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THE NECESSITY TO ENCOURAGE LINK INDUSTRIES AND ANCILLARY ✓
TRADES TO OBTAIN SUPPLIES OF MATERIALS FROM LOCAL SOURCES.
CAN GOVERNMENT PLAY A BIGGER PART?

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In view of its unique properties still unrivalled by the many synthetic substitutes, leather has been in use over the centuries for making articles of day to day use. As the gap of transport and communication started narrowing peoples with different cultures are brought into closer contact. The increased production made possible by the factory system gave new hopes of ending poverty and raising the standard of living. With more and more mobility of society, the pattern of life and attitudes of peoples changed considerably. This had a profound influence on every day life. Science, Industry and Technology blended together have contributed in a significant manner to the material well being of mankind in all industrialised countries. Naturally the developing countries look to the more advanced nations for some sort of help and guidance in carving out a better society for themselves and look forward to becoming equal partners in the economic development of all parts of the globe. The increase in living standards, impact of Fashion and Industrial design development have all contributed to keep the use of leather in making leather goods very much in the forefront.

Until recently, the pattern of world leather trade had been that developing countries were supplying raw hides and skins or semi-processed leather to the developed countries. But now the situation is changing rapidly. The difficulty of getting workers for this industry and the high cost of labour are compelling the developed countries to look for more and more finished leathers from the developing countries. Though the cattle wealth is very high in the developing countries, slaughter rate is still on the lower side and hence availability of good raw material is very low. Again due to the increase in the consumption of

finished leathers in the domestic markets, the quantity available for export is less, thereby increasing the price also. There has been a steady increase in the consumption of leather footwear and leather goods in the developing countries in recent years. Even so there exists a very good potential for leather goods export from the developing countries. Moreover the export revenue multiplies several times if finished products are exported. For this there is need for building up a sound infrastructure for their manufacture in the developing countries.

The manufacture of leather goods in developing countries is still a craft oriented trade carried out by traditional artisans at the cottage level. Bulk manufacture has not been systematically attempted to any degree and hence the industry is not geared for export trade as such. Manufacturers in the advanced nations have to a great extent mechanised the production, whereas in the developing countries they still depend upon hand labour to a large extent. The former has the distinct advantage of ensuing uniform quality and greater productivity.

The problems facing the leather goods industry are many. The industry is in its infancy, having many a teething trouble. The dealers in leather goods are mostly small traders who have to depend solely on the skill and capacity of individual artisans and craftsmen. Also the number of these artisans engaged in the traditional handicrafts is fast dwindling. The industry in the developing countries is at various stages of development. Different combinations of materials and workmanship are adopted in production techniques. The markets for leathergoods being

very sophisticated, design and fashion are considered to be very important factors. The prices also vary considerably according to the materials used and quality of workmanship. The term "leather goods" includes a wide range of products such as travel goods, hand bags, novelty items and small goods like purses, wallets, belts, etc. Sometimes even articles made of materials other than genuine leather are also called leather goods.

There must be continuous rapport between the manufacturer in developing countries and the importer abroad. The exporter should satisfy the buyer about his own capacity to accept bulk orders at competitive prices and execute the order in right time. He should be thoroughly conversant with changing fashion trends, styling and price ranges if he has to successfully compete in world markets. Since time is the essence in export trade, modern production techniques must be successfully adopted. Efficient managerial skills introduced together with judicious exploitation of available human resources go a long way in improving the economy. The results of technological development should be quickly diffused into the industry, to obtain maximum dividend in the way of increased productivity and standard quality.

Some of the problems faced by the industry can be classified as shortage of quality finished leather, non-availability of good quality accessories or hardware like frames, locks, zips, clasps etc., non-availability of small machines for stepping up productivity and finally lack of adequate market intelligence.

Development of many link industries and ancillary trades has to be carefully planned out when we talk of

development of the leather goods industry. One of the major accessories is hardware of grindery. This comprises a wide variety of products like frames, zips, locks, rivets, handles, buttons, clasps etc. They are mainly functional like helping to close a handbag or lock a brief case or fixing a handle for lifting. But some are used for ornamental trimming also. In any case it has to be sturdy, durable and pleasing to the eye. This aspect has not been given sufficient importance and thought in the developing countries and consequently export of finished goods to the western markets is found to be difficult. The light engineering industries within the country must be well developed so that it is in a position to take up production of these hardware materials and thus help the industry. Also there are many small tools used in the manufacture of leathergoods such as tools used in framing machine, eyeletting machine, riveting machine, punches, press knives etc. These too have to be locally fabricated. The Government can provide both technical and financial assistance for the development of the light engineering industry especially in the small scale sector.

Another important accessory is lining used in the leather goods industry. They are used to add strength in some cases and for serving functional purpose, like providing pockets. A wide variety of materials are used as linings. They play an important part in constructions and often influence the final sale of products. Some linings are used as outsides in costly bags like brocade bags. It can be from vegetable fibres like cotton, flax, hemp, jute etc., or animal fibre like silk, wool etc. or synthetic fibres. They can be used singly or in combination. Their selection depends upon the type, quality and price required. Some of the common

Fabrics for the cheaper variety of articles are mostly cotton and rayon mixtures like taffeta, moire, velveteen, cater, faille, sunshine and swansdown. Velvet, satin and brocade based on silk fabrics are used for high quality bags.

Their availability in the local market depends upon the development of the textile industry in a broad-based manner. Sometimes when synthetics are used they have to come from chemical industries.

Another important accessory used in leathersgoods is foundation. They are of varied types and are used to give shape, strength, increased thickness etc. to the finished article. They are mainly based on paper, cardboard and fibre board but occasionally on plastic also. The many uses to which foundation, stiffening and reinforcement materials are put demand a range of differing qualities to meet the variety of styles, type and grades of quality existing in the articles. The reinforcements are usually invisible on the finished product and therefore their colour is not important. It can be either ordinary fibre board or vulcanized fibre boards. The other type of reinforcements can be millboards, chip boards, leather boards, texon boards, sugar paper, backed sugar paper, felt paper, plotting paper etc. For this the development of paper and plastic industries is very essential.

The mechanical production of leather goods necessarily involves the use of machines. In the developed countries they have in operation a wide range of machines to manufacture all types of leather goods from heavy travel goods to handbags and fancy leather goods. Inough some of the machines are highly sophisticated like splitting machine, cutting press, plastic welding machine, hydraulic shaping press etc. many of them are small and simple machines like eyeletting machine, stapling machine, riveting machine, skiving machine, bending machine etc.

Another important branch of machines are the sewing machines. These are used in all branches of the industry from heavy to light with appropriate modifications and special attachments. Stitching machines are of numerous types and for specific uses different types are used. There are more than 1000 different types of sewing machines used in industries like clothing, boot and shoe, hat leather work, hosiery etc. The cylinder or arm machines having a long beak shuttle are mostly used. The 17 class machines with single needle, twin needle, reversible feed mechanism are some of the varieties used. For stitching heavy material like handles for brief cases, holdall straps a heavier type of sewing machine called 'Pilot machine' is used. Here the needle is bigger and a heavier type of linen thread passing through hot molten wax is used.

For stitching of travel cases with wooden foundations a heavier type of machine called 'Puritan post machine' is used. This is essentially meant for very heavy duty work. This does not use a bobbin but involves only single chain stitching. The stitching is done with the help of an awl on the top and a needle with guides at the bottom. For stitching of corners and edges in suitcases, a rapid stitching machine is used. Here the stitching is done diagonally at the edges. The bending machines is used for bending plywood used as foundation for many types of cases. The machine essentially consists of heated rollers through which the plywood pieces are passed, and are thereby bent to the desired angles by simultaneous application of heat and pressure.

For the successful manufacture of these simple machines, the local engineering industry must be well developed and broadbased. There has to be continuous research also to

improve the existing machinery and introduce more and more useful special attachments. Otherwise in a highly competitive world market, it may not be possible to increase productivity and thereby cut down cost.

Last but not the least important is the availability of good quality finished leathers in the local market. No doubt the emphasis has been on increased export of finished leather and finished leather products from the developing countries; but there has always been the problem of procuring quality finished leather in the required quantities for the manufacture of leather goods. The finished leather industry must be provided with adequate machines, auxiliary chemicals and finishes. If they are not locally available their import must be allowed. The leather industry must also be fully conversant with modern development of the industry in the developed countries. The leather industry must have sophisticated machinery as well as skilled operators to turn out finished leathers which can satisfy the western markets.

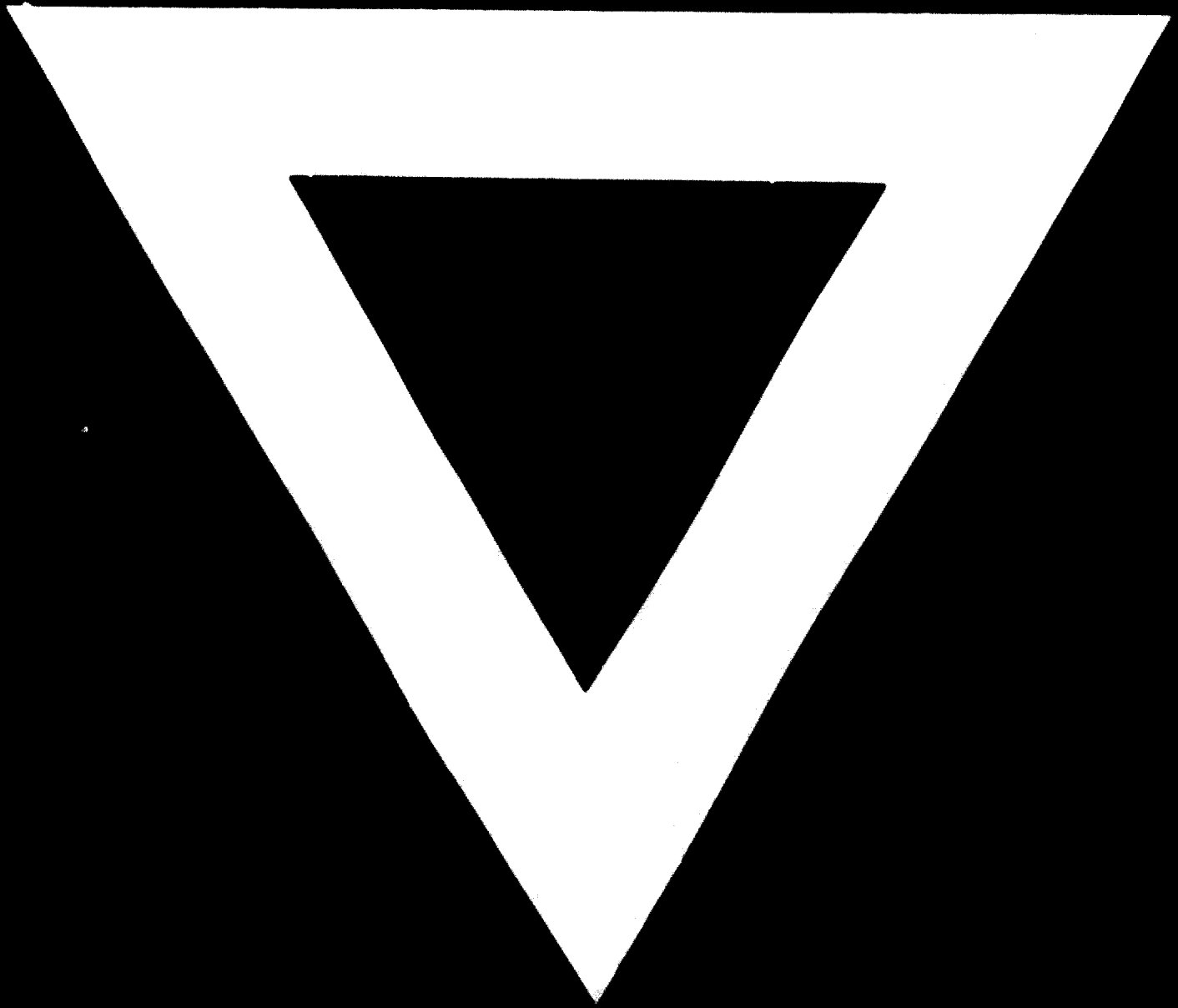
Many of the developing countries do not have infrastructure potential for chemical, light engineering, textile and plastic industries. There are no giant complexes to develop these industries on any planned footing. The local government should come to the rescue of the industry in a big way. Steps will have to be taken for the opening up of suitable industrial estates to take care of the small units manufacturing hardware, tools etc. For manufacture of suitable machines progressively within the country itself, far-sighted planning and developmental work are necessary. Government should help in the formation of co-operative units for bulk purchases of raw materials like leather, hardware and machines. The co-operative ventures should

also look after sales distribution, quality control and advertisement. If suitable equipments of good quality are not available locally, import of the same should be allowed liberally in the initial years. Similarly, in the case of hardware, linings and reinforcements, imports should be liberalised till such time the indigenous manufacturers are able to produce quality products. To ensure quality control, training of skilled personnel is essential. This training is not only for operative type workers but also for managerial cadres. In fact demonstration-cum-training centres can be started with Governmental help where foreign technical experts are employed for a sufficient number of years to impart training and also arrange for the craftsmen to get training abroad for some time. The Governmental laws on duties, taxes have to be suitably modified to give the industry the much needed fillup in the initial developmental stages. Market intelligence is very vital to the industry which can also be provided by the government in the developing countries.

Since the fashion changes quite frequently in the world markets, it will be very necessary that developing countries concentrate on manufacture of leather goods of classical styles rather than fashion items. In order to reduce the gap in delivery time, sometimes it is necessary to resort to air lifting of merchandise also. Here again it is only the government that can give a big hand to help the industry. Leather goods being basically a personal item, there must be constant touch with the consumer in developed countries. The manufacturer must be in a position to travel widely and as often as possible so that he can study the market trends and gear up his production accordingly. He must take part in as many international trade fairs as possible to

popularise his products. Due to lack of sufficient finance, manufacturers in many of the developing countries are not in a position to undertake such costly foreign trips on his own. Here also government should come forward to help him by arranging to provide show room facilities in the developed countries to a group of exporters.

Government can also set up a task force to look into the requirements of the manufacturers for machines and tools. The task force can be assigned the duty of analysing the various factors involved and arrange for proto type machine to be locally fabricated with the help of the existing engineering industry. In fact the small scale sector is very favourably situated for this purpose. The Government can help the task force with suitable men and material to hasten up the industrial development process.



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