



ANANT SHAH

Meghraj Group
UNITED KINGDOM

- Mr. Shah's father, M. P. Shah, retired from business to devote himself to building institutions in health and education in Gujarat, India and Kenya (1954). Three years later, the family moved to the United Kingdom
- Mr. Shah and his brother, Vipin, set up Meghraj Group, offering private banking, fiduciary and investment services (1973)
- The brothers restructured the Group, shutting the private banking operations, which allowed Mr. Shah to focus full time on philanthropy (1999)

Philanthropy is a vocation

that can change your life

When Anant Shah was 50 years old, he found his calling—one that would ultimately lead him to wind down the London-based bank he had founded with his brother, Vipin, so that he could focus full-time on philanthropy.

“I didn’t realize until then that I had another side,” Mr. Shah says.

Mr. Shah’s inspiration was his father, Meghji Pethraj Shah. His father’s commitment to the service of humanity was embedded in the family’s values and their faith, Mr. Shah explains.

As Jains, his family follows five religious tenets, one of which is *aparigraha*—often translated as “non-accumulation.” “The idea is that everyone needs enough for a comfortable life, but anything surplus should be used for the community,” Mr. Shah says. “We have a saying: If you have two chappatis on the table, that is enough.”

FAMILY SUPPORT

It is easy to see why Mr. Shah would want to follow in his father’s footsteps. M. P. Shah left India for Kenya in 1919, when he was 15 years old, in search of new opportunities. He built a manufacturing, distribution and financial empire before retiring in 1954 and moving to the United Kingdom in 1957.¹

¹ Paul Marrett, *Meghji Pethraj Shah: His life and achievements* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay: 2004), www.herenow4u.net/index.php?id=cd4715.

In M. P. Shah's later, philanthropy-oriented years, he built more than 120 schools, colleges, hostels, hospitals and clinics in the family's home state of Gujarat in India, as well as in Kenya and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Shah was nine years old, and his brother, Vipin, was 13, when the family moved to the United Kingdom. They were in their 20s when they started Meghraj Group, a financial services firm named after their father and the first private business of Indian origin to receive a banking license in the United Kingdom.

"We started the business by talking to friends and relations," explains Mr. Shah. Trust and referrals in the expat Indian community were a strong basis for building banking relationships. Meghraj Group now manages more than \$15 billion in client assets.²

When Mr. Shah decided to focus on philanthropy in 1999, he and his brother restructured their operations to accommodate his new role. He says the change has brought him and his family great personal happiness—and he feels he has continued to serve his community as a donor, social investor, mentor and connector.

STARTING "SMALL"

Initially, Mr. Shah and his brother continued their father's philanthropic focus on healthcare and education. They have expanded their range of activities over time. Many of the buildings that M. P. Shah helped construct were aging and needed repair, so the family has recently rebuilt them. The current value of the donations, land and buildings held by the institutions is in excess of \$250 million.



▲ EMPOWERING THE DISABLED—Mr. Shah provides guidance and funding to organizations such as Scope.

² www.meghraj.com/group_home.asp.

Philanthropy should help liberate the most vulnerable and voiceless—and that includes animals.

From his father, Mr. Shah inherited some important lessons about philanthropy:

- **Align your philanthropy with your knowledge and expertise.** First, one should contribute time, skills, relationships, credibility and experience in addition to money so as to achieve greater impact. Second, where needed, one should partner with expertise. When M. P. Shah negotiated with the state authorities in Gujarat, he asked the government to take responsibility for delivering the education and healthcare services
- **Stakeholder engagement is critical.** M. P. Shah provided half the funding to kick-start each institution. However, he insisted that the rest of the funds should come from both the government and the communities served by the schools and hospitals so that all involved were committed to achieving the best possible results. He believed in the adage that “you only value what you pay for”

As a result, Mr. Shah says he asked himself, “How can I put my contacts, skills and time to good use?” He decided he liked “being in touch with people,” and the style of philanthropy he developed was “a natural extension of that.”

For example, when Mr. Shah was introduced to Sense International, a charity for the deaf and blind, he provided both funding and guidance to help the organization extend its reach into East Africa.

At Scope, a charity supporting disabled people, Mr. Shah is tasked with helping to expand the programs that serve the United Kingdom’s Indian and East African ethnic communities. Mr. Shah was also an early investor in the £20 million Scope Bond, which was one of the first charity bonds in the United Kingdom.



▲ MAKING IT REAL—Sense International helps the disabled in a variety of ways. Here, a vision-impaired young boy is learning through touch.

³ These include Aavishkaar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, The Brooke, CRY India, Faraja Cancer Support Trust, Global Giving, iPartner India, Scope, Sense International, Shishukunj, Soko and Tamasha.



◀ **FAMILY MATTERS**—Mr. Shah's daughter, Meghna, holds Pablo, the cat who sparked Mr. Shah's empathy for animals—which has led him to help groups supporting working animals.

ENGAGING FULLY

Today, at 66 years old, Mr. Shah is actively involved with more than a dozen organizations operating in the United Kingdom, India, Kenya and South Africa.³

On this formidable roster are three animal welfare charities. Mr. Shah is a trustee of The Brooke, an international welfare organization for working horses, donkeys and mules. He is also a patron of the Animal Interfaith Alliance and the founder of the Animal Helpline in Gujarat.

Characteristically, Mr. Shah's passion for animal welfare began simply. It was prompted by the insistent reappearance of a stray cat at his home in 1992. At the time, Mr. Shah was building Meghraj Group with his brother. The cat, whom the family named Pablo, kept Mr. Shah company while he worked late.

"My giving to animals is straight from the heart; partly because I am a Jain, but really it is because of Pablo," Mr. Shah confesses.

Their friendship taught Mr. Shah the importance of the relationship between animals and humans. In the developing world, he notes, animals support the livelihoods of whole families. But Mr. Shah also believes that philanthropy should help liberate the most vulnerable and voiceless—and that includes animals.

"I have become something of a serial philanthropist and really enjoy it," says Mr. Shah, characteristically downplaying his purposeful support of the wider community.

"I would encourage anyone to consider both time and money for the greater good."

Key notes

- Philanthropy is a calling; have the courage to let it change your life
- Giving back to those less fortunate can not only benefit your community and society, but also enrich your life
- Philanthropists who are willing to share their talent and expertise often find deeper engagement and enjoyment in their giving, and can achieve a greater impact
- You can leave a lasting philanthropic legacy by starting simply and building from there