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Indian-born entrepreneur who led the probiotic industry

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MINNEAPOLIS: Sita Kantha Dash, born in Tunpur, Odisha came to USA in 1969 and earned a doctorate in nutrition in 1973. Currently living in Minneapolis, he embodies the “American dream” as an innovator, entrepreneur, community leader and philanthropist. His vision and hard work led a little known probiotics company in the seventies to an industry worth \$35 billion today. Probiotics are generally regarded good bacteria for the digestive system.

When asked how he came up with the idea, Dash recalled a product to treat E.coli infection in pigs which led to the development of probiotics for humans. Subsequently, he founded the UAS Laboratories, a leading probiotic company, with the help of three American friends.

“The financial challenges and inability to hire probiotic scientists and executives” slowed the growth, according to Dash. Today, he says with pride, the company is a global leader with presence in 55 countries including India.

When asked about future research and development in probiotics, Dash said he is funding innovation centers and endowed chairs at IIT-Bhubaneswar and South Dakota State University, USA.

Dash says “helping others and giving to the have-nots” means a lot to him. He recounts a “satisfying” endeavour of helping more than 300 students for higher studies in the USA. The adoption of his village and helping to build shelter homes, a school, a micro bank and temple sets a fine example of corporate social responsibility. In greater Odisha, he has helped projects such as Fakir Mohan University, Kalinga Hospital and upcoming separate schools to train nurses, pharmacists and lab technicians.

As for his leadership in the local community, Dash regularly supports activities financially to preserve and promote Indian heritage and culture in the US. Examples include Odisha Society of America, Indian Association of Minnesota and Hindu Society of Minnesota among others. Dash has been honoured as “Distinguished Man of the Year” by several local organizations as well as by the Odisha state government.

Dash was awarded an honorary D.Sc. by Utkal University in February this year for his contribution to probiotic research, philanthropy and love for Odisha.