

## Despair to success: How three Punjab entrepreneurs built multi-crore jaggery startups and achieved global reach

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



Crushed under debts, Amrinder Singh, 34 and an aeronautical engineer from Hoshiarpur in Punjab, was on the verge of giving up all hopes in 2013 and had even purchased poison to end his life. Fast forward to 2024, he now owns a jaggery-based startup with an annual turnover of Rs 12 crore. Amrinder's success isn't an isolated story in Punjab. Two MBA graduates, Navnoor Kaur (28), and Kaushal Singh (29), joined forces to create their own jaggery venture, which now boasts of an annual turnover of Rs 7 crore. While Navnoor was struggling with family health issues prior to starting the venture, Kaushal, a farmer, was battling unfair pricing for his sugarcane crop. These two jaggery-based startups — Amarinder Singh's 'Jimidar' under Guru Nanak Enterprises, and Navnoor and Kaushal's 'Jaggercane' — have turned the traditional jaggery-making cottage industry into an internationally recognised businesses. They supply their products to the USA, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and England. Both startups have FSSAI, US FDA, and APEDA licenses that are required to meet international standards. Ludhiana's Navnoor started her journey in 2017 while researching healthy alternatives for her diabetic family. Though she secured a high-paying corporate job after her MBA in 2019, she quit in 2021 to pursue her passion for organic, unadulterated jaggery, a sweetener she hoped could benefit not only her family but millions of others dealing with similar health concerns. However, the market was saturated with adulterated products, and finding clean, nutritious jaggery was a challenge. At the same time, Kaushal, who holds

an MBA degree in agriculture and a sugarcane farmer from Sallopur village in Gurdaspur, was struggling with low sugarcane prices. Despite setting up his own jaggery plant in 2016, he wasn't seeing much success and was determined to upgrade his plant to international standards. The two met at a Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) mela, and their shared vision led them to launch 'Jaggercane' in 2021. Navnoor visited various jaggery-making units and found most of them unhygienic. However, when she visited Kaushal's unit in Sallopur, she found it clean and hygienic. Navnoor's research revealed that proper seed selection and technical knowledge could significantly improve jaggery quality. Jaggercane produces a variety of products, including Organic Jaggery Cubes, Coconut Jaggery, and Crunchy Jaggery Granola. "Jaggery provides over 30% of the recommended daily iron intake, even in small quantities," said Navnoor, adding that their goal was to modernise jaggery and make it a must-have product for health-conscious consumers. After receiving an overwhelming response, particularly for their Coconut Jaggery Crumbs, Punjabi Shakar, Navnoor quit her job in 2021. Within a year, Jaggercane achieved a turnover of Rs 2 crore. They also make jaggery-based atta cookies, millet cookies, ketch up. The duo have sought technical and scientific inputs from PAU to extend jaggery's short shelf life. Jaggercane now has over 1,000 touchpoints like well known bakeries and sweet shops across India and export to 16 countries and supplies its products on Amazon and Flipkart. "We work with over 30 farmers across 200 acres of sugarcane plantations," said Navnoor, adding that their packaging unit in Sallopur employ local women. Kaushal added that the plant produces one tonne jaggery every month. "We are also ensuring that the farmers behind our jaggery receive their fair share," said Sukriti Beri, Chief Strategy Officer, Founding member of Jaggercane. In Hoshiarpur, Amrinder started his career with a 'chapati' business after completing aeronautical engineering in 2010. "We developed a method to prepare chapatis without using any preservatives, which could be stored at room temperature for up to six months. However, my business partner backed out, leaving me in Rs 37 lakh debt when I was just 24," He said, adding that at that point, he even thought of killing himself but the thought of leaving his mother alone kept him going. He then decided to focus on the food industry and started from scratch. "Drawing on Hoshiarpur's unique sugarcane flavour, I launched my jaggery business in 2018-19 under the 'Jimidar' brand. Today, my firm produces 800 tonne of jaggery annually. We supply jaggery-based cookies, rusk, flavored jaggery, and Gachak to consumers across several countries, including the USA, Canada, Australia, England, and the Netherlands," he said, adding that he is now a

registered manufacturer under the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme. “I started from scratch, repaid all my debt, and now the company’s turnover is Rs 12 crore. We work with around 300 farmers from Punjab and other states. Apart from jaggery, we also sell over 100 items, including spices and ready-to-eat snacks. In 2023, we launched our first unit in Canada,” he said, adding that his wife, Devanshi Sharma, has been a great support in his venture

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