

Make in India – A journey well-Travelled



While writing this script, I go down the memory lane to the journey that started about 55 years back. I therefore, expect some slips/ omission in time and sequence that is bound to happen for which I beg to be excused in the beginning itself.

I joined the Indian company by name Shalimar Wires & Industries Ltd. In the year 1965 when this company was producing metallic forming mediums which used to be known as “Wire”. This company at that point of time was a newcomer to paper industry starting its ‘wire’ production in 1963. The Uttarpara plant near Kolkata was the outcome of its visionary chairman Mr. Satya Narayan Khaitan. This was time when technology was kept under wraps by world manufacturers who would not part with it at any cost.

I had no experience of paper industry when I joined Shalimar. On other hand my exposure to production of wires under one German wire expert, Mr. Karl Ulrich Schuster became handy for my selection for the job. We continued to produce metallic wire cloth with all our wisdom and in-house innovation. In the year 1967, the management of Shalimar decided to strengthen its technical department and I got an additional assignment to help marketing department in interacting with paper mills while I was carrying out my regular production jobs. It needs to be clarified that at that time AFTER SALES SERVICES was part of production and not marketing. Marketing was manned by commercial people and no paper makers were available for such jobs. In this process I came in touch with the paper industry and learnt about paper making through several interactions with shop floor and top notch of paper Industry. I fondly recall some of the OLD GURUS like Mr. Nanda, Mr. Ravindranathan, Mr. Hangal, Mr. K.C Verma, Mr. Joglekar, Mr. J Kapoor, Mr. Narula, Mr. G.D Maheshwari, Mr. N.B Dasgupta, Mr.S.G.Rangan , Mr. Dharam Raju and many more who were expert in their fields and their words of wisdom helped us come a long way.

While the metal wires was the only forming medium ruling the paper Industries for more than 150 years, the paper making community was handicapped with the limitation of metallic mediums like increasing the machine speed, damages while on machine and during transportation and many more drawbacks. Due to the said problems researchers in the developed countries were trying to develop an alternative after the world war II. Towards mid Fifties they developed Polyamide wires and made number of trials in US and Europe but

due to dimensional instability it could not be commercialized. Finally, towards early Sixties Polyester fabrics (first generation) appeared in the paper industry which was dimensionally much more stable than earlier varieties. Those days M/S West Coast Paper Mills was a regular user of synthetic on its Papriformer (m/c no. 3). If I remember correctly, this machine was the first twin wire machine in India.

We, in Shalimar, were feeling the need of manufacturing synthetic forming fabric. Armed with articles published in American and European paper journals we made maiden effort of producing synthetic Fabric employing metal wire technology and produced three fabrics out of which two were supplied to Titaghaur Paper no. 2 mill (m/c 6) in the year 1973 and the third to West Coast. While in TPM -2, the results were somewhat encouraging but the one at West Coast was a failure. Here I would fail to acknowledge once again vision of our chairman Mr. Khaitan and efforts of Mr. S.N Arora the then GM.

Looking at the ray of hope, Mr. Khaitan and team started looking for a partner who would supply the technical know-how. Finally, in 1976, Shalimar signed a technical collaboration agreement with a Scottish company who agreed to train Shalimar's technicians in the different field of production and technical services. It was not a big company but were good for hand holding and initial technical inputs. After all the formalities were completed, I left for UK along with four other technicians. Those days I was designated as Manager- production and overall, in- charge to implement the project. After a long and rigorous training, spreading over long twelve plus months, we returned to India and got engaged to implement the project. While the erection of plant and machineries were going on, it was felt necessary to approach the potential customers for necessary orders for the production. At this stage the Managing Director deputed Mr. 'M.K.Goyal' and Mr. TSV Rao to look after Techno-commercial matters related to his project Thus periodically we three started visiting the mills and answering various questions of the paper makers who were initially reluctant to use synthetic fabric in place of metal. There were many questions related to running, lifetime, dimensional stability, sheet formation, retentions etc. The commercial matters like guarantee of performance and many.

After meeting all the demands and collecting necessary data of the Paper machine, the first forming fabric produced under foreign collaboration by Indian Technocrats was supplied to Bhadrachalam Paper Mills (P.M. No 1), If I remember correctly, it was in the month of August,1980, the fabric was mounted on the machine when me and Mr. TSV Rao were present. All the mill management and machine crews extended their full support and encouraged us. It was a very happy hour for two of us representing Shalimar that there was no problem and the machine was run smoothly. It was very necessary for us to collect some vital running information for which I and TSV decided to stay in the mill premises for some

more days. It was, at this stage, an accident happened. A nut from the Dandy Roll system suddenly fell on the fabric and made a hole which we repaired skillfully and thereafter no problem till 47th Day of the fabric's lifetime. Thus, the first ever indigenously made forming Fabric was born successfully. Thereafter in quick succession some more trials were performed at West Coast, Seshasayee, Star and some more paper mills with mixed results. In general, the paper makers of those days accepted synthetic forming fabrics produced for the first time in India. It is essential to mention that the initial batches of Forming Fabrics produced in India were all Single layer varieties.

With initiatives from Mr. 'M.K.Goyal' and Mr. T.S.V.Rao ,the business was in high trajectory but they also sent some strong feedback from the market that some more modification was necessary on the design of fabrics. Since Shalimar's first collaboration covered only single layer fabrics, we had no choice than to go in for another technical collaboration for manufacturing multi-layer fabrics. This time it was a company in Finland, Metcoform. O.Y. Again I had to lead a new team to Finland for technology transfer.

On completion of technology transfer Shalimar started producing Double layer, one and a half layer and a three layer (not SSB type) in India in the year 1983 – 84. With some modification these multi-layer verities continued to be a Part of Indian Paper industry until the SSB verities came into Indian Paper making system. It was during this period a need to induct paper makers in technical services team and a full-fledged quality control department with tools and knowledge for understanding the needs of paper mills and analyzing problems was felt and implemented. A department under Mr. Tapas Dutta whom we recruited from WCPM was thus born. Management took several steps to shore up quality and production and thus solid foundation for a successful mission MAKE IN INDIA was laid.

So, the time came to hang my boots after a long forty years' service to the paper industry (from 1965 to 2006). All along my journey through Indian paper industry, I never felt that I was all alone in my personal life having lost my only child in the year 1982. I was highly supported emotionally and professionally by my friends in the industry which helped me to recover from severe emotional challenges in life. I am also thankful to current MD of Shalimar Mr. Sunil Khaitan for his vision and zeal to keep updating the plant & technology and making sure that each member of his team delivers his best.

Wire manufacturing is a true story of **MAKE IN INDIA** on face of fact that nobody wanted to share technology and we made it happen through shear guts and determination. Once again thanks to all the members of Shalimar team, its management and paper making fraternity who made this possible.



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