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# Use Of Super Plasticizers In Cement Concrete: Present Status And Future Prospects In India

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The addition of certain substances to concrete mixes has been found to result in the reduction of water content for preparing a workable concrete. The materials used to increase the workability are many, like lime, foaming agents, sodium silicate and the surfactants etc. The addition of one such substance, the plasticizer to the concrete results in better workability and higher strength than the control concrete. However, the above materials have effects of a low order. There are some other substances such as glucose, Na-gluconates, Ca and Na-lignosulphonates, salicylic acid, hydroxy acids, carbohydrates, borates, phosphates of Pb, Zn, Cu etc. which are also capable of reducing water requirement to the order of 10-15 percent. Higher dosage of these may result in further reductions but the properties of the concrete may get adversely affected.

To achieve still higher reduction some organic materials have been developed during the last two decades which are called super plasticizers. Such substances are capable of reducing water contents to the order of 30 percent and at the same time result in improvement in the desirable properties of concrete. Although such materials have been known since 1940, they have been used for purposes other than concrete. Their use for concrete began in 1960 in Germany and Japan and later on these substances got introduced in Europe and America in 1970. In the initial stage the salts of polymerised naphthalene formaldehyde sulphonate were introduced; later on other formulations found their way. Now super plasticizers constitute a class of their own and can be classified into four groups on the basis of their chemical composition:

- a) Sulphonated melamine formaldehyde condensate (SMF)
- b) Sulphonated naphthalene formaldehyde condensate (SNF)

- c) Modified lignosulphonates (MLS)
- d) Others including sulphonic esters, carbohydrates esters, salts of organic hydroxycarboxylic acids etc.

A number of advantages in concrete behaviour have been found by the researchers with the use of super plasticizers such as (a) the production of high workability for easy placement of concrete even in complicated situations as well as those bearing complex reinforcements, (b) high strength concrete with less water content but with normal workability, and (c) concrete with normal strength using lesser content of cement etc. The addition of super plasticizer is said to help in avoiding adverse effects on shrinkage, durability etc. in concrete with higher cement contents for high strength by reducing the water cement ratio and allowing slow stiffening.

## Types And Pattern Of Use

A number of studies on the use of different types of super plasticizers in concrete to enhance one or the other property have been reported mostly in the developed countries. SMF and SNF based super plasticizers are cited for use in concrete extensively in the literature.

Rixom and Waddicor(1) and Malhotra and Malanka(2) compared the behaviour of melamine, naphthalene and lignosulphonate super plasticizers and found that all behaved well; 0.6% SMF or MLS produced similar effect as obtained by 0.4% SNF by increasing the slump from 50-260 mm.

The dosage required to obtain a particular slump depends on the initial slump, while the slump value increases with the increase in amount of super plasticizer in concrete(3) but to a limited extent. The slump is generally found to be affected by the type and content of cement used(4). Water reduction in concrete with use of super plasticizer

with all types of cements does occur but the extent of reduction is not the same(5). Excessive dosage of super plasticizer in concrete tends to promote segregation of fresh concrete and subsequently results in an increase in the heterogeneity of hardened concrete with depth(6). However, on keeping the slump, water-cement ratio and fine aggregate percentage constant, super plasticized concrete behaves similar to air entrained concrete with regard to resistance to segregation and homogeneity of hardened concrete. Kishitani et al(7) have shown that a flowing concrete obtained by using SNF based super plasticizer had no adverse effects on the properties of hardened concrete except inducing some increase in bleeding of fresh one, whereas the placeability of concrete was observed to be twice as easy as that of control concrete in addition to improved surface appearance and high strength.

A study by Brooks et al.(8) on strength, elasticity, creep, shrinkage, swelling etc. of water cured and steam cured concrete made with a rapid hardening portland cement with and without SMF super plasticizer yielded very interesting results. The continuously water-cured specimen showed strength and modulus of elasticity in increasing order but in case of exposure to drying at the age of two days, the super plasticized concrete showed higher shrinkage and creep and constant stress strength ratio and at later ages gave lower compressive strength and modulus of elasticity. Steam curing for six hours and then storing in water results in higher initial compressive strength than those stored continuously in water. At higher ages (407 days) the strength of steam cured and then water cured specimens were 7 and 14 percent lower than with continuous water curing for control and admixed concrete respectively.

Tokuda et al.(9) performed studies on rich mix concrete using three super plasticizers namely polycyclic sulphionate, highly polymerised triargin and b-naphthalene acids, to improve drying shrinkage, thermal diffusivity and coefficient of thermal expansion. The choice and suitable dosage of super plasticizer resulted in reduction of unit water content and also resulted in the decrease in cement content which may be of great help in designing massive concrete structures of comparatively rich mix concrete for preventing shrinkage and thermal cracks.

### Flyash Substitution In Cement — Concrete

Although a large number of workers have studied (10-15) the use of flyash in concrete but only a few have tried to obtain high strength concrete with replacement of cement by flyash and incorporation of super plasticizer.

Dransfield (16) described a case history where 20 per cent cementitious material was replaced by pfa (pulverised fuel ash) and use was made of super plasticizers which resulted in water reduction of the order of 20-25 per cent and the strength increase of 140-155 per cent at 28 days and that was maintained to the order of 120-135 per cent after three years. Eriksen and Christensen(17) experimented on increasing the flyash content in concrete by using super plasticizer NSAP and showed that a reduction in cement content from 450-500 kg/m<sup>3</sup> to 270 kg/m<sup>3</sup> is possible by increasing the flyash content to as much as 130 kg/m<sup>3</sup>. It was also found that the combined use of flyash and super plasticizer (cemix) may be exceedingly beneficial from strength point as water cement ratio is reduced, since the heat evolution is reduced in such conditions. Malhotra (18) also showed that the combined use of flyash and super plasticizer allows the manufacture of semi-light weight concrete of 1835-1961 kg/m<sup>3</sup> with strength of the order of 30 and 40 MPa at 1 and 3 days respectively. Nagataki et al. (19) found that incorporation of 45 per cent flyash and super plasticizer in cement concrete gave autoclaved concrete of good strength properties. Mukherjee et al. (20) also established that high strength

concrete can be obtained by using higher percentage of flyash in presence of super plasticizer. Stuart et al. (21) showed that high replacement of cement by flyash in mortar in presence of super plasticizer does not result in an appreciable increase in strength.

### Precast Units

Use of super plasticizers for obtaining good performing concrete units have been advocated by a number of workers. Aigneberger and Kern (22) found that by the use of SMF super plasticizer in high performance concrete for blocks, pipes and extruded concrete products, proper placing and compacting can be achieved at almost any water cement ratio. The water cement ratio is reported to be reduced in this case but workability maintained and the strength increased. Higher dosage of SMF resulted in increasing the workability with reduction in water-cement ratio but gave higher strength concrete. Even with the use of lower quality of cement in the presence of SP the results obtained have been as good as with use of SP without lowering the quality of the products. There is little information on the use of super plasticizer for no slump or zero slump concrete. Pfeifferberger and Ray (23) investigated the use of various dosages of SMF based super plasticizer for producing extra higher strength concrete blocks and found that 3 per cent addition showed best performance. One point for further study was raised i.e. whether a mix of 1:7 cement aggregate could be altered to leaner mixture and would it be possible to lower the curing temperature and machining time etc.

Similarly Mureta et al. (24) showed that it is possible to produce and utilise high strength concrete for prestressed concrete piles, rail piers etc. The production of high strength concrete can make it possible to reduce the cross section of the structural members and these can replace steel structures. In this study various cement contents (450-500 kg/m<sup>3</sup>), two types of super plasticizer (SNF and SMF), two slumps (140 mm and 80 mm) for insitu cast concrete and prestressed concrete respectively were used. Curing was done in autoclave, steam and ordinary temperatures.

A 60 MPa strength concrete was obtained with water-cement ratio of 0.35 per cent. The particle size distribution of cement was found to greatly influence the consistency of high strength concrete with very low water cement ratio.

Ramakrishnan et al.(25) studied the performance characteristics of super plasticized fibre reinforced concrete and found that fibre content may be increased with good bond and improvement in flexural strength, load carrying capacity and ductility.

Collepari and Corradi (26) showed that addition of super plasticizer to concrete mix helps improve the adhesion of concrete and steel and that the bond strength with normal bar increased from 1.2 to 3.5 MPa while for twisted bars increased from 15.0 to 27.5 MPa after 7 days curing.

### Efficacy In Presence Of Other Additives

The addition of certain other constituents alongwith the super plasticizers has been found to influence the efficacy of the super plasticizer on the properties of the resultant concrete. Collepari et al.(27) used SNF super plasticizer in a concrete containing an expansive agent to reduce the drying shrinkage and found that a less expansive agent would be required for shrinkage compensation purposes.

Addition of certain retarders or water reducers in the superplasticized concrete was studied by Ramachandran(28) with respect to slump loss in super plasticized concrete as super plasticized concretes have been observed to show loss in slump. It was found to have been extended, in presence of super plasticizer, to different extent by the addition of various retarders like Ca-lignosulphonate, sucrose, Na gluconate, citric acid, salicylic acid, Na heptonate, Na-boroheptonate etc. Sodium gluconate was found very effective. This acts as a dispersant of cement particles and starts hydration of C<sub>3</sub>S. The slump can also be maintained by additions of a polymer to super plasticized concrete (29). Repeated dosage of super plasticizer extends slump loss time.

Roberts(30) studied the effect of curing time, temperature and cement on the strength of concrete by making use of four different types of cement and different types of super plasticizers, with and without retarders. The use of super plasticizer was found to permit reduction of elevated temperature curing of type III (ASTM) cement. It was found to be governed by the age on which the required strength was needed to be achieved and the type of cement used. In case of the need for lower curing temperature, a water reducer was recommended to be used and a retarder if higher temperature curing was expected. Hampton (31) suggested ways and means to improve fluidity of concrete at higher temperature of 85-90°F (29-32°C) as it goes down within 30 minutes. Modification of naphthalene sulphate condensate was made with some retarders and the slump loss was checked for longer periods.

**Use In Blended And Other Cements**

Use of super plasticizers in blended cements or portland cements incorporating silica fume, blast furnace slag or flyash etc. has been found beneficial for strength development. Bache(32) achieved considerably higher strength, 150 MPa at 100 days in super plasticized (1-4 per cent SP) concrete with silica fume (133 Kg/m<sup>3</sup>) and cement (400 kg/m<sup>3</sup>). In the case of blast furnace slag concrete, upto 65 per cent cement has been replaced by blast furnace slag (33) and it was also found that in this case, 10 per cent less superplasticizer than the reference portland cement concrete was needed for achieving the same consistency. But a change in behaviour was observed in such cases. In case of 25 per cent cement replacement level, the strength of air entrained concrete was more than the corresponding super plasticized air entrained concrete at water cement ratio of 0.38. But at 0.46 and 0.56 w/c levels the strength of the super plasticized air entrained concrete was higher than the corresponding air entrained concrete. This needs further study. Valore et al. (34) have found that superplasticizer's use with flyash cement concrete gives good performance.

**Table - 1: Comparison Of Different Super Plasticizers For 1 CUM 1 : 2 : 4 Concrete (Cement Content = 6.4 Bags)**

Sl. No.	Superplasticizer	Physical State	Density	Shelf life Yrs.	Recommended Dose by wt. of Cement	Quantity of Superplasticizer Required (kg.)	Cost of Superplasticizer Rs./Kg.	Cost of superplasticizer for 1:2:4 concrete in 1 Cum (Rs.)
1.	SIKAMENT	Liquid	1.20	1	0.6 - 3%	1.7 - 5.1	26.50	43 to 135/-
2.	COMPLAST	-do-	1.10	1	0.3 - 0.6%	1.8 - 3.6	12.00	21 to 42/-
3.	Supa plast	-do-	1.17	1	400 - 600 ml	2.2 - 3.1	29.00	64 to 90/-
4.	FOSROC 337	-do-	1.20	1	500 - 700 ml	2.7 - 4.0	32.00	86 to 128/-
5.	FOSROC 430	-do-	1.20	1	500 - 700 ml	2.7 - 4.0	32.00	86 to 128/-
6.	M <sub>c</sub> Plast	-do-	1.04	1	0.15 - 0.3%	0.9 - 1.8	49.00	44 - 86/-
7.	Entrament	-do-	1.30	1	0.5 - 1.0%	2.5 - 5.0	41.00	102.50 to 205/-
8.	CBRI-SP	-do-	1.17	2 Yrs. Old Samples working alright	0.4 - 0.6% (600 - 900 ml)	3.3 - 5.0	5.10	17 - 25.50

Quon and Malhotra (35) used three types of super plasticizers on high alumina cement concrete for slump, strength and degree of hydration studies. At early ages of 10 hours and 2 days a lowering in strength of the super plasticized concrete was observed. At 180 days the strength of the two concretes was comparable, reaching a value of the order of 80 MPa. The addition of SP to high alumina cement does not affect the rate of hydration but at 180 days it was found to have converted 30 per cent less than without SP.

**Use In Aggressive Conditions**

Walter Lukas (36) tried to find the chloride penetration in super plasticized concrete and observed that high quality concrete with a low water cement ratio had a considerably smaller chloride content than other concrete of same consistency. Similarly a superplasticized concrete has a smaller tendency to absorb chloride than untreated concretes of the same water cement ratio. Haltori (37) showed that reinforcement in a SNF type super plasticized concrete does not show any significant corrosion in a chloride solution while normal concrete shows high corrosion.

Mailvagnam et.al (38) studied the sulphate resistance of cement flyash or slag mortars with super plasticizer and found that mixes containing 30 per cent replacement of normal portland cement with flyash or slag in presence of super

plasticizer are comparable to mixes made from sulphate resisting cement in their capacity to resist the sulphate attack. Similar results were reported to have been obtained by Brooks et. al (8) and Colleparidi et. al (27).

**Modifications On Site Applications**

The addition of super plasticizer may result in flowing concrete, when the required water-cement ratio is not altered, or the high strength concrete when the required water-cement ratio is reduced. Flowing concrete mix design is affected by cement type and content, fines content, aggregate properties, maximum placing slump, dosage of super plasticizer and sequence of addition. An important application of such high workability cohesive concrete by use of super plasticizer is in pumped concrete. Some areas where use of super plasticizer has resulted in converting the impossible into successful implementation of concreting ideas are construction of bank vaults (Standard Chartered Bank at Bishopsgate, U.K.), strengthening of bridges and platforms for London Transport Executive where pumpable concrete was produced by use of super plasticizer (39). Other applications include the construction of floor slabs, roof decks, and concrete bay areas. In the base limit of a water treatment plant, closely placed plastic pipes precluded the use of normal vibratory compaction due to unaccessibility for vibratory machine

and possibility of pipe damage, thereby calling for the use of super plasticized concrete. Diaphragm walling, casting heavily reinforced structural elements and precast units of complex shapes such as construction of toroid shaped dome units of Ninian Platform in Scotland are some other such situations. High strength in concrete realised by the use of super plasticizer may be advantageous for production of high strength precast columns in high rise buildings, girders and also the concrete for nuclear plants for prestressed concrete pressure vessels(40).

### Use Of Super Plasticizers In India

Gokhle and Paranjpe (41) advocated indigenous production of super plasticizer for concrete in view of the established beneficial effects reported in the advanced countries. The use of super plasticizer was also envisaged to cut the total cement demand which in a way would supplement the production. Limited trials have indicated that addition of 0.6 per cent and 1.2 per cent of one super plasticizer is able to reduce the water requirement by 15.4 per cent and 23.6 per cent respectively at same workability and the 28 days compressive strength increases by 35% & 51.7% respectively. Chithranjan(42) on the basis of some laboratory investigations concluded that 0.2 per cent super plasticizer addition is optimum for a M 30 concrete and that results in a saving of 30 per cent cement. Aggarwal (43) during the preliminary investigations on the development of a super plasticizer from CNSL found that the slump, compaction factor and the 28 days compressive strength as well as the 3 and 7 days strength increases with the addition of super plasticizer to concrete.

### Scope Of Further Investigations

A perusal of the literature cited above makes it clear that good quality concrete can be produced with a low water cement ratio and least possible cement for required strength so that it has a low slump or workability and requires good compactive efforts to produce a dense concrete. But all these conditions are

difficult to achieve simultaneously. With the incorporation of super plasticizer, the workability and ease of placement etc. are improved, the water requirement is lowered and improvement in strength occurs. The reduction of water cement ratio leads to higher strength concrete and also brings down cement consumption.

However, all the super plasticizers do not behave similarly. The loss of workability or slump with time of concrete mixing is more with melamine based than the naphthalene based super plasticizer. The change of condensation also shows a difference in behaviour even with similar family condensates. The number of cations present on the super plasticizer and the molecular weight also influence the effectiveness.

The behaviour of the concrete mixes obtained from different type of cements is found affected to different degrees in the presence of super plasticizer. Flyash or slag based blended cements may make a good subject of study in this regard. Concrete of high flyash contents may be designed to utilise the waste for making up the proper paste content and thus alleviate the polluting material. For designing concrete of different properties, the strength of the cement used plays an important role and added to it the effect of the super plasticizer employed. Therefore, in view of availability of different types of cement in India a thorough study on the designing of concrete with a view to rationalise and update the relationship, as given in NBC 1970(44), on strength or grade of cement with grade of concrete and addition of pozzolanic or inert micrograin filler for optimum paste contents in concrete is called for. Extensive trials will give a guideline for economic mix design of concrete with high strength cement in presence of super plasticizer. Ultra high strength concrete shall also be designed by proper evaluation of shape, size, grade of coarse and fine aggregate.

The alteration of concrete properties have been attributed to the presence of super plasticizer which is supposed to affect the hydration characteristics of cement compounds. The addition of super plasticizer has been found

to influence the dispersion of the cement particles but their effect is varying with the type of super plasticizer, dosage, mixing method and time etc. The rate of hydration of cement is affected by similar factors as well as others like temperature, type of cement, its fineness, water content etc. However, all these factors have not been fully studied with regard to concrete properties. The presence of super plasticizer has been found to alter the CaO:SiO<sub>2</sub> ratio in C-S-H phase and in one case it was reported (45) to be altered from 1.19 to 1.21 with addition of 2 per cent SMF. The efficacy of super plasticizer in presence of other materials viz retarders, accelerators etc. as well as the effects of surface area, particle size distribution, C<sub>A</sub>, C<sub>S</sub>, SO<sub>3</sub>, alkali contents etc. of cement should be determined. The use of super plasticizer beyond a certain limit may produce undesirable effects which are under evaluation. The change in microstructure and morphology of the hydrate phase in presence of different types of super plasticizers can be studied to explain the compactness, denseness and permeability of super plasticized concrete. Therefore, a comprehensive study on rate of hydration, change of particle size and dispersion of different types of cement in presence of super plasticizer available at present in the country shall be worthwhile.

Super plasticizers have revolutionised concrete technology in the past two decades in advanced countries but have yet to pick up in India. Very little information is available in the country on the use and efficacy of various super plasticizers available with regard to the properties like slump, shrinkage, workability, durability, permeability, behaviour in aggressive environments, corrosion of reinforcement, bonding of old and new concrete etc.

At present super plasticizers manufactured by foreign collaboration namely Fosroc (U.K.), Mc-Bauchemie (Germany), Tamol BASF (Germany) are being marketed in the country in addition to some others based on lignosulphonate. A preliminary information on some of these is given in Table 1. Their behaviour in tropical countries like India is not thorough

evaluated which may be of great help to the construction agencies. The type and grade, particularly of the fine aggregate changes from place to place which has a considerable effect on the design method and the properties of mortars and concrete. Therefore, a study of the above aspects vis-a-vis the use of different type of Indian super plasticizers may be of great utility.

Another important field of application may be for ferrocement components where 95 per cent of matrix consisting of cement, aggregates, mixing water etc. has a pronounced effect on the behaviour of the final product (46). A super plasticizer is expected to result in reduction of water, increase in strength, reduction in permeability, impart waterproofing and increased durability and reduced reaction between the matrix and galvanised reinforcement. The use of water reducing admixtures shall permit the use of more sand for same design strength which also results in fewer creep strains and less surface cracking.

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