



Mr. Paras Shahdadpuri

# From Diplomacy to Biz Wonders

With practical wisdom and maturity gained through his diplomatic stint and inspired by his community's commercial instinct, Mr. Paras Shahdadpuri, Chairman of Nikai Group, UAE, has successfully emerged as an enterprising genius setting milestones in the business world as also the community services sector in his host land. While earning great eminence by developing Nikai as a major brand in electronics and home appliances and winning the trust of 15 million consumers in the Mid-east region, he also enjoys the appellation of "MR. RELIABLE" suggesting reliability of his company's products...

**T**he greatness of a man irrespective of his venturing domain lies in his high moral character, resolute integrity, strong will power and fortitude. A man possessed with such rare attributes has no hesitation to embrace the myriad challenges as an inevitable part of life's experiences that enable him to fly like eagles, attaining greater heights of heroic successes in dream objectives. The adventurous journey of landmark successes of Mr. Paras Shahdadpuri, the Chairman of Nikai Group of Companies, UAE, is found revolving on his dauntless courage, pragmatic vision, deep conviction in human possibilities and endless desire to face newer challenges that

constantly urged him to take detour from a highly paid glamorous and prestigious career with the Indian Foreign Service to a financially lucrative domain i.e. business enterprise. His fast track strides towards the landmark



Paras with his Wife Poonam

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Paras with H. H. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, UAE Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, during the presentation of the Nikai Award to the Best Student

success became possible due to the highly salubrious business atmosphere of the UAE which has always been encouraging for the entrepreneurs and traders, and the Emirate and entrepreneurs are often found flourishing together harmoniously. In such a favourable biz ambience, only the sky came to be his limit.

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Shahdadpuri's foray into business world is tantamount to his homecoming because he served with the Indian Foreign Services despite being a Sindhi which is predominantly a business community by traditions. He admits frankly: "I belong to the Sindhi ethnicity and I indeed then realized the widely held belief that business runs in the blood veins of the Sindhis, although it got invoked in me only in my 40's!!"

Born in Sindh (now a state of Pakistan) before India's partition in 1947, Shahdadpuri hails from an educated and cultured family. His family migrated to Nagpur/Delhi where he grew up and pursued his studies. His father was a senior health officer who managed to provide good education to his children. It was his parents' thrust on education, and of course, his slogging on studies that Shahdadpuri excelled in all his competitive examinations.

After joining the Indian Foreign Ministry, Shahdadpuri served as a diplomat in Indian missions in various countries such as Beijing (China), Washington DC (USA), Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) and Tripoli (Libya). By virtue of such coveted job and prestigious position, Shahdadpuri used to rub shoulders with decision-makers, diplomats and other bigwigs in the government. While in his 40s, he was offered a posting in Helsinki (Finland). However, he turned it down,

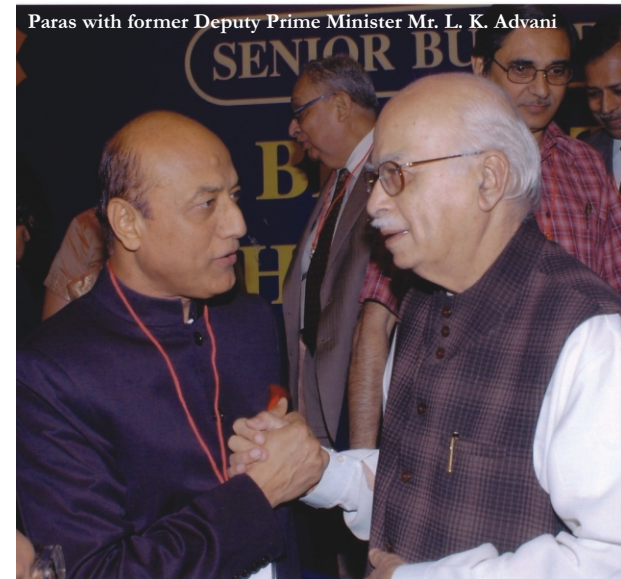
and instead, opted for Tripoli. During his stay in Libya, he nurtured an idea of doing something of his own and build something from the scratch that may have a huge impact on people. He acquaints: "It was during my tenure in Libya as a diplomat that I realized that I was cut out for something different in life. I was in early 40s and I felt it was an opportune moment to redirect the course of my life path". Why he opted to go for business while posted in Libya, he explains: "I realized my own potential while in Libya when

I handled the economic and commercial portfolio in the Embassy. Working in bureaucracy has its own handicaps, your efforts and initiatives do not always come to fruition. This at times leaves you with a sense of dissatisfaction, and perhaps frustration..."

Though Shahdadpuri was going to enter a new domain, the instinctive spook of quitting a highly respectable and well-paid job made him oscillate at least for a while. But since he had already made up his mind to move ahead for business, he was not the person to retreat. He appraises: "Business was an alien field for me. None



Paras receiving Bharat Shiromani Award from former PM Mr. I. K. Gujral



Paras with former Deputy Prime Minister Mr. L. K. Advani

of my immediate family had dared to foray into this field. There were no siblings I could seek guidance from". However, his urge for the business was too strong to be resisted. "Challenge is my adrenaline", he asserts with a heroic urge to venture into the new domain of commercial enterprise despite its uncertainties and risks.

The real challenge lay in his irresistible desire for a drastic change in the pattern of his career pursuit. He with his family members had already suffered the

agonies of displacement following the country's partition in 1947 and faced the challenging situations quite bravely. He was therefore instinctively prepared to meet the challenges, however horrific they might be. In fact, it was his gene pool that ignited the fighter in him, and he was resolute in his determination to go for a drastic break, joining a business career in preference to continuing as a dignified public servant. Past his age of forty while working at the Indian Mission abroad, Shahdadpuri stood as a disillusioned man having an insight into the potentialities of his own self if allowed to work beyond the ambit of the

government regulated assignment, however prestigious it might be in status. It had been this realization that forced him to adopt a track of life that offered him enormous opportunities to fulfill his dream objectives with excellence and distinct recognition. Besides, the moral support to his venturing spirit as provided by his parents gave a high boost to his decision for the challenging break.

When Shahdadpuri's two distinct career options are taken into account, his sensibility is found evolving consistently based on his assignments and experiences. His work experience in the Indian Foreign Service helped him a lot to decide about his future. He admits thus: "It (the Indian Foreign Service) provided me enormous opportunity to get exposed to the varied culture, political and economic systems of different countries. The Indian Foreign Service taught me to deal with different nationalities, to understand their psyches, the local nuances, the working constraints etc.....These perhaps trained me to face the challenges, and successfully convert these challenges into opportunities." The honesty with which he admits the truth is the essence of his personal character, and which is the key to his laudable successes in his endeavors. Shahdadpuri was fully aware of the fact that the path of business career was not laid with roses and that there were always umpteen challenges and obstacles. But still he opted for this challenging path mainly on the strength of his conviction born out of his spiritual as well as intellectual qualities that characterize his iconic personality.

Thus, determined to take a break in business, Shahdadpuri resigned from his diplomatic service in 1986 and returned to Delhi to execute his future plan of action. The first oddity he had to encounter was the restrictive business environment prevailing in India which at that time was not so encouraging. Moreover, the communication systems were also dissuading. Shahdadpuri understood it well that it was not a place to start or continue a business smoothly. Hence, he set up his business office in England, for it was the only English speaking country in Europe, and he could relate to in terms of professionalism and business opportunities well. Like a man of common wisdom, Shahdadpuri also preferred a country which he

H. H. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, UAE Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research awards Paras Shahdadpuri for his valuable support to the Higher Colleges of Technology



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then found better to start a business in comparison to others because then he could not have thought about the world beyond the stars which he was going to land in and make a distinct landmark there.

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business there per se. Why he chose Dubai for business, is explained by Shahdadpuri as thus: “I was very impressed by the infrastructure, free foreign exchange environment, telecommunications, absence of taxation and the ease with which one could set up a business”. The other encouraging factors had been the advantage of daily flights from Dubai to Indian destinations with good frequency, hardly a few hours journey from Dubai to Delhi and Mumbai, huge Indian population with the availability of standard schools for children besides other facilities.

How he teed off the business, is described by Shahdadpuri in his own words: “Initially, I traded in commodities soaps, detergents, urea and fertilizers, and later branched out to importing and distributing consumer home appliances. Over a period of time, I diversified and decided to create my own brand (of consumer durables). Thus, in 1995, the concept of Nikai was born. I saw there was a niche for a private brand that could stand its own against major international European, Korean and Japanese brands. And today, Nikai is a brand to reckon with”.

As unraveled by Shahdadpuri, his company's initial foray was into general trading and bulk movement of commodities to various international destination, soon Crescent General Trading tied-up with the Indian FMCG giant, Hindustan Unilever Ltd, to stock market and distribute the vast portfolio of Unilever products in designated countries. Gradually, the Group further diversified its commercial activities into the retail food business with Boston Foods, a franchisee of the second largest American fast food chain, Subway.

Besides Nikai emerging as a popular brand, the Group has also broadened its horizon with consulting and staffing in wide range of industry with TASC. TASC Outsourcing is a global staffing solutions company based in Dubai and



Bengaluru. It specializes in outsourcing and staffing services to large companies around the world in various sectors, including banking/finance, call centers, energy, engineering, IT, sales and telecommunications. TASC's outsourcing division provides scores of skilled people resources for short and long term projects, which helps their clients in reducing the costs. Besides providing visas, payroll, insurance and other benefits, they can also manage staff on a day to day basis. They make customized service offerings to meet client needs that help fulfill complex SLA's where they are measured on metrics such as attrition, training and performance of the outsourced employees.

Every successful businessman has a success mantra that generally enables him to reach his desired goal. About the principle that Shahdadpuri applies to his endeavors to success, he reveals with reasons: “There is no alternative to success. (Success) is an individual's birthright. We have got to work towards making every effort a success. Whenever I am confronted with a difficult task, I review my SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis and try to optimize on my capacities and capabilities. One has to keep his spirits high and mind alert. I am 65 now but I believe there are more heights to conquer. What I learnt as a diplomat that at the end of the day, every issue has to be sorted out in an amicable manner. Sincere communication is important. My heart bleeds when I see people fighting and killing their own kind while pursuing wrong objectives. Diplomacy taught me... how to express, explain and communicate with respect while holding my ground”. Thus,

Paras (then) President of IBPC with Indian President Ms. Pratibha Patil



he feels very sad to see those who harm others while pursuing their objectives.

Shahdadpuri with his sharp instinctive faculty is a self-inspired man. His keen observation of life and its happenings with their inevitable consequences has enabled him to seek inspiration and regulate his own affairs. Thus, he is a man who does not believe in idolizing anyone for the sake of inspiration. However, spiritually, he gets inspiration from Swami Vivekananda's personality. He likes to draw references, inferences and comparisons with various achievers like India's Narayan Murthy of Infosys and the Tata's who have shown innovative thinking and have sustained the growth with social responsibility. His personal inspiration comes from a very senior member of the UAE Royalty, His Highness Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al-Nahayan, UAE's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, whom he fondly calls “an amazing person, beyond words”.

Shahdadpuri's belief in self-inspirations is suggestive of something known as “internal process”. In other words, it is one's own deep conviction or passion which helps to sustain the drive within oneself. Thus, he is devoutly realistic in his approach to the attainment of life's goals and becoming successful achiever. To him, there is no magic wand that can do the trick for anyone. To be counted in the list of achievers, one has to be resolute in thinking and focused towards one's goal in life with undiluted sincerity in dealings and commitment to achieve the objectives..

Fully conscious of the modern management tasks, Shahdadpuri keeps himself updated with the rapid

advancement in technology around the world so as to keep up the biz momentum of his consumer electronics at the desired level. He is committed to adhere to the imperatives such as consistent quality controls, high level of service and honest conduct with both vendors and distributors while taking care of employee partners. His brand is ahead of other brands mainly by virtue of his R&D and strategic tie-up with his manufacturing partners. He unravels: “There is no doubt that the technology is advancing at an extremely rapid pace and internet has only pushed this forward. We of course have to be on top of the things and watch and imbibe every new technological advance and translate it into our product range and use it for enhancing the growth of our group”.

Married to Poonam, Shahdadpuri is blessed with two children: a son named Mahesh Shahdadpuri and a daughter, Dr. Jean Shahdadpuri. As a true Hindustani wife, Poonam has always been a big support to Paras Shahdadpuri, as he claims with the words of praises for her: “My wife, Poonam has been a huge support to me. She has believed in me and in my efforts and has stood by me through the highs and lows of life...” While at home, Shahdadpuri has the aplomb of having a reliable support in the person of his better-half, on the other hand, his son Mahesh and daughter Dr. Jean have emerged as the future leaders of Nikai Group's ventures.

Responding to a question about his children's association with his business, Shahdadpuri acquaints: “All three of us (father, son and daughter) are board members on the Nikai Group of Companies where we discuss strategic issues together. My son, Mahesh heads two businesses: TASC Outsourcing, a temp and contract staffing company and Boston Foods, operators of some of the Subway



Paras with Mr. Anand Sharma Minister of Commerce & Industry

outlets. He is armed with an Engineering degree with an MBA from Boston. Dr. Jean, my daughter, who has been engaged in the Nikai brand division, will soon oversee our foray into the healthcare and education business, where her second post-graduate degree in Healthcare Management will be useful”. Dr. Jean is a specialist in Pediatrics and an MBA from the US.

Shahdadpuri's family life is not much different from other businessmen. He admits: “It is important to have a balance between business and family life, though I admit, at times I have faltered on this score”. However, he tries to spend sufficient time with his family members and lays greater emphasis on infusing oriental education and culture in children rather than adopting the Western ones. Choosing

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Paras with Dr. Raman Singh Chief Minister of Chattisgarh

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*When it comes to giving back to the community in various manners, Shahdadpuri has been a renowned name in this sphere. He says: “I believe our life is not complete without discharging our social responsibilities towards the society. There is no end to making money and spending on yourself”. Such noble thoughts of Shahdadpuri have inspired him in a way that Nikai Group has established Nikai Awards for the Best Teacher and Best Student in UAE.*”  
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Dubai to live and do business has also been one of the reasons behind it rather than staying or going for any country in Europe or America. Shahdadpuri maintains with a sense of superiority of his cultural tradition: “We Asians like to bring up our children in an Oriental society rather than the permissive Occidental society”.

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As the Chairman of the Overseas Indians Economic Forum during 1999-2001, Shahdadpuri brought together the Indian business community with the UAE hosts and fostered closer working relationship. Again, he was elected to lead the Indian Business & Professional Council (IBPC) as its President for the term 2009-2011. During his Chairmanship of these two important business bodies of UAE, he met with various Ministers of the Indian Government and emphasized the role of NRIs in the economic growth of their home country India and the ways in which this National Resource of India can be roped in the development of Infrastructure sector which requires over USD 1000 billion in the next 5 years. He is equally respected by the Indian business community and the UAE government officials for his initiatives and contributions made to the community. Shahdadpuri expresses with pleasure: “I draw enormous satisfaction in contributing my small bit to the society at large which I consider as a duty and responsibility of every human being of some means”.

What is unique about Shahdadpuri's personality is his switching over to business from a plum position held in Indian Foreign Service on diplomatic assignments, and then making a distinct niche for himself in the field of business; it is quite a rare phenomenon. Though belonging to the Sindhi

community, business was initially an alien domain for him yet he ventured into this world and started acting like a seasoned entrepreneur. Now with his vision to build a diversified global business that provides reliable products, exceptional service and superior value to his customers, Shahdadpuri's efforts to make further accomplishments in business and serve the Indian community in UAE are still on, and which of course, are his great attributes that make him a rare biz luminary shining in the Mideast sky while glorifying his motherland, India.

Again, the most charismatic feature of Shahdadpuri's personality is his relentless and unquenchable thirst for imposing newer challenges upon himself. Even past 65, he does not believe in retirement. He wishes to leave this world with his shoes on. He says beamingly: “I believe Resting is Rusting. God Almighty has bestowed on few of us these amazing grey cells to generate wealth; we must keep producing it partially for self and partially use this wealth for the welfare of the society at large. Keep working till you drop”. This is the height of dynamism blended with the virtue of optimism that drives him from within to go for the risks in the enterprising world with his firm belief in God's help in his endeavors, as he says: “Being novice and uninitiated to the corporate world, I had to invent the wheel at every stage of my business and I kept on consolidating my small gains and looked forward tonewer challenges and God helped me wherever I stepped forward”.

Thus, he deserves all the accolades and praise and to be remembered as a humble man, a reliable friend and an energetic person ready to help others.....and above all, a true achiever in life and a vital source of inspiration to the Indian fraternity at large.



Paras and his wife Poonam at the reception of the Indian CEO Awards (He was awarded the best CEO - International achievement)