

Value-addition in textiles is needed not only to survive, but to thrive

The most important sector for value addition of textiles is the processing which includes dyeing, printing and finishing of textile products from yarn and fabrics to the finished garments. The proper finishing of textile according to the requirements of the discerning customers worldwide is vitally important aspect of global challenges. What differentiates one textile product from the other is the unique finishing of the yarn and fabrics, according to specific requirements such as vibrant dyeing and printing as well as softer handle and odour control.

Traditionally Pakistan's finishing sector though important was neglected because of the lower expectations on part of the buyers of Pakistani textiles including the domestic as well as the foreign buyers. The requirements of the foreign buyers were simple as Pakistan was supplying low count yarns and grey fabrics which were then finished by the their buyers and sold at a much higher premium. This is no longer the scenario.

The global consumers are able to pick and choose from a multitude of high quality textile products from all over the world. The profits in the basic textile products have shrunk to a fraction of what they used to be before the textile quotas were abolished.

The benefits of value addition were not realised by our textile industry until faced with the harsh reality that exporting grey cloth or yarn and low quality products is not viable anymore. An example of a sector where the industry developed its unique niche and competitive advantage is the home textiles industry which has invested heavily in the wider width fabric processing in the last two decades and have proven to be a formidable foe to other suppliers in this domain.

The Europeans and the Americans are the biggest buyers of Pakistani home textiles and their standards of quality are quite high. Companies like Gul Ahmed, Chenab Group, Crescent Group, Al Abid, Afroze among many other industry leaders are now known for their innovatively processed and finished textiles.

This is the age of intense competition and it requires that the industry quickly responds to the everchanging needs of the market by both supplying the best acceptable quality at the right price and timely delivery while remaining viable through tight production controls and cost savings. It is indeed difficult to have a healthy profit margin in these difficult times but those who have managed to market their innovative products through their own brands most certainly have been able to not only survive but also thrive. Most of such innovations need to take place in the sphere of textile finishing.

As the Italian textile technologist Mr. Sommariva pointed out while presenting the conclusions of an extensive study on Pakistan's finishing sector commissioned by the Italian Trade Commission and ACIMIT, the association of Italian textile machinery manufacturers, there is great room for improvement in Pakistan's textile finishing sector. The study conducted by Mr. Sommariva is very significant and ACIMIT and the Italian Trade Commission are to be commended for this effort.

This is the first time this important sector of Pakistan's textile industry has been systematically analysed by a highly qualified textile technologist from Europe. Pakistan's textile industry can benefit tremendously from the experience of the Italian textile industry which has succeeded to thrive despite the practical shutdown of the traditional textile industry in Western Europe.

Mr. Sommariva's findings highlighted strengths of our industry which include abundance of raw material, sufficient and relatively skilled manpower and the positive and responsive attitude of the textile owners and top management. However, he also listed the weaknesses that urgently need the attention including a lack of efficient production and conservation practices which are now vital for the profitability of the textile industry. The production costs are bound to continue their upward incline and it is absolutely necessary for the industry to be innovative as well as to use the most efficient and latest production technology and processes.

According to Mr. Sommariva this will result in improvement in the quality of textiles and garments according to the current demand of the global consumers. Simultaneous savings in the energy and input costs will make the organisations better poised to survive in the difficult days of intense competition. ♦