



Ved Krishna- MD and Strategy Head, Yash Papers

An exclusive Conversation with Mr. Ved Krishna on 'CHUK', "a Vision for Creating an Environmental Movement in India by Shifting the Entire Range of Tableware from Styrofoam/ Single use Plastic to Compostable Tableware".

"CHUK produces 100% backyard compostable tableware products made from sugarcane fiber (bagasse) and get decomposed within 60-90 days. Owing to sugarcane fiber, the products are lightweight, flexible, microwavable, and strong enough to prevent leakage".

FOOD & BEVERAGES PROCESSING

Please give us a brief overview about your company and core business.

CHUK is the subsidiary of Yash Papers (BSE listed company and India's first manufacturing BCorp which was established by Mr. K K Kjunjhunwala in 1981. Yash Papers, over the years, grew into the largest manufacturer of wrapping grades in India, with a present installed capacity of 39,100 MT per annum.

Introspection led to clarity that we had to work towards finding and providing more earth friendly packaging solutions and thus Chuk was born.

Hence, we wanted to foray into specialized products and contribute to the society at large. We aim to make CHUK a game changer in the years to come. CHUK produces an innovative range of compostable tableware products which are not treated with any kind of chemicals. While plastic takes more than 500 years to decompose, CHUK's tableware products are made from sugarcane fiber (bagasse) which decomposes within just 60-90 days.

Tell us something about your brand CHUK and its target audience.

CHUK produces 100% backyard compostable tableware products. As the products are made from sugarcane fiber (bagasse), they get decomposed within 60-90 days. Owing to sugarcane fiber, the products are lightweight, flexible, microwavable, and strong enough to prevent leakage.

We want to reach out to the masses, by initially tapping the food and hospitality sector. We also aim to tap the unorganized food sector starting from street chaat vendors to gol gappa walis, which is dominated by plastic and styrofoam tableware products.

Various restaurant/ food chains which are high on awareness are coming on board with CHUK. We have tied up with various restaurant chains like Vaango, Hyderabad-based Paradise Biryani Group, and food delivery company Foodpanda so that it can recommend CHUK's tableware products to other partner restaurants. Lite Bite Foods, Haldiram's, Chai Point, Baker Street & Fresco Airports have also come on board with CHUK. We have also tied-up with Indian railways as a part of its Go Green drive and with the Uttarakhand government to make the Kedarnath Char Dham Yatra eco-friendly this year.

We have invested INR 65 crore to set up the plant for CHUK, which has a production capacity of 1 million pieces a day.

What are your predictions about the growth of the food industry over the next few years and how do you see the demand for your products?

The Indian Food and Beverage industry is one of the most vibrant

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and booming industries that has seen an unprecedented growth in the recent past and continues to expand rapidly. This is majorly contributed to the changing demographics, increase in disposable income, urbanization and growth of both organized and unorganized food industry.

The Indian Food Industry has been going through a boom and is expected to cross \$540 billion in market value by 2020 (As per reports). While the food industry is one of the most lucrative industries, the food packaging industry is equally important. As per reports, the food packaging industry is the fifth largest in the world, worth \$40 billion. And the market for disposable tableware products is INR 8000 crore which is dominated by plastic and Styrofoam.

Hence, with the growing food and food packaging industry, there is a huge scope of growth for biodegradable tableware market. As mentioned earlier, we are witnessing demand from food chains who are appreciating our efforts and have also tied up with Indian railways and Uttarakhand government. We also plan to reach out to other state governments in the near future.

Since our launch in January 2018, 2,25,75,000 units of CHUK tableware have been sold which means 22.5 million people ate safe since January 2018, and 308 tonnes of plastic was prevented from going to landfills - 307.755 tonnes of bagasse (good garbage) was dumped instead because of CHUK.

How successful is your R&D department for developing biodegradable materials?

Our R&D department has done an extensive study on the food consumption patterns in India and thus, created designs which cater extensively to the Indian eating style and habits.

Our products inspired from Lego have been designed as a family of products wherein one fits into another. Moreover, we have worked on a rapid development cycle for products based on 3D printing and quick tooling.

While styrofoam tableware products are white because of chemical treatment, CHUK's tableware products are brown in colour since they are 100% chemical free. CHUK has also recently been awarded the Red Dot award for the innovative design of its tableware products.

How do you see the demand of biodegradable packaging over plastic packaging?

The Indian society is going through a change in mindset today wherein they are becoming more and more aware of health issues and prefer leading a healthy lifestyle. The educated and urbanised Indians, specifically, do not shy away from making informed decisions. They have also become courageous enough to move ahead from the conventional notions instilled in their minds from generations.

With the right sensitization amongst masses, biodegradable packaging will witness a growing demand in the coming future. It is inevitable for masses to understand the harmful hazards created by plastic and Styrofoam in the environment. This is not only harmful for nature but is equally hazardous for marine life and human health. The carcinogens emitted from Styrofoam and plastic are cancerous for health. People will automatically shift towards biodegradable products once they have the right understanding of the harmful effects of plastic.

With plastic getting banned in states like Maharashtra, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir to name a few, biodegradable packaging and compostable products is the way forward in the country. I would also like to point out that using cheap plastic or melamine today increases our chances of spending a lot more on medical expenses later. Switching to non-toxic tableware that is hardly a rupee or two more than the cheaper ones will save one from that cost.

Please give us a brief about your sales network in India? Are you also selling your products online?

We have the fastest, biggest and fully

automatic machines in the world, producing around 1 million pieces per day. But to cause a dent in the pile of plastic, we need to rapidly multiply this. As of now we have been focusing on the B2B segment for sales like Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs), institutions and caterers and are present in 15 cities of India. However, we have been overwhelmed by the demand from individual consumers as well.

As mentioned above, we are exploring various channels to reach out to the consumers. We are also looking at tie-ups with ups with leading e-commerce platforms and retailers in the near future.

What are your firm's recent achievements and future plans?

So far, our biggest breakthrough has been the tie-up with Indian railways. In its drive to be eco-friendly, the Indian railways have collaborated with CHUK for its compostable tableware.

The pilot project has been introduced in 32 premier trains by the railway ministry, in various Shatabadi, Duronto and Rajdhani trains. We have been working with railways for the last four months, trying to build products as per their needs. It gives us immense pleasure to be on board with Indian Railways for compostable tableware products. We are going to sign an order of INR 5 crores for the next six months. We will supply around 15 lakh tableware pieces per month for the coming six months. We can also see the commitment from the Indian government for the same. We are confident of the success of the pilot project and subsequent orders.

Another big achievement for CHUK was to win the prestigious Red Dot award. Designers and manufacturers from 59 countries submitted more than 6,300 objects to the competition. A jury comprising of roughly around 40 members assessed the products individually, including the level of innovation, functionality, formal quality, ergonomics and durability. We won the award for the innovative design in tableware products, CHUK's compostable tableware will now be showcased at a special exhibition at the Red Dot Design Museum in Germany.