

## A Destiny Well Lived and Fulfilled



I believe all of us live our destinies. Why I say so? Because when I joined B.Sc. (Non-Medical) in Mahendra College Patiala, I never had Pulp and Paper industry in my mind as a career. I always wanted to become a teacher but never realized how a small episode in my life would turn my life's journey towards paper industry. Being from a financially humble background, I had to support myself financially from a very young age. During B.Sc. I used to teach tuition to children of Dr Bhagat Singh, who was Head of Dept of Economics. Once my B.Sc. was complete, he asked me as to what I would like to do further. I told him about my desire to pursue teaching line, but he guided me to go into industry and that set the ball rolling.

In 1962, I chanced upon an advertisement for Shree Gopal Paper Mill, Yamuna Nagar. I gave the interview and got selected as Technical apprentice. So my career in Paper Industry started. But still I kept on fighting my destiny. During this period, I appeared for Indian Forest Services Examination and met a Bengali family, who invited me to their home in Kolkata whenever I had a chance to visit. I told them that there is no way I will ever be visiting Kolkata. As I reached back to the mill after the exam, to my surprise my Boss Mr Ganguli, who was a Bengali, ushered me into his office and told me about a job opportunity in Titagarh Paper Mills, West Bengal. I told him about my apprehensions in going to West Bengal. He advised me that even if you don't want to join, at least go and appear for the interview and have a chance at visiting Kolkata too. Titagarh Paper Mill, that

time in 1965, was being run by British people. Interview with them went well and I was offered the job, but I never wanted to join. I quoted a high salary, to discourage them into considering me, but to my surprise they agreed and added few perks also. It was too good an offer to refuse and this is how my destiny brought me back on the track to paper industry and from here my journey in industry unfolded, leading me to many of life's learning lessons and many challenges to successfully conquer and shape my life as a pulp and paper technocrat.

Though my journey in Paper industry has been long, arduous, and fruitful, it will be difficult to concise it in these 3-4 pages. I will try to sum up my journey as life lessons so that the younger generation can try learning something from these lessons.

I learnt basic life lessons and the important lessons to improve the pulp and paper mill functioning, observing the people around me. I realized an important thing early in my career, that even a small-time illiterate worker can end up teaching a big lesson which the big degrees and courses don't sometimes teach.

**So Life's lesson number 1-** Always keep your eyes, ears open and your mind receptive. When on the floor of the machine listen to your workers and when in meetings listen to your subordinates.

**Life's lesson number 2-** Never be hesitant in adopting a change.

I had the fortune of working in Titagarh Paper mill for 12 years and I utilised this opportunity in learning Bengali language and imbibing the local culture. Though being the only Sikh in the 3500 strong work force mills was not an easy task but once you pick up the local language and the local culture the people adopt you easily.

**Life's lesson number 3:** I had a strong belief in good work culture and work was my only worship. My belief is aptly summarised in a quote by Thomas Carlyle "Blessed is the one who has found his work, let him ask for no other blessedness". This is life lesson no 3. This work principle helped me in working for all the big paper industries of Punjab and helped me turn around their fortunes from sick units into profit making units.

**Life lesson number 4:** “Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves”. It means always try doing the small savings and the big losses will get controlled itself. All the big and successful industrialists with whom I have had the chance to work, always followed this principle. I got the first lesson on this principle by the doyen himself, Sh Karam Chand Thapar. During his rounds of the Shree Gopal Paper Mill, Sh. Thapar will always look and examine the drains. He used to find out from the drains where the losses were happening and used to bring it to the notice of concerned department.

Another example of this principle was taught to me by the British in charge of the Titagarh Paper Mill. One day pulp started leaking from the pump gland packing and I instructed the worker to collect the pulp and put it back into the chest. On seeing this the Britisher complimented and said, try saving one rupee every day and you will end up saving thousands ultimately.

This principle was again stressed to me by another great man Mr Pavan Khaitan, MD of ABC Paper Mill. While doing rounds of the mill he sighted a brick lying on the road. He picked up the brick and told me, “Mr Darwesh, please see that this brick is not wasted, it has costed me two rupees”.

**Life Lesson number 5:** Most problems in life and in industry have simple solutions, look to simplify.

I worked on this principle at many places. I will illustrate with few examples.

My entire life I have worked in Agro-residue based paper industry. During the early years of my working I realised that our mills used to face difficulty in procuring adequate agro-residue raw material. In the vicinity of Mukerian Paper mill, there was abundant growth of a wild grass called Sarkanda (*Saccharum munja*) on the banks of river Beas. Sarkanda was being used for making board but was never used for quality paper making. We worked in our lab to design a way to use Sarkanda pulp for quality paper making and were successful in doing so. Subsequently majority of the Agro-residue based paper industries took up Sarkanda for making quality paper. This move resulted in a change in the economy of the mill along with the economy of the local area, as the local people started seeing value in the wild grass. My Paper on “Alkaline pulping of Sacchrum

munja with anthraquinone and steps taken to achieve higher yields” was published in IPPTA in September 1991.

In Mukerian Paper Mill, initially the Machine no 1 had both MF and MG combined. I decided to take out the MG from this machine and using this MG a separate paper machine was erected and we started manufacturing MG grade papers.

In Shreyans Paper Mill, pulp mill yield was very low and our efforts at improving the yield were hitting a dead end. One day when I checked the reject, I found that it is fully cooked but it is coming out as reject. We increased the Knot screen holes from 6 mm to 16 mm diameter to take out maximum reject along with pulp and passed this pulp through a refiner. Yield improved from 32 to 41% which resulted in drastic improvements in economy of the mill in 3 months time.

In Satia Paper Mill, Pulp mill lines used to be clogged with scale as the water there was hard and cleaning used to involve lot of down time. So double lines were installed for each pump and when one line was being cleaned the plant used to run through the standby line.

In ABC Paper Mill, now known as Kuantam Paper Mill, finished paper quality was not good due to holes in the paper. A simple measure of installing slot type screen in place of hole type screens resulted in drastic improvement in paper quality.

ABC Paper Mill was producing a high brightness paper using Titanium dioxide, which was increasing the cost of production. We substituted 98 brightness talcum instead of Titanium Dioxide to make the same quality paper and reduced the cost of production drastically.

**Life Lesson No 6:** Always keep pace with new technologies.

We were in the process of increasing the production capacity of Mukerian Paper Mill by planning paper machine no 3. For selecting the machine parts during my visit to Greece, I saw the continuous digester for the first time. We decided to install the continuous digester and latest bleaching plant for Paper Machine no 3. This continuous digester revolutionized the agriculture residue-based pulping.

We all live our destinies, but it is up to us to make that journey towards our destiny worthwhile with our hard work and determination. We should strive to leave footprints which the others can follow and bring a positive difference in this world. All these life lessons may seem very simple to the younger generation, but I have lived my life through these principles. These principles along with honesty towards my work and towards my colleagues and superiors, made me achieve the professional excellence and helped me win lot of accolades and professional satisfaction. I hope they help in making a difference in someone's life.



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