

EXPERT INTERVIEW:

PHILANTHROPY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Introduction:

Entrepreneurship and philanthropy come together to bring about meaningful change by combining creativity and compassion. Motivated by a desire to address societal issues, entrepreneurs use their business acumen to promote charitable causes and create sustainable solutions that strengthen communities. In addition to meet urgent needs, the collaboration promotes long-term growth and leaves a positive legacy that goes beyond conventional charity models, inspiring others to make significant contributions to the advancement of humanity.

Profile of the Experts:

Shanta Baliarsingh, a former faculty in Behavioral Sciences and Management, an APA Associate, is the founder of WOOD APPLE School and Chocolaca. She was a former member of the Child Welfare Committee, Bhubaneswar. She also serves as an Empanelled Psychologist at the Juvenile Justice Board, Khordha,

Rita Baliarsingh, a certified chocolatier, is the co-founder WOOD APPLE School, and a trustee of Shree Sai Niketan. She holds qualifications from Stanford and Utkal University. She also teaches at Unacademy.

Since 2016, they have dedicated themselves to work with children with special needs through the establishment of Wood Apple School. Their journey began with a philanthropic intent to nurture the children with special needs especially the ones with autism and Down's Syndrome. While nurturing these children through their childhood to adolescence, the philanthropists were perturbed with the idea of making these young person's self-dependent and self-reliant. Vocational training was always an option. However, getting them placed was a great challenge. Inclusive environment in organizations is still not very popular. Thus, WOOD APPLE School gave birth to the idea of a venture where these special persons can find their own prosperity. In 2021, they launched Chocolaca, a venture to fund the school, and provide vocational training to the special persons.

Chocolaca's success story is a narrative of immense dedication of two sisters Rita and Shanta Baliarsingh, who turned traditional Odia ingredients into exquisite chocolates. Founded with the capital drawn from the venturists' savings, Chokolaca is Odisha's first bean-to-bar and millet chocolate manufacturer, prioritizing organic ingredients without additives. Their efforts have earned recognition, including the MSME Excellence Award, Odisha Millet Innovation

Challenge Award, Audience Choice Award, Best Women Entrepreneur Award, Swayamsidha Samman, and Woman Leadership Award.

The following interview unfurls the determination of two philanthropic women who are in the spree to win over the business space for making the corporate world more inclusive and sustainable.

Prof. Ananya: Madam could you please share your background? How did you come up with the idea of starting Chocolaca? What Inspired you to start your own business?

Experts: So basically, we both are educationalist. We started our school in 2016, which is for the special needs. The name of the school is Wood Apple. The school provides congenial atmosphere to specially challenged children. Then we started conducting some CSR at that time who conduct annual events. Then gradually we shifted to Chocolaca because we need some funding for the sustainability of the school. So earlier, it was just like any other chocolates, making chocolates from compounds. Then in 2009, we both went out and we got the training of how to make chocolates from cocoa beans.

Prof. Kali Prasad: Madam please tell us about your products and process?

Experts: We are making healthy chocolates. We are making chocolates from cocoa beans, cocoa butter. No refined sugar has been added to our chocolates. Then we blend

chocolates with millets and other few spices like turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, all these things with our chocolates. Whatever is available in Odisha's agricultural land, we blend chocolate, and coffee as well. And last year just we have established a millet-based bakery. We are just converting every junk food to millet-based things. Like vada pav, pizza, puffs, everything millet. From the healthy point of view, this is safe to take a forward step. Healthy and tasty both. Healthy and tasty, the most vegetarian one can have.

Prof. Ananya: Madam how do you market your products, or any marketing strategy?

Experts: Earlier we are just putting stalls in every exhibition. Then we get with corporate people and made gift bags. The companies were JSW and Infa and Medan, Nalco also. Now we were doing mainly Diwali and New Year gifts as well. We send festive packages like Rakhi, Valentine's Day. And online, we have not tapped it I feel, like we are having our own website, chocolaca.in We are present on Amazon, Flipkart, Bioscale, India Mart, Just Dyer.

Prof. Kali Prasad: Madam why do we have very few women entrepreneurs as compared to men entrepreneurs?

Experts: So there is a gender concept that comes to our mind. Few are having, but like the

government as well as the corporate, everyone is giving importance to women primarily. And another thing there is many facilities available for women entrepreneurs like fundings and governmental help.

Prof. Ananya: Madam what challenges do women entrepreneurs face that men may not?

Experts: It's very obvious that the challenges come from home itself. Managing house and then devoting towards business, is not so easy. So it is really difficult around the house to manage both the house and attend all the related seminars as well as looking after all this manufacturing, marketing and everything. So yeah, it is challenging. So we are utilizing it evidently. Then other part is that whether you are secured or not secured properly in the society. So it may be beneficial for us. We two are working together in every situation. But no one is there to recognise our activities. That's the biggest struggle.

Prof. Kali Prasad: Madam what are the success factors of women entrepreneurship?

Experts: Talking about ourselves first, As I said, the government and the public from every sector, we are getting support as women entrepreneurs. That's the best part of it. Like, Odisha is progressing. Odisha is progressing in women entrepreneurship. Like we have obtained the PMFMS scheme, where we availed 35% subsidy. We have tied ourselves

with IRCTC and E-catering services. And now we are taking help of the incubation of IIT Bhubaneswar. Because we are less people, we will start with Jackfruit Seeds. So, it's in the pre-inhibition stage now. Since you both are devoted towards enterprises. Hence, we women need to find out our own path.

Prof. Ananya: Madam both of you are devoted to this enterprise. How do you maintain Work-life balance?

Experts: We are women and we have our personal and professional life. But, if we are earning then we can hire someone at least to help in the household chores. That should be our contribution for a healthy maintenance. Time management should be the first priority. You don't need to supervise everything, but you can just do a phone call. Like, I am watching the outlet from my phone always. You see, the technical concepts or technology, they are very important.

Prof. Kali Prasad: Madam what role do you think mentorship plays in the success of women entrepreneurs?

Experts: Simple word is patience, the need to give. Because you know, you are struggling so much and you are paying to 15 or 16 employees, but you are not earning for yourself. Hence, patience is our beneficial idea.

Prof. Ananya: Madam what are your future plans?

Experts: So financially we want to grow stronger. Another project is going to be finalized where we are going to work for around 24 levels of Rayagada. I will show you a few things in the outlet so that you can see a little bit of the explanation. We are going to a very small unit also over there. There are only small units over here as well. So they will work with us. So we need to reach 100 women. For now this is our future plan.

Prof. Kali Prasad: Madam you both have won many awards. Kindly tell about your moment of pride.

Experts:

- Shri Ram College of Commerce [1st Edition of Startup Conclave 2024] —Audience Choice Awards
- MSME Excellence Award by WORLD TRADE CENTER
- 2nd Runner up in Odisha Millet Innovation Challenges
- SWAYAMMSIDDHA SANMAN
- OASME —Best Women Entrepreneurs

Prof. Ananya: Madam what advice would you give to other women who are aspiring entrepreneurs?

Experts: —Never lose hope and patience always keep trying until you achieve

Prof. Ananya & Prof. Kali Prasad:

Thank you Madam for sharing your Experience and Insights !

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