

THE OPAL PERSPECTIVE



Banana Leaves to China-ware

From the finest of bone china at one end of the spectrum to earthenware pots and banana leaves at the other, the table-ware industry in the country has always been a well diversified one.

In fact, 'a little too well diversified' as numerous manufacturers of crockery would not hesitate to tell you. In the past, the crockery market was one where brands hardly seemed to matter, cloning was rampant and quality assurance was virtually unheard of. Money power and utility were the chief buying motivators in the upper and lower ends of the customer segment. And the producer had practically no option but to flood the market and hope something caught the buyers' fancy. "After all", they would argue, "in the absence of a clearly defined target audience what else are we to do? To the average consumer a plate is just a plate."

Winds of Change

All this however started to change in the mid-eighties with a new breed of image-conscious, socially active youngsters starting to find their feet. Armed with well endowed bank balances and an upwardly mobile attitude to life they were all too ready to surround themselves with what they considered essential ingredients of their lifestyle: cars, VCRs, colour televisions, washing machines, audio systems - and yes, crockery! But the 'best' was no longer to be limited by what the shopkeeper had to offer, now it was only what the consumer felt would best satisfy his/her perceived need.

La Opala

An established presence in the glass and table-ware industry for over 70 years; the Jhunjhunwala family too had long been a part of this hitherto unfocussed industry. However, unlike most others they yearned for change. In fact, a scion of the Jhunjhunwala family not only felt the need for change but fully believed that he had it in him to find the elusive material which would help him one day "revolutionise the Indian table-ware industry and help restore the beauty of dining."

It was on one of several trips overseas that he practically stumbled on to a material which he recalls as "a beautiful milk-white translucent substance out of which the finest of crockery

had been crafted." The material in question was Opal glass. Developed in France sometime in the 18th century, Opal glass had long been used to craft beautiful pieces of crockery all over Europe. Its 'marblesque' appearance and 'chip 'n' craze' resistant qualities made it a prized possession in any household. And from Europe, Opal glass has spread to the USA, Japan and South Korea, where he found that it constituted one of the most popular forms of crockery.

This, Mr Jhunjhunwala instinctively knew was the material he had been looking for. And a technical collaboration with an overseas manufacturer helped bring the international favourite into India, because by then he was sure that he had a potential winner on his hands.



The Jhunjhunwalas: seeing things differently.

Veni, Vidi, Vici

And a winner it has undoubtedly proved to be. Barring the initial teething problems which are common to almost all industries, the La Opala story since 1987 is perhaps best described as 'Veni, Vidi, Vici'- yes, it came, it saw and it definitely conquered.

La Opala today has come to mean much more to the consumer than the mere distinctive, quality alternative to bone china that it was originally made out to be. Its attractive product design, innovative packaging, attention drawing product displays and ready availability both in mono and multipacked formats around the country has helped it find the pride of place in numerous households, hotels, restaurants and corporate houses.

Indeed in a very short span of time, La Opala has not only succeeded in developing an identity of its own, but has lent a much required fillip and focus to the Indian table-ware industry.

Looking to the Future

With a growth rate of over 45% during '92 - '93 and market projections rather 'conservatively' placed at some 50% over that this year, La Opala is evidently not too satisfied with its current number two status in the crockery segment. A fact which is borne out in the company's ambitious expansion plans and recently doubled capacity. But with the company's booming market within the country and growing interest in the highly lucrative export market, one wonders whether even this increased production capacity would be sufficient to meet the demand for La Opala table-ware in the years to come. A demand which is sure to increase manifold once the company introduces its new premium range of Opal glass crockery and crystal -ware which it plans to do later in the year.