Chapter Four : Hot Working of Metal

4.1. Metal Forming

Metal forming is also known as mechanical working of metals. Metal forming operations are frequently desirable either to produce a new shape or to improve the properties of the metal. Shaping in the solid state may be divided into non-cutting shaping such as forging, rolling, pressing, etc., and cutting shaping such as the machining operations performed on various machine tools. Non-cutting or non machining shaping processes are referred to as mechanical working processes. It means an intentional and permanent deformation of metals plastically beyond the elastic range of the material. The main objectives of metal working processes are to provide the desired shape and size, under the action of externally applied forces in metals. Such processes are used to achieve optimum mechanical properties in the metal and reduce any internal voids or cavities present and thus make the metal dense.

Metals are commonly worked by plastic deformation because of the beneficial effect that is imparted to the mechanical properties by it. The necessary deformation in a metal can be achieved by application of mechanical force only or by heating the metal and then applying a small force. The impurities present in the metal are thus get elongated with the grains and in the process get broken and dispersed through out the metal. This also decreases the harmful effect of the impurities and improves the mechanical strength. This plastic deformation of a metal takes place when the stress caused in the metal, due to the applied forces reaches the yield point.

Plasticity is the ability of material to undergo some degree of permanent deformation without rupture or failure. Plastic deformation will take place only after the elastic range has been exceeded. Such property of material is important in forming, shaping, extruding and many other hot and cold working processes. Materials such as clay, lead, etc. are plastic at room temperature and steel is plastic at forging temperature. This property generally increases with increase in temperature.

Ductility is the property of a material enabling it to be drawn into wire with the application of tensile force. A ductile material must be both strong and plastic. The ductility is usually measured by the terms percentage elongation and percent reduction in area often used as empirical measures of ductility. The ductile material commonly used in engineering practice in order of diminishing ductility are mild steel, copper, aluminium, nickel, zinc, tin and lead.

Malleability is the ability of the material to be flattened into thin sheets without cracking by hot or cold working. A malleable material should be plastic but it is not essential to be so strong. The malleable materials commonly used in engineering practice in order of diminishing malleability are lead, soft steel, wrought iron, copper and aluminium. Aluminium, copper, tin, lead, steel, etc. are recognized as highly malleable metals.

4.2. Recrystalisation

During the process of plastic deformation in metal forming, the plastic flow of the metal takes place and the shapes of the grains are changed. If the plastic deformation is carried out at higher temperatures, new grains start growing at the location of internal stresses caused in the metal. If the temperature is sufficiently high, the growth of new grains is accelerated and continuous till the metal comprises fully of only the new grains. This process of formation of new grains is known as recrystallisation and is said to be complete when the metal structure consists of entirely new grains. That temperature at which recrystalisation is completed is known as the recrystallisation temperature of the metal. It is this point, which draws the line of difference between cold working and hot working processes. Mechanical working of a metal below its recrystalisation temperature is called as cold working and that accomplished above this temperature but below the melting or burning point is known as hot working.

4.3. Hot Working

Mechanical working processes which are done above recrystallisation temperature of the metal are know as hot working processes. Some metals, such as lead and tin, have a low recrystallisation temperature and can be hot-worked even at room temperature, but most commercial metals require some heating. However, this temperature should not be too high to reach the solidus temperature; otherwise the metal will burn and become unsuitable for use. In hot working, the temperature of completion of metal working is important since any extra heat left after working aid in grain growth. This increase in size of the grains occurs by a process of coalescence of adjoining grains and is a function of time and temperature. Grain growth results in poor mechanical properties. If the hot working is completed just above the recrystallisation temperature then the resultant grain size would be fine. Thus for any hot working process the metal should be heated to such a temperature below its solidus temperature, that after completion of the hot working its temperature will remain a little higher than and as close as possible to its rccrystalisation temperature.

4.4. Effect of Hot Working on Mechanical Properties of Metals

1. This process is generally performed on a metal held at such a temperature that the metal does not work-harden. A few metals e.g., Pb and Sn (since they possess low crystallization temperature) can be hot worked at room temperature.
2. Raising the metal temperature lowers the stresses required to produce deformations and increases the possible amount of deformation before excessive work hardening takes place.
3. Hot working is preferred where large deformations have to be performed that do not have the primary purpose of causing work hardening.
4. Hot working produces the same net results on a metal as cold working and annealing. It does not strain harden the metal.
5. In hot working processes, compositional irregularities are ironed out and non-metallic impurities are broken up into small, relatively harmless fragments, which are uniformly dispersed throughout the metal instead of being concentrated in large stress-raising metal working masses.

6. Hot working such as rolling process refines grain structure. The coarse columnar dendrites of cast metal are refined to smaller equiaxed grains with corresponding improvement in mechanical properties of the component.
7. Surface finish of hot worked metal is not nearly as good as with cold working, because of oxidation and scaling.
8. One has to be very careful as regards the temperatures at which to start hot work and at which to stop because this affects the properties to be introduced in the hot worked metal.
9. Too high a temperature may cause phase change and overheat the steel whereas too low temperature may result in excessive work hardening.
10. Defects in the metal such as blowholes, internal porosity and cracks get removed or welded up during hot working.
11. During hot working, self-annealing occurs and recrystallization takes place immediately following plastic deformation. This self-annealing action prevents hardening and loss of ductility.

4.5. Merits of Hot Working

1. As the material is above the recrystallisation temperature, any amount of working can be imparted since there is no strain hardening taking place.
2. At a high temperature, the material would have higher amount of ductility and therefore there is no limit on the amount of hot working that can be done on a material. Even brittle materials can be hot worked.
3. In hot working process, the grain structure of the metal is refined and thus mechanical properties improved.
4. Porosity of the metal is considerably minimized.
5. If process is properly carried out, hot work does not affect tensile strength, hardness, corrosion resistance, etc.
6. Since the shear stress gets reduced at higher temperatures, this process requires much less force to achieve the necessary deformation.
7. It is possible to continuously reform the grains in metal working and if the temperature and rate of working are properly controlled, a very favorable grain size could be achieved giving rise to better mechanical properties.
8. Larger deformation can be accomplished more rapidly as the metal is in plastic state.
9. No residual stresses are introduced in the metal due to hot working.
10. Concentrated impurities, if any in the metal are disintegrated and distributed throughout the metal.
11. Mechanical properties, especially elongation, reduction of area and izod values are improved, but fibre and directional properties are produced.

12. Hot work promotes uniformity of material by facilitating diffusion of alloy constituents and breaks up brittle films of hard constituents or impurity namely cementite in steel.

4.6. Demerits of Hot Working

1. Due to high temperature in hot working, rapid oxidation or scale formation and surface de-carburization take place on the metal surface leading to poor surface finish and loss of metal.
2. On account of the loss of carbon from the surface of the steel piece being worked the surface layer loses its strength. This is a major disadvantage when the part is put to service.
3. The weakening of the surface layer may give rise to a fatigue crack which may ultimately result in fatigue failure of the component.
4. Some metals cannot be hot worked because of their brittleness at high temperatures.
5. Because of the thermal expansion of metals, the dimensional accuracy in hot working is difficult to achieve.
6. The process involves excessive expenditure on account of high cost of tooling. This however is compensated by the high production rate and better quality of components.
7. Handling and maintaining of hot working setups is difficult and troublesome.

4.7. Classification of Hot Working Processes

The classification of hot working processes is given as under.

1. Hot rolling
2. Hot forging
3. Hot extrusion
4. Hot drawing
5. Hot spinning
6. Hot piercing or seamless tubing
7. Tube Forming and
8. Hot forming of welded pipes