

A Predator in a Quagmire: Anupam Bharat**Ratnakar Mishra**

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ARTICLE INFO*Article history*

RECEIVED: 04-Jun-22

REVISED: 08-Aug-22

ACCEPTED: 20-Aug-22

PUBLISHED: 15-Sep-22

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Citation: Ratnakar Mishra (2022). A Predator in a Quagmire: *Anupam Bharat*. Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci. Res. 4 (S), 106–110. <https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2022.v4.nS.id1195.p106>

**ABSTRACT**

It is said '*history repeats itself*'. When we are able to exterminate a potential business upheaval with a soothing solution, a sigh of relief pushes us to think as if the business whipped off the venomous tide but in reality, things usually do not go as per our whims and expectations. Sometimes the same problem once perceived solved permanently resurfaces again in a new incarnation. That exactly happened in this case. The business empire thought to have resolved the issue it faced years ago but in recent past the issues again started showing its ugly fangs pushing the protagonist to scramble the dots again for solutions. To understand the case and its current exigencies we have to comprehend the genesis of the problem germinated 20 years ago.

It was 12th November, 2001 when the newspaper business house of Berhampur city of Odisha state in India lost its dynamic 'Managing Director' Mr. Kalicharan Panda in a fatal road accident leaving her mother and Chairman of "Anupam Bharat" into deep contemplation for finding a suitable substitute to hand over the reins of business. The dooms day brought a bolt from the blue for then 70 years old Mrs. Mahadei Panda. She knew the moment she completes the last rites of her son Mr. Kalicharan within no time she has to appoint a new "Managing Director" for her business empire. Ultimately the matter of immediate succession planning was solved and the business house got a suitable successor and business activities went on normal quickly.

Chairman Mrs. Mahadei Panda was probably amused to solve a puzzle but hardly had she known the storm had just started brewing to test her mettle again after 20 years.

Keywords: *Anupam Bharat*, Leadership, Succession Planning, Challenges to sustain.

Introduction

'*Anupam Bharat*', an Odia newspaper (state of Odisha, India) started its operation in 1986 with just 10,000 circulations and was largely confined to Berhampur city of Odisha only. In first year, it had 30 employees including its founding 'Managing Director' Mr. Kalicharan Panda. Alike a typical family-owned business, the Panda family

owns all shares and Mrs. Mahadei Panda, the mother of Kalicharan Panda was the 'Chairman'. Gradually the business grew like a 'money plant' and it saw an employee base of 150 in 1998 from 30 at the time of inception and all Odisha coverage by December 2000. The circulation reached 50,000 and the newspaper was simultaneously printed from Berhampur, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, and Balasore. All other branches were controlled from

its head office situated at Berhampur city. Berhampur being a southern Odisha city is located on banks of Bay of Bengal and to the 170 km southward from state capital city Bhubaneswar towards neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh.

In this 15 years period from 1986 to 2001, although Mr. Panda saw many hiccups but accolades never left him behind. He was awarded as best entrepreneur in various forums. This helped him to carve a niche in both social as well as political circles in Berhampur and Bhubaneswar. It further helped him to get more Government advertisements, tenders, and employment news printing contracts besides the regular featured private classifieds advertisements. In the year 2001 'Anupam Bharat' was circulated all over the state but a lion's share of 25,000 copies was printed in Berhampur city only. Other 25,000 copies were equally printed by the rest 3 cities. The financial position of the business house showing a sound health at time of his death in year 2001 is displayed as *annexure-1*.

At the time of accident Mr Managing Director was aged 49 and survived by her mother Mahadei Panda (70 years), younger brother Rabindranath Panda (35 years), wife Mrs Sarita Panda (41), son Prasanjeet Panda (21 years) and two daughters Diksha (15 years), Siksha (10 years). The entire family was in shock but despite her age, Mrs. Mahadei Panda thought herself being capable enough to take a decision to move ahead with a new successor.

Younger brother Mr Rabindranath Panda was engaged in a company in the capacity of an engineer far away at Delhi. Mr. Rabindra was well known for his sincerity, empathy towards employees and had a typical managerial intuition for predicting the machine failures. However, Mr. Panda was the 'Mom's boy' and had never been forgetting to enquire about the health of her mother whenever he got free time from his busy schedule.

Grief stricken Mrs. Sarita Panda, B. Com and a Diploma holder in Mass Communication was turned to be a housewife after her marriage to Mr. Kalicharan. Except some ceremonial business celebrations, she never got time to come out of her house. Except obtaining some journalism tips Mr. Kalicharan was never getting any other business-related helps from her. It was a shock to her and she returned from the medical only after spending 5 days after sudden demise of her husband and with a medical note to bed rest for another week or so.

Younger son 'Prasanjeet' an MBA by education was very jovial, upbeat and possessed a suave personality. He was very sincere and meticulous in all his works. He was an

avid reader. Entire team of 'Anupam Bharat' employees knew him. He was regularly attending all annual functions of all centers and his subject expertise was helping him to draw crowds in the functions to his advantage.

The untimely demise of founder shocked everybody but Mrs Chairman stood firm not to lose grip over the business empire that her son had built with passion. She obtained consent from all the family members for reaching a final decision to appoint a new 'Managing Director'.

The family rituals and meetings among the stakeholders went on for some days but eventually the reins of business was transferred to younger brother Mr Rabindranath who took over as 'Managing Director cum Editor' of 'Anupam Bharat'. The protagonist 'Chairman' felt relaxed and the employees were relieved. Despite his lucrative job in hand and its promising future prospects Rabindranath vowed to manage the family business left by his beloved brother Kalicharan. The grief-stricken Mrs. Sarita Panda as usual kept herself busy in family chores upbringing her two little princesses Dikshya and Sikshya. Post MBA degree, Prasanjeet got engaged in a job. The entire family got relieved, thinking successfully solved the problem they faced. But hardly had it been known to them a storm just started brewing to test their mettle again in future.

Current Challenges

Often small volume news papers are ridiculed in society for ignoring ethical values and largely perceived as they are using their newspaper as a tool for settling personal scores. But gradually another school of thought also realized, a time has come to protect and promote the genuine small and medium volume circulated newspapers which are in fact trying to maintain Indian values and ethos to strengthen the democracy.

A study was conducted by 'Press council of India' in December, 2020 to assess the problems of small and medium newspapers. Major challenges are identified and documented in the report as below:

1. In comparison to current value, Government should plan to increase its financial support.
2. Machineries and equipments in subsidized rate are needed.
3. Transparency to be maintained in empanelling the newspaper house.

4. Quick clearance of advertisement bills by the DAVP and other advertising authorities
5. Making separate arrangements for input of information, news materials and visuals through Press Information Bureau (PIB) of the Government of India.
6. Subscription support from various agencies to be increased.
7. Organizing workshops to nurture local journalistic talent.
8. Setting up a special focused 'Small and Medium Newspaper Development Corporation (or a small and Medium Newspaper Advisory Committee).
9. Relief to the small newspapers from the burden of GST.
10. Big newspaper launching regional supplements to the main paper to be avoided.
11. Technological advancements and non-availability of the best of personnel due to financial constraints

The country's population today has crossed one billion. Out of them, almost 60% live in rural areas. The literacy rate which was around 17% at the time of independence, now stood at 74.04% as per census of 2021. If the Government released data be trusted then Indian populace are gradually rising above the poverty line and as the times passes by, more educated and self-employed people are included in the mainstream and their contribution leading to higher economic growth are also noticed. This change and progress will expect- edly improve newspaper buying and reading capacity. Literacy and consequential growth of potential readers buoyed by the economic growth will obviously help

Annexure-1**Profit & Loss Account of M/S Anupam Bharat for the year ended 31-03-2021 (in INR)**

DR. (INR)		CR. (INR)	
To Opening stock	1,25,000	By Sales	43,00,000
To Material	16,00,000	By Closing Stock	1,99,000
To Wages	1,75,000		
To Fright	1,13,275		
To Carriage Inwards	81,375		
To Gross Profit c/d	24,04,350		
	44,99,000		44,99,000
To Salary	2,87,567	By Gross Profit b/d	24,04,350
To Printing cost	4,25,458	By Income from Advertising	10,25,000
To Postage Expenses	89,765		
To Repair and Maintenance	45,600		
To Office Expenses	37,000		
To Rent	1,35,000		
To Carriage Outwards	23,000		
To Office lighting	25,000		
To Electricity	2,75,000		
To Advertising Expenses	1,55,000		
To Stationary Expenses	1,75,000		
To Transport Expenses	2,66,500		
To Salesmen Commission	1,43,000		
To Insurance	1,11,000		
To Depreciation	1,50,000		
To Interest Paid	40,000		
To Tax	1,43,000		
To Net Profit c/d	9,02,460		
	34,29,350		34,29,350

Source: Balance Sheet released, 31.03.2021

Annexure -II

LIST OF "A" CATEGORY NEWSPAPERS in ODISHA, INDIA

Sl No	Name of the Newspaper	Circulation
1	Sambad	269988(DAVP)
2	Dharitri	194997(DAVP)
3	Samaj	174732(DAVP)
4	Samaya	163207(DAVP)
5	Pragatibadi	153178(DAVP)
6	Suryaprabha	142586(DAVP)
7	Orissa Baskar	124017(DAVP)
8	Anupam Bharat	122002(DAVP)
9	Sambad Kalika	112725(DAVP)
10	Prajantra	110516(DAVP)
11	Orissa Express (BBSR)	107770(DAVP)
12	Khabar	96573 (DAVP)
13	Dinalipi	82252 (DAVP)
14	Matrubhasa	75000(DAVP)

DAVP- Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity, Government of India
 Source: <http://enews.nic.in/pdf/circulation.pdf>

small press. Simultaneously the small newspaper business houses must realize this impending high paced change and should act as catalyst of socio-economic and political improvements by extending constructive co-operation to the development of the country while helping the country to root out the malaise of corruption, moral degradation. Forget not, only an independent and responsible media committed to the democratic process will certainly and positively contribute to the nation building.

What Next?

Although the media business in the Odisha state is currently running smoothly but looking to the post pandemic southbound business growth, the owners who

earlier were confident now apprehend a bleak future. Challenges are many and the competition is very tough to tide over. If we look towards the circulation scenario of Odia vernacular dailies in Annexure-2 we can easily comprehend the pitiable conditions of small scale circulated dailies. How far the business can withstand the challenges and with whose support is a big question to get answered. The growth rate of this business house has declined close to 20% in 20 years so how the newspaper will face the rising newsprint cost and other overheads is a question to ponder.

Case Discussion Questions

1. Is the decision of handing over the charge to younger brother wrong because a sharp decline of business to the tune of 20% witnessed in past 20 years?
2. What is the current scenario of media business houses in Odisha state and how the challenges highlighted by the association can be answered for a better sustenance?
3. Can a decision be taken by the same protagonist who is now very old and completely ignorant about the current competition challenges and market scenario? If not, what is the next best possible scenario?
4. What should be the strategies the business house to adopt to wade through the challenges highlighted?
5. What will be the scenario if the rein of business is handed over to son Prasanjeet now?
6. What is the current situation of family-owned business in India?



Biographical Statement of Author(s)

Ratnakar Mishra, MBA, PhD is in teaching profession since last 24 years. He authored 2 books and several book chapters, Dr Mishra's research area includes 'Organisational Behaviour', 'Industrial displacements and Human Rights'. He is an 'Accredited Management Teacher' of 'All India Management Association, New Delhi'.



Currently he is associated with NSB Academy, Bengaluru, Karnataka as Professor cum Domain Chair. He has been a resource person for various staff development programs on leadership, psychometric assessment, management software and analytics in institutions for higher and technical education.

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