



REDEFINING SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ODISHA

-DR. BIJOY KUMAR SAHOO

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Abstract : Today, India is the one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in the economic growth of any country and in a developing country like India, the importance of entrepreneurship increases manifold. Many people in India have strong entrepreneurial skills, but due to lack of support and guidance, their vision is not transformed into reality. However, there are some people, who, against all odds, achieve what they want to because of their passion, dedication and desire to excel.

It's a tale of a highly educated individual's obsession for education which ends in triumph with SAI International School. His unrelenting and continuous efforts of 10 years gave rise to SAI International School standing on the pillars of 360 degree holistic education. His main mission is to enable, encourage and endow every young mind to initiate a lifelong pursuit of learning and excellence. Dr. Bijo Kumar Sahoo, a Chartered Accountant by profession, revolutionized the private education sector of Odisha and brought with him a sea of opportunities into the lives of school students.

This case illustrates the passion of a man in bringing about a change in private education sector in Odisha. However the path to success was not an easy one. Is there anything that could have been done to help Dr. Sahoo? Does the government play any role? Could the Society have done something for him? There are many such questions which need to be answered. Entrepreneurship is a key facet of any nation's economy and is the crucial driver for employment and economic growth. A favourable environment needs to be created so that more and more people are encouraged to become entrepreneurs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Bijo Kumar Sahoo, a familiar name in the state of Odisha, is an Edupreneur. His passion to learn and share new ideas resulted in the establishment of SAI International School that has changed the traditional approach of school education system in Odisha.

Looking at Dr. Sahoo, it isn't immediately apparent that he is the man who let go of his lucrative and well established career as a Chartered Accountant in order to make a mark in the education sector. Passionate about change, he presents his deeply held convictions

without reticence, which makes him unique in the conservative society that surrounds him.

It was indeed a very difficult task to spark a revolution and to break the jinx of traditional classroom teaching. However, this didn't deter him. His belief in combining traditional classroom teaching with activity based learning and developing creativity among students has led to making SAI International School the 6th best school in the country within a span of only 7 years.

II. HIS LIFE AND STRUGGLE

Born in a well-to do family, Dr. Sahoo is the son of Sri Arjun Sahoo and late Smt. Sushila Sahoo. His early childhood was spent in luxury; however, the year 1977 saw a change of fate and his world came crashing down when emergency was declared in the country. They lost their business and even their house was demolished landing them in streets. Although this was the most struggling time for the family but his mother was determined to give the best of education to her son even at the worst of times.

He completed his schooling at Demonstration Multipurpose School, Bhubaneswar as a topper of Senior School Certificate Examination of CBSE. He graduated in Commerce from Ravenshaw College, Cuttack under Utkal University in the year 1982. During this time he was awarded National Scholarship through which he funded his college education. He bagged a place for articleship at Price WaterHouse Cooper, Calcutta for a stipend of Rs. 300 per month.

Survival in Calcutta with a meagre amount of Rs. 600 per month (Rs 300 stipend and a sum of Rs. 300 from parents) was indeed difficult, however the love, support and encouragement from his parents was like a silver lining in dark clouds. For the initial two years he stayed with a watchman at Kolkata's Princep Street Post Office verandah and used common toilet. There were days when he could not even manage two square meals a day. These trying times didn't deter his determination from completing Chartered Accountancy and he was able to bag himself a seat at Rajendra Chhatra Bhawan, Calcutta in his third year. His importunate hard work was rewarded with Certificate of Practice, from the

Institute of Chartered Accountants of India in the year 1986 in a single chance. He started practising with A.K. Sabat & Co, Bhubaneswar.

In the year 1998, he started his own firm JSS Associates, Chartered Accountants and became the Founder Chairman of the JSS Group. In the year 2000, he merged with two more firms to form SRB Associates. But all these years he always felt “**he was with his profession and not passion**”. His love for education and desire to be with children kindled in his mind to open a school that would be one of its kinds in the state. He put in 10 long years of research (1996-2006) and visited more than 100 schools, both in India as well as abroad, to give shape to his dream and passion. Aldrich & Zimmer (1986)* opined that entrepreneurship is constrained by linkages between aspiring entrepreneurs, resources and opportunities and this holds true in the case of Dr. Sahoo. He had to run from pillar to post in order to get a piece of land for his school and in the year 2007, he was finally allotted a land in Bhubaneswar. He mortgaged all his personal assets which included his house, ornaments of his wife Mrs. Shilpi Sahoo and mother to generate the seed capital. During this time, it was the Chairman of Oriental Bank of Commerce, who restored his confidence on Dr. Sahoo and sanctioned a loan of Rs. 7.5 crores. However, this was not the end of his struggle. The local goons didn't allow the construction of school to take place and forced him to knock the doors of the court. He could not afford a professional contractor and had to manage with labour contractors for the first phase of school construction. But all his efforts were rewarded with the inauguration of SAI International School in April, 2008.

III. CURRENT PERFORMANCE

The year 2008 was the turning point in the life of Dr. B.K.Sahoo and there has been no looking back since then. With an ambition to change the educational outlook of Eastern India, Dr. Sahoo created an institution with world class facilities catering to the needs of 22nd century. His efforts have been rewarded at different forums. The school received the International School Award (2010-2017) from British Council for outstanding achievement in exemplary category. SAI International School was ranked No. 6 in India by World India School Rankings 2015 (Exhibit-I). The school has been recognized as a member of the Worldwide Network of UNESCO Associated Schools (ASPnet). The school has consistently produced region toppers for the last 5 years in CBSE Commerce. Microsoft has declared SAI International School as the most Innovative School.

As an educator, he always strives to keep a track of the recent research and developments as to how best to help his students develop and succeed in every sphere of life. His insatiable hunger for knowledge has led him to the creation of SAI Aangan, India's largest Play

School and SAI International College of Commerce, a pioneer degree commerce college in eastern India.

The wheel of SAI International Group of Educational Institutions encompasses SAI Vidya- Learning Management System, SAI Samikshya- Student assessment monitoring, SAI Swasthya- Student health monitoring, SAI Bhavishya- Career counselling, SAI Vyaktitva- Personality Development programme, SAI Gurukul- Global immersion programme, SAI Netritva- Leadership camp, SAI Sanskaara- Connecting with roots, SAI Dayitva- Community service programme and SAI Bruti- Merit Scholarship.

His efforts are not only bringing knowledge to many households of the state but also providing employment to thousands of people. He aims at creating more entrepreneurs who will become employment generators which will eventually result in eradicating poverty and will also contribute to the economic development of the nation.

*Aldrich, H., and Zimmer, C. 1986. Entrepreneurship through social networks. In D. Sexton, and R. Smiler, eds., *The Art and Science of Entrepreneurship*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Co., pp. 3-23

IV. CSR ACTIVITIES

Corporate Social Responsibility has been internationally in existence since the late sixties embracing a collectively incorporated and assiduous responsibility for the Company's actions through ethical and symbiotic practices. CSR encourages a positive outcome through its activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders and shareholders along with significant philanthropic endeavours.

Dr.Sahoo is a known philanthropist in the state of Odisha. He believes that the key to mental wellbeing and social happiness is through building positivity and self-esteem in students. So, he instils in each and every student of SAI International Group, the spirit of community service. In this endeavour many activities have been undertaken by the students under his guidance, such as;

Sakhya: “Sakhya” promotes economic self-sufficiency of the underprivileged, targeting initiation of education in beginners and dropouts by counselling. Inclusion of vocational training in various fields provides earning in industrially friendly fields along with learning as a cohesive 360 degree programme. The two pronged approaches included a door to door courier cum delivery service during the working hours and flexi- evening classes.

Odisha Flood Relief Campaign: Students of the SAI International have always expressed their solidarity for the needy. When rains wreaked havoc in 19 districts of Odisha, the students of SAI came forward to extend their support to the flood victims.

Operation Sanitation: SAI International has adopted a government school in Patia, Bhubaneswar and has made a lot of improvements to the school's facilities (Exhibit-III). While adopting the school, it was noticed that the school did not have bathrooms for its students. SAI students contributed generously to building two bathrooms for boys and girls at their adopted school.

The Clean Campaign: Students of the SAI International organized a cleanliness drive at the "Baramunda" Bus stand as a part of the Joy of Giving week (Exhibit-IV). Student volunteers cleaned up the bus stand and distributed awareness leaflets to the passengers present at the bus stand. This entire activity was carried out in the presence of the Mayor of Bhubaneswar who was present to encourage the students.

V. ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr. Bijoy K. Sahoo, a self-motivated and head-strong man, faced all adversities of life with a smile and has always marched ahead with confident steps to conquer his dreams. In this process, his achievements have been manifold. He is the Founder and Chairman of SAI International School, the 6th Best School in the Country as per Education World India School Rankings 2015; SAI Angan, India's largest play school; SAI International College of Commerce, a pioneer Degree Commerce College in Eastern India, Founder Director of JSS Software Technology Park and JSS Group, the IT, ITES, that has brought a revolution in the state of Odisha. He is a Chartered Accountant, Cost Accountant, MBA (Finance and Treasury), ISA, Law graduate and PhD holder.

Dr. Sahoo is the Director at Allahabad Bank, Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) and Management Board of Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), all of them being Government of India Enterprises. He is the Member, Management Board of Central Electricity Supply Utility (CESU) of Odisha. Dr. Sahoo is a Member of Shri Jagannath Temple Managing Committee, Puri, Odisha. He is also an Executive Committee Member of State Red Cross, Odisha. He is a Member Task Force - Govt. of India and had also been invited by the Govt. of India, Planning Commission as an advisor on the proposal of Model Concession Agreement for Public Private Partnership to establish 2500 Rashtriya Adarsh Vidyalayas for bringing in qualitative reforms of development in School education. As a Rotarian, he has led the GSE Team to Arkansas, USA, as an Ambassador of Goodwill.

A Harvard Alumni, Dr. Sahoo is a devoted educationist and has attended a number of training programs and workshops to learn about the innovative teaching learning methods and concepts of school education (Exhibit-V). He constantly engages himself in bringing the latest concepts into practice in education. He added another feather to his cap when he received Global Teachers Accreditation (GTA) from British Council,

UK (Exhibit-VI). He received the Achievers of Odisha Award, from Times of India, for his pioneering services in the education sector of Odisha. In the year 2015, he was also conferred upon with the "Odisha Living Legend" award by Odisha Diary, a leading news and web portal of Odisha for his excellence in Business leadership and outstanding contribution in the field of education (Exhibit-VII). Under his able guidance, SAI International School in a short span of seven years has received a number of accolades and achievements. Recently, Dr. Sahoo has been awarded the Achievers of Odisha by Times of India. Undeterred and unfazed by all the accolades he has received, and he quotes Robert Frost, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have miles to go before I sleep."

VI. SUGGESTIONS

The story of Dr. Sahoo is truly inspiring. Like him, many people in India possess great entrepreneurial skill, however, their talent is not channelized in the right manner. The path of Dr. Sahoo would have been a lot easier if he would have had adequate support at the right time and from right channels. Though the government has many schemes like providing loans at concessional rates, subsidies from institutes like NIESBUD, EDII to provide training for budding entrepreneurs, but the main hindrance in fostering entrepreneurship is lack of awareness. If requisite land and adequate finance would have been provided at the right time, then it wouldn't have taken Dr. Sahoo ten long years to come up with such an institution with a world class infrastructure catering to the needs of the 22nd century. It was his sheer determination due to which he was able to overcome all the difficulties.

Along with the government, even the society plays a pivotal role. No one except his mother and wife believed in his dream and supported him. He literally struggled all alone. Time has come to take some concrete steps in order to promote entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in the economic development of the country. "If every individual is educated and employed, then the day is not far away when India will be counted as one of the superpowers of the world"- the long cherished dream of Dr. Sahoo.

VII. CONCLUSION

"I am not the product of my circumstances but a product of my decisions." This is how Dr. B.K. Sahoo describes himself. Casson (1982)** calls entrepreneurs as market makers who co-ordinate market activities and "specialises in taking judgemental decisions about the coordination of scarce resources." Dr. Sahoo has silenced his critics through his entrepreneurial ventures and judgemental decision of SAI International.

He believes that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of the changes around the world and he himself has been a dedicated learner. He has always engaged himself in different researches and the outcomes of his thorough research are values like

empathy and compassion. He aims at educating one million children during his life time and knows that only schools will not help him achieve this. He relates children to buds and wants them blossom into beautiful flowers which is possible through teachers, and believes that capacity building of teachers and teachers training programmes can only help him in achieving his goal. He considers that education is not mere learning to read and write but imparting of knowledge. For Dr.Sahoo, “education is not preparation for life; but life in itself.”

Dr. Sahoo’s efforts have certainly redefined school education in the state of Odisha. Schools have understood that infrastructure goes a long way in building a healthy, mental and physical atmosphere for the students. His focus on teachers training and capacity building has improved the performance of teachers and worked as a spark that has taken SAI International School to the 6th Best School in the country. He has been the reckoning force behind the change in salary structure of teachers in the state and also bringing back the much deserved respect for teachers. It was his passionate dream and ambition that has taken SAI International School to the national level and has compelled other schools in the state to ponder on this achievement.

He stands out in this crowd not for his physical stature but for his belief in “Either be the best or be different from the rest.” In a country like India, where poverty and illiteracy go hand in hand, the efforts of Dr. Bijoy Kumar Sahoo is commendable, as the only solution for all problems is education.

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