PATENT TRENDS

Dear Readers,

At the SIAM annual convention in September this year, Takeshi Uchiyamada, Chairman of Toyota Motor Corporation offered interesting insights into the development of the world's first mass-produced hybrid vehicle, the Prius. During the development stages of the first-gen Prius, Toyota had filed for 530 patents, which subsequently grew to over 2,000 systems and components on the Prius itself.

In recent years, Tesla Motors has been leading the patent drive in electromobility. Then, there are the traditional German, American, French and Japanese manufacturers and suppliers, who continue to introduce cutting-edge innovations. And let's not forget the rapid number of innovations Hyundai Motor Company are patenting.

A Thomson Reuters analysis released in early 2015 reported that patents on new propulsion technology jumped from under 2,000 patents filed in 2009 to nearly 12,000 by July 2014, indicating that propulsion technologies continue to drive most of the innovations in the automotive world. Other areas that have seen a surge in patents include batteries, infotainment, navigation, telematics, digital data processing, autonomous driving and safety.

Interestingly, many of these patents are being filed by technology giants such as Samsung, Google, Microsoft and Apple – companies that are fast changing the way the world viewed cars. As per data released by SmartUp Legal, Samsung has filed for 510 automobile-related patents in the past decade, followed by Google with 308, Microsoft with 222, and Apple with 83. But these are very small numbers compared to the traditional automotive players.

Thomson Reuters also reported that Toyota was assigned over 7,000 patent in the five year period. Japan, incidentally, has four other companies in the top 10 list, the other being Honda, Denso, Seiko Epson and Mitsubishi, making it the most for any country. South Korean Hyundai has seen the steepest climb to the top 10, from under 500 in 2010 to the third position in 2014. The company reportedly filed for over 1,200 patents in 2013 alone.

It is heartening to note that all the key players in the Indian automotive industry are actively filing patent applications, but the numbers are still very small. The situation calls for more focus and investments on research, engineering, and technology development.

DEEPANGSHU DEV SARMAH
Editor-in-Chief
New Delhi, November 2015

@deepangshu