Forge and Foundry: Pillars of Manufacturing Sector

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India is set to become a global manufacturing hub. With a growing population and a growing demand for goods and services, the country has realised that manufacturing is a key sector that can drive economic growth and create jobs for its youth. However, in order to achieve this goal, Indian youth must equip themselves with skills that are relevant to the industry. One such skill is forge and foundry, particularly in industries that use metals as their base material.

Forge and Foundry technology have been instrumental in the industrial revolution and have played a crucial role in shaping the modern world. These technologies have been used in a wide range of industries, from aerospace and automotive to construction and mining. One of the most significant applications of forge technology is in the aerospace industry. Aerospace components must be able to withstand extreme temperatures, pressure, and stress. Forged components are preferred in aerospace applications because they have superior strength and durability compared to other manufacturing processes. Additionally, forged components are lightweight, which is essential for aircraft and space vehicles. Likewise, another critical application of forge technology is in the automotive industry. Forged components are used extensively in high-performance vehicles such as sports cars, as well as in heavy-duty trucks and construction equipment. Forged parts have a higher strength-to-weight ratio, which makes them ideal for use in high-stress applications such as suspension and steering systems.

On the other hand, foundry is used most extensively in the construction industry. Cast iron and steel are used in the construction of buildings, bridges, and other infrastructure. Cast iron is preferred in applications that require strength and durability, while cast steel is used in applications that require high-stress resistance. The mining industry also heavily relies on foundry technology. Mining equipment is often subject to harsh conditions, such as extreme temperatures and abrasive materials. Castings made from high-strength alloys are used in mining equipment to ensure durability and reliability.

Continued on page 46

Continued from page 1

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Forge and Foundry: Two Basic Fields of Metallurgy

Metallurgy is the branch of materials science and engineering that studies the physical and chemical behavior of metallic elements, their compounds, and their alloys. It encompasses a broad range of processes involved in the extraction, purification, and processing of metals, as well as their properties, applications, and behavior under various conditions. Metallurgy is an interdisciplinary field that draws on principles of physics, chemistry, materials science, and engineering to understand and manipulate the behaviour of metals and alloys.

The two most basic and in-demand fields of metallurgical skills are forge and foundry. Both forge and foundry deal with the shaping and manipulation of metals, but they differ in the techniques used and the types of products they produce.

Forge: This is a process of shaping metal by applying heat and pressure to it. This is typically done by heating the metal to a high temperature and then using a hammer, press, or other tool to shape it into the desired form. The products produced by forging include a wide range of tools, equipment, and parts, including hand tools, automotive parts, and industrial equipment. Forging is often used for manufacturing products that require high strength, durability, and precision.

Foundry: This is a process of casting metal into a desired shape by pouring molten metal into a mould. The mould is typically made of sand, clay, or another material that can withstand the high temperatures of the molten metal. Once the metal has cooled and solidified, the mould is removed to reveal the finished product. Foundry products include a wide range of parts and equipment, including engine blocks, pipes, valves, and decorative objects.

Both forge and foundry are important fields of metallurgical skills because they are essential for the production of many everyday products. Without skilled workers in these fields, the manufacturing industry would be unable to produce many of the goods that we rely on everyday.

India's Metal-Based Industries

India has a thriving metal industry which is a significant contributor to the economy, supporting key sectors like aviation, railways, construction etc, and providing employment to millions of people, thus contributing in a big way to the country's GDP.

Some of the major metal-based industries in India are:

Steel Industry: The Indian steel industry is one of the largest in the world, with major players such as Tata Steel, JSW Steel, and Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL). India is also a major exporter of steel, with exports accounting for over 30% of the country's steel production. Aerospace, shipping, construction, automotive businesses rely heavily on this industry.

Aluminium Industry: India is the fifth largest producer of aluminium in the world. Hindalco Industries, Vedanta Resources, and National Aluminium Company (NALCO) are the top companies in this sector. Key industries that rely on aluminum are packaging, electronics, cookware, furniture, electrical, aerospace and automotive components and construction.

Copper Industry: Copper is a versatile metal that has numerous applications across various industries. In India, major companies that produce industrial use copper are Hindustan Copper Limited, Sterlite Copper, and Hindalco Industries. Copper is used in the telecommunications sector, renewable energy industry, healthcare industry apart from construction, automotive, aerospace and electrical.

Zinc Industry: India is the world's second largest producer of zinc, with Hindustan Zinc and Vedanta Resources leading the industry. Zinc is used extensively in the steel industry, healthcare, chemical industry, battery industry, etc.

Lead Industry: India's lead industry has Hindustan Zinc and Hindustan Copper Limited as major producers of the metal and its ores. Industries that rely heavily on zinc include battery, construction, healthcare, fishing, ammunition and manufacturing of various metal-based components across many sectors.

Iron Ore Industry: India has a flourishing iron ore industry with NMDC Limited and Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) providing the ore to industries that manufacture products related to energy, packaging, aerospace, automotive, healthcare, construction and manufacturing of machineries.

Nickel Industry: Nickel is also a key metal used in the manufacturing industry and Vedanta Resources and Hindustan Zinc lead the pack of industries in this sector. Nickel is used extensively in the production of stainless steel, battery, catalysts and pigments in the chemical industry, electronics and aviation components.

Importance of Forge and Foundry in India's Manufacturing Sector

The importance of forge and foundry skills in India's manufacturing industry cannot be overstated. These skills are particularly important for the following reasons.

Bridging the Skill Gap: Despite having a large workforce, India faces a shortage of skilled workers in the metal-based manufacturing industry. This is because most of the youth in the country do not have the necessary technical skills required to work in this sector. By equipping them with forge and foundry skills, India can bridge this gap and create a more skilled workforce that can meet the demands of the industry.

Reducing Import Dependency: Currently, the country imports a significant amount of metals and metal-based products from other countries. By developing these skills, Indian youth can help the country to produce these products domestically, thereby reducing the need for imports and saving valuable foreign exchange.

Employment Creation: As more companies set up their operations in India, there will be a growing demand for skilled workers who can work with metal-based products. This can create new opportunities for the youth in the country, particularly in rural areas where there is a need for job creation.

Supporting SMEs: Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are important part of the Indian economy and are known to create jobs at a faster rate than larger companies. By providing the necessary skills and knowledge to the youth, SMEs can be established in the metal-based manufacturing sector, which can in turn lead to the creation of more jobs and the growth of the economy.

Some Recent Advancements in Forge and Foundry Technology

Forge and Foundry technologies have evolved significantly over the years, driven by the need to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve quality. Here are some technologies that have revolutionised forge and foundry:

Electric Arc Furnaces: These furnaces use electric arcs to melt scrap metal and other materials, which can be processed into high-quality steel. Electric Arc Furnaces have revolutionized the steel industry, as they are faster, more energy-efficient, and have lower emissions than traditional blast furnaces.

Induction Heating: Induction heating uses an electromagnetic field to generate heat in a metal part. This technology is widely used in forging and casting, as it provides fast and efficient heating of the workpiece, resulting in faster processing times and higher-quality products.

3D Printing: Additive manufacturing, also known as 3D printing, has transformed the way prototypes and molds are produced in the forge and foundry industry. By using digital designs, 3D printing allows for faster and more accurate production of complex parts, reducing lead times and costs.

Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Machining: CNC machines use computer programs to control the movement of machine tools. CNC machining has greatly improved the precision and accuracy of metal cutting and shaping, reducing the need for manual labour and increasing the speed of production.

Robotics and Automation: Automation technologies such as robots and conveyor systems have transformed the foundry industry by increasing efficiency and reducing labour costs. Robots can perform tasks such as pouring molten metal, removing finished castings, and cleaning molds, leading to higher productivity and better product quality.

Job Opportunities

Metallurgist: A metallurgist is an expert in the physical and chemical properties of metals and their alloys. They conduct research to develop new materials, improve existing products, and troubleshoot production problems.

Foundry Manager: A foundry manager is responsible for overseeing the operations of a foundry, including the casting of metal parts, the management of the production process, and the maintenance of equipment.

Quality Control Inspector: A quality control inspector is responsible for ensuring that products meet the necessary quality standards. They inspect finished products and raw materials, and use testing equipment to measure product properties.

Patternmaker: A pattern-maker is responsible for creating patterns used in casting metal parts. They may work with wood, plastic, or metal to create intricate patterns that are used to make molds for casting.

Forging Machine Operator: A forging machine operator is responsible for operating machines that forge metal into different shapes. They may work with large presses or hammers to shape metal parts.

Heat Treater: A heat treater is responsible for heat-treating metal parts to improve their strength and durability. They use heat treatment processes such as quenching and tempering to modify the properties of metal parts.

Welder: A welder is responsible for joining metal parts together using welding techniques such as MIG, TIG, or arc welding. They may work on a variety of products, from small components to large structures such as bridges and buildings.

Colleges and Courses

Forge and Foundry technology is an essential field of study for those who want to specialise in the manufacturing of metal components. Here an indicative list of colleges that are considered leaders in imparting the knowledge of metallurgy with focus on forge and foundry technology:

PSG College of Technology, Coimbatore
- Bachelor of Engineering in Metallurgical Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology
- Master of Engineering in Foundry Technology

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur
- Bachelor of Technology in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology
- Master of Technology in Foundry Technology

National Institute of Advanced Manufacturing Technology (NIAMT), Ranchi
- Bachelor of Technology in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology
- Master of Technology in Foundry Technology

Government College of Engineering, Salem
- Bachelor of Engineering in Metallurgical Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology

Dr. Mahalingam College of Engineering and Technology, Pollachi
- Bachelor of Engineering in Metallurgical Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology

Institute of Technology (Banaras Hindu University), Varanasi
- Bachelor of Technology in Metallurgical Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology
- Master of Technology in Foundry Technology

Coimbatore Institute of Technology (CIT), Coimbatore
- Bachelor of Engineering in Metallurgical Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology

Government College of Engineering, Pune
- Bachelor of Engineering in Metallurgical Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology

Anna University, Chennai
- Offers a Bachelor of Engineering in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology
- Also offers a Master of Engineering in Foundry Technology

Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering and Technology, Longowal
- Bachelor of Technology in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering with a specialisation in Foundry Technology
- Master of Technology in Foundry Technology

These colleges offer comprehensive programs in forge and foundry technology and provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the manufacturing industry. They have well equipped labs and research facilities for students.

Top Recruiters

While forge and foundry technology are used in a variety of industries ranging from heavy industries to smaller ones like those manufacturing decorative items, below is an indicative list of industries and businesses that recruit metallurgists specialising in forge and foundry on a large scale. These companies have a strong presence in the Indian Metallurgy Industry and have regular job openings for metallurgists with a focus on forge and foundry. They offer a range of positions in domains such as research and development, production, quality control, process control, and design.
- Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL)
- Tata Steel
- Jindal Steel and Power Limited
- Essar Steel India Limited
- JSW Steel Limited
- Bharat Forge Limited
- Mahindra & Mahindra Limited
- Hindalco Industries Limited
- Vedanta Limited
- Aditya Birla Group

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Views expressed are personal.