

BREAKING THE MARGINS

THE TALES OF THE UNSUNG HEROES

Abdus Samad dropped out during his post-secondary studies due to poor finances of the family and lack of opportunities. He developed an entrepreneurial zeal while assisting his father with his work. He now heads enterprises, including a large-scale seed centre and rice mills. He works for the development of backward communities and facilitates their well-being through providing employment and income generating opportunities. He focuses on providing them proper educational infrastructure and establishments.



Sheikh Abdus Samad: A Young Entrepreneur

At the very onset of the interview, Samad denounces the lack of educational facilities and the improvised educational environment which led to his early school dropout. He jovially recalls the younger days of his life when he described himself as a notorious child but had a keen interest in business.

During his school days we would help his father in his business whenever he needed a helping hand. He recollects that during his Madhyamik days he would visit, in his free time, his father's shop for any assistance.

He could offer pertaining to the business. He recalls his work in the household cowshed where he not only looked after the cow's well-being, milking the cow, but also collected the dung paste to be used as an organic fuel in the household cooking.

The grief of his father's demise surrounds his anguish for an incomplete educational qualification coupled with the financial constraints, since his father was the sole breadwinner of the family.

After the failure to achieve rudimentary educational qualifications, he joined his father's grocery shop on a permanent basis.

Thus, at the age of sixteen, he dropped the school bag and lifted the bag of family responsibilities, stepping into the shoes of his father, who is survived by his wife, a daughter and two sons. The family struggled through the tides of financial crises but Samad was an entrepreneur in the making.

During these tumultuous times of his life, he received great support from his neighbours, which he attributes as a gift because of them following a righteous and honest path of life.

He used to manage his father's grocery store, and during which he came across the entrepreneurship programme sponsored by NABARD to which he feels indebted for having taught him the various avenues of business by various experts.

After the training sessions, Samad recalls noticing a market potential for jute bags for the agriculture produce of the region. Coming to the real life arena of business and its demands in 2001, his idea generated for the setting up of a jute bag unit which he projected was of significant demand in the market place.

For his aspirations to take shape, the need for financial support was the most arduous hurdle of all. Thus, he approached various cooperative banks with his business plan. To his good luck, he gained a sum of 5 to 6 lakh rupees that concretized his idea into a market-acceptable product. In the beginning the production was only a thousand or fifteen hundred, and with the numbers gradually escalating, the market coverage of his product saw a boost.

To diversify his business and to cater to the other market demands he conceptualized another business in a period of one and a half years. It was now the establishment of a seed firm, integrating his knowledge and market driven demands.

He recalls this to be a great step towards his flourishing employment generation motivated approach. He was moved by the plight of farmers not being able to get quality seeds and felt the urge to do something to change this situation, establishing three seed farms.

With this he hopes to boost the local farmers' earning to be self-sufficient and income generating units of his village and district as a whole.

Mr Samad now possesses two brands of seeds, namely, Kaveri and Kalyani. Mr Samad expresses that the Research and Development of these firms has always been cutting-edge in delivering products which are best suited to the farmer's requirements considering all the biotic and abiotic conditions and also keeping in mind and meeting the

trade requirement of crop quality, thereby earning us respect among farmers and traders. A new era unfolded subsequently when the family decided to forward the burning ambition of making the business big. Though the business was small, efforts were taken to lay the necessary foundation to grow the business to become big. From producing seeds in their own farm, the business moved to leasing lands from other farmers and to produce seeds.

A business model that Mr Samad initially gave shape to cater to the nearby villages and district now saw a greater leap. Two processing plants were opened in Rasulpur in West Bengal. The business expanded beyond the borders of West Bengal for the first time to Jharkhand followed by Bihar. The recent addition to the marketing kitty is the State of Karnataka where their potato seeds are favored by farmers. There was no looking back as states like Assam and Orissa followed. Sowing the seeds for a better and healthy farming practice is his business vision for this unit.

The Research and Development and infrastructural capability has enabled the company to be a leader and emerge as the competitive advantage in the agro-business domain, selling more than, 9000 tons of paddy with 40 varieties, 100 MT of oil seeds, 1000 MT potato seed and 500 MT wheat seed. The production capacity per day shoots up to 125 MT and warehouse capacity to 75000 sqft over the years.

Mr Samad quotes 'If we don't change, we don't grow and if we don't grow, we don't live!'

With a greater zeal to cater to employment generation stance of his business units and to serve the market demands judiciously, he furthered his business endeavors to set-up a Rice Mill.

His thirst for knowledge and incapability to pursue the same through the formal education system drove him to establish D. EL. ED College and a B.Ed college which he foresees as a change-making agent in the education domain which will drive the development of his district. He states 'The plight of minority community mainly comes from the dim light of education.'

He goes on to reason for the dismal economic situation of our country today, and states that the economically deprived section of the society need basic education for betterment of their life and that of the society as a whole. He emphasizes towards working on that aspect to develop educational infrastructure for the human resource assets of India. With a ray of hope towards catering to the educational needs of the backward communities at large, Mr Samad says 'I will be grateful if I could contribute towards taking our country ahead.'

Mr Samad is an ardent philanthropist and has keenly worked towards the development of the backward communities, facilitating their well-being through employment and income generating opportunities and proper educational infrastructural establishments. He, along with his close associates, runs a charitable educational institution, residential in nature, for the children of the daily wage earners, marginalized people as well as for orphans.

The fee structure varies from being free of cost to a nominal amount depending on the existence of the child's parents and an assessment of their financial status. He is also seen helping other minority Development oriented educational institutions like Siddique-E-Akbar Mission situated at Kantadighi

Village of Bankura. Mr. Samad supports the poor minority students of the adjacent areas with free education with zero cost. Moving towards another aspect of development, he facilitates in conducting Blood Donation Camps on a regular basis as well as providing financial assistance to the people suffering life-threatening complex diseases and also bears the cost of medicine. The village minority culture faces a great social pressure pertaining to the hefty cost of the girl child marriages. In this aspect as well he extends a helping hand facilitating the marriage ceremony of orphan girls and poor widows' daughters.

When asked about his future pathways towards his business and philanthropic endeavors, he voices the initiatives pertaining to modern storage facility for seeds, cold storage for potato seeds with latest technology, modern schooling facility from primary to secondary education at low prices for the rural poor, followed by a college catering the bachelor level educational facilities, for the science, commerce and arts streams and nursing college empowering the rural younger generations, especially the girl child.

His prominence gained light during the National Seminar on Skill Development organized by the American India Foundation in New Delhi in collaboration with National Skill Development Corporation and the bankers with the theme 'Skilling India's youth: Successes, lessons and the way forward' on the 3rd of August, 2011. In this seminar our former President Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam brought to the notice of the participants as well as the nation of a book named, Creating Job Creators: 101 Representative Success Stories of I Create Entrepreneurs. Dr.Kalam states that while reading this book, he came across the story of a young man, Samad from Rasulpur village of West Bengal. Our former President takes note

Mr Samad's difficult past of deprivation and how he reached such great pinnacles of life through Skill Development initiatives which not only empowered him to become an entrepreneur but also to come forward as a job creator in a job-deficit society.

2011 marked his business turnover touching rupees ten crores with two hundred families directly or indirectly benefitting in terms of the means of livelihood from his enterprise. His case highlights two unique aspects which would be critical for development of all sections of the society. First, the necessities to create job generators like Samad who could generate multiple employment opportunities for the deprived sections, and second, entrepreneurship incubation institutions that need to be developed at a pan-India level as well as across the developing world.

'Breaking the Margin: Tales of the Unsung Heroes', an initiative of West Bengal Minorities' Development and Finance Corporation(WBMDFC) , presents examples of inspirations, hopes, and accomplishments. We are pleased to present the the stories of individuals drawn from the minority communities, who fought all kinds of odds and broke the barriers of stereotype. They triumphed over deeply entrenched poverty to set the examples for emulations. The first aim of the series is to capture the journey of different individuals, what were the enabler and triggering points that moved these heroes to embark upon the path travelled by a few people. The second principle guiding our this effort is to tell the stories of these unsung heroes to motivate others, especially those who come from similar backgrounds. One of the common threads running across every profile is the story of grit and determination.

Sustain the stories: Nominate your own unsung hero

There are many such stories of unsung heroes that remain unheard, this is the first attempt of this kind, we urge people to share such stories for another edition of this series. Your little effort can enlighten a large audience of an extraordinary achievers, and encourage a thousand of aspirants to emulate the stories who have cross the hurdles.

For Details visit <http://www.wbmdfc.org/icons>

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