



THE MAHARAJA SAYAJIRAO UNIVERSITY OF BARODA
BBA PROGRAMME



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THE UNIVERSE WITHIN

INTERVIEW

Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur is the 76th Custodian of the House of Mewar. HRH Group of Hotels, Udaipur, is the flagship commercial venture of the House of Mewar. It is India's largest and only chain of heritage palace-hotels and resorts under private ownership. As Chairman and Managing Director of the HRH Group, Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur has been instrumental in preserving and developing palace-hotels and sanctuaries-resorts across Rajasthan. Interviewing such an immensely admirable personality was indeed a pleasure.

Sir, how does it feel to be the scion of a dynasty that dates back to 1,400 years?

Every legacy is a responsibility. And every responsibility has to be handled with a degree of sensitivity and respect one must inculcate for one's past. In our case, in the House of Mewar, it is not just the legacy and reputation of my father, his late Highness Maharana Bhagwat Singhji or my grandfather, great-grandfather and...we go back a long way to 75 generations! Yes, every generation of Maharanas have taken pride in being 'Custodians' of the legacies they have inherited. I would not say there is pressure on us but the expectations from us are very high, at every stage in life, not just childhood or as young adults. One lives, learns and imbibes from the family's core values itself. 'Eternal Mewar', the vision that is guiding our House today, is the sum and substance of these values and principles. We need to protect, develop and enhance these values, make them relevant to the 21st century, and not carry these as a burden or baggage of the past. This is the responsibility of being a Custodian.

Despite your enormous inheritance and the business sense, you've a 14-hour unflinching schedule each day. Could you tell us more about the same?

I do enjoy my work and begin my work-day early by 9 am. I have to work at different levels, dealing with different categories of people from far and near. No two days are alike in my life, but yes, every day is a working day! I have direct dealing with my senior management and consultants. And I believe in keeping my table very clean: no outstanding papers or letters, unless of course I am travelling! Travel and social commitments are also important and I do spend time in Mumbai, New Delhi and London through the year. Work never stops...thanks to the

IT revolution. I am comfortable Skype-ing with my colleagues and ensuring that there are no delays.

Q: Sir, you have done a hotel management course in the UK and then went on to Chicago, USA where you learnt the job thoroughly which included washing dishes, changing linen and serving the guests. How do you think such experiences contributed towards getting you where you are today?

When I was in London, it was a great learning experience to be exposed to hotel management courses and interacting with the British royalty and gentry whenever the occasion arose. We are extremely down-to-earth people. Our upbringing has been devoid of any superfluous ceremony. I believe in doing a good job...whether it is cleaning dishes then or looking after our palace-hotels now! I do not cut corners. The people I met, the friends I made in the U.S. have lasted a lifetime. Chicago was a great city to live in. I have very fond memories of those days. At HRH Group of Hotels, I was able to put into practise many things I learnt there.

Sir, we've learnt that you have a crystal collection in the palace as well as a fleet of antique cars. Could you tell us more about the same.

Udaipur's Vintage and Classic Car Collection and the Crystal Gallery are today the talk of the world! Yes, the Crystal Gallery is the probably the world's largest single private collection of crystal under one roof. One of my forefathers in the 1880s had ordered most of this crystal which we have preserved and exhibited at the Fateh Prakash Palace.

The cars in our Collection range from Mercedes, Cadillacs to Rolls Royces: all of them are in running condition. My favourite set of wheels is the MG TC 1946.

But through 2011-12, the focus had been on the Royal Udaipur Rolls-Royce GLK 21 which is the proud Winner of 'The Lucius Beebe Trophy' at Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in California, in August 2012.

Q: The Shiv Niwas palace of Udaipur received the Heritage Award for Excellence in 1999 from the Prime Minister. Though we're sure it's a combination of factors that must have led to this remarkable achievement, what is that one thing you think this would

have been impossible without?

What began in the lifetime of my father continues till date. I recall when he took the decision to 'convert' Jag Niwas into Lake Palace Hotel in the early 1960s. There were many people, and many within the family, who were against this decision. They were unable to realize the depth of his vision. He was able to gauge the potential of heritage tourism way back in the 1960s; and he showed almost every royal house in India the ways and means of how to preserve heritage and generate revenues through tourism. I don't have to drive home the point, but Lake Palace Hotel is today one of the 'most recognized' hotels of the world. There is a lesson in it for all of us to learn. What he achieved can be construed as a lesson for many former royal houses, not just in India but across Asia.

Q: You have contributed a great deal to the beautification of Udaipur. Can you share how the city has changed and what more needs to be done?

Udaipur, surrounded by hills, built on the lake-shore, is a beautiful city, no doubt: it is a city of peace. Yes, in the 1950s and 1960s it had a population not exceeding 50,000; today, it is almost 700,000+. Naturally, the city's resources are stretched. But we are working to make it even more beautiful and sustainable in the 21st century. There is much that needs to be done. Saving the Lake Pichola, more afforestation, anti-pollution measures for the air and water, safety of tourists, rigorous building laws.

When in July 2009, Travel+Leisure voted Udaipur as the 'best city in the world to visit', it clearly was a landmark achievement for all stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry. It was also a testimony to the holistic, comprehensive development of the city, growth and enrichment of its local economy and generating greater pride in traditional professions, crafts and culture. Tourism has made Udaipur's economy more robust than it ever was.

What message would you like to give our readers about life in general?

Don't be afraid of the future; be positive and optimistic. I wish all your young readers 'happy and healthy years' ahead. Remain young, remain contemporary: keep on learning new things and be friendly with new technologies.

ARVIND SINGH MEWAR

