

# Shouldering an illustrious legacy

Binoy has large boots to fill given the long and successful business history of **Meghraj Group**. His pragmatic attitude to business and his core values play key roles in his success.

**B**usiness, philanthropy and social responsibility are the pillars that drive Meghraj Group. Binoy draws inspiration from his grandfather, M.P. Shah, who retired from his business career at 49 and spent the rest of his life on philanthropic work as a pioneer of what we now know as venture philanthropy.

Meghraj Group was founded by Binoy's grandfather, M.P. Shah, in 1922 in Kenya, and he is the third generation of his family to work in the business. The business' activities have changed considerably since his grandfather's time.

The core guiding principles which have flowed down since then are around their values: respect for relationships, taking a long-term view, integrity, social responsibility and contribution. These cover both how the business plans and operates, and how the business integrates into society.

Today the Group is involved in three

main areas: investment banking advisory, fiduciary services and infrastructure consulting. With offices in India, Kenya, UK, Japan, USA and Dubai, the investment banking business advises on buying and selling companies, finding business partners, and raising equity and debt financing. Much of their work is around capital flows between the regions they operate in.

The fiduciary business, with offices in Jersey, UK, Switzerland, Dubai, Mauritius, Kenya and Singapore, provides professional trustee services, and sets up and administers trusts, companies,

investment vehicles and funds for international businesses, wealthy families, family offices and fund managers.

The infrastructure consulting business advises internationally in the power sector (including renewable energy), climate change, and urban and transportation infrastructure to businesses, development agencies including The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations, and governments, through offices in India and Kenya.

## EARLY LIFE AND NOW

Binoy's initiation into the business began when he was only 14, and he joined the business full time at 20, after graduating from University. He began in the marketing department, working directly with clients. He was soon involved in the start up of the investment banking business in India, their first expansion since the 1960s in Asia. He

MY GRANDFATHER, M.P. SHAH, IS A GOOD EXAMPLE. I ADMIRE HIS ENTREPRENEURIAL EXAMPLE, GOING FROM A VILLAGER IN INDIA TO BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN IN KENYA THROUGH HIS DETERMINATION, ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AND INTELLIGENCE

also worked on a project to rethink the Group's management structure, resulting in developing external professionals to run the businesses, and refocusing the roles of family members.

From a Group perspective he is involved with strategy, relationships with clients and partners, and new businesses. He is responsible for the investment banking and infrastructure consulting businesses. As a matter of policy the Group hires professional MDs from outside the family to run each business. Binoy supports the MDs and teams, helping with expansion, business development and client relationships, and facilitating interaction among the teams and between the businesses internationally.

### HIGHS AND LOW

Addressing some of his highs and lows he says: "I am excited about the international expansion of Meghraj's investment banking and infrastructure consulting businesses, which were originally just in India. I am also proud of the experience and credentials we have developed advising large Japanese companies investing overseas, which is a unique differentiation for us."

"Over the last few years, the businesses have all started operating in Kenya, and are growing well there. It is exciting to be returning to our roots, and expanding in the country in which Meghraj was founded 95 years ago. We are looking forward to significant expansion for Meghraj across East Africa."

"There have of course been lows as well. Some key partnerships have not worked out as anticipated, despite investing significant resources, and it is always frustrating when this happens. We try to learn the right lessons from these experiences," says Binoy. ▶

## ► HIS MENTORS

There are two people that Binoy seeks out for advice. He says: "My father and uncle are the DNA of our business, they are its living history, and they have decades of experience as entrepreneurs and businessmen. I go to them for general advice, and also specific advice about individual situations. Their knowledge about our clients is very extensive."

## HIS VIEWS ON SUCCESS

"Within each business, we want to build and strengthen relationships, meet our clients' needs, increase the level of repeat business from clients, and exceed our annual budgets: that is a base we set for success," says Binoy.

"From a more personal perspective, I don't really define tangible success goals for myself, because I feel that approaching these goals would risk complacency. I want to continually strive and push ahead. My mother tells me off for this, and says I should celebrate each success, but my natural instinct is that as soon as there is something to celebrate, I am already thinking about the next challenge," he adds.

More broadly he measures success in terms of the positive contribution and impact made on society, and to that extent, he feels, the business is a means to a much larger end.

## MANTRA FOR A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS

According to Binoy, to run a successful business, qualities including determination, persistence, hard work, integrity and reputation are important. He says reputation takes time to build, but it is time well spent.

He adds, "It is critical to attract a great team to work with – it's a cliché, but it has certainly helped me to be able to recruit people that are smarter and more experienced than I am."

"Having access to external opinions and experience helps. I am a member of an organization called Young Presidents Organization, and there is a small core group of members I meet regularly that are a great sounding board," says Binoy.

## HANDLING HIGHS AND LOWS

When it comes to handling the highs and lows of life Binoy is fairly philosophical, and deals with life with equanimity. He says, "I believe in karma, and this moderates my reactions. I try to remain

neutral to both highs and lows. For the highs, I tend to start thinking about the next challenge, so I don't dwell on them much. For the lows, I find it helpful to consider the potential impact of an issue after 1 and 5 years to judge its real impact."

## ATTITUDE TO WEALTH

Wealth, feels Binoy, is a responsibility. He says, "I feel that it should be used to help society. This is something I have learned from my family, particularly my grandparents, father and uncle. I have seen their examples of contributing to society."

"My grandfather retired from business at the age of 49 and spent the rest of his life on philanthropic work, giving back to society most of his wealth, building more than 100 educational and healthcare institutions. This defines my attitude to wealth. I believe in capitalism and trying to build wealth, and that this

## BUSINESS, PHILANTHROPY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ARE THE PILLARS THAT DRIVE MEGHRAJ GROUP. BINOY DRAWS INSPIRATION FROM HIS GRANDFATHER, M.P. SHAH.

has important societal benefits, such as creating employment and reducing poverty. The utilisation of that wealth is a responsibility, and a mindset focused on contribution is important," he adds.

## IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY VALUES

Family is extremely important to Binoy. He says, "I would be nothing without my family. They have taught me, helped me and supported me. As the third generation in a family business, it is difficult to separate our family values from the business' values. I discussed earlier our business values, and these are similar to our family values, which is more holistic and natural."

## IMPORTANCE OF PHILANTHROPY

Philanthropy is very important to Binoy. He says, "I have been left with big footprints to fill. The areas of focus for my family's two foundations are education and healthcare. Within education, I am particularly interested in entrepreneurialism, and helping encourage grassroots micro-entrepreneurs. Their increased

survivorship should lead to sustainable impact, increased employment and community wealth creation, giving significant benefits. I was involved with a charity that taught basic business skills to micro-entrepreneurs, and the impact it had was encouraging."

The family's foundations support the institutions, such as schools and hospitals, started by the family, and also some independent charities. "We believe tremendous value can be created by business people applying their business skills, experience and relationships to charities, helping to make them sustainable and efficient," says Binoy.

If he were to pioneer something, Binoy says, "It may well be in the area of venture philanthropy, and the application of business disciplines and technology to philanthropy."

## UNWINDING

Most of Binoy's time is spent on work, leaving him little time to enjoy hobbies. He says, "I like listening to music, and used to play and write music earlier. I enjoy travelling, and I'm interested in architecture and design."

## HIS IDOLS

Several people Binoy admires in business are also people he admires outside work, because they straddle the business and philanthropic worlds. He says, "My grandfather, M.P. Shah, is a good example. I admire his entrepreneurial example, going from a villager in India to becoming a successful businessman in Kenya through his determination, entrepreneurial skills and intelligence, but also how he switched focus from business to philanthropy and applied his skills, experience and money to helping society."

"As a more recent example, I admire Bill Gates for his entrepreneurial and business brilliance, and for how he changed direction to focus his skills and resources on philanthropy," he adds.

Outside of business, he admires the physicist Richard Feynman, a true polymath, the architect Tadao Ando for his conceptual concrete buildings, the creativity of the musician Brian Eno, and the author Yukio Mishima among others.

## ADVICE FOR BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS

"Be prepared to work very hard, get some good mentors to guide you, and don't underestimate the importance of luck," says Binoy in closing. **AG**