

## Ajinkya Dhariya's PadCare Labs creating dignity and circularity in menstrual hygiene

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**Business Remedies Rajshree Upadhyaya |** On an ordinary afternoon in Pune, Ajinkya Dhariya watched waste pickers rummage through garbage, their bare hands brushing against soiled sanitary pads. The image stayed with him, disturbing in its silence yet powerful enough to demand action. When he later asked his mother how she disposed of pads, her simple reply—“wrap and throw”—revealed the depth of a systemic issue faced by millions of households. Menstrual waste in India usually ends up in landfills, spreading odor, disease, and taking centuries to decompose. For Ajinkya, a mechanical engineer from a small village in Raigad, this was not just a matter of disposal but of dignity, safety, and sustainability. In 2018, he founded PadCare Labs with the belief that even the most taboo waste stream could be transformed through design and engineering.

The early experiments were ambitious but impractical. Ajinkya first imagined compact recycling machines inside every washroom, but pilots failed. Restrooms lacked space, water was limited, and users simply wanted safe, discreet disposal rather than complicated processing systems. That failure became a turning point. He shifted the model from “process-at-source” to “segregate-at-source, process centrally.” The first result was the PadCare Bin, a simple container that used proprietary VAP technology to store pads without odor or bacteria for up to 30 days. For menstruators, it meant relief from the awkward improvisations of wrapping

pads in plastic or paper. For facilities teams, it was a hygienic solution that fit seamlessly into their operations.

The real breakthrough lay in what happened after collection. PadCare Instead of burning pads and polluting the air, the technology separated them into sanitized cellulose pulp and plastic granules. These by-products could then re-enter supply chains as stationery, packaging, composites, or even new PadCare bins. What once seemed like unmanageable waste now had a second life, proving that circularity was not just an environmental idea but a practical business model.

Adoption began slowly, one restroom at a time, but corporate India quickly recognized the value. Tech parks, banks, manufacturing companies, and campuses subscribed to PadCare's service model—install bins, schedule pickups, and rely on PadCare's central facilities for recycling. Within a few years, thousands of bins were installed across hundreds of sites, and the company was processing over a tonne of pads daily for clients such as Meta, Capgemini, TCS, and Goldman Sachs. By standardizing the collection and treatment of sanitary waste, PadCare created a system for cities that had long ignored or mishandled this sensitive issue.

The turning point in visibility came when Ajinkya appeared on Shark Tank India in 2023. He pitched not just a product but a shift in mindset, asking for Rs. 50 lakh for 2% equity. He walked away with a four-shark deal of Rs. 1 crore for 4%, with Peyush Bansal, Namita Thapar, Vineeta Singh, and Aman Gupta backing him. Beyond funding, the episode sparked a national conversation on menstrual waste, bringing the taboo subject into mainstream dialogue and giving PadCare a platform of credibility.

Momentum only grew from there. PadCare raised Rs. 5 crore in seed funding led by Social Alpha, with support from Lavni Ventures, 3i Partners, Rainmatter, and Spectrum Impact. The capital helped build more material recovery centers and open new markets for recycled pulp and plastics. With a revenue model built on recurring service fees, PadCare turned sustainability into an operational line item rather than a CSR afterthought. By FY 2023-24, the company crossed Rs. 10 crore in revenue with 7% profit after tax and carried an order book of Rs. 22 crore for the following year.

Recognition followed impact. The World Economic Forum highlighted PadCare's model for cutting emissions by nearly 70% compared to incineration and recycling over 240 lakh pads annually. Global accelerators such as WIPO GREEN and the Circulars Accelerator showcased its technology as a scalable solution, while national institutions including BIRAC, NITI Aayog, Tata Trusts, and Infosys Foundation supported its expansion.

Through it all, Ajinkya remained grounded in the mindset of a builder. He often recalled the thousands of failed trials before a working prototype and spoke more about the next iteration than past accolades. He envisioned

smaller recycling units for communities and self-help groups that could generate livelihoods while promoting sustainability. For him, PadCare's true achievement was not just creating bins or machines but embedding a new habit-one where a pad's last mile is handled with the same care as its first. What began as a moment of discomfort at a landfill has become a nationwide movement for dignity and sustainability. PadCare Labs shows how empathy can be engineered into scalable solutions, transforming a neglected problem into a circular system that safeguards people, protects the planet, and redefines how India thinks about menstrual waste.