spaces.

When it comes to Wi-Fi-based home cameras, Godrej Security solutions has introduced Eve (Easy Viewing Everywhere), a device designed to keep a watch on every corner of the home and office space. The camera can remotely pan and tilt with just a tap on a smartphone. Encompassing four variants – Eve Mini, Eve Cube, Eve PT and Eve NCR – the biggest USP of the product is that unlike other cameras it allows a two-way conversation. Viewers can check multiple spots at one time, tilt from 10 degrees to 90 degrees and pan from 0 to 355 degrees. With Eve, owners have access to the livestream of their property on the smartphone. The owner of the property can also take a still picture, converse, and even record the footage in real time. Eve also offers a motion sensitive feature which activates Record & Stream functionality when needed, it alerts the phone the second it senses movement on the premises.

HOME AUTOMATION

When choosing the perfect home automation, clients prefer solutions that are aesthetically appealing yet easy to understand and operate, found Hada while working for multiple high-end projects. "Companies like Lutron are producing user interfaces which look good and are easy to use as well. The backlit, custom engraved Palladiom keypads by Lutron are amongst the top picks for customers," he shares. Lutron HomeWorks QS system is designed for homes and seamlessly integrates the control of electric lights and daylight, along with integration of audio visual and HVAC systems – while simultaneously saving energy. "When you choose HomeWorks QS, you're not only investing in a system that will redefine your way of living, but you're also making a conscious choice to reduce your impact on the environ-



ment," adds the automation expert. As for the Palladiom Keypads, its popularity can be linked to its subtle elegance and architectural design. The keypads allow control of lights, shades/drapes and HVAC from one location, creating an optimal user experience. To give the product a coordinated look, the faceplate and buttons are made up of the same material. User customisable, backlit text makes the keypad easy to read and provides scene status to the user.

Diversification always makes good sense in home automation, according to Panasonic's Aggarwal. In recent years, Panasonic has successfully managed to draw the attention of the majority of Indian consumers with product offerings like the KNX-based Thea IQ, which enables users to control comfort, enjoy energy-saving, safety and security in any kind of building. It can be controlled either fully automatically or centrally right from a desk, and even by a smartphone from outdoors. Panasonic Life Solutions enables the entire home ecosystem with numerous opportunities for automating the home environment right from LED lights, curtains, air conditioners, door security and other safety instruments.

Newer technologies are gradually drawing more attention in the market. Philips recently introduced the Interact IoT platform for connected lighting, which enables professional customers to unlock the full potential of their connected lighting assets. The platform delivers new insights to help customers drive operational efficiencies and take more effective decisions. Then there is Light Fidelity (LiFi), which is a technology in which high quality LED lighting provides a stable and fast broadband Internet connection through light waves. "Unlike other forms of wireless communications that use radio waves (e.g. Wi-Fi, 4G/5G, Bluetooth, etc.), LiFi uses the broader spectrum of light waves to transmit and receive data wirelessly. LiFi's bandwidth is more than 1,000 times the size of the radio spectrum," explains Sumit Padmakar Joshi, CEO, Signify India (formerly Philips Lighting). LiFi works in such a way that each luminaire is equipped with a built-in modem that modulates light at



12,13&14. Goldmedal i-Touch Wi-Fi 6 Module is a range of smart switches that allows one to control all electrical appliances through the touch of a button or voice command.

15. Kishan Jain, director, Goldmedal Electricals.

AUTOMATION TRENDS

Homes are anticipated to be equipped with IoT devices that will make everyday jobs easier, faster and smoother. Alok Hada points out to these continuing trends to watch out for...

Voice controlled automation: "Alexa and Google Home will be increasingly adopted by the younger generations at home."

Set top boxes going away?: "It is amazing how in a period of less than three years the DTH set top box has been replaced by the online streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, etc, and how the once ubiquitous console under the TV for keeping the 'box' might soon disappear completely."

Wireless - taking over: "In a lot of control applications, the house wireless network is increasingly becoming the carrier to control signal of devices - be it lighting, security or entertainment. But does this sound like the death knell for the low voltage wiring? I don't think so - as the speed of the wireless network increases so does the resolution of the picture - thus making the bandwidth requirement higher."

Information: courtesy Anusha Technovision



speeds imperceptible to the human eye. The light is detected by a USB access key/dongle plugged into the socket of a laptop or tablet (in the future such technology will be inbuilt into laptops, mobile phones, and devices).

"Our recent innovations such as LiFi and Interact reiterate our focus on driving customer value through connected lighting systems. As the lighting company for the Internet of Things, we are the first global lighting company to offer LiFi-enabled luminaires from our existing office lighting portfolio. In the coming years, we expect LiFi will penetrate more and more sectors and applications such as public transport, hospitals and schools," mentions Joshi.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The idea of controlling lights, music, shades, temperature and security via a smartphones/iPads seemed unrealistic a decade ago. But here we are in 2019, with voice-controlled devices becoming a popular gifting option – that's how pervasive automation is becoming. "This year was full of innovations and proved to be a smart year! Keeping that in mind, the expectations from 2020 are quite high. Artificial intelligence is one such technology which is expected to revolutionise home automation with automatically running devices according to the user's preferences. Every device can't be controlled via a smartphone or voice command, hence, constant efforts are being made to integrate everything under one system through Internet of Things," shares Hada.

Future is going to be wireless; wireless charging technology, induction charger and wireless chargers that work on radio frequency are some of the trends to watch out for, says Saxena. "This will catch the attention of consumers. Legrand is future ready and offers all types of modular USB and wireless chargers." With IoT-enabled technology (Zigbee), the traditional switches will get replaced by Smart switches, which is a reliable solution for comfort and convenience. Saxena also informs, "All products from Apple, smart phones and laptops are looking at conversion from



USB A to C type with the added advantage of fast charging and data transfer with HD view. USB charger A and C type is going to be the future requirement in the modular category for user interface."

Godrej's Pithawalla is confident that security solutions will gain prominence for homeowners in coming years. "We can already see the security infrastructure provided by developers emerging as a key selling point for several real estate projects in metros. Similarly, millennials and Gen Z have a fair grip on technology." More intuitive solutions based on artificial intelligence (AI), connected security, and systems that allow privacy to take prominence shall witness a higher growth prospect.

It goes without saying that customers will demand more in the coming years, reiterates Jain. "For a company like Goldmedal, it's good to see customers appreciating the effort we have put in introducing new ideas into the market. High quality and innovative products that match their aesthetic sense is what we feel will be the trend for the near future." Introduction AI and IoT in daily use products is inevitable says the director of the company. "The ability of AI to identify trends and patterns will help make smart technology smarter. In the next few years, we are likely to see AI-supported devices that enable users to make accurate data-driven decisions become mainstream."

By 2025, the home automation market in India is expected to cross INR 50,000 crore which is largely on the back of better internet connectivity, high consumer awareness and cheaper electronic and electrical devices. Aggarwal discloses, "In the current financial year, the share of home automation market in Indian markets is highest in Pune which stands at 15%, followed by Delhi NCR 13%, Mumbai 12%, Hyderabad 9%, Ahmedabad 7% and lastly, Bengaluru which is presently contributes 7%."

Technology is all-pervasive. While today's switches are experimenting with different finishes and designs, their backbone remains this aspect of modern living. The comfort, convenience and security offered by home automation, increasing penetration and betterment of internet connectivity, and new generations that take to technology like the proverbial fish to water, ensure that this is one market with an incredibly positive outlook. ■

16. Sameer Saxena, director - Marketing, Legrand India.

17. Sumit Padmakar Joshi, CEO, Signify India.

18. Lyncus Range by Legrand India is inspired by the bold lines (aerodynamic shape) of a modern sports car, and the plate design is in sync with contemporary gadgets.

19. Signify India has recently introduced the Interact IoT platform for connected lighting, which enables professional customers to unlock the full potential of their connected lighting assets.