

# Paper trade - its role in a developing country

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Paper Industry and Paper Trade are synonymous to each other. Both go hand in hand to serve the consumer be it an individual of a primary school or a large converter or printer. A Paper mill is as much responsible for maintaining quality and production of its products as the traders to have perfect communication between the consumer and the mill to maintain quality and production. He has to act as a paper maker, as paper & pulp technologist, as a converter, as a salesman and as a financier. This means that a paper trader must be conversant and aware of all these disciplines. His role is multifaced. He is a strong bridge between the industry and the consumer public. Although there is a school of thought, particularly in socialistic pattern of society, that there is no need of a trader, the consumer and the manufacturer should have direct link in all matters of transactions. But this thinking fails to understand that the trader, in fact, works as a buffer between the two. At time of emergencies or breakdown of communications, the trader proves more helpful in various ways, which is otherwise not possible. A trader is situated near the consumer, while the manufacturer is many a times far away. Consequently the communications between the consumer and the trader are much quicker and effective than with the manufacturer.

In a developing country like India, where paper industry has to develop fast to meet the growing needs of the consumer, the trade community has a special responsibility.

Although the paper industry has developed fast during the last two decades, yet it has not adopted the newer machines and processes as the converting and printing industry has come up with new technology and machines. This has created a sort of gap in qual-

ity requisites, particularly for the paper mills who are under the crunch of raw material shortage and inadequate finances, to adopt advanced technologies and new machines. Except a couple of mills, recently started, most of the mills have old machinery and processes which are not adaptable to modern systems. They need extensive modernisation and renovation, before they can adopt new systems. We have enough agricultural residues to supplement raw material shortage but this needs extensive modernisation of the mills, so that they could successfully use unconventional raw material in making quality paper and board. Looking to the present financial situation in the country, such change-over may take quite some time to materialise. The Government has imposed new restrictions on imports. With such restrictions the quantum of import of waste paper and pulp has been seriously affected creating further pressure on raw material availability for paper making.

Looking to the situation stated above, it is high time for the Trade Community to gear itself to educate the consumer to adopt lower quality of cultural papers used for printing of books and magazines, manufacture of stationery material, common varieties of paper and board used in packaging and other cultural activities, where special quality of high brightness, high strength and attractive look are not essential. This change needs a quicker implementation to enable to save conventional raw material and at the same time use more and more of unconventional raw material like straws, grasses, waste paper and wastes from textile industry. Nothing is lost in reviving the use of once popular semibleached Badami paper in the manufacture of exercise books, text books of lower standards, Stationery articles like envelopes, cheaper magazines and handbills, communication memo books, files and such other commercial stationery where the material is discarded after first use. At present in India

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nearly 80% of the paper and board is made out of chemical pulp, where even from bamboo the yield of the pulp is not beyond 37-38%. If we switch over to semibleached pulp, this yield can easily go upto 40-42% i.e. for every tonne of paper made from semibleached pulp we save nearly 250 kgs of raw material. Even if we make about 2 lakh MT of paper and board from semibleached pulp, which is just 10% of our total annual production, we can save nearly 50,000 MT of bamboo, which is not a small quantity. If this pattern is further supplemented with the use of waste paper, we can make a substantial saving in the consumption of conventional raw material, without creating any shortage of the commodity. Similarly, wherever kraft paper is used in the manufacture of fluting media and the pulp board in packaging, their furnish should be suitably charged from 100% chemical pulps to furnishes containing higher percentage of waste paper. For such a change the Trade Community has to prepare itself first to adopt and educate the consumer.

There is another important point, to which the Trade Community should give a serious thought. Indian Paper Industry seriously lags behind in producing suitable quality of paper and board for export purpose. In the International Market, we do not stand on reasons of quality and cost. Even in neighbouring countries where there is a good scope of demand of our paper, we do not have any business worth the name. The reasons may be many like the high cost of production, low quality and lack of any liaison at national level. If we want to develop our paper industry and trade we must resort to export of atleast 10% of our total production. Small countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and Thailand are coming in a big way to develop their export market in this commodity. For export papers, even high quality of pulp and waste paper can be imported which the government will allow gladly. But for this both the industry and the trade have to make joint & vigorous efforts. Perhaps Trade has a greater responsibility in this regard.