

Is life made of Hard work, Good luck or Destiny?



When life makes full circle and you look back you keep wondering whether all milestones were destiny, blessings of elders or good luck or hard work or mix of everything.

I was born in a joint family and was youngest amongst the 8 siblings. My 4 sisters post graduated in early 50s and my father who started his medical practice at Allahabad way back in 1930, had desire that one of 4 brothers should be a doctor and one should be an engineer. Two brothers joined family business of chemists and druggists while 3rd brother got through joint medical exam and joined Allahabad Medical college. The onus was on me to become an engineer and fulfill the dream of my father. IIT Kanpur was always the goal. However, in run up to the entrance exam I realized that I will not be able to make it. To save situation I searched for an alternative and landed at School of Paper Technology Saharanpur. **Should I call this Destiny?**

I came from Hindi medium school. The lectures were in English which I could follow but writing and speaking was a big call. I just managed not to fail in year one and picked up threads in subsequent years. My friend Ashok Kalra helped me in my studies, and I remain indebted to him for his commitment to clear my fundamentals on many chapters because of which I secured 1st Division and second position in final exam. The ranking helped me walk tall for a while. **Was this the result of HARD WORK or Destiny.**

Based on recommendation of my GURU Dr. B.L. Bihani I secured my first job in 1969 at APPM on paper machine. I never realized the distance; I travelled those days by slow trains when possibly nobody from north India would go to a small town deep in Andhra for a job. But there was burning desire to do something in life and make my parents happy. Mr. K.C. Verma was the chief paper maker and everybody in the mill was mighty scared of him as he was a hard task master. He would come in our dreams and steal our sleep. On the other hand, we respected him immensely for his knowledge and leadership.

Two incidents shook me at Rajahmundry. Firstly, a cyclone which flew the roof of Agraja machine and made entire town come on its knees with flood, blackout, and misery. Second was a very personal affair. Anuja machine was under rebuild and there was practically no work for us. We were toiling during the shift and caught by the eyes of Mr. Verma who asked us to climb on felt roll and attend something. We went up with emery paper and 3 of us were standing on flat box practically doing nothing. The emery slipped out of my hand and fell on the floor. I told my friend that let me pick emery paper or else Mr. Verma will catch me and went down to pick it up. Few second later I heard a big thud and could not believe my eyes. Where we were standing, on the top some maintenance work on roll was going on and one end of roll slipped out of chain block and like a pendulum hit right side body of my friend who looked badly injured and motionless. I had seen death so closely which I missed by few seconds. **I keep wondering whether this was a stroke of GOOD LUCK or Destiny.**

After working for a year, I left APPM in search of managerial role and joined small mills and worked there for 2 years. I soon realized that it was a hasty decision on my part. I should have stayed in a big mill to learn technology, system, and professionalism. I started applying for job in every possible mill. I still have registered AD copies of such applications as souvenirs. Most of the mills did not reply and few responses came to say that they are keeping my candidature for future reference. This reminds me how tough were those years to get a job. During this period, I saw an ad from Shri Dinesh Mills for the post of sales engineers. There were two vacancies. My qualification and experience did not match the benchmark, but I still applied. I got a call for interview and was surprised to see 30 boys from IPT lined up there. It was almost like alumnae meet. Written test followed by interview and at the end of the day Mr. X and Mr. Y were told HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON and rest were told THANKS FOR COMING. The verdict was delivered, and I returned home with heavy heart. Surprisingly after 2 weeks I got letter of appointment and joined Dinesh Mill immediately. At first opportunity I asked my boss Mr. H.V. Bangera as to how I got selected. He told me that Mr. X was selected by the board but during interview he had expressed reservation about job in private company vis a vis government sector where he was working and hence directors decided to pick next candidate which happens to be me. This was a turning point in my carrier. **Was it a GOOD LUCK or DESTINY?**

I would fail in my duty not to thank Mr. Bangera the sales Manager at Dinesh Mill who taught me how to communicate with client, how to carry myself. My territory was southern & western India and I enjoyed visiting places. A word of thanks to people of Baroda for their open arm reception which made me extremely comfortable from day one. Given a chance I would have loved to retire in any city of Gujarat.

There was always a desire to come close to my hometown – Allahabad consequently in 1975 I joined Shalimar Wires at Kolkata as senior sales engineer. By this time, I was married, and thus, started new chapter in our life. I stayed with the company for next 25 years. I received promotion almost every 3 years. I was looking after sales and services. I was the only person in marketing with technical background. There was no concept of having a dedicated department like AFTER SALES & SERVICES in 1070s and early 80s. In 1984 company received a complaint from a customer from Bangladesh. Those responsible were not there and I was asked if I could do the job. I grabbed the opportunity by both the hands. The next question was do you have a passport. Remember possessing a passport those time was a big achievement. I had and was thus baptized in export. **Was it a stroke of good luck or Destiny?**

Shalimar's Chairman Mr. S.N. Khaitan was a visionary. He always wanted us to go out and export the product. On his insistence I lined up 3 weeks travel to Indonesia, Taiwan and Thailand in 1987. A long journey with big

hope started turning into FLOP Show. No laptop, no fancy brochure or sample and no reference turned customer away from my products. 17 days had passed by and order worth a \$ was neither in pocket nor promised. I was getting nightmare. On day 18th I was in Central Paper mills Thailand and happened to get a chance to visit the machine. I saw something wrong in dandy set up. I asked the young boy standing on the machine some questions who could not speak English and soon we were asked to leave machine floor and go to reception. Our agent Mr. Chreon got terribly upset with me. We were wondering what crime I had done and were counting our chickens. Soon we were called inside the conference hall and to my utter surprise I was introduced to the boy whom I had spoken at the machine as owner of the mill who had gathered his 6 engineers to discuss the issue I was referring to. The meeting opened flood gate of orders and little did I know that this customer would turn into one of the biggest customers in the years to come with Shalimar being only supplier on all 6 machines. A new chapter was written in my CV. **Was it a God sent OPPORTUNITY? Or was it destiny?**

Management was so pleased that I was sent to USA for training. Mr. Sunil Khaitan DMD took personal care to groom me. I progressed in all fields in leaps and bounds. It was a different time. All success was mine and in case of failures management will stand by me. Such a support is rare to be seen in current times. This was possibly single biggest reason of one's success in life. Mr. K.D. Sangar, my immediate boss a true professional from Thapar Group taught me how to handle customer with calm and let storm pass by with smile. It was different time when factory team will see that you are armed well to meet a job requirement in the field. Mr. Sarangi the technical head and his entire team contributed significantly in this direction.

On home front my wife got a teaching job and completed her Ph.D. and acquired many qualifications to stake claim as a Principal in one of top Girls school being run by Birlas'. Education of my two sons went on high platform and they made to IIT and NTU Singapore to flourish in their field later via Harvard and similar academic institutions. I had also progressed well in the company and was uncrowned king or a powerful ambassador. I never felt that I was going to office. I was on a mission each day.

Life sometimes takes unexpected turns and twists. Mr. S.N Khaitan fell sick and was in bed for long time in late 90s. The performance of company wobbled. Some old people retired, and some new people joined. Power game was playing its role somewhere. In 2000 I was asked to take over sister company engaged in jute spares predominantly and paper mill spares in small way as its President. I realized that while on one hand it was a big promotion but on other hand this was being done to favor my chair to somebody else. I had little option but to accept the offer. Soon as I feared I realized that culture of jute mill was not to my liking. I started looking for a change. I knew I would not be there for long.

It was one of the toughest periods in my life. Funds were required to support higher education of both the children and there were no jobs for similar profile available in Kolkata. I did not want to leave Kolkata since my wife had a plumb job in hand and she was hitting headlines each day. I had brought a house in Kolkata and moving from this city never crossed my mind. Out of nowhere I happened to get a fabulous offer from Reliance Industries to look after polyester fiber which they were introducing in paper mills. Late 2000 I shifted to Mumbai with heavy heart and several questions in my mind. **Was this destiny?**

My wife joined me 6 months down the line with another great offer from a reputed school. She progressed in leaps and bounds while I struggled every day. At Maker Chamber, I realized that it was ocean of talent. IIT and IIM alumni were in abundance. Computer culture was all over while my exposure to computer at Kolkata

was limited. At Kolkata in a small company I was its star performer while at RIL I was one of many. RIL was an ocean and my business would submerge under rounding off figure of the group.

It was second face of struggle in life at the age of 50. The product had shortcoming and it was getting rejected. Business was dwindling and it was expected from me to resurrect it. With no knowledge of polyester manufacturing an extremely hard task was cut out. It was clear that management would give me two years' time to succeed or else ----- . I had a highly qualified colleague by name Dr. Ajit Joshi. We started working together to develop the product with knowledge gained from internet and support from Patalganga Plant and its technology center headed by Dr. Nadkarni and Chandra. It was an incredibly challenging time as developing a new product with limited knowledge was fraught with risk and chances of failure was very high. Polyester sector of RIL had taken many product development activities with earnest but success rate was limited. Fear of failure was biting hard. Our prayers and hard work were answered, and we came up with two new products. It created ripples in the sector, but many thought the initial success cannot be converted into commercial scale. But for support of sector head Mr. Sapra and business head Mr. Gaur the product would have died its natural death. The success gave me lot of exposure to global market in EU and USA and entry to construction segment in India. I was a part of every initiative for my product at Patalganga and soon we developed world class facility including a small paper machine to test fiber during the run. Reliance taught me how to think big, go for best and do your best. A great deal of success is credited to my colleague Mr. Rajiv Gauri. **I still wonder – Was it not a good luck that we succeeded against all odds. Was it mere hard work and sincerity or mix of all or DESTINY?**

After 3 extensions I retired from Reliance in the year 2010 and went back to Kolkata and joined Wires & Fabriks as its adviser. The product and market were known to me and soon I was back to my old days of 1990s and started enjoying the assignment and role. It was nice to work under visionary Mr. Basant Khaitan, brotherly shadow of Mr. Kishan Khaitan who would guide me on day to day basis for best results under demanding personality of Mr. Mahendra Khaitan and Mr. Madhur Khaitan. Five years down the line I was 66 and my wife was not at all comfortable with my extensive travelling. Hence, I hanged my boot by March 2015. **It was thanksgiving time to God, elders, Colleague, and well-wishers for what all they gave me in my career.**

I have been member of IPPTA since 1971 and had hardly missed any meeting, particularly AGM. I had always served IPPTA from the core of my heart. I was its critic and supporter. it was time to repay the industry by helping IPPTA. I came remarkably close to IPPTA board during its Golden Jubilee celebration under the presidentship of Mr. Sanjay Singh. It was a big success. Past Golden Jubilee I started helping IPPTA on daily basis in an informal way. However, because of an existing set up IPPTA was not able to give me formal position & it was getting difficult to act freely and carry out reforms that I thought was necessary. I thus stepped backward. Few months passed by and a new situation arose. The than Secretary General fell ill, and my services was sought to help IPPTA. It was natural on my part to devote my full time for benefit of IPPTA on honorary basis. Had God written this chapter?? **Was it a destiny??**

Considerable time was spent with IPPTA staff at Saharanpur to modernize entire functioning of IPPTA. Guidance and support of 3 presidents with whom I have worked closely helped carry out desired changes. I wish to share my experience of working with various presidents of IPPTA viz, Mr. Neehar Aggarwal had always been truly professional in every walk of operation, Mr. Pawan Agarwal had mix of entrepreneur and

professionalism & the one who would resolve issue earlier than expected. and Mr. Sanjay K Singh possess heart of gold which gets reflected in all his decision making. It has been phenomenal journey to carry out my duty. Their inputs and guidance have helped me refine my thought process and application from time to time. I must acknowledge here that I have been taken by surprise many a times by then Vice President Mr. Ved Krishna for his fresh thinking at every stage. His one sentence keeps ringing my ear – “IPPTA must justify time and money of each delegate. So, offer something unique from IPPTA’s platform”. I have been close to Mr. Anil Kumar since 1980. He had been extremely helpful through my professional carrier and has been not only President but a true well-wisher of IPPTA. It was natural for me to fall back on him for his wisdom more often than not while performing my duties with IPPTA. He has been always helpful to guide me so that best decision in the interest of industry and IPPTA is taken.

My stay 2000 kms away from HO has taught me how one can utilize digital resources to work for last 5 years when it looked impossible. However, I am sure Covid time has taught everybody in general that many things can be done without meeting physically.

I am thoroughly enjoying my association with this great organization as Secretary General. It is just beginning of the journey. Many more milestones need to be achieved. I will continue to strive for it with the support of industry and its members. Thanks to IPPTA staff for their support to scale new heights every day.

I look back and wonder how my professional life of 51years has passed by and cannot say for sure if it was **HARD WORK, GOOD LUCK or DESTINY.**



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