

MARWAR

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PORTRAIT OF A COMMUNITY

India

**Rajasthan
making
headway**
Perspective
by Rajiv Arora

**Changing
skylines**
Rajas Jain,
Akshay Pasari,
Rishabh Siroya

**A legacy
in writing**
Ajay Piramal

Gourmet gurus
Suman Agarwal,
Deepa Jain
& Bharti Sanghi

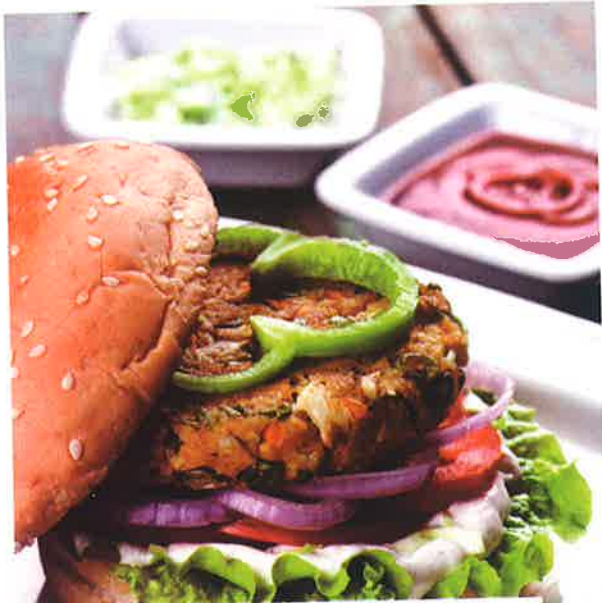
AGRO-VISIONARY
Bhavarlal Jain

Trailblazers

Gulab Kothari, Girish Jhunjhnuwala,
G K Kabra, Shikha Durlabhji, Pradip Chopra

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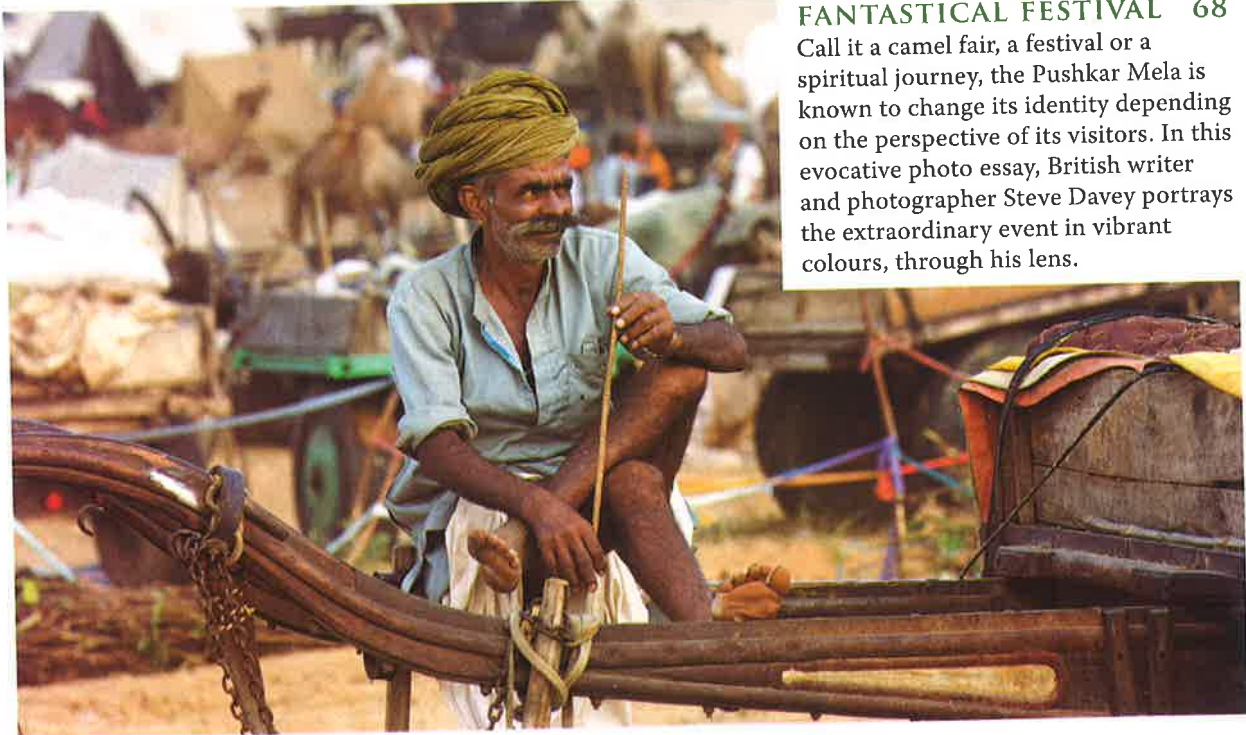
CULINARY ENTREPRENEURS 54

If Marwaris are known to be connoisseurs of food, credit must also go to those Marwari women who have mastered the art of cooking. Three exceptional women—Suman Agarwal, Deepa Jain and Bharti Sanghi—have taken their love for food beyond the kitchen to start their own businesses.



REVITALISING INDIAN AGRICULTURE 60

From selling kerosene off carts for a living to running a multimillion dollar enterprise that has revolutionised agriculture in India, Padma Shri awardee Bhavarlal Hiralal Jain truly epitomises adroit entrepreneurship. MARWAR talks to the founder-chairman of Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd about his philanthropy, his efforts to improve the lives of Indian farmers, his affinity to technology and his unique approach to holistic development.



FANTASTICAL FESTIVAL 68

Call it a camel fair, a festival or a spiritual journey, the Pushkar Mela is known to change its identity depending on the perspective of its visitors. In this evocative photo essay, British writer and photographer Steve Davey portrays the extraordinary event in vibrant colours, through his lens.



Revitalising Indian agriculture

From selling kerosene off carts for a living to running a multimillion dollar enterprise that has revolutionised agriculture in India, Bhavarlal Hiralal Jain truly epitomises adroit entrepreneurship. At equal ease, whether he is conversing with local farmers or delivering talks at international conventions, the Padma Shri awardee has two schools and an advanced Gandhian research facility to his name at his native Jalgaon. His penchant for the written word and the plethora of books he has authored (including the *Sourcecode of an Unusual Enterprise*, which is expected to release in June this year), is yet another aspect of his multifaceted personality. MARWAR talks to the founder-chairman of Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd about his philanthropy, his efforts to improve the lives of Indian farmers, his affinity to technology and his unique approach to holistic development.

Text: NEEHAR MISHRA

Being carted around on the meandering roads of Jain Hills, home to Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd (JISL), is like taking a tour of a Utopian farm—the rural elements like sprawling fields dotted with bullock carts, tube wells, et al are aesthetically juxtaposed with state-of-the-art agricultural research laboratories and glistening solar panels. The great extent to which this amalgamation of the rustic with the modern is an apotheosis of Bhavarlal Jain—the man behind the ₹5,000-crore enterprise that pioneered drip irrigation in India—becomes apparent within the first few minutes of our conversation, as he relentlessly stresses on technology being indispensable for the upliftment of the small farmer. All the diverse and superior technology that the establishment boasts of, be it tissue culture, food processing, or, of course,

drip irrigation, however, converges to the pursuit of a single aim—a smile on the farmer's face—a sentiment that all his employees, or associates, as Jain likes to call them, enthusiastically wear on their sleeves.

Hailing from a family traditionally engaged in farming, one may take Jain's affinity to agriculture for granted. And while he admits that his family background coupled with his experience of working in the field sensitised him towards the needs of small farmers, it was his passion to positively impact lives around him that further bolstered his commitment to agriculture. Armed with a diverse educational background, including degrees in commerce and law, Jain had a plethora of career options to choose from, but decided to start his own business of trading in agricultural equipment. "Once, when I was at our family-owned petrol pump, I





Bhavarlal Jain receiving
the Padma Shri from Smt
Pratibha Patil



happened to see the words 'Agriculture: a profession with future' printed behind a drill. That was the triggering point for me," he reminisces. From then on, there was no looking back for Jain, who further expanded his company's base by adding PVC pipe manufacturing facilities, dealerships of tractors, sprinkler systems and other equipment and agencies for fertilisers, seeds and pesticides.

Towards a sustainable future

Defying the common perception of agriculture being a poor man's occupation, JISL, which commenced operation with a meagre capital of ₹7,000, is now a multimillion dollar enterprise! It is the largest drip irrigation company in India and the second largest in the world. And as Jain tells us his story, his self-confessed obsession with integration—between agriculture, technology and education—seems to have been not only beneficial but also inevitable for the success reaped by the company. It was in 1985, while attending an exhibition conducted by the American Irrigation Association, that the idea of introducing drip irrigation in India dawned on him. "The exhibition showcased technologies which could save water. Based on my knowledge, I

knew that even if one was to dig as deep as 2,000 ft, one would not find enough water to bring more than 20 per cent of Maharashtra's land under irrigation. The situation is similar in most parts of India." To find a permanent solution to this problem, JISL, in 1988, introduced micro irrigation via drip irrigation technology in India. Ever since, at least 2.5 million of the country's 100 million farmers have reaped its benefits. Apart from training farmers to make efficient use of this technology, JISL has also promoted a non-banking finance company to extend financial support to them. All these efforts have not only garnered profits but also international attention, with the Harvard Business School recently doing a case study on JISL's business model.

Saving water, however, is only one aspect of Jain's integrated approach, which comes a full circle with JISL's advanced research laboratories dedicated to tissue culture. Within a span of few years, the company's efforts have made it the world leader in tissue culture banana and pomegranate production. Its agriproducts like dehydrated onion, fruit purees and juices—retailed under the brand name *FarmFresh*—are sought after by global

"The bigger picture is to make life sustainable on earth; the motto being conservation instead of consumerism"

giants Nestlé and Unilever. "Irrigation alone cannot increase productivity. One needs to enhance the potential of the seeds which in turn will multiply the yield. This is where tissue culture comes in—to provide superior quality seeds to the farmers," explains Jain.

While integration forms the cornerstone of Jain's vision, it is his idea of sustainability that has ensured it reaches fruition. For him, sustainability is a way of life, which teaches one to strike the right balance between prosperity and frugality. "This principle—being content with less—is ingrained in my DNA and has now been institutionalised in my business too. The bigger picture is to make life sustainable on earth; the motto being conservation instead of consumerism." Apart from facilitating



sustainability in agricultural practices by providing small-scale farmers with better raw material and efficient irrigation technology, JISL has also ventured into harnessing renewable forms of energy such as solar and bio waste. Also in the pipeline is a university that will offer courses on water conservation, sustainability and renewable energy.

Preserving Gandhi's legacy

With simplicity, humility and

magnanimity underpinning all his ventures, Jain's ardent devotion to Mahatma Gandhi, the epitome of all these traits, comes as no surprise. "There is no part of my life that he has not touched. It is because of him that I have learnt the importance of honesty, integrity and education, both in personal life and business," he says. Personal lessons notwithstanding, Jain finds it his duty to ensure that Gandhi's legacy lives on—that his ideals continue to

inspire generations to come, just like they inspired him. "In fact, if Gandhi was relevant in my time, he is even more relevant now, when people are becoming more and more ambitious and engaging in excesses of capitalism and consumerism."

Jain's efforts to preserve Gandhi's ideals for posterity have culminated in the Gandhi Research Foundation (GRF), inaugurated last year by the then President of India, Smt Pratibha Patil. Located amidst well-manicured lawns in a noise-free zone, the Foundation houses a museum, an international research centre and well-preserved Gandhian archives and artefacts.

Inside the museum, the saga of India's freedom struggle comes alive through not only photographs and memorabilia—usual suspects in any museum—but also state-of-the-art multimedia aids like film and video clips, audio books, light and sound displays and sections modeled to depict



Facing page: Crops being irrigated through the drip irrigation system

Above: An aerial view of Jain Hills

Below: A view of the Gandhi Research Foundation

VANTAGE POINT

"*Bhau* is an institution in himself. In many ways he lives what he believes in, whether it is the treatment of employees (whom he calls associates), developing a whole grid of products along the entire farm value chain or focusing on the farmer around whose welfare the entire business is based. *Bhau* has been working on issues of sustainability much before the concept caught the fancy of the Western world."



PROFESSOR ARUN K JAIN, PROFESSOR OF STRATEGY, TECH-INNOVATION AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, IIM - LUCKNOW

significant incidents like the Swadeshi Movement. As you imbibe these lessons from history, you also realise how the museum is not only an embodiment of Gandhi's life, but also of Jain's own, given the way it uses modern technology to project the importance of our historical moorings, both in the present context as well as in the years to come.

Education, an equaliser

If GRF serves as an accurate testimony to Jain's devotion to Gandhi, then his philanthropic efforts exemplify the Mahatma's advocacy of education as an essential means of progress. Hailing from a rural family of modest means, for Jain, it was education that set his life's course. "Just like there is no agriculture without water, there is no life without education. If it wasn't for my education, the ₹7,000 that I began with would have never become a million dollars," he says.

Personal and monetary gains for Jain, however, are merely collateral benefits; the primary goal of education being to equip one to make a difference in the lives of others. Jain has established two schools—Anubhuti 1 and Anubhuti 2—which are collectively managed by his trust and JISL. Anubhuti 1 is a residential school located within the premises of Jain Hills, with a focus on experiential learning. Ensuring that socio-economic barriers do not stand in the way of a child's right to education, Anubhuti 2, an English-medium school also based in Jalgaon, caters specifically to children from families Below Poverty Line.

As we take a tour of both the schools, it is heartening to see the staff truly partaking in Jain's vision—to make education accessible to those who are

Dhiman Chatterjee



Students learning through song and dance at Anubhuti 2

willing and deserving. Interacting with the staff and students at Anubhuti 2 in particular was a lesson in reality, as we realised that providing financial support is only half the job done. While the free uniforms, meals and medical attention that the school provides may seem incentive enough for these children to get enrolled, the bigger challenge for a guide is to actually break the barrier created by economic disparity and adapt to their sensibilities. Apart from a specialised method of communication and instruction, it requires a great deal of patience to work with them—urging them to make the most of this opportunity. But seeing both the teachers and students brim

with enthusiasm that was contagious—talking to us about science models and giving us a dance performance with equal ease—is proof enough that the Anubhuti family has come a long way in its endeavours.

Genetics vs genomics

Not one to dissociate himself from his roots, Jain admits that business comes naturally to him, as does risk-taking and number-crunching—traits often ascribed to Marwaris. But for him, it is the community's penchant for hard work that makes its people successful in every walk of life. "Hailing from a region with very hostile living conditions, hard work is intrinsic to the Marwari culture.

They are not afraid of struggle or even failure," says Jain, who traces his ancestry to Agolai near Jodhpur.

However, while genetically inheriting these traits is one matter, the extent to which they are applied in real life depends on individual will and the external factors that influence them. For Jain, while it is natural to get carried away by ambition and greed—forces of genomics, according to him—it is up to the individual to draw the line between the two. Fortunately, when it comes to business and philanthropy, Jain's sons not only share his vision, but have dedicatedly worked towards furthering his efforts. "It was my sons' idea to divert 80 per cent of our earnings to the trust dedicated to social welfare activities. Fortunately, it comes naturally to them; I have never had to impose my thoughts and ideas," he proudly says.

Honouring the Indian farmer

Jain's list of awards and accolades runs as long as that of his contributions. He has received four honorary doctorates for his path-breaking efforts to improve agriculture in India. In 1997, he became the first Indian and the second Asian to receive the prestigious Crawford Reid Memorial Award, instituted by the Irrigation Association, USA, for 'Significant achievements in promoting proper irrigation techniques and in

VANTAGE POINT

"At heart, he is a farmer; at mind, an industrialist. He is one of the most innovative and futuristic persons I have known. He introduced the micro-irrigation system—so critical in a water-starved agricultural country like India. He brought in alternative energy based on bio-gas and solar system. His tissue culture facility is again unique. And above all, his vocational life is fully leavened with ethics and compassion."



D R MEHTA, FOUNDER AND CHIEF PATRON, BMVSS, JAIPUR

Dhiman Chatterjee



A glimpse of one of JISL's tissue culture labs

fostering major advancements in the Industry outside the United States of America'. For his pioneering work in the field of irrigation, he was awarded the UNESCO-West-Net 'Water Conserver of India' Award in 2007, and in 2008, he received the Padma Shri from the President of India.

All these honours, however, seem inconsequential to Jain, his biggest reward being the prosperity of the farmer. "It is my obsession with excellence—to provide the best of the world to my farmer—combined with my nationalist spirit," he says, adding that the next milestone for him would be to facilitate dry-land farmers and those with small landholdings with sustainable technology, which they can use to till the land themselves.

Jain's industrious efforts in the field of agriculture no doubt prove that it can exist in synergy with modern technology and industry. But has JISL's technological breakthrough really managed to change the common perception of agriculture in India? "To tell you the truth, if I am an agriculturist, no one will give me their daughter's hand in marriage. Those who are already engaged in it are waiting for an opportunity to sell their land at a good price! Also, there is a strong

decline in interest with each successive generation," he laments. Adding to the lack of interest is the risk factor involved, due to the sector's dependence on climate, delay in subsidies by the government and unstable market. For Jain, the solution lies in promoting the farmer's interest in tilling his own land through formats such as contract farming. "There is immense scope in agriculture. I have been told that by 2020, 30 per cent of India's GDP will come from agribusiness. Right now, it's barely 15 per cent! This potential can only be realised if problems like education, absorption of technology and infrastructure are addressed."

While agriculture clearly has a long way to go before it can match pace with modern industry, Jain's undeterred perseverance in accomplishing his goal has undoubtedly brought about a revolution in the field. Now joined by his sons, Ashok, Anil, Ajit and Atul, JISL is certainly an international entity to contend with. And if the saying, 'Little drops of water make a mighty ocean' is anything to go by, we are certain that his endeavours will, one day, change the face of agriculture in India. It does, after all, sustain the livelihood of at least 60 per cent of our country's population!