

BHARAT TILES AS I SEE IT

BY

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I was to report on duty on 1st February 1943 as a fitter in Bharat Tiles Company, Mora (Uran) dist. Colaba, now dist. Raigarh. For that purpose I went to Mora factory on 30th Jan. 1943. It was decided that I would go home at Udvada and come back to Mora by 1st Feb. Unfortunately (or may be fortunately) I was down with fever the same night and could not come to Mora till 13th February.

When I reached there on 13th February 1943, at about 9.00 a.m. I was warmly received and looked after i.e. breakfast etc. was offered immediately and I was shown to my bed which was in a huge room called "pedhi" (meaning office). Next to my bed there was a wooden cupboard with four separate compartments, out of which one compartment was allotted to me. "Pedhi" was a very big room which was used as a bed-room/dining room, office-cum-store cum anything and everything under the sun. The bathroom was away in some other room and toilet was far away.

In our room there was an imported battery set of 32V, our only hope in the darkness and that too till 10 p.m. Sometime the battery would misbehave and go on strike. At such times we would attend to the batteries etc. and the lamp would revive. There were 2 big pedestal fans working on kerosene. At that time mosquitoes at Mora were of special size and quality so mosquito net was a must. It was an art to fix the net in the evening without allowing one or two mosquitoes to sneak inside and that art was mastered by servants of the Company who would do this job daily. As such the fans were helpful but there were only two and the staff members were many. But as I had never used a fan before I did not bother for the same.

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After about 2 hours i.e. at about 11 a.m. I was introduced to the staff members. At that time the staff structure was as under:-

Manager (officially) - Mr Shapurji P. Madon
Assistant Manager - Mr Dinshaw C. Patel

* Machine maintenance Supervisors @ Production Supervisor

Fitters, Asst.Fitters, helpers # Mukadam

* Mr Keki Engineer
Mr Hamid Adam Arosker
Mr Bhaiya Chandarsi Rhorsi
Mr Harchand Arjoon Haldankar & helpers from workers

@ Mr Keki Dalal
Mr Homi Udvardia
Mr Jal Khambhata

Mr Madhav Kathami
Mr Balaram Sakharam

At that time there was less demand for tiles due to the war. Only about 50 workers were employed out of which 10 were females. There was no electric power readily available (we had to generate electricity) or telephone or radio. There was only 1 battery operated transistor set with several pairs of earphones with Shapurji and we would tune to news twice a day.

Engines and Machinery:-

1) There were 2 oil engines for generating power. One of 60/66 H.P. 3 cylinders-horizontal crosslay oil engine, another 20/22 HP one cylinder - horizontal crosslay engine.

At that time there was only one act for labour and that was "The Factories Act". I am proud to say that, that too was possible because of labour of a Parsi gentleman Mr Sorabji Shapurji Bangali who sailed in a country craft to London to pressurise the Parliament which was reluctant to pass the Act.

I was in a habit of eating a snack after work ended. There was nothing handy so I gave a two anna coin to a worker who was residing in the factory compound and asked him to get me groundnuts of 1 anna. When he brought the groundnuts I asked him to keep the remaining 1 anna as tip but he refused saying in our factory we do not accept anything except our wages. This was first such experience in my life.

In the big manufacturing shed there was an old table and a chair. I sat there and started eating the groundnuts. After a little while I saw Seth Rustomji Sidhwa - a tall impressionable figure clad in simple clothes and chappals coming towards me. I stood up and slid the groundnuts in the drawer of the table. He came to me and putting his hand on my shoulders said, "So, you have finished your first day of service". I replied in the affirmative but he said "no, you are mistaken, till I am here the factory working day never finishes. At dinner table also I talk about work only, so sit down and we shall talk about work."

Since there was only one chair I went to get another chair for him but he said there was no need for that as he would sit on the table. So he sat on the table and forced me to sit on the chair and started talking. But first thing he asked me was to take out what I had slid in the drawer. I was surprised and took out the groundnuts reluctantly. On seeing the packet he said "Oh groundnuts! I am very fond of it let's share it while we talk." He asked me about my family, education etc.

Ultimately he said "Look Rusi, there is less work here for a fitter as Hamid, Bhaiyaji and Harchand are all experienced and dedicated. So you will find a lot of spare time on your hands, therefore if you pick up manufacturing work it will go a long way for promotion etc. and if you like I will talk to Shapoorji and Dinshaw and you can start that work too from tomorrow." I said I was willing and I would love to learn anything. He told me that if I worked hard with him, after 5-10 years he would put me on No.1 position, that is of the Manager. Next day Dinshaw told me that RDS had a discussion with them regarding giving me work of a fitter as well as manufacturing side and he instructed me to accompany RDS when he went for his routine rounds in the factory.

So from the 2nd day I started my training with RDS as my "guru" and not after 5-10 years but after exactly 21 years hard and rigorous training I became Manager of the Kurla factory again on 13th February 1964, due to the sad demise of Dinshaw on 3rd Feb. 1964.

Thus the prophetic words of RDS became a reality, so he and I were very happy, though there was a shadow of Dinshaw's untimely demise.

Now we will have to go again to February 1943. My work was going on satisfactorily. I was earning and learning and there was co-operation from all. There was no bother of boarding & lodging. Every thing was ready and of good quality which was a great advantage. At that time the following products were manufactured in the factory :-

- 1) Cement tiles, pattern, plain and Mosaic. That was the period of exit for pattern (galeecha) tiles and entry of mosaic tiles.
- 2) Pre-cast steps, Risers, window and door-sills and table-tops.
- 3) Kip-klin (cleaning powder)
- 4) Handysoap (soap for cleaning utensils etc.)
- 5) Dipak Metal polish

There were 3 companies working under our supervision.

1. Bharat Tiles - Tiles, precast
2. Sidhwa & Co. - Agent of ACC
3. Pilloo D. Sidhwa & Co. (manufacturing tents for military)

I was doing anything and everything. Anybody could give me any kind of work and if possible I would do it. I did not hesitate to learn anything. I did not know from anyone. I was working enthusiastically because I was used to hardwork. Where I worked previously there was tremendous hard work only. There was no appreciation, no sufficient reward, no proper boarding and lodging facilities. To top it all there was no guarantee for better prospects in future. Whereas here, everything was favourable, and so naturally my work was giving me satisfaction and it was acting like a vitamin without actually swallowing the pill. Besides that the bosses, colleagues and subordinates were all co-operative and kind.