

A STORY OF THE LEGENDARY TYCOON OF LAC SECTOR: INSPIRING JOURNEY OF A SMALL ENTREPRENEUR TOWARDS THE BUSINESS LEADER

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ABSTRACT

Natural gums, resins and latexes are among the most widely used and traded Non-Wood Forest Products. Applications of gums embrace food, pharmaceutical and miscellaneous technical purposes. Shri Roshan Lal Sharma is the most experienced person in the Lac business, having experience of about seven decades in the Lac industry. During the journey of more than 60 years in the lac sector, his entrepreneurship could generate employment for the local tribal's. His factories process about 1500 tons of raw sticklac to produce different qualities of value-added grades of seedlac, shellac, bleached lac, lac dye and other by-products, which earns valuable foreign exchange for the country and provides employment to about 100 tribal workers.



Natural gums, resins and latexes are among the most widely used and traded Non-Wood Forest Products. Applications of gums embrace food, pharmaceutical and miscellaneous technical purposes. Resins have an equally diverse range of applications in paints, varnishes and lacquers, flavors, and fragrances. Latexes have specialized applications in, for example, insulating materials and the manufacture of golf balls and chewing gum. Some of these products have declined because of synthetic products' competition. However, over time, changes occurred, and the experiences of an entrepreneur/processor/industrialist/exporter in the natural resin industry may highlight the lac sector's potential and opportunities. It also focuses on the impact of technological and policy interventions.

At 85, Shri Roshanlal Sharma is the most experienced person in the Lac business, having experience of about seven decades in the Lac industry. He can rightly be called a living encyclopedia of Lac business and industry, having seen the evolution and ups and downs in the history of Lac in India and abroad. Although he hails from Punjab, he came to Jhalda (presently in West Bengal) on June 20th 1956 and worked in the Calcutta office of Achhruram Kalkhof (Shellac) Private Limited. In 1964 he was sent to Murhu (presently in Jharkhand) to build a new factory for the company, where he worked as a manager. As the company grew, he was assigned to open new purchase and production centres in other lac-producing areas of Palamu (Jharkhand), Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Meantime he also extended & increased the production capacity of the company's Murhu factory to 4-5 times which by the time 1982 was the largest shellac & seedlac-producing factory in India.



File Pic of Shri Roshan Lal Sharma

In 1983 he decided to set up his own industry & business and rented a small (cottage) factory in Khunti (presently in Jharkhand). After running the rented factory for three years, he bought a piece of land by the side of river Tajna & built his factory in Khunti with financial assistance from Bihar State Financial Corporation and named the factory Tajna Shellac factory. As his business was growing with financial support from the State Bank of India, the factory was converted into a Private Limited Company in 1993.

In 1997 another unit for value-added shellac production was named Tajna River Industries Private Limited in financial and technical collaboration with M/s Kane International Corporation, New York USA. The US is the largest buyer of shellac and seedlac in the world. He lost his mother at the tender age of five, which was partially compensated by his grandmother's nurturing. The situation changed after the death of his grandmother when he had to go to Gorakhpur to live with his father and stepmother. He was a bright student whom the esteemed college of Banaras Hindu University offered a scholarship. Soon he escaped stepmotherly treatment and decided to move to Jhalda at 18, leaving his academic education



halfway to work in the Indian Shellac factory in Jhalda. That was his first contact with lac. He picked up work quickly and put in his best efforts. Subsequently, he contacted ILRI, Ranchi's experts and got the help of legendary publications entitled "Chemistry of Lac" and "Monograph of Lac" at the

Institute library. He was trained to test and analyze different qualities of Lac samples under the guidance of the then director Dr S V Puntambaker, of the Indian Lac Research Institute, Namkum in Ranchi.

In 1962–63 when the Murhu Seedlac Factory was formed, he was sent to Murhu from Kolkata with his wife and son to this factory. He took over the production of Seedlac and worked very hard to supply the best quality Seedlac to M/S Kalkhof GmbH Petersen und Stroever in Frankfurt / Mainz in, Germany. The company had three units in Mainz, Hamburg and Bremen). In 1957 When Dr Kalkhof Rose visited India. This was the first time Mr Sharma met with the couple, and it was the beginning of a long business relationship with them which continues with Mrs Rose. His training in the Lac Research helped him to make trials of making value-added shellac while employed in the company, and with the help of the Lac Institute, he was very happy when he could succeed in making two tons of Bleached Shellac in 1975. In 1980 Late Shri Sohanlal Bahl, owner of the company, provided him with the opportunity to get

training at the factories of Kalkhof GmbH Petersen und Stroever Germany for the production of Bleached Shellac as per the proper quality standard specifications. He worked with the same spirit and enthusiasm but decided to leave in 1982 for personal reasons.

Once again, he had to start from scratch, but his experience, courage, faith and confidence inspired him to start making Seedlac in a small rented building in Khunti, Jharkhand. He got the first order for Seedlac and handmade Shellac from Europe in 1986. After that, he continued manufacturing various grades of Seedlac & handmade shellac. In 1988-89, the production of Machine-made shellac was also added to fulfil the quality requirements of the Indonesian buyers. Shri Sharma desired to work on high-value product lines as the demand for lac dye and bleached lac from the overseas market. In 1990-91, Mr Sharma got training (May 31st to June 14th 1990) on value-added products of Aleuritic acid and lac dye and for increasing the shelf life of Bleachedlac in the Lac Institute.

In 1997 the production of value-added improved-quality bleached lac was introduced. After that, Tajna River Industries Private Limited Khunti was established with 50 tons per month capacity. He also started the production of orange shellac in Jakarta, Indonesia, in partnership with an Indonesian businessman of Jakarta to cater to the requirements of Indonesian customers who worked for ten years and had to be closed because the cultivation of lac had significantly reduced in that country.

During the journey of more than 60 years in the lac sector, his entrepreneurship could generate employment for the local tribal's. In both of his factories, about 1500 tons of raw sticklac is processed to produce different qualities of value-added grades of seedlac, shellac, bleached lac, lac dye and other by-products, which earns a valuable foreign exchange for the country and provides employment to about 100 tribal workers.

His attitude towards business has been guided by humility and oneness with all. He is constantly in touch with the latest development in lac and with the lac Research Institute now known as the Indian Institute of Natural Resins & Gums, with which he has an old association and is still enthusiastically guiding his R&D laboratory with vital tips on shellac. He is also a member of the advisory committee of Research & development of the Indian Forest Institute of Productivity in Ranchi.

Having come a long way from a simple boy from Punjab to a successful industrialist and exporter, he can look back and attribute his success to devoted hard work, dedication, openness to learning, curiosity, global attitude, gratitude and optimism. He gives honesty great

importance in all his dealings with his suppliers and customers in the overseas markets. He has never become bitter with failure or hardships but remained grateful and gracious about what life has bestowed on him. Today, he keeps himself fit by getting up at 3 a.m. and following a disciplined regimen of Yoga, *Pranayam* & meditation. The case study revealed that introducing technological interventions in the existing scenario makes a difference in resource utilization and productivity.

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