

The Growth Story Beyond Sight: Advitiya Masale of Kashi

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Case highlights

During the pleasant evening of April, 2025, on the ghats of Ganges, the protagonist of the case Satya Prakash Malviya, a visually challenged entrepreneur from Varanasi stood reflecting on his journey in the spice business. The social enterprise he had been built on the values of dignity, purity, and inclusion was now facing turbulent times. He was uncertain of the future course of actions with much at stake.

Motivated by the COVID-19 crisis, which wiped out livelihoods for many specially-abled individuals, Malviya founded Advitiya Masale a brand under Svampurna Kashi Masala LLP. What once began with minimal savings, basic machinery, and immense resolve had now evolved into a mission-driven enterprise. Malviya was committed for empowering specially-abled workers, widowed women, and marginalized individuals, therefore employed majority of

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workforce who had special abilities. His major focus was to supply pure spices to the Indian households.

However, as demand grew, Malviya faced an urgent need to expand beyond his existing B2B networks in local vicinity. He had to take the stand whether to enrich his participation in the historically famous Kashi market Gola Dinanath Mandi or move beyond the Varanasi for national level expansion. He grappled with the question of whether and how to scale the business to fulfill his vision of delivering quality spices to households across India. He was concerned around quality procurement, operational capacity, and marketing. Still, driven by his mission to sustain livelihoods for specially-abled individuals, he searched for answers on the shores of the Ganga. With trust deficits and operational vulnerabilities adding to the challenge, the path ahead was far from smooth. Malviya now stood at a crossroads one that would determine not only the future of his enterprise but also the social purpose at its core.

Initial journey of venture development

“Why is the hostel food never tasty?” a voice echoed in the mess of a Central University in Varanasi. A student sitting silently in a corner wondered about a simple question: “What does it take to prepare tasty and hygienic food?” This thought became the genesis of Advitya Masale of Kashi.

Satya Prakash Malviya was the founder of Advitya Masala, a brand under Svampurna Kashi Masala LLP, a Varanasi-based social enterprise. It was formally registered in 2022 and got operational from 2023. Malviya, blind since birth, comes from Ishwarpur village in Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh in India. He pursued his B.A. (Hons.) and later doctoral research at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), with a Ph.D. topic focusing on blind education and empowerment. His lived experiences as a visually impaired student deeply shaped his entrepreneurial vision. During his student years, he frequently collaborated with blind and

physically challenged peers. This collaboration further resulted in organizing small-scale activities such as making candles during festivals and selling pickles at BHU stalls which had generated supplementary income for marginalized students. The COVID-19 pandemic further sensitized him to the vulnerabilities of special ability and deprived individuals who lost livelihoods. As depicted earlier, he observed the poor quality and adulteration of food and spices in student hostel messes. This had ignited him to explore the idea of delivering pure quality and economical spices to consumers while empowering the specially-abled persons through employment.

The early stages of the start-up were filled with greater challenges. Malviya struggled to obtain a food license and open a current account due to bureaucratic hurdles related to his visual disability. Social bullying was strong with critics accused him of exploiting his blindness as a marketing gimmick, while many discouraged him without realizing his business acumen. Back in 2023, initial sales were low, clients often delayed payments, and financial resources were scarce. Nevertheless, this situation could not shake off the confidence of Malviya who was on a mission of social change in the form of providing high-quality spices to Indian households. The business was launched with an investment of ₹2.5 lakh from personal savings, supplemented later by ₹1.65 lakh from a Chandigarh-based philanthropic group supporting disabled entrepreneurs.

Mr. Malviya found a ray of hope with Mr. Keshav Jalan, Chairman of Jalan Industries, who provided both mentorship and infrastructural support, offering factory space in Rohniya (locality in Varanasi) and placing regular institutional orders. This was crucial support to sustaining operations in the early phase and gave the venture legitimacy in local business circles. By 2025, Advitiya Masala had scaled to a turnover of approximately ₹5–6 lakhs per month, with significant margins due to repeat buyers.

The start-up employed between 10-12 people on a paid basis, most of whom were specially-abled, widowed women, or individuals from marginalized backgrounds. The staff was offered

with salaries ranging from ₹5,000–₹15,000 per month. Volunteers, including BHU students, also contributed to packaging, distribution, and marketing. Operations ran on 6–8 small machines (valued at roughly ₹10 lakhs), which handled cleaning, drying, grinding, and packaging. The product portfolio spanned more than 30 stock keeping units (SKUs) across single spice powders (turmeric, chilli, coriander, cumin, cinnamon, asafoetida, cardamom, etc.), blended spice powders (garam masala, pav bhaji masala, chole masala, biryani masala, tea masala, etc.), and flour products (gram flour, millet flours, multigrain blends). This was also in light with the existing market demand for the blended spices which had higher growth of about 24% CAGR since 2019-2024. It was also evidential that among all the spices, blended spices had higher margins (Aventus Capital, 2021) The venture also planned for expansion by launching spice mixes for non-vegetarian dishes in order to diversify product portfolio and client base.

Its business model emphasized direct procurement from farmers, hygiene in packaging, and order on demand to the customers in proximity (BHU and local areas) and other repeat buyers through positive word of mouth. The regular procurement from the farmers was major bottleneck for the Malviya, since many farmers remained susceptible to the market pressure and preferred higher margins regardless of the constant selling to the single place. Regular buyers included NGOs, Army canteens, university mess kitchens, and catering groups in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Distribution was partly relied on Malviya's university networks and motivational talks across cities like Ahmedabad and Chandigarh, which was due to his personal narrative. Marketing remains primarily relationship-driven, supported by grassroots outreach and social media channels.

Overview of spice market

The spice sector in India was evolving on a dynamic pace and encapsulates the mixture of heritage and modern business space. During 2024, Indian spice and seasonings market was valued at over INR 2,00,000 crores with growth projection estimated at a double-digit compound annual rate. The factors attributing to such phenomenal growth were driven by rising domestic consumption, demand for hygienically packaged products, and exports of premium varieties

(IMARC Group, 2024). Among various states in India, Uttar Pradesh played a significant role as consumption and processing hub. The traditional food habit and large regional trade networks made the state a critical market for important stakeholders including spice processors, wholesalers, and retailers. The spices in Uttar Pradesh run through a network of wholesale mandis, local grinders, small Kirana outlets, and branded FMCG distributors.

In Varanasi, the Gola Dinanath Masala Mandi (popularly known as Masala Mandi or Gola Dinanath Mandi) offered a unique case of such a traditional institution for last two centuries. Established nearly 250 years ago, the market today comprised about 200 wholesale and retail shops that deal in various categories of spices, dry fruits, and medicinal herbs (Alam et al., 2021; Live Hindustan, 2024). Despite its traditional roots, it continued to act as a central hub not only for the city but also for a much wider regional catchment covering eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, parts of Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand (Times of India, 2013).

Traders at the mandi procured raw materials and finished spice products from multiple sourcing regions including Kanpur, Lucknow, Delhi, Nainital, Purnia, and even Chennai, ensuring a constant flow of diverse varieties into the Varanasi market (Alam et al., 2021). The mandi was reputed for offering more than 20,000 varieties of spices such as cardamom, cumin, cinnamon, and cloves, alongside a wide array of dry fruits as well as Ayurvedic and Unani herbs (Times of India, 2013). Thus, while the Varanasi mandi represented only a fraction of this national market, it plays a disproportionately important role in the regional supply chain.

The industry structure of the spice trade in Varanasi reflected a mix of local wholesalers, traditional family-run shops, and emerging national players. Some of the well-known wholesale establishments included Spice Asia Pvt. Ltd., Shubham Enterprises, New Gopi Enterprises, Mayur Mart (Mayur Masala), Kitchen Grace Spices, and Gujarat Spice. These firms served as intermediaries between producers and downstream retailers or institutional buyers, with some also engaged in grinding and blending operations. In addition, many shops in Gola Dinanath

continued to create their own local blends such as *garam masala*, turmeric, and chili powders, which catered to long-standing customer preferences (Alam et al., 2021). Alongside these local actors, national FMCG spice brands such as Everest Spices, MDH (Mahashian Di Hatti), and Catch had established their presence. Their penetration in Varanasi signified the changing consumer expectations, particularly regarding hygiene, standardized blends, and brand assurance (refer exhibit I for more details).

Consumer preferences within the Varanasi spice market revealed a dual pattern. A significant proportion of households and small restaurants still preferred loose, freshly ground spices purchased from local vendors due to their aroma, freshness, and the ability to adjust blends according to taste. At the same time, a rising segment of urban and middle-class consumers were increasingly demanding packaged, branded products with clear labelling and hygienic standards. Price sensitivity was an important determinant, especially among wholesale buyers and bulk consumers. A growing niche market was also emerged for organic and herbal blends, marketed as natural or Ayurvedic. Apart from this, local initiatives like Kashika Foods, led by women entrepreneurs in Varanasi with support from the NGOs were capturing the market and creating hindrance for the protagonist (30 Stades, 2023).

Role of various employees and experience of conducting business till now

Presently, 7 out of the 11 employees were from specially-abled category. These employees were primarily involved in processing and packaging of the spices. Out of the four remaining employees, two were associated with procurement and one each in quality control and accounting. These employees were primarily recruited through reference by some individuals. After their recruitment, these employees were explained about the activities they were going to undertake. There was no structured training for these employees.

Mr. Malviya himself looked after the sourcing, marketing and business planning activities. He contacted the raw material suppliers based on the order he receives from the customers. He negotiated the rates and quality with the help of employees who assist him in the procurement activity. He did not keep a large stock of inventory. Once required processing of the spices was done and followed by packaging, then the same was delivered to the concerned customers. As majority of the customers of the company were institutional, the payment was received only after supplying the spices. Only a few customers paid in advance while majority paid after some time. Generally, it took around 7-45 days post the delivery of products to receive the payment. This created problem of fund availability to manage day to day operations. In some cases, Mr. Malviya had to follow up very frequently for receipt of payment.

In last 3 years, his business had expanded to Rs 7 lakh/ month. Some of the employees, who had joined earlier, left the organization after spending 6-8 months. Mr. Malviya had spent a lot of time personally training these employees. Although students from some reputed institutes such as IIT BHU and professionals from various domains such as finance and marketing had shown their interest in supporting his journey on voluntary and part-time basis, there were very few well educated professionals who had displayed their enthusiasm to join this organization on a full-time basis. He was finding it difficult to attract committed and talented employees.

On some occasions in past, Mr. Malviya also experienced trust breach by their employees as well as customers. Once Mr. Malviya was going to participate in one of the fairs of Rajasthan for selling his spices, the employee accompanying him during the journey left him alone and fled away. Mr. Malviya faced a lot of problem during the journey but he eventually went and sold his spices in the fair. He also experienced similar bitter experiences in case of some customers who purchased a large quantity of spices from him but did not pay back the money. In such circumstances, he felt being cheated and sensed a strong need to have competent people around him and organizational systems in place that can take care of his business.

Dilemma for expansion

As the venture enters in its third year, protagonist found himself in the most critical strategic crossroads. With the ongoing operations, venture was able to earn monthly revenues of 5-7 lakhs while emphasizing on B2B buyers and repeat customers. In addition to this, travelling across various places in the country and sharing his entrepreneurial journey, Mr. Malviya was motivated to scale up the business beyond Varanasi. He had repeatedly experienced strong interest in his products, appreciation for the purity of his spices, and encouragement from diverse audiences which was one of the strong indicators of his thought process to go beyond the existing institutional buyers. Other than that, his network of specially abled community had also provided him strong encouragement to market the product for broader audiences.

The idea of market expansion was also backed by his interest to provide livelihood to the special ability persons and to serve best quality of the spices among the Indian households. However, this very commitment had also emerged as a source of strain in his growth strategy. Market expansion, particularly through B2B channels and geographically dispersed institutional buyers, demanded stronger marketing coordination, reliable supply chains, and professional sales management. At the heart of this dilemma, a marketing-led growth challenge persisted, compounded by constraints of paybacks, human resources, and organizational systems. Malviya realized that the demand for hygienic, unadulterated spices was on the rise, therefore, the idea of market expansion with the existing brand had its own merit. At the same time, Malviya recognized that the Kashi spice market itself offered a significant untapped potential considering the heritage spice trade ecosystem. Strengthening presence within this familiar and trust-based market could allow deeper penetration with lower risk, and better control over quality. However, focusing locally might constrain growth aspirations and limit the scale of social impact he envisions. On the other hand, his business relied on the quality inputs from the farmers so expansion would also require strong control on the supplies to maintain quality throughout the chain. Also, he was not sure how only specially abled employees could help his organization

grow sustainably and at a significant pace with high impact? How should he develop his future growth trajectory and implement effectively to realise his vision?

Malviya must decide whether to focus his marketing strategy on deepening the spice market in Kashi or scaling into wider B2B markets, while ensuring quality control, and the professional scalability of a workforce largely comprising specially-abled employees.

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Exhibit I: Spice Survey Report — Dina Nath Gola, Varanasi

(Note: This information may be useful to the readers for understanding spice market dynamics in Varanasi)

A. Most Preferred Brands

Rank	Brand	Popular Products / Notes
1st	MDH	Most preferred brand in Varanasi region, especially during wedding seasons, festivals. Popular varieties include- Kitchen King, Jaljeera, Kashmiri Lal Mirch, Garam Masala, Haldi Powder, and Dhaniya Powder.
2nd	Everest	Widely used for regular household cooking and by local food outlets and also huge demand in wedding seasons, festivals and special occasions.
3rd	Rajesh Masala	Locally recognized and often stocked by neighbourhood retailers.
4th	Goldie Masala	Moderate popularity in retail shops.
5th	Catch Masale	Less preferred by consumers.

Source: Author's own through survey

B. Spice Regional Sources

Dina Nath Gola, Varanasi, sources its spices from multiple states across India. The network ensures a steady supply of both whole and ground spices.

State/Region	Major Spices Sourced	Notable Areas / Markets
Kerala	Black Pepper, Cardamom, Cinnamon, Cloves, Nutmeg, Turmeric	Direct imports from southern traders
Andhra Pradesh	Chilies	Kuchipudi – known for high-quality red chilies
Tamil Nadu	Turmeric	Erode – The Turmeric City of India
Gujarat	Cumin (Jeera), Fennel, Coriander	Unjha (Asia's largest cumin & spice market), Ahmedabad (Sindhi Market, Lal Darwaza Market)

Rajasthan	Chili Powder, Cumin (Jodhpur), Coriander, Turmeric, Fenugreek, Star Anise, Cloves, Black Pepper	Jodhpur and many other markets
Assam	Bay Leaves, Large Cardamom	-
Maharashtra (Mumbai)	Lalbaug Market - Turmeric, Cumin, Cardamom, Star Anise, Kashmiri Chili Powder Crawford Market - Cinnamon, Carom Seeds, Nutmeg, Red Chilies	Lalbaug Market, Crawford Market
Delhi	Turmeric, Cardamom, Coriander, other whole and ground spices	Khari Baoli near Chandni Chowk – Asia’s largest wholesale spice market
West Bengal	Cashew, panch phoron (mixture of five whole spices), black cardamom, coriander, nigella seeds.	Medinipur, Contai region
Madhya Pradesh (Neemuch)	Black Cumin (Kalonji), Ajwain, Coriander, Fenugreek, Poppy Seeds, Black Pepper	Major central Indian supplier to Varanasi market

Source: Authors own

C. Distribution Network of Dina Nath Gola

- **Primary Focus-** Domestic distribution mainly Northern India and adjoining regions.
- **Central Hub-** Dina Nath Gola Market, Varanasi a major trading center for both whole and ground spices.

D. Key Customer Locations Served through the said market

Patna (especially Banarasi Rai area); Near Nepal border regions; Prayagraj; Ghazipur; Buxar; Baliyan; Sultanpur; Mirzapur; Jaunpur among others

E. Major Customer Segments

- Wholesalers and bulk buyers from North India
- Retailers purchasing stock for local shops
- Ayurvedic practitioners requiring medicinal herbs
- Traders or exporters distributing to wider markets

F. Local Spice

- Several local spice brands in and around Varanasi (including Dina Nath Gola area) prepare their own spice powders and sell under private labels, such as Kesari Spices.
- Some shops own powder-making machines, allowing them to produce spices powder.
- This small-scale production supports self-branding and local employment while catering to diverse customer needs.

G. Survey pictures from Gola nath market, Varanasi



Source: Pictures taken by student Ms. Anjali Singh, MBA (ABM), RPCAU, batch 2024-26





Specimen Copy