

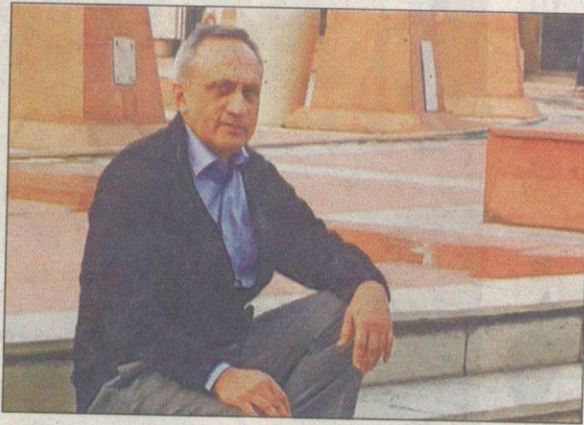
# Philanthropy OK in India, but not business, says Manoj Bhargava

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**U**S citizen Manoj Bhargava is investing Rs 500 crore in Uttarakhand. His interest, however is philanthropy, not business. He says he will provide 25,000 units of water purifier, so thousands of gallons of clean water can reach villagers. Also, innovative techniques and equipment will be used to generate more water for farming and for forest regeneration. One smokeless stove, he says, will be provided to each household in the hills so that women who cook on chulhas do not have to get lung diseases. He is also planning to foray into the health, education and water sectors. His energy drink business in US is worth at least Rs 7,000 crore. Forbes magazine ranked him the wealthiest Indian in 2012. He is, however, tight-lipped about his total turnover. Besides, his interest in India is philanthropy alone, not business, he says.

**Tell us about your childhood.**

I was born in Lucknow in 1953, and studied for three years, in Classes V to VII, at Woodstock Boarding School in Mussoorie. My father had a flourishing business as a publisher in North India. We had a large, prize winning garden villa. However, my father wanted to move to the USA. He asked me to choose



one of two options: We either stay in India, where we did not lack anything, or move to the US and start from scratch. I chose the latter. We moved with eight dollars. That was the policy in those times. We handed over everything we had to my uncle.

**How were your early years in the US?**

My father started dabbling with small businesses. I too would work for three months a year to support my education. I have carried stones at a construction site as a labourer, worked on side-roads with a sledge-hammer. Working manually is not considered bad in the US. On a birthday in our family of five, we celebrated with just one bottle of Coca Cola. I enjoyed those experiences, I gained confidence. Now, put me anywhere, I'll be fine.

**But all of a sudden, as a teenager, you quit every-**

**thing there are pursued spirituality in India for 12 years...**

I was 18, and in the reputed Princeton University. The richest youngsters were among my friends. Despite their riches, they were unhappy and would come to me to seek advice. That hurt me deeply. I decided that I would not just work to make money. I travelled in India, and had an education in how to live life. Life became pretty simple. I learnt how to look at everything by doing things in the simplest ways.

**What does money mean to you?**

People become rich and have bigger houses or larger cars. These are just like toys for boys. Toys look good with a 10-year-old child, not with a mature person. I have not cared for money, and I enjoy working. Money comes my way. People work hard so

they get enough money. Or they work hard so they don't have to work hard later in life. But though I don't need money, I still work hard because I like what I am doing. **What first led you into the energy shot (energy drink) business? You now control 90% of the energy shot business in the US.**

I liked this technology, and I did it my way. I am good at making money. I sell what I like, what my family uses. So there is money behind it. I have started some other business lines, which in five years will be bigger than the energy shot business.

**Some 45% of your total profit goes to philanthropy. What is the reason behind that?**

Philanthropy is natural. For a mother, taking care of her children is natural. If I am rich, I take care of the poor, like a mother would. Down the years, I will put in 99% of my profits into social causes. One percent would suffice for my family. People who leave money for their children end up destroying the children's lives. Those who earn money have different positive temperament. Those who just inherit it live in fear of losing it.

**Are you concerned that your money may not be properly used, because of corruption?**

Some of my money may be stolen, but most will be utilised. NGOs are consid-

ered even more corrupt than official entities. I am selective about the people I recruit for the projects.

**Why did you choose Uttarakhand? And what are your priority areas in the state?**

Uttarakhand is the land of the Ganga, the Himalayas and the rishis (sages). The entire country draws from Uttarakhand. My first and foremost priority will be water. Nearly 50% of patients in hospitals are sick with water-borne diseases. If we tackle that, we may not need hospitals. So I want to provide clean drinking water, which is not easily available in rural India. So I will give them simple technology, equipment of 25,000 units, which will purify thousands of gallons of water in one hour in each village.

Second, I will provide smokeless stoves. Ironically half of the people in the hills have lung disease despite the fresh air. If ones goes into their homes, one will see the ceiling blackened with soot from the chulha. Each house will be given a smokeless chulha, which will consume less fuel, whether wood or coal, and burn faster. That will save wood. These chulhas will be made available in the marketplace. I am fond of new technology, and have premises dedicated to developing new technology.

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