

INDIA'S MEWAR DYNASTY: UPHOLDING 76 GENERATIONS OF SERVICE AND CUSTODIANSHIP

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“I believe in the past, but my feet are firmly rooted in the present and I’m constantly thinking about the future.”

Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar

Over 25 years, Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar had built upon his father’s legacy, and that of the previous 74 generations he represented as the custodian of India’s historic former state of Mewar, later part of modern-day Rajasthan. It was early 2009, and Shriji knew that his responsibilities as trustee of Mewar would ultimately pass to his son Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar, with his daughters Bhargavi Kumari and Padmaja Kumari contributing their efforts to both the HRH Group of heritage hotels that the family owned and managed as well as numerous non-commercial activities under the umbrella of the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation, the trust that Shriji’s father, Bhagwat Singh, had established.

As he considered how much he had grown as a visionary and leader over his years as custodian, Shriji pondered the best next steps for Mewar and Udaipur, the city that housed the former kingdom and drew large revenues from its associated tourism. Shriji had already established the notions of a “City Within a City” and “Eternal Mewar” earlier in the decade in order to develop further the Mewar family’s held properties and bring all Mewar holdings, both commercial and non-commercial (see Exhibit 1), under the same umbrella. These initiatives had helped brand Udaipur as a tourism hub and unite Mewar’s supporters worldwide in a common mission to uphold its strength and traditions. Despite these advances, the hotel industry had suffered major slumps post-9/11 and more recently with the global economic downturn, so a thoughtful growth plan was crucial. What was the best way to carry that momentum forward?

Shriji also had to consider the best distribution of shares to ensure Mewar’s continuity and the harmony of future generations. Through his brother, Mahendra Singh’s split with the family and lawsuit against his father in 1983, Shriji had seen first-hand the deep discord that perceptions of inequity could foster. He sought the ideal asset shareholding pattern and succession plan to keep his children and subsequent generations united in placing Mewar’s needs above their own. In line with this goal, Shriji wished to ensure that his three children, who had divergent career interests and already held established roles within

the House of Mewar, continued to enjoy sharing responsibility for Mewar and, ultimately, for Udaipur's welfare. With these issues in mind, Shriji persisted in building his vision of how best to extend the legacy begun 13 centuries earlier.

THE STATE OF MEWAR: A RECENT HISTORY

The House of Mewar, located in modern-day Udaipur in India's state of Rajasthan, had its origin in the former state of Mewar. This state, founded by Bappa Rawal in AD 734, had boasted an unbroken chain of custodianship for more than 13 centuries, a period in which 76 generations of Rajput Maharanas (or kings) ruled as custodians and defenders of the state in the name of Shree Eklingnath ji (a manifestation of Lord Shiva). Of the many colourful kings, several stood out as architects of the palaces, forts and civic-mindedness that remained through the centuries. Among these kings, Bappa Rawal, Rana Kumbha, Rana Sanga, Rana Pratap, Fateh Singh, Bhupal Singh and Bhagwat Singh (Shriji's father) stood out for their contribution in different areas including nation building, defence and fine arts.

Like many other Indian kingdoms, Mewar became a princely state under the British in the 19th century; the state merged with Rajasthan after India gained independence in 1947. In 1971, the abolition of Privy Purse¹ and other privileges provided to princely states by the Union of India as part of their conditions of accession had posed a huge challenge to then-custodian Bhagwat Singh, who recognized the need for additional sources of income to maintain the House of Mewar in the long term, protecting its rich heritage and cultural legacy and fulfilling its duties to the people of Udaipur. The challenge was two-fold: creating a source of income for the maintenance of the custodian family and its properties as well as ensuring a constant revenue flow with which to discharge the moral and social responsibilities of the House of Mewar. Additionally, India's abolition of royal titles, along with the Privy Purse, posed a serious threat to the institution of Maharana, which had been vested in an individual to that point.

Bhagwat Singh found a solution to these problems by converting some of the palaces into luxury hotels (which were later developed as the HRH Group of Hotels under Shriji), thereby generating income for the upkeep and maintenance of the properties of the House, as well as immortalizing the institution of Maharana by vesting it into a trust called the Maharana Mewar Institution Trust. In earlier times, Maharanas regarded ensuring the welfare of the people of their states through various developmental activities as their moral duty. Maharana Bhagwat Singh strongly believed that these duties towards the people of Mewar must be disseminated regardless of whether the state of Mewar existed or the presiding government recognized him as the ruler; therefore, in 1969, he also established a charitable trust called the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation (MMCF) to discharge the moral responsibilities of the House of Mewar.

Shriji, the 76th custodian of the House of Mewar and the first designated trustee of the Maharana Mewar Institution Trust, inherited his responsibilities in a hostile environment: as Bhagwat Singh's second son, he was not the traditional choice to head the family, that role was typically assumed by the oldest son (Mahendra Singh, in this case). In 1983, however, Mahendra Singh filed a lawsuit against his father seeking partition of the ancestral property; he then dissociated himself from the family. Thus, upon Bhagwat Singh's death in 1984, Shriji, as a leader who was "asked to rule," rather than "born to rule," faced significant disapproval from members of his extended family and the people of Udaipur, some of whom believed he had usurped the Maharana title from Mahendra, its rightful owner. He was now responsible not only for carrying forward his father's responsibilities and initiatives, but also for maintaining the core values (self-respect and dignity, respect for mankind and service to the community) of

¹ A payment made to the royal families of former princely states as part of their agreements to integrate with India in 1947.

the House and winning over his doubters, all while keeping pace with a rapidly changing India. Shriji recalled those challenging times:

After father's death, I was suddenly pushed to the top, a place which is very, very lonely. I tried to do an amicable settlement with my brother, but he wanted either all or nothing. I made it very clear to him that there would be no fragmentation, but he did not agree. Most of the people were against me. Some of those who stood by me were also constantly brainwashed by others to leave me. For the first 10 years, it was a question of survival; there were court cases after court cases (the main case is still pending in the court). But, I never lost faith. I wanted to keep the word I gave to my father. Slowly, I gained confidence in my job and became more comfortable in my shoes. I started taking up more responsibility; I started understanding the whole thing better. When you are doing your work with full commitment, the direction automatically comes because you are interacting with a whole lot of people on a daily basis. I think all my learning was on the job.

As his partner and confidante, Shriji's wife, Vijayaraj Kumari Mewar, was also an important part of his adjustment. As first lady of the House, she performed the customary tasks of organizing religious functions and participating in the traditional celebrations in the City Palace complex such as Holika Dahan, Ashwa Poojan and Kartik Poonima, all while standing beside her husband. She commented on the family's challenges:

Emotional health and the well-being of my family has always been the priority for me. I always told the children that as long as we were together, the House of Mewar was intact. I have seen enough strained relationships in the past (among my husband, his brother and my father-in-law) and did not want my children to fight amongst themselves. I wanted them to know that our calling in life is much higher than these petty internal differences. Our calling was to protect and perpetuate the legacy of the past, to work for the betterment of our community and our country.

Shriji had become the chairman and managing director of the HRH Group of Hotels (HRH), the foundations of which had been laid by his father. HRH was the flagship commercial venture of the House of Mewar and India's largest chain of heritage palace-hotels and resorts, as well as the only one under private ownership. The Group owned and managed a long list of palace-hotels and resorts in Rajasthan, and offered tourists a regal experience at island palaces, museums, galleries, car collections, desert safaris and wildlife sanctuaries. Shiv Niwas Palace and Fateh Prakash Palace in Udaipur, as well as Gajner Palace in Gajner, won several awards from the Government of India under the heritage palace category. "Royal Retreats" of the HRH Group included Shikarbadi Hotel and Garden Hotel (Udaipur), The Aodhi (Kumbalgarh), Fateh Bagh (Ranakpur), Gorbandh Palace (Jaisalmer) and Karni Bhawan Palace (Bikaner).

Along with income-generating commercial properties (which paid for the family's living costs), Bhagwat Singh had established a number of public charitable, educational and religious trusts to create a platform through which the custodianship duties of the head of the House of Mewar could be carried out in perpetuity. Before becoming custodian of Mewar, Shriji had worked closely with his father, participating in many of his decisions concerning the future of the House. Once in charge, Shriji gradually expanded the activities of both the commercial and non-commercial wings of the House of Mewar over two decades, thereby extending the local visibility of the HRH group of hotels and the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation to an international level. He continued with vigour the modernization process his father had initiated, on which Shriji commented:

Change rarely invalidates the past and it does not necessarily imply a rejection of the old. I believe in the past, but my feet are firmly rooted in the present and I'm constantly thinking about the future. A great deal can and should be preserved from the past. In particular, we should treasure the selfless values that have stood the test of time.

Vijayaraj, Shriji's wife, voiced the same feelings:

Sometimes when we sat in a remote corner of the palace, I used to wonder who sat there 100 years ago and who will be sitting at the same place 100 years after. We did not build the palace; neither can we take it with us. So, the only good that we can do is to make it a little better for the next person. I am from the Kutch district in Saurashtra; there is a very nice saying in Gujarati: '*Bhogare ni bhagyshali.*' That means, 'the one who is able to enjoy is fortunate.' So, we must not forget that we are fortunate to have gained this opportunity to enjoy so much. When you cut pieces, what are you doing? You are distributing poverty. All I know is we have been entrusted with this responsibility by our ancestors to touch the lives of every strata of the society and benefit them through our work. The Indian government might have taken away the stage from where we performed, but our calling is still to work for our community, for our country, for the betterment of the people.

Shriji cast this notion in the context of economic benefits:

Even though the Udaipur state did not exist legally, we felt responsible to the people, we wanted to bring money into the economy. It is not just those two or three thousand people we employ (to whom we were directly responsible); in the changed circumstances, the idea was to be able to continue doing what our forefathers did as a part of their custodianship duty. The Maharana's position was never an office of profit; the purpose was never accumulation of wealth. Focus on continuity in carrying out the moral duties was extremely important and it had to run across generations.

With this goal in mind, Shriji had been building upon his father's legacy of custodianship for more than 20 years; specifically, he facilitated the creation of the concept of "Eternal Mewar" to preserve and extend the long-standing holdings, community and principles of Mewar, bringing all of this under one umbrella. Thus, Eternal Mewar encompassed the "City Within a City" initiative he established earlier to develop Udaipur into a role model heritage city and further the MMCF charitable trust his father had started decades before to support non-commercial efforts.

ETERNAL MEWAR

In 2007, Shriji conceived the concept of Eternal Mewar to bring everything that the House of Mewar stood for and every activity it undertook, including hotels, museums, schools, charities, a library and an airport, under one umbrella held not only by his family, HRH and the Udaipur community, but also by a broad group of individuals worldwide with ties to Mewar. Focus areas were human values, arts, heritage, culture, education, environment, tourism, sports and the welfare of flora and fauna: Eternal Mewar was instituted to cover all of the House of Mewar's commercial and non-commercial activities as well as its people.

Rationale for Eternal Mewar

Shriji commented on his motivation for developing Eternal Mewar:

I was not very happy about the fact that the trusts, their staff and activities were not getting as much attention, visibility and priority as the HRH Group, its hotels and the people working with the hotel group. The House of Mewar stood for much more than its hotel business. There was a fully operational non-commercial wing that existed inside the City Palace complex, which was as important and vital to the growth and perpetuity of the House as the commercial wing. The HRH had begun to emerge as a brand, but the other branches were getting overshadowed by it. This is not what my father or I had envisaged. The original idea was to generate income from the hospitality business for maintaining the ancestral property, and at the same time discharging our moral responsibilities through the non-commercial activities. The commercial and the non-commercial wings were equally important and deserved similar visibility.

Thus, Eternal Mewar was established to “seamlessly bridge and unify the diverse activities of the House of Mewar,” according to Shriji; he expected that Eternal Mewar would become a unique heritage brand and a model for sustainable development of properties, philanthropy and values. Accordingly, Shriji developed the Eternal Mewar emblem (see Exhibit 2). It symbolized custodianship with two brackets representing cradling hands. Inside the brackets was a vermilion “*tika*”² with rice grains, a sign of welcome used commonly in India. The emblem also signified a rising sun, the centuries-old original family symbol of Mewar.

The term “Eternal Mewar” was an expression of the House of Mewar’s core values: self-respect, self-reliance, respect for mankind and service to the community. To sustain these values, the House of Mewar, through its Eternal Mewar initiative, invited all those people who had links to Udaipur or who had expressed the desire to do something for the city to become joint custodians of the House and to uphold the values for which it stood. These well-known ‘people and friends of Mewar’ had familial, matrimonial, academic, professional and strong emotional ties with Mewar and its family members. Most of them expressed a desire to contribute to the developmental issue that Shriji had undertaken through the various trusts. Shriji formed another organization (Mewar Sabha Shiromani), under the aegis of MMCF, to facilitate networking among accomplished people from across the world who were well wishers of Mewar. Membership of this organization was restricted.

According to Vijayraj, “Eternal Mewar is like Eternal India. India is working towards eternalizing its culture, fundamental values, traditions, historical monuments, and others. Through Eternal Mewar, we are trying to do the same thing.” Padmaja Kumari Mewar, Shriji’s younger daughter and the joint managing director of the HRH Group since 2007, said, “Eternal Mewar will always be a work in progress. It is not something that is going to be completed any time soon. My father initiated it just to get it going and to keep working on it.”

THE CITY WITHIN A CITY

After India’s independence, the governance and control of Udaipur, except the Mewar family’s extensive landholdings around the shores of Lake Pichola, went into the hands of the Rajasthan State government. Shriji wished to develop this protected area as a “city” within the city of Udaipur, including a regeneration

² Red saffron dot put on the forehead.

of the City Palace complex. In 2003, he termed this initiative the City Within a City (CWC) project. Shriji envisioned the City Palace complex as a self-sufficient, income-generating entity. The broader objective was to preserve Mewar's rich culture and heritage by creating a constant flow of income not only to the palace but also to the people of Udaipur, thus serving as a role-model city for other heritage cities worldwide. The City Palace complex's income would also support MMCF, the largest public charitable trust of the family.

The CWC had multiple objectives: preserving and maintaining historical buildings, monuments and artifacts (architectural heritage); keeping the continuity of religious functions and rituals; celebrating social and cultural festivals; creating museums, art galleries, libraries, research institutes, archives and training centres to promote local arts and crafts; managing the environment and ecology (sewage and waste disposal systems, waste-water recycling, protection of fauna and flora and even promotion of passive energy systems such as solar power). Thus, the CWC served three primary purposes: to create awareness of Mewar's rich architectural heritage and socio-cultural traditions, to preserve and develop Mewar's intellectual property for academic and other research purposes and to create a rich database of information for future generations. Shriji envisaged the CWC project as a self-sufficient and sustainable model of a dynamic 21st century city:

I believe that tourism, other than being a great source of income and revenue, is in disguise a great opportunity to preserve and maintain the vital elements of a kingdom's ancient culture and heritage. Today we are a living palace complex: school, library, temple, museum, hospital, hotels, restaurants, public parks; we are currently managing them all. Tomorrow I can see The City within a City becoming a model of a self-reliant multi-faceted enterprise. I am fully conscious that I may not be able to witness the project's completion in my lifetime, but I have certainly set an example that others may wish to follow in the future, a future that is so inextricably linked with preserving the legacy of the past.

MAHARANA OF MEWAR CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

In 1969, Bhagwat Singh established the MMCF, the largest family trust, as an effort to preserve the age-old traditions and obligations of the House of Mewar to serve society and to provide a platform from which future generations could preserve and protect the House of Mewar's spirit of self-respect and self-reliance. It was funded by interest on Bhagwat Singh's original endowment and by entrance fees to the City Palace Museum. The main objective of the Trust, as outlined in the 'Declaration of the Trust,' stated that its funds must go towards charitable purposes in India, including relief to the poor, promotion of education, medical relief, the maintenance and expansion of library resources and the preservation of heritage monuments. Thus, the aims of the MMCF were fourfold: academic initiatives, eco-management, philanthropy and heritage conservation and promotion. The MMCF's major initiatives, all overseen by Shriji as part of his vision of Eternal Mewar, included the City Palace Museum, MMCF Annual Awards, Mewar Solar Cell, Maharana of Mewar Special Library (which contains reading material concerning Mewar), Maharana Mewar Research Institute, Maharana Mewar Public School and the Maharana Mewar Charitable Dispensary.

The City Palace Museum: The foundation of the City Palace was laid in AD 1559 by Rana Udai Singh II, on the advice of Goswami Giriji Maharaj, a hermit. Successive generations of Maharanas had added to the palace. Rana Karan Singh, Rana Sangram Singh II, Maharana Sajjan Singh and Maharana Fateh Singh made especially notable extensions. When Shriji became trustee of Mewar, the City Palace complex

included a series of palaces built from the 17th to the 20th centuries and divided into royal private areas and public zones. Each of the palaces represented unique architectural styles and materials.

After India's independence and the merger of Mewar with Rajasthan, the City Palace complex was converted into a museum; other palaces in the vicinity were converted into heritage hotels. Shambhu Niwas Palace remained the private residence of the Maharana. The Mardana Mahal (palace for the royal men) and Zenana Mahal (palace for the royal women) together formed the City Palace museum. Since 1969, these two palaces had been preserved and developed as the City Palace Museum, which was open to the general public. The monuments within the City Palace complex had been listed as monuments of high architectural and historic significance by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), based in New Delhi. The MMCF owned and maintained the City Palace complex, on which Shriji commented: "The tourist income generated by this single monument directly sustained 750 employees and their families, and indirectly provided income to 5,000 families in Udaipur."

The entire City Palace complex was developed in five major historical phases: mature phase (1559 – 1620), Mughal early phase (1620 – 1698), Mughal mature phase (1698 – 1778), British phase (1778 – 1930) and the post-independence Mewar phase (from 1931).

Over time, Shriji introduced value-added museum services including package tours and self-guided audio tours; he also added a light and sound show called "The Legacy of Honour" in the City Palace complex in 2005, which was offered in both English and Hindi. The City Palace Museum did not feature a higher rate for foreign tourists, contrary to government rules, according to Shriji: "Are we charged any differently than local Americans when we visit their country to see their monuments? Then why should we charge them differently in our country?"

As previously mentioned, the CWC project was aimed at conserving and revitalizing the City Palace and remaining complex as part of a model city, encouraging the involvement of not just the entire Udaipur community, but also funding agencies, universities, scholars and other specialists worldwide. The revitalization program encompassed assessment and documentation, consolidation, seismic reinforcement for the monument, restoration of building crafts, ornamental works, glass inlay work and traditional lime finishes for walls and floors, restoration of furniture, interior decoration and preservation of the surroundings.

MMCF, under Shriji's guidance, had created comprehensive documentation, including drawings of the City Palace Museum and other areas in the complex. The next step was to prepare a comprehensive "Conservation Master Plan" of the City Palace Complex. According to Shriji, "The Conservation Master Plan looks into everything that falls under MMCF. The Plan helps you to think and plan ahead."

MMCF was awarded two grants of US\$75,000 by the U.S.-based J. Paul Getty Trust for preparing a Conservation Master Plan that would be in-line with international resource management guidelines. This project included several other organizations such as the National Museum Institute, Birla Institute of Technology, TVB School of Habitat Studies and INTACH. The Foundation also collaborated with corporate, government and non-government organizations (NGOs) within and outside India on several related sustainability projects within Udaipur. The goal of these partnerships was to synthesize information on the local setting's history, present condition, maintenance and conservation challenges and priorities. The plan was developed by a multidisciplinary team of architectural conservators, environmentalists, architects, material conservators, community planners and professionals in heritage tourism.

Maharana Mewar Foundation Annual Awards: Bhagwat Singh instituted the Maharana Mewar Foundation Annual Awards in 1980 to 1981. Initially the Awards were meant to honour Udaipur-based scholars, but Shriji gradually expanded their scope internationally, targeting scholars, students and others who had contributed to the society in different ways. The awards helped to carry forward the Mewari tradition of recognizing merit and promoting excellence in various walks of life. This tradition dated back to Bappa Rawal's time (the eighth century), when Guru Maharishi Harit Rashi selected Bappa for the role of Mewar's custodian (diwan) on the basis of merit, wisdom and piety. With Shriji's expansion, there were one international, four national and eight other awards given to eminent local journalists, social activists, film personalities and scientists of national and international repute.

Mewar Solar Cell: In 1992, Shriji initiated research to convert solar power into a source of energy to drive the transportation system in and around Udaipur. Resulting from this research were a small solar-powered ferry on Gajner Lake at Gajner in Bikaner and an eight-seater boat (RA II) transporting visitors on Lake Pichola in Udaipur. The Mewar Solar Cell, a project office, was established to undertake research in passive energy systems in 1999. By 2003, six prototype rickshaws with three and four wheels and one electric motorcycle had been built. In 2010, 14 prototypes of solar vehicles were on display at the Vintage and Classic Car Collection in Udaipur. International non-competitive solar rallies were organized to test the prototypes on Rajasthan's roads in 2003 and 2004. Shriji had planned to help Udaipur emerge as a solar city through the Mewar Solar Cell, which aimed at transforming Lake Pichola into a fossil-free zone and deploying only solar-powered vehicles inside the City Palace complex, along with conducting further research on commercially viable solar vehicle prototypes.

In November 2004, the Society for Environmental Education and Research of India (SEERI) honoured MMCF with a national award for the best organization in the field of environment conservation for its more than 20 years of work developing boats and vehicles run on renewable energy sources. In 2005, MMCF was also awarded the European Solar Prize in the category of "One World Cooperation" for its solar projects.

Maharana Mewar Special Library: Preservation and development of Mewar's intellectual property was one of the prime objectives of the CWC and Eternal Mewar initiatives. Shriji established the Maharana Mewar Special Library (MMSL) with this very objective in mind in 1999. He also created a separate library for students of the Maharana Mewar Public School. According to Shriji, "In the past, the place where we have the MMSL today used to be the storage house for grain and a hiding place for the royal women and children in case the invaders entered the City Palace complex. So the utility of the space has changed with the changing times." Under Shriji's guidance, the previously existing Shiv Shakti Peeth Library was merged with MMSL. The three libraries collectively boasted a collection of 42,000 volumes of varying antiquity. Shriji also undertook extensive documentation of the books and manuscripts through computerized cataloguing and ensured that the library was well-maintained.

Maharana Mewar Research Institute: In 1985, Shriji created the Maharana Mewar Research Institute to preserve seminal archival documents, drawings and maps, some of them dating back to the 17th century, as a database for future generations. The centre promoted cultural research and was a storehouse of archival information pertaining not only to the House of Mewar, but also to Rajasthan and broader India. The institute digitalized and transcribed these manually catalogued documents regularly.

Maharana Mewar Public School: In July 1974, Bhagwat Singh established the Maharana Mewar Public School. The School provided high quality English medium education to a cross-section of children, ensuring a well integrated development of the physical, educational, moral and social fabric of its students.

Maharana Mewar Charitable Dispensary: The Maharana Mewar Charitable Dispensary, established in 2003, provided free medical counselling and medicines to the poor and needy.

For more than two decades, Shriji had been operating and enhancing several additional religious, educational and charitable trusts created by his father. All the trusts were governed by a board of trustees (see Exhibit 3).

SPORTS, AVIATION AND RECOGNITION

As a former state-level cricket player, Shriji believed in the value of sports: he had been instrumental in promoting polo in India, establishing the country's first professional team, Mewar Polo, under his guidance. He also established Ramgarh Resort & Polo Club in Jaipur as India's first "polo destination" and patronized the sport in the United Kingdom through the Cambridge & Newmarket Polo Club.

Shriji also built a private airport on the grounds of the Shikarbadi hotel; the facility featured micro-light aircrafts and small airplanes for Shriji's use and that of special guests. Shikarbadi Airport was also used by National Cadet Corps pilots for flight training with micro-light aircrafts.

In recognition of his contribution to the promotion of tourism in the country, Shriji was conferred the prestigious "Agastya Award" by the Travel Agents Association of India in 2001. In 2007, Shriji was conferred the "Tata AIG Lifetime Achievement Award" by Galileo Express TravelWorld. For 2009, the Indian Association of Tour Operators bestowed upon Shriji the "Hall of Fame Award" for his distinguished contribution to the growth of tourism in the past three decades. He had also been an active member of the World Travel & Tourism Council, an advisor to the Rajiv Gandhi Tourism Development Mission and an Executive Member of The Rajasthan Foundation, which promoted Rajasthan tourism worldwide. In considering these achievements, Shriji noted, "Nothing can happen in one day or one generation. Every generation must endeavour to utilize and augment the available resources and assets. Stagnation of assets needs to be avoided; the moment an asset stagnates, it loses its value."

GENERATION 77

By 2009, Shriji's three children (two daughters and a son), Bhargavi (32 years old), Padmaja (28) and Lakshyaraj (24) had gained significant academic, career and community service experience. As the 77th generation grew more confident and capable, Shriji considered their established and future roles in maintaining the legacy of Mewar, taking into account their strengths and interests.

Bhargavi Kumar Mewar

Bhargavi, the eldest of the three siblings, lived in Jaipur with her husband and two daughters. Apart from being executive director of the HRH Group, Bhargavi ran Aashka ("God's Blessings"), a high-end lifestyle boutique with two locations within the City Palace complex. Of the three children, Bhargavi had spent the most time with her father as a child. She completed her education in the United Kingdom and had been involved in various HRH developmental activities since the late 1980s; for example, she assisted her father with the revitalization plans for The Durbar Hall and renovations to Shiv Niwas Palace and Fateh Prakash Palace.

Bhargavi had created the Aashka boutique to popularize and revitalize the handicraft and handloom traditions of the Mewar region. Reflecting Mewar's rich craftsmanship, Aashka featured a rich collection of handicrafts in metal, glass, marble, stone, wood, silver and gold. The Shiv Niwas Palace outlet also offered crystal products and a line of jewellery. Bhargavi ensured that the master-craftsmen and their artisans benefited the most from Aashka's sales. She was also involved deeply with Seva Mandir, an NGO supporting the development of rural and tribal populations in Udaipur and the Rajsamand districts of southern Rajasthan.

Padmaja Kumari Mewar

Padmaja, Shriji's second daughter, worked as the joint managing director of the HRH Group since 2006. She graduated from U.S.-based Tulane University's Newcomb College in 2003, with a degree in international relations. She attended summer programs at New York University and Columbia University between 2000 and 2003. Later, she worked in hospitality management at top hotels including the Four Seasons Hotel, New York.

Padmaja directed a series of strategic changes at the HRH Group, including a major phase of renovation completed at Shiv Niwas Palace and Fateh Prakash Palace in Udaipur. She also led the HRH's participation at major travel and trade shows in India. Having attended several global travel marts abroad, Padmaja had gained deeper knowledge of the hospitality industry and built multiple valuable business alliances. In 2007, Padmaja received the SATTE-Intach Award for her pioneering achievements with HRH Group in heritage tourism. She was also associated with two non-family charitable trusts in Udaipur.

Padmaja's hero was Bhagwat Singh, her grandfather. "He was such a visionary," she said. "He was able to think so much ahead, generations ahead and then actually do something about it." She commented:

We have obviously seen our father work the way he has. He has led us by example. Our mother has been equally important in instilling not only the core values of the House, but also the practicalities of present times through communication and conversation. So, the information that came together from both of them impacted us a great deal.

Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar

Lakshyaraj, the youngest sibling, had become the executive general manager of Jagmandir, an island palace in Lake Pichola, in 2008. He had a bachelor of commerce in hospitality management degree from the Blue Mountains Hotel School in Australia and spent five years in Australia and Singapore before returning to Udaipur in 2007. In both locations, Lakshyaraj gained hands-on experience with fine-dining restaurants and luxury hotels.

In Udaipur, Lakshyaraj was responsible for developing Jagmandir as a destination complete in itself. "An all-day café, a stylish dining restaurant and a luxurious spa are revitalizing Jagmandir for 21st century tourists who are travelling across the globe for uniquely enriching experiences," Lakshyaraj said. Specifically, his project teams had created the all-day café, Picholi Bar and Darikhana Restaurant, along with the luxurious Panghat Spa. Lakshyaraj also worked with several teams to enhance the menu and services at Palki Khana, the European-style café at the Manek Chowk, in line with the best practices of cafés in Europe and Australia.

GROOMING THE NEXT GENERATION

Shriji was proud of his childrens' progress and excited about their current and potential contributions to upholding the House's values. Shriji commented on Lakshyaraj specifically:

I am already grooming Lakshyaraj for future roles and responsibilities. I have ensured that Lakshyaraj is happy reporting to his elder sister. I push him to attend and speak at social functions. This will certainly help him establish rapport with the local community. He is only 24, so he has to first get used to operations. He cannot fully understand what we are talking about right now. As he grows up, hopefully he will grasp the more intrinsic values of running a business. However, there is no formal mechanism to groom or train him either in terms of teaching him the nuances of business or lessons in family traditions and values. I think I am trying to teach him by walking my talk. For instance, when we are discussing the water and sewage issue, they all feel the need to do something about it. They are seeing what I have been trying to do. So, Lakshyaraj is aware of the problem, now he has to decide how he wants to attack this problem.

Vijayaraj explained the grooming process in the family:

There is no formal mechanism to groom or mentor the children, but the children have seen their father work hard towards preserving and perpetuating the House of Mewar. They understand the magnitude of Shriji's responsibilities towards the House, the community and Udaipur. They, especially Lakshyaraj, are also aware that soon it will be their turn to shoulder the same responsibilities. I have observed Lakshyaraj: since childhood he has never had any difficulty connecting with the local people or the employees. As a child, he used to play with the kids of the palace staff. He used to go to the palace garage and talk to the drivers. He still does it. Once when the tractor driver did not turn up, Lakshyaraj himself worked the tractor all night. Such is his sincerity and commitment.

Talking about Shriji's City Within a City initiative, Lakshyaraj has always told me that nobody could have done it the way his father had done it. And I thought to myself that this is a good sign because I have seen successors changing everything once they stepped into their father's shoes. They thought they could do it better!

Vijayaraj also discussed her decisions regarding the children's education:

Being brought up in a happy environment by my grandparents and studying in a boarding school (convent) in southern India really helped me. It taught me the value of harmony and discipline. It helped me a lot, especially in my life with Shriji. I was ready to go back to a not-so-easy life in Udaipur and give it the best I could. When the Maharana Mewar Public School was opened for the poor children of Udaipur, I decided to put my own children in the school. I myself took a lot of interest in the activities of the school. My children really learnt a lot about our values and traditions in the school. I mean, they did not go to fancy schools to start with. We shifted the children to Mumbai (in 1995) because as they grew up, it became difficult for them to balance their school life and the social attention they enjoyed from the people in Udaipur.

Shriji noted that his children took their work, and the economic welfare of the House, very seriously. "For instance, when I ask Padmaja to give a complementary room to an acquaintance, she questions why," he

said. “I back off if I think she’s being reasonable. I try not to push beyond a limit because I can see where she is coming from.” Similarly, Lakshyaraj preferred to dress and behave as any other executive at work: “One cultural change that I would like to bring is to take people along with me rather than work under somebody or have people work under me. I believe in treating everyone at par.”

Shriji had been thinking of delegating operational management responsibilities to non-family members and positioning the family members in strategy-focused roles. The children had mixed feelings about this shift. Lakshyaraj noted that he relished working closely with myriad projects teams. While she supported her father’s views in general, Padmaja also enjoyed her hands-on involvement in operations:

I think the idea is to adapt to the changes that are happening around us. Earlier the changes came a little slower; maybe things changed from one generation to the other. Nowadays, the pace of change is much faster. You may use experts and take outside help and advice, but the key part is sustaining the quality of the services being offered.

Shriji believed that the quality of management was improving consistently, in part because he had delegated a lot of work to consultants: “The consultants have been able to achieve a great deal of discipline at work, including systems and processes for the MMCF.” Shriji felt that the time was right for the family to delegate operations and concentrate on strategy: “Professionally managed operations is my current priority.”

Understanding the best way to engage Mewar’s next generation was even more important in the economic context of the time: the House had been forced to focus much more on survival after 9/11 due to the worldwide hotel industry slump; the global economic downturn of 2008 to 2009 was also a challenge. “It has been about keeping the company alive. But we certainly need a better strategy now,” Shriji said. “Right now we are in a consolidation phase. I want to hand over a clear and clean canvas to the next generation.”

OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE AND SUCCESSION

Transitioning to the 77th generation also involved careful consideration of the House’s ownership structure and succession issues. Aggregating the commercial and non-commercial properties, Shriji held the majority of shares (almost 75 per cent) in the House of Mewar (see Exhibit 4). Shriji commented on the House’s ownership:

My father had structured the ownership in such a way that both me and my brother had equal holding. My shareholding further increased as I expanded on the enterprise, while my brother’s did not. Whenever it was required to pump in funds to any of the companies, we brought out convertible debentures and asked my brother to invest. He did not invest, but I did. Consequently, our shareholding kept increasing gradually. In any case, my sister did not have any shares.

In the past, the Maharana took personal income from the state; the remainder of the money was used to discharge his duties. According to Shriji, this process was still in effect:

We are following the same principle. Income from the commercial wing is the family’s income, while the income from the charitable or non-commercial is used for discharging our moral responsibilities. We get dividends if the commercial wing does well. So, our

dividend is correlated with the efforts we put in. I just started taking a salary (chief executive officer salary) this year.

Shriji made clear that in line with the family tradition, custodianship of the House would pass to Lakshyaraj, not to Bhargavi or Padmaja. Bhargavi and Padmaja would, however, continue to assist their brother in business and foundation activities. Shriji was determined to ensure that history would not repeat itself. Vijayraj noted, “The children have a lot of affection for each other. Both the girls have made it very clear that they are not interested in owning the property.”

However, like any first-generation entrepreneur, Shriji faced inheritance-related dilemmas; for example, he had not yet been able to decide the best way of settling his personal shares and assets to perpetuate the House: “My biggest worry is who is going to manage my assets after me. My son will get married and will get his share of money and land (as per the family tradition) from the House. Suppose I bequeath my personal assets to him and he decides to sell them, that is a possibility that I want to avoid!”

Shriji had considered several options, including placing his personal assets in a private discretionary trust and appointing trustees. He was also considering creating strategic partnerships or introducing venture capitalists by selling part of the equity to bring in fresh funds to develop the HRH Group. “However, I don’t want to sell to the extent that I become a minority shareholder,” Shriji said.

The immediate challenge before Shriji was to settle minority shareholder issues and complete the consolidation process by bringing all the commercial activities under the HRH Group umbrella. Shriji discussed this issue:

Minority shareholders can create problems by disagreeing with us or by not supporting our ideas and plans, but they cannot oust or change the structure. Hopefully, I will be able to settle the issues with minority shareholders (his sister and brother) by the end of this financial year (March 2009). I had given an offer to the minority shareholders to sell their shares to me and take money, but they want fragmentation and I am dead against fragmentation of the business, which in turn will mean fragmenting the House of Mewar.

He added:

In our kind of family, the biggest issue is status. This over-emphasis on status and ego are coming in the way of thinking rationally and reasonably. There is jealousy; there is dislike about why one is doing better than the other. Normally these things happen in all families. Let me be very clear, I am not preventing any member of the family from growing,

FAMILY GOVERNANCE

Family governance was a key component in understanding the next generation’s role, and Shriji planned to focus more on this area. He wanted to institute formal family meetings to discuss business needs and the role of the family in fulfilling those needs. There was already an informal rule that any family member in town should gather daily for lunch. As Padmaja noted, “Regardless of where we are, all of us take a break from work and get together for lunch. It usually becomes sort of a business lunch where we discuss what had happened in the first half of the day and what we planned to do post-lunch.”

The House of Mewar had no written constitution, but Shriji believed that there was a fallback reference for almost every problem or situation in Mewar's colourful history:

In our long history, I do not think there is a single conceivable situation that our family has not encountered. In earlier days, we used to have a close-knit family system; we were educated at home and learnt from each other's experiences. The whole scenario has changed now; priorities of the new generation have changed. Maybe it will happen for them later in life, but that questioning has not begun, that hunger for learning about the past is missing.

Learning from history was potentially important for enhancing and advancing a vision of Udaipur's future.

A VISION FOR UDAIPUR

In 2007, MMCF, in association with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization India Office and Udaipur Municipal Council (UMC) hosted a joint cooperation program to develop a sustainable agenda to preserve the living heritage of Indian cities. Programme activities included outlining a heritage-sensitive Udaipur city development plan and establishing a heritage unit within the UMC, as well as discussing how to implement joint cooperation activities.

Shriji and his team were working on a specific new initiative called the Mewar Sabha Shiromani. There was a large diaspora of people who had birth links, family links and matrimony links to Mewar. Over the previous two decades, many of these individuals had been in touch with Shriji to discuss how they could contribute to Udaipur's development. Shriji had invited many of them to serve as co-custodians: "I want to tap into their intellectual property," he said. "I want to provide them a good networking platform and in turn get a lot of intellectual inputs from them on what more can be done for the further upliftment of the local community of Udaipur." This concept provided much of the impetus to begin the Eternal Mewar initiative. He added:

Earlier, Udaipur was only known for the Lake Palace hotel in Lake Pichola. The city was not a brand; only Lake Palace, which was leased to the Tata group in 1971. Today we have managed to make Udaipur into a brand. We did it by bringing the best people here. My greatest strength is my ability to invest in people. We have done the tourism bit; we have brought money into the economy of Udaipur. My hotel room gets me \$500 a day, but the tourist staying in it also spends another \$500 elsewhere in the city. Whether it is a guy who drives you in a taxi from the airport to the hotel or a shopkeeper or a guide, all of them have benefited from the tourism industry. Many residents of Udaipur have started letting out a room of their houses during the busy season, which becomes a source of income for them. Today a taxi driver also takes pride in having made whatever small contribution he has by driving a guest from the airport to the city. So you see, I have made them into stakeholders! If you compare the number of flights per day to different cities in Rajasthan, you will find that Udaipur has the maximum number of flights daily.

Vijayraj considered Shriji's vision in the context of his passion for their city:

Shriji has been very transparent all his life and has worked selflessly for Udaipur. There was a time when business was so bad that the Lake Palace was absolutely empty. Shriji thought he will close the hotel for some time to renovate it. There was a line of local

people outside his office asking him not to close the hotel, as it was the pride of Udaipur, something that the city was known for. Shriji decided not to close it as he felt Lake Palace touched the life of every strata of the society in Udaipur. Another instance that I can recall is earlier when we used to go for a drive on Diwali (India's Festival of Lights) night, Shriji used to see the lighting in the local bazaar and say that this year we had good business: 'Look, every house is lit up!' You know these little things used to give him a lot of satisfaction. I remember when Shriji leased our land to Hotel Udai Vilas; everybody said he has kicked himself in the stomach. But he said to me very clearly, 'I want to make Udaipur an up-market destination. If I do not invite the best people over here how we will fulfill our dream of making it an up-market destination?'

Developing palace-resorts and hotels, conceptualizing and implementing the "Conservation Master Plan" for revitalizing the City Palace complex, accelerating the pace of ongoing philanthropic trust activities and even promoting polo more broadly in India and abroad all served one purpose: to eternalize all that Mewar stood for.

GENERATION 77 AND BEYOND

Over 13 centuries and 77 generations, the Mewar dynasty had sustained itself while contributing to the economy and culture of its community, all part of the value of custodianship transmitted through a long line of Maharanas. As the 77th generation was poised to inherit Mewar's legacy, Shriji, the House's first designated trustee, involved his three children more and more deeply in operating commercial and non-commercial entities that drove tourism revenues and charitable activities for Udaipur. Developing a strong vision for Mewar's future and thoughtful models for business growth and family empowerment was crucial, not only for maintaining the dynasty's continuity and the family's long-term harmony, but also for creating a blueprint worth following by other heritage-cities worldwide. How should Shriji continue to guide the dynasty's development?

Exhibit 1

THE HOUSE OF MEWAR: PROPERTY HOLDINGS

<i>Commercial Institutions</i>	<i>Non-commercial Institutions</i>
1. The Lake Shore Palace Hotel Private Limited <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shiv Niwas Palace 	1. Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation, Udaipur <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maharana Mewar Foundation Annual Awards • The City Palace Museum • Eternal Mewar • Maharana Mewar Special Library • Maharana Mewar Research Institute • Maharana Mewar Charitable Dispensary
2. The Lake Palace Hotels & Motels Private Limited <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Palace Hotel, Udaipur • Fateh Prakash Palace, Udaipur • The Promenade, Udaipur • Jagmandir Island Palace, Udaipur • Arsi Vilas, Udaipur • Garden Hotel & Restaurant, Udaipur • Ranakpur Hotel & Restaurant, Ranakpur • The Aodhi Hotel, Kumbhalgarh • Ghas Ghar, Udaipur • Khas Odhi, Udaipur • Air Charter Service, Udaipur • Fateh Bagh, Ranakpur • The Legacy of Honour (the Mewar Sound and Light Show), Udaipur • The Vintage & Classic Car Collection of the Palace, Udaipur • The Crystal Gallery, Udaipur • Flora Danica, Udaipur 	2. Shree Eklingji Trust, Udaipur <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shri Mewar Shiv Shakti Peeth • Shri Dharma Sabha Fund • Shri Amba Mataji Ka Fund • Shri Asawara Mataji Ka Fund • Shri Mahasatyaji Ka Fund • Shri Parmarth Fund • Shri Sadavart Fund • Shri Hem Ka Gola Fund • Maji Sahiba Chavdiji Fund • Mandir Shri Surya Narain, Ranakpur
3. Historic Resort Hotels Private Limited <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gorbandh Palace Hotel, Jaisalmer • Karni Bhawan Palace, Bikaner • Maan Bilas Hotel, Bikaner • Ramgarh Resort & Polo Complex, Jaipur 	3. Maharana Mewar Historical Publications Trust, Udaipur
4. Rajput Hotel & Resorts Private Limited <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gajner Palace Hotel, Gajner (Bikaner) 	4. Maharana Kumbha Sangeet Kala Trust, Udaipur
5. Shikarbadi Hotel Private Limited <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shikarbadi Hotel, Udaipur • Shikarbadi Airport, Udaipur 	5. Vidyadan Trust, Udaipur <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maharana Mewar Educational Institutions • Maharana Mewar Public School • Maharana Mewar Vidya Mandir • Maharana Mewar Technical Institute

Exhibit 1 (continued)

Commercial Institutions	Non-commercial Institutions
6. The Lake Palace Trade & Travels Private Limited. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Udaipur, Office • Bikaner, Office • Jaisalmer, Office 	6. Rajmata Gulab Kunwerji Charitable Trust, Udaipur
7. Mewar Memorable Millennium Melodious Music Private Limited, Udaipur	7. Maharana Mewar Manav Dharama Trust, Udaipur
8. Meva Media Management Private Limited	8. Shree Goverdhan Trust, Udaipur
9. HRH Information Technology Private Limited, Udaipur	9. Chetak Trust, Udaipur
10. Chetak Exports (I) Private Limited <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anmol Gems, Shiv Niwas Palace, Udaipur • Anmol Gems, City Palace, Udaipur • Anmol Gems, Jaisalmer • Aashka, City Palace, Udaipur 	
11. Central Office Mewar Palace Organisation Private Limited	
12. Mewar Hospitality Management Solutions (India) Private Limited	
13. Udaipur Equine Institute, Udaipur	
14. The Cricket Institute, Udaipur	
15. Polo Federation of India, Udaipur	

Note: The commercial properties of the House of Mewar consisted of companies operating in the areas of hospitality (hotels and resorts), music, trade and travels, media management, information technology, handicrafts and gems, hospitality management, and equine, cricket and polo institutes. The non-commercial properties of the House consisted of various charitable, educational and religious trusts.

Exhibit 2

ETERNAL MEWAR EMBLEM



Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 3

**MAHARANA OF MEWAR CHARITABLE FOUNDATION: TRUSTEES
(AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2010)**

Name	Title
Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar	Chairman and managing trustee
Smt. Vijayraj Kumari Mewar	Trustee
Shri Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar	Trustee
Shri Karan Singh Karjali	Trustee
Shri Mahendra Singh	Trustee

Exhibit 4

**THE LAKE PALACE HOTELS AND MOTELS PRIVATE LIMITED: SHARE OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE
(NUMBER OF SHARES)**

Date	Bhagwat Singh Mewar	Executor of will of Bhagwat Singh Mewar	Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar	Mahendra Singh	LSPH (Lake Shore Palace Hotels) Pvt. Ltd	Total
Mar. 2/63	101	0	51	51	0	203
Nov. 3/84	788	0	426	426	1,500	3,140
Sep. 30/10	0	788	1,000	426	2,210	4,424

Note: Bhagwat Singh had divided the shares equally between his two sons (Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar and Shri Mahendra Singh) in 1963; Shriji's shares increased from then onwards through issue of fresh shares and conversion of debentures.