

Sustainable Entrepreneurship: The Case of Mitticool Private Limited

Kaberi Bhattacharyya

Department of Commerce, Netaji Nagar College, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author's Email: kaberi.bhattacharyya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The unabated exploration and exploitation of natural resources to feed unbridled human consumption hand in hand with the progress of civilization has rendered the earth and its environment quite unlivable for its occupants. For this, the business houses whose procurement and production processes have been at the root of this cycle of degradation need to 'humanize' their operations enough, to ensure sustainability. While many glowing examples of new-age entrepreneurs going back to nature to respond to the sustainability agenda exist, the case of Mitticool Private Limited has been highlighted in this paper.

Keywords: *Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Case Study*

Introduction

The compromised natural conditions of today are testing human resilience to combat pollution in drinkable water, breathable air, pesticide contamination in food, and others in every hour of survival, with not so satisfactory results. The pivot in the damaging cycle has been undeniably the business organizations that, over time, through their selfish and completely thoughtless procurement of raw materials from nature or their merciless production processes, have caused sweeping and often irreversible damage to planet Earth. Progressively, the living conditions for humans have deteriorated, and uncountable species of flora and fauna have ceased to exist or become extinct because they found it impossible to survive or propagate in the transformed conditions.

If sustainability is understood as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, then a paradigm shift in the procurement and production processes of businesses and in the consumption process in general, is imperative. The crux of the matter is that the entity that has caused the most damage, namely the business organizations, must ensure maximum damage control and, preferably, renewal.

Literature Review

'Green Entrepreneurship', the concept introduced by Berle in 1993, is hailed as the linkage between innovation and sustainability that can uphold the dimensions of

sustainability while meeting the needs of almost 8 billion consumers worldwide. The term 'Green Entrepreneurship' signifying sustainability agenda in entrepreneurial endeavor has been differently addressed viz 'environmental entrepreneurship' (Keogh & Polonsky, 1998), 'ecoentrepreneurship' (Schaper, 2002), and 'ecopreneurship' (Schaper, 2016).

Demuth (2014) asserts that business houses over time have damaged the planet's environment to a frightening level, and the only imperative forward is sustainable business practices. UNCTAD (2017) illustrates through myriad business cases how, over time, this concept of sustainable entrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals complemented each other through real life business actions, providing hope for negotiating future environmental challenges. Dale (2019) reiterates the same idea that sustainable entrepreneurship is the revolutionary tool that can combat the growing challenges in society, the economy, and the environment.

Kulkarni *et al.*, (2022) point out that to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, funding is crucially required, especially for SDG 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, and 15. Hence, the assessment of such funding requirements is irrevocably linked to their attainment. The 2015 estimates (when the SDGs were adopted) have been substantially surpassed and require careful reassessment as a serious pursuit for their success.

The case of mitticool private limited

While Green Entrepreneurship is still far from full-fledged global adoption, every single entrepreneurial effort in that direction undoubtedly strengthens the sustainability agenda of the planet. Here in this paper is a humble attempt at exploration of one such entrepreneurship Mitticool Private Limited is being studied in the following way:

Mitticool private limited

Mitticool Private Limited is in the business of making clay kitchenware. Mansukhbhai Prajapati, the man behind the business, originally hailed from a modest potter's background in Gujarat. Lack of academic success and financial constraints drove him to work in a tea stall and later at a clay tile factory. It was at this point that he started experimenting with clay to model Indian kitchenware for regular use. This was at the fag-end of the 1980s, when clay utensils had quite vanished from the Indian kitchen, and Mr. Prajapati's father, a traditional potter and out of work himself, discouraged his son from going seriously into their fast disappearing family trade of pottery.

However, in 1988, Mr. Prajapati created his first functional clay product - a pan - using a tile press instead of a traditional potter's wheel. Despite disapproval from well-wishers, the entrepreneur in him dove headlong into the business, trusting his instincts and day, a loan from a local moneylender to arrange for the seed capital. Modifying the tile press to make a pan, he manufactured 3500 - 4000 pieces a day, whereas the potters using their wheels could only manage to do about 100 of them, a day. Next on the line was an

earthen water purifier with ceramic candles. Designed to meet the local needs, these unique products, which were also extremely economical, became progressively popular in the market (Austa, 2019).

Gradually, Mr. Prajapati's passion for doing business, his creativity, and his innovation introduced a variety of clay products, including pressure cookers, under the Mitticool banner. This journey, continued with grit and determination, faced challenges at every turn. The Gujarat earthquake dealt a crippling blow to his business by destroying a substantial quantity of stock. A month after the disaster, Sandesh, a Gujarati daily, carried photographs of the broken clay water filter, labelling it 'the poor man's broken fridge'. Refrigerator, that too of clay had escaped even Mr. Prajapati's innovation till then. But rising to the true entrepreneurial spirit, Mr. Prajapati sensed opportunity in the crisis. For three years, he tested soils and refrigerator designs along with his family members, took a loan of Rs 19 lakh, putting up his ancestral home as collateral, and finally, in 2005, launched the Mitticool refrigerator. Made from clay, this unique product is 26 inches long, 15 inches wide, and 12 inches deep, carrying two chambers, and does not require electricity to run. It utilizes the fundamental scientific principle that evaporation causes cooling for its working. When the roof, bottom, and walls of this supremely innovative refrigerator are filled with water, its gradual evaporation keeps the contents fresh (Austa, 2019).

In 2006, angel investor Anil K Gupta, professor at IIM Ahmedabad and vice-chairman of the National Innovation Foundation, became interested in the Mitticool refrigerator and funded Mr. Prajapati with Rs 180,000 for 100 such refrigerators which helped pay debts and motivated the entrepreneur never to look back. This flagship product of Mitticool, extremely utilitarian and eminently affordable by those who can't afford a regular refrigerator, has been priced in the range of Rs 3000. The Mitticool refrigerator has put the business on the world map, with the range of products, especially the refrigerator travelling to customers in Dubai and Africa. The Mitticool refrigerator had earned appreciation from the People's President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in "4 th National Award Function, Delhi in 2007 who hailed Mr. Prajapati as a true scientist. Within the country, kitchenware is popular in the southern states. The rising demand for Mitticool products has led to the establishment of a series of factories equipped with assembly lines. The innovator in Mr. Prajapati has designed machines to turn clay into his assorted product range in very little time (Sharma, 2012).

Apart from earning numerous laurels for itself (mitticool.com/our-awards) the business of Mitticool has financially stabilized and earning handsome profits for itself. At the end of 2020-2021 financial year, Net worth of the company has increased by 70.60 % EBITDA of the company has risen by 114.70 % and total assets of the company has escalated 24.99 % (www.tofler.in/mitticool-private-limited/company).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be stated that, since earth is 3 parts water and 1 part land, the sustainability of clay is unmatched. Yet it takes a path-breaking entrepreneur and visionary like Mansukhbhai Prajapati to recognize its versatility and resuscitate it to its rightful place in the civilization's kitchen. In the process, the age-old tradition of clay pottery making in India has been snatched from death's door to light the hearth in numerous artisan and potter's homes.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the kind opportunity of writing this paper for the esteemed publication in collaboration with Lincoln University College, Malaysia, given to her by Netaji Nagar College and the constant encouragement and support received from the honourable Principal, Dr. Amrita Dutta. Also, the author gratefully acknowledges the academic contributions of the research articles cited in the present paper as its building blocks.

References

- Austa, S. (5th September 2019). *From a Roadside Teastall to the Mitticool Success Story: How Mansukh Lal Prajapati did it All*. <https://yourstory.com/2015/04/manshuk-lal-prajapati-mitticool/amp>
- Berle, G. (1993). *The Green Entrepreneur: Business Opportunities that can Save the Earth Make you Money*. United States.
- Dale, G. (2019). Climate, communism and the age of affluence. *A Review of Aaron Bastani in Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto*, 1-6.
- Demuth, A. (2014). Green entrepreneurship: A promising path towards a sustainable future in Tunisia and elsewhere. Deutsche Gesellschaft für, Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Germany
- Keogh, P. D., & Polonsky, M. J. (1998). Environmental commitment: a basis for environmental entrepreneurship?. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 11(1), 38-49. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534819810369563>
- Kulkarni, S., Hof, A., Ambrósio, G., Edelenbosch, O., Köberle, A. C., van Rijn, J., & van Vuuren, D. (2022). Investment needs to achieve SDGs: an overview. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pstr.0000020>
- Schaper, M. (2002). The challenge of environmental responsibility and sustainable development: Implications for SME and entrepreneurship academics. *Radical changes in the world: Will SMEs soar or crash*, 541-553.

The Case of Mitticool Private Limited

Schaper, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Making Ecopreneurs: Developing Sustainable Entrepreneurship*. CRC Press. 2nd Edition, Routledge, UK.

Sharma, M. (2012). Mansukhbhai Prajapati's Mitti Cool Clay Creations brings clay back in fashion'. *The Economic Times*, 3.

UNCTAD. (2017). Promoting Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development: A Selection of Business Cases from The Empretec Network. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diaeed2017d6_en.pdf