

NAME**Subroto Bagchi****PROFILE**

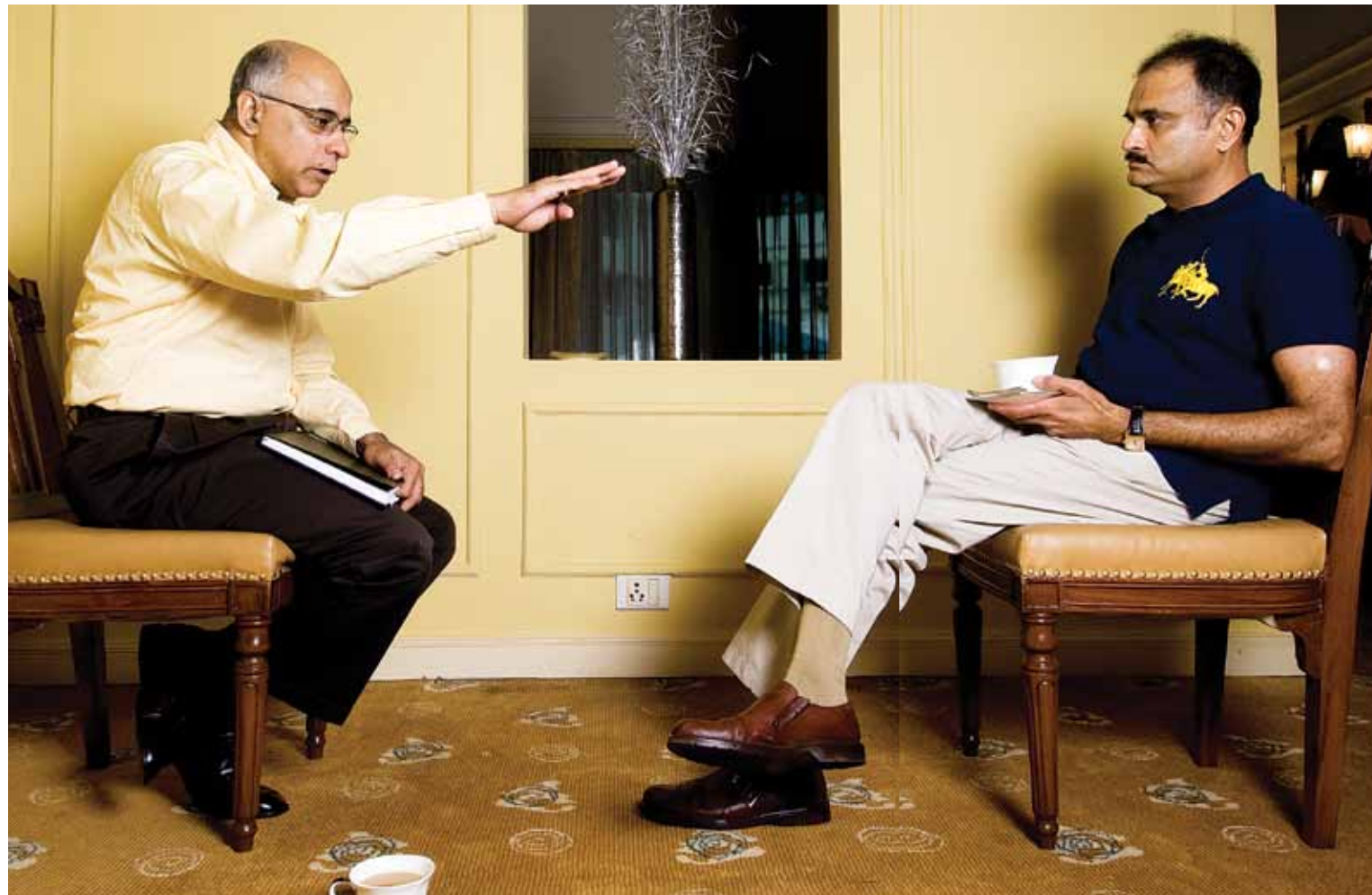
Co-founder & Gardener, MindTree Ltd., best-selling author

FORBES INDIA BRIEF

Every fortnight, exchange tales of the road with successful entrepreneurs

by Subroto Bagchi

Amit Verma

**NAME****Vikram Bakshi****PROFILE**

JV partner, McDonald's India

OPERATING PRINCIPLE

Take two steps forward and one back. The one back is to settle the dues.

How did McDonald's happen?

So far he had been the master of one-to-one selling. His dream now was to be a mass-marketer, but he had no idea how the transition would take place. One day, his neighbour, a man named Madhusudan Thakkar, came to tell him that he wanted to bid for getting McDonald's to India. He was raising money from friends. How much? "Five lakh," he said. Vikram took out his cheque book, but Madhusudan was not ready for it yet. He was just asking for a commitment. "For now, write me a cheque for Rs. 1," he said. So, the symbolic cheque was handed over.

Six months later, Vikram asked him what happened? Madhusudan said that he had given up on the idea but if Vikram liked he could pursue it. "You can have all the files I have," he said. Vikram read it all and was overcome with the urge to write to the folks at the Golden Arches. But how? He turned to three expats he had sold housing to, who had become his friends. Pramod Bhasin of GE, Navin Dave of KPMG Peat Marwick Thorne and Steve Schreckengast of Pepsi. The three got him to write a CV — something he had never done before — and collaborated to put on paper his accomplishments. When Vikram read it, he said in wonder, "Wow, is this me?" To his utter surprise he got a call for a joint-venture discussion.

One thing led to another, both sides put in \$5 million each in equity and McDonald's came to India. Vikram opened restaurant after restaurant, he drove franchising costs down to one-third of what typical McDonald's outlets required elsewhere and made money.

Today, he knows he can make a success of anything. He is just 54. I want to meet him again when he is 75. Something tells me, his best years have just begun.

It is a quiet Sunday morning. After our meeting at the McDonald's just around the corner, I am waiting on the road in front of an office building with the words Mohan Dev written on it. Mohan was Vikram's grandfather and Dev was his father. The structure rises from the ancestral land on which the family home once stood. In the silence, I can hear a mother's voice reverberating with the words, "Beta, Chalo". ■

Vikram Bakshi recalls vividly that time when he was 14. "Beta, chalo", his mother had said with firmness. The mother of six had just become a widow. And her son was refusing to come out of despair.

Her father-in-law, the patriarch of the family, had died first. The family was neck-deep in debt. Her husband, a 42-year-old businessman who had been in and out of hospitals for two long years, had just died.

"I was in a state of complete hopelessness. My father's terminal illness and the family's debt seemed overwhelming. The most vivid images of that time remain etched in my mind. When father died, they shaved my head and made me sit on his chair. I felt boxed in. For months, I was gripped by a sense of foreboding. At night, I would just shake. Then one day, she asked me to take a walk with her."

Kamala Bakshi did not have to take

THE POWER TO RECEIVE

Today he runs a very successful fast food franchise, but at each juncture in his journey Vikram Bakshi found angels to show him the way forward

him far from the family home. Delhi's Connaught Circus was walking distance. The first stop was a beggar.

"Look at him", she said. Vikram cast a reluctant glance. "Look again", she said firmly, "He does not have limbs".

The second stop was another destitute.

"The man cannot hear or speak. Tell me what is wrong with you? You have limbs that work, you can hear and speak. Why are you behaving as if the world has

come to an end?"

Silently the two trudged home. And then Vikram hit back at life. One year later, he emerged from the cocoon as a bright, confident and aggressive individual. "Ever since, I have told myself, I would take two steps forward and one back. The one back is to settle the dues".

Vikram finished school, graduated from Delhi University and took charge of the family's printing press. He struggled to

keep it from failing. Now barely in his 20s, he still needed the shelter that only age could provide. That came in the form of a certain Mr. Jagannathan who used to be a manager at a bank.

The elderly man's evenings were drowned in alcohol and young Vikram was his silent listener. They developed a bond. Months passed. One day, the man suddenly said he wanted to help Vikram.

"You have a future. You should go overseas. I want you to meet someone". That introduction led to a plan for selling handicrafts in Europe. The man broke a few norms and lent Vikram Rs. 75,000 from the bank. Young Vikram went back to his mother, sought her blessings and

pushed off to Germany with sample bags.

"I stayed in Youth Hostels. I searched for names from the Yellow Pages and went from door to door. In Germany, I met an elderly gentleman. Again, he turned out to be my angel. He showed me the path from trade fair to trade fair". Products changed from handicrafts to carpets to garments.

Vikram returned with money enough to pay back the bank, release the mortgage on the ancestral home and take charge of the five siblings. From then on, he moved into real estate. He built houses for expats and leased offices to multi-nationals. Each time, he built a deep and abiding relationship with people he did business with. In 1983, he married Madhurima.