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DEVELOPMENT OF FURNITURE MAKING IN BANGLADESH^{1/}

by

F.M.Z. Pasha, General Manager,
FIBCO Furniture Limited, Kalurghat, Chittagong,
Bangladesh

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INTRODUCTION

Furniture making in Bangladesh has been influenced in turn by the Arabs, Portuguese, Mongols and British, and the designs and demand pattern reflects this intermixture.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe was responsible to a certain extent for the development of the furniture industry in Bangladesh, but its existence is now characteristic of an advanced secondary civilization. The development of today's furniture industry has grown with industry in general, and with an industrial population with the ability to pay for housing and for goods and chattels to put in it.

In the technical field, efficient production inside the works is the main purpose of this study, whereas personnel research has been concerned with welfare. Technology leaves problems of location to be solved by the industrialist taking account of the spatial advantage of site and situation. Proper plant set-up and technical knowledge of the operation of available machinery will ensure sound progression.

The costs involved in the setting up of industrial enterprises are important locational determinants, as are the characteristics of furniture from geographical studies of personal tastes, etc. plus historical, technical and economic data.

GROWTH OF THE MODERN FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH

The period 1947-60 saw the major growth of the modern furniture industry in Bangladesh. Previously, private entrepreneurs and industrialists were only engaged in trade without a mechanical/scientific approach. Owing to the non-availability of treatment and seasoning facilities, the locally available timber could not be used to its greatest advantage. For quality furniture, teak was considered as the only species which could be used without much care and seasoning. Thus a vast portion of timber resources could not be properly utilized. Through research and tests, it was found that various species of hardwood available in the forests of Bangladesh (and in particular in the Chittagong Hill Tracts) could well be used in modern furniture making, if treated or seasoned to suit climatic conditions.

The establishment of the central Forest Research Laboratory of the Forest Industrial Development Corporation during 1959-60 marked an important beginning in the field of modern furniture making. Mechanical extraction of timber from the Chittagong Hill Tract forests, plus the setting up of wood treating and seasoning plants, cabinet manufacturing projects and a sawmilling and lumber processing complex, has facilitated the build-up of modern furniture plants with the latest equipment. The availability of timbers, facilities and easy transportation for the export market initiated a big furniture project as a joint venture with an American firm, which was unfortunately discontinued before completion. The logical starting point for new industrial projects in a country such as Bangladesh is to increase the use of local skills to process further and thereby increase the value of agricultural and forest products. The establishment of a Training Institute of Wood Technology with Swedish aid has created a better atmosphere to work towards a modern furniture industry with fully automatic plants.

Timber

There are numerous species of trees of various parts of the world tropical hardwoods are available in Bangladesh. In fact, through research and tests, it has been found that many of our species are superior to those of other countries. Some of our species have properties rivaling those of the best of the world. Some have better figuring and are more readily available. Since the year of Bangladesh is still immature, this calls for more exotic hardwoods which are locally abundant. These species are Gorkan (*Dipterocarpus* Spp), Tali (*Dichopsia Polyantha*), Cedar (*Chamaecyparis*), Jaru (*Lagerstroemia floribunda*), Dal (*Birtula*), Kauri (*Calophyllum* Spp), Surigoni (*Cedrela toona*), Chirpal (*Chlorocardium*), Champa (*Nicholia* Spp), Khas (*Schinus Molle*), Satta (*Lophopetalum striatum*), Jau (*Eugenia* Spp), Khas (*Albizia procera*), etc.

Other Materials

Other materials such as particle board, plywood, glass, surface finishing materials and hardware fittings are available in limited quantities. The only particle board factory is not in a position to supply the increasing demand of the furniture industry. The Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation has recently taken up another project for a particle board and veneering plant, which is expected to come into production this year when completed. This factory will be in a position to meet the total demand of the country and export the surplus products.

EXPORT PROMOTIVE

The popularity of and constantly rising demand for new and easy to make Danish-type furniture are conducive to the satisfactory development of a Bangladesh furniture industry oriented towards supplying furniture to these markets. The Danish-type furniture emphasizes the beauty of natural wood and places great importance on the use of fine quality tropical hardwoods, while down-playing the traditional role of complicated cutting, carving and shaping involved in the construction of the more intricate and antique type of furniture. The Danish-type designs are simple to manufacture on a mass production basis utilizing standard woodworking machines and dispensing with expensive specialized carving and shaping equipment. Hence FIE has adopted the Danish-type designs in their processes.

Finishing in the furniture industry has involved the use of highly skilled workmen to prepare the wood surface and to apply the high-gloss polishes. In recent times, relatively complex and delicate automatic spraying and handling equipment has been developed to speed up this expensive process. Such surfaces are easily damaged in transit and difficult to repair. However, the popularity of oil finishes for Danish-type furniture has eliminated most of the problem.

Hence, the creditation of a large segment of the world furniture market for oil-rubbed furniture is a most important factor for our factory.

AVAILABLE FACILITIES

Of the total forest area of 2,000,000 acres, the majority are state-owned and of the total forest growing stock, most species are hardwoods well suited to furniture manufacture. The survey made recently demonstrated that there are sufficient resources of furniture grade hardwoods. The costly and demanding veneering of such of the old-style furniture is not necessary for the Danish-type designs, since, for most components, solid local timber will be less expensive than veneering, and for the larger case-woods, local teak-faced plywood can be used.

MARKET FOR KNOCKED-DOWN FURNITURE

The former traditional need for furniture plants to be in close proximity to existing markets in order to eliminate the high transport costs of bulky pieces is now obviated by the development of furniture that can be shipped in parts or "knocked-down". Very recently we have gone into an arrangement with a Canadian firm for export of knocked-down kitchen cabinets for marketing in the American continents.

PROBLEMS FACING FURNITURE MAKING IN BANGLADESH

The basic problem facing furniture making in our country is the lack of finishing and upholstery materials. The finish and upholstery sections are still in a primitive stage. The finishing work is being done manually and the production work greatly suffers for want of raw materials such as shellac spirit, and even the supply of imported substitutes such as lacquer and thinner are also not adequate to meet requirements. The quality of upholstery cloths is low and the sewing machines in operation are not adequate to meet requirements.

In the assembly section we face the problems of want of adhesives and hardware fittings, etc. However, we are planning to arrange these through imports. More modern equipment and apparatus for assembly and finishing are essential, and a survey study is being made to list the actual requirements. There is vast scope for expansion of furniture making and, equipped with more modern machinery in all sectors of production, it will be possible for Bangladesh to supply knocked-down/prefabricated furniture to the world market on a most competitive basis.



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