

Steelworld

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Editorial Desk

Dear Readers,

Indeed, specials steels sector has come a long way in last decade or so. It has developed not only in terms of volume but also in terms of new grades and specifications, technologies and processes and more importantly, new applications.

If one recalls the situation about two decades ago, there were very few special steels producers, commonly known as 'mini steel plants' which adopted scrap based steel melting and refining process. In most of the cases, electric arc furnace was employed. The applications of such steels were also limited to few end user industries like auto, springs, fasteners, gears etc. It was basically a seller's market till de-control of steel happened in early nineties. Along with many private sector integrated steel plants, the population of special steels producers also increased substantially. The availability of sponge iron changed the input mix and also helped to make cleaner steel as sponge iron naturally contains lesser tramp elements. Along with EAF route, blast furnace route was also used to produce special steels and allowed the producers to cater to higher volume demands from the users. All this gradually started changing the face and the profile of this metallurgical knowledge demanding industry.

When any society grows economically, it starts using more special steels. Thus the special steels sector in India started expanding post liberalization along with the economic growth of the country. Also as we all know, most of the inventions are done due to the pressure put by the customer industry. Indian special steels producers got such a trigger from the fast moving auto industry. If you see, the auto industry, auto models have gone through a sea change in last few years. A great emphasis is given to fuel efficiency, light weight, aerodynamic shape etc. In last few years special steels industry has lost sizable business to other materials such as aluminium, composites etc. and there is a standing danger of losing further. All this has more or less compelled special steels sector to develop new grades, enhance their competitiveness and cater to the ever increasing demands from the auto sector. Also special steels have found applications in other emerging industries such as power, defense, aerospace, nuclear etc. and thus the long term future of this industry looks bright.

Though all this is true, we all know that this industry vertical is today struggling for its survival and hoping for the revival of the economy in due course of time.

D. A. Chandekar

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