

## **Arunachalam Muruganantham: The Man who Sparked a Revolution Against all Odds**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Uncertainty and ambiguity are a key challenge to every business organization existing today. Every individual should be equipped to build strategies that not only defends threats but also helps in taking advantage of the available opportunities. Obstacles and uncertainty must not prevent a person from doing things differently. Arunachalam Muruganantham is a person whose determination transformed all obstacles to his stride.*

*It's a tale of an inventor's obsession, in the face of ostracism, which ends in triumph, with Muruganantham's simple, low-cost machine for the production of sanitary napkin at a very affordable price that transformed the lives of several rural women across India. Muruganantham's decade long experimentation to create an affordable sanitary pad manufacturing machine for underprivileged women is the subject of a remarkable story.*

**Keywords:** affordable low-cost machine, passion and women.

### **Introduction**

Arunachalam Muruganantham, the founder of Jayashree Industries, is a social entrepreneur. His passion to bring about a change in the society resulted in a low-cost sanitary towel making machine that helped improving lives of women specially across rural India.

Looking at Muruganantham, it isn't immediately apparent that he is the man who patiently lived through public ridicule for about six years, or received a presidential award for innovation. Passionate about social change, he presents his deeply held convictions

without hesitation, which makes him a novelty in the conservative society.

It was indeed a very difficult task to spark a revolution as the subject itself is such a big taboo in India. However, this didn't deter him. After struggling alone for many years, his efforts bore the fruit. He received the Best Innovation award from Smt. Pratibha Patil. He founded a company named Jayashree Industries. He has been recognized as one of the hundred most influential people in the world for his accomplishments, by TIMES magazine in the year 2014. He has lectured at several institutes like IIT Mumbai, IIM Ahmedabad and at Harvard. His inspiring story was the subject of a prize winning documentary by Amit Varmani titled "Menstrual Man".

### **His life and struggle**

The son of a handloom weaver, Muruganantham, grew up in poverty, after his father's demise in a road accident. As a child, he was interested in science but had to quit studies at the age of fourteen in order to support his mother.

Shortly after his marriage, Muruganantham discovered his wife Shanthi collecting filthy rags in a newspaper to use during her menstrual cycle. When asked about this unhygienic practice, she replied that she couldn't afford a sanitary napkin. Troubled by his wife's statement, he decided to make experimental pads. Initially he made pads out of cotton which were subsequently rejected by his wife and sisters and eventually they stopped co-

operating him and refused to be test subjects for his innovations.

He then bought the commercial product in order to analyse the raw materials used. Being from a handloom background, he thought he could make a cheaper one instead. Though his thought was noble, he had to pay a heavy price for it. Menstrual flow, a rather taboo subject in India, left him ostracized by family and community.

It took him a little more than two years to analyze that the commercial pads used cellulose fibres derived from pine bark wood pulp which not only helps to absorb but also retain its shape. Then he went on to devise a low cost machine that could be operated with minimal training.

After a struggle of over four years, he succeeded in creating a simpler version of the machine. Powered by electricity and foot pedals, the machine de-fibred the cellulose, compressed it into napkin form, sealed it with non-woven fabrics and finally sterilised it with ultra-violet light. The best part was that the entire process could be learnt in less than three hours.

### **An Achiever**

The turning point for Muruganantham came in the year 2006, when he visited IIT Chennai to show his idea and get feedback. His idea won the award for the best innovation for the betterment of society. He also received Indian Presidential award for Innovation in the year 2009 by Dr. Pratibha Patil. This event

brought him to media spotlight and very soon he founded Jayashree Industries, which now markets these machines to rural women not only in India but also in different parts of the world.

### **Current Business Performance**

The cost of the machine is rupees eighty thousand as against the machines used by MNCs costing three and a half crore rupees. Though the initial market acceptance of sanitary napkin machine as well as its penetration was very poor, a determined Muruganantham along with his wife started selling them to women in the local area of Coimbatore. Soon the two were unable to keep up with the demand. By 2009, the product was a success.

Jayashree Industries, as a company, sells the machines directly to women in rural areas with the help of bank loans as well as through NGOs and women self help groups. Though it is a 'zero employee' company but it has generated employment by empowering its customers with entrepreneurship. Its customers are those who aren't even privileged to have employment. The person who operates it can learn the entire process in three hours and can employ three others to help with processing and distribution. It is now being used in twenty-five states and across thousands of villages in India.

### **Aim**

Muruganantham's aim was not only to create awareness and increase the use of sanitary napkins but also create jobs for rural women.

### **Conclusion**

In a country like India, menstruation has always been perceived as a social taboo. The topic is seldom discussed due to which adolescent girls and even women resort to extremely unhealthy practices which includes the use of unsanitized cloth, ashes or sand resulting in Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) which is common more among women in rural India.

In such a scenario, the effort of Mr. Arunachalam Muruganatham is definitely commendable. Adverse conditions and limited resources didn't deter him from his aim. Today Muruganantham is hailed as a visionary who is empowering rural women across India. He is the hero who actually stood up for women and their issues. His vision is to make India a 100% napkin using country. His invention is not only creating awareness among women but also providing employment, whose lives were once confined to the walls of kitchen. Now they are independent, confident and leading a better life.

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