

REMEMBERING  
MOHAN T ADVANI  
THE MAN  
AND HIS LEGACY



NANDITA BHAVNANI



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"Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"  
- Robert Browning



Mohan T Advani  
November 11, 1912 - February 14, 1974



# FOREWORD

The birth centenary of a much-loved man who accomplished a great deal is a time to celebrate his life and to commemorate his legacy. Mohan T Advani was such a man, whose most enduring achievement was the creation of Blue Star in 1943. Though the Company started small, MTA's vision and courage led it on an eventful corporate journey until his untimely demise in 1974. The Company today is a respected 69-year old leader in the fields of airconditioning and refrigeration, as well as import-distribution of hi-tech equipment and systems, the lines of business pioneered by MTA.

During our 43-year long careers in Blue Star, the Company has grown some 300-fold and evolved through a number of business and organisational changes. But through all the tumultuous change of the last few decades, the constant source of strength and inspiration has been the Blue Star culture which embodies MTA's clear business philosophy and values - the values of hard work, integrity and fairness to stakeholders. It is these beliefs that have guided Blue Star and its people for nearly seven decades. And, we trust, the same values will continue to guide the Company long after we are gone.

The story of MTA and his fourth "child", Blue Star, is exciting because it is so improbable. For a moment, imagine a young man of thirty who has resigned two jobs in quick succession in the middle of World War II, who has two young children and a third one on the way. This young man then starts a business in a product line never before manufactured in India, and which cannot be imported because of wartime restrictions. Is this courage? Audacity? He says it is an overpowering ambition to reach for the stars. Well, this is the story of this man who, like a comet, does indeed touch the stars, but then flies too close to the sun and burns out too early, but not before leaving behind stellar proof of his success. Blue Star.



MTA was a force of nature. He studied economics but had the chutzpah to set up an engineering business. He had the foresight to surround himself with the best engineers he could find, and had the gumption to learn enough engineering to build on their strengths. He was an instinctive businessman with dazzling charm, sublime self-confidence, and his moral compass set firmly in one direction. He imparted these attributes and his can-do spirit to his young Company. The magical journey on which he led his men and his Company is revealed in these pages. In the words of one of his favourite poets:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
but to be young was very heaven!"  
- Wordsworth

On this momentous occasion, we are delighted to present this pictorial tribute to our beloved father, with inputs and anecdotes from a number of people whose lives he touched. We thank them all for sharing their memories with his many friends, relatives and the entire Blue Star family.

We hope you enjoy this tribute to MTA.

With warm regards,

Ashok M Advani

Suneel M Advani

November 2012





One day in 1935, a young salesman came to Hindustan Lever to sell an imported water cooler. As he passed through a long hall filled with people sitting and working at their desks, he thought to himself: "One day I am going to start my own business and, when I come in to work every day, all my employees will say, 'Good morning, sir. How are you today?'"

For most people, this would have been but a daydream. But for the twenty-two-year old Mohan Advani, ready to take on life's challenges, it was this germ of an idea that would grow into an obsession, leading him to found a business that would grow into a highly successful corporation: a widely respected organisation, the leader in its field; that would grow beyond him and endure long into the future; an organisation that would be his legacy. As he would later remark, "It may have seemed an idle ambition then. But I made it come true. I was born awfully ambitious, you know."

This is the story of that young dreamer and how he fulfilled his dream, starting out with nothing but guts, grit and charm, a dash of impatience, and unbounded confidence. How else to characterise an entrepreneur who creates a new business in wartime, seeing opportunities where others see only difficulties?





# THE MAKING OF THE MAN

Mohansing Advani was born in Hyderabad (Sindh) on November 11, 1912 to Gulibai and Tolasing Advani. His father, a respected lawyer, subsequently shifted with the family to Karachi, where Mohan graduated from the D J Sind College in 1934.

✿ Arjan Advani, an old classmate of Mohan's, remembers how caring and generous he could be:

*"We were both saving our limited pocket allowances for a ten-day excursion to Lahore. How enthusiastically we looked forward to this trip away from parental control! At the last minute, Mohan dropped out of it. Later I learnt the reason. He had given his money away to pay for the school fees of a neighbour whose father had died leaving the son in financial distress. He helped with such courtesy that the person receiving the help never felt small."*

Mohan was a sharp student: he ranked first in Sindh when he matriculated in 1930, and won a scholarship on entering college. He also won the Edulji Dinshaw medal for the highest marks in Logic at the Intermediate examination in 1932. This gave his father high hopes that he might join the Indian Civil Services (ICS), then the most prestigious career option. But when Mohan graduated with a BA in History and Economics,



Gulibai and Tolasing Advani

he did not obtain a first class, much to his father's disappointment. This was probably because he had fallen in love with Padmini Advani, who was one year junior to him in college. He spent more time





Padmi Advani

with her than attending his college classes!

✿ Mohan's sister, Devi Vaswani, recalls:

*"Baba, our father, was quite strict with his sons. In those days no one smoked in front of their parents. On one occasion Baba walked into the room when Mohan was smoking. Mohan hid the cigarette in his palm and put both his hands behind his back. Baba could see the smoke but continued to talk to Mohan knowing full well that he was smoking. By the time Baba left the room Mohan had burnt the palm of his right hand. Baba knew that Mohan was holding a cigarette and Mohan also realized that Baba was well aware of this."*

Tolasing Advani still clung to his ICS dream for Mohan, and sent him to Fergusson College in Poona to study for it. Meanwhile, his elder brother, Bhagsing (Bhagu), had qualified as an electrical engineer from England and now worked with the Poona Electric Supply Company. Mohan

went to live with him, and this was the beginning of a deep fraternal bond which lasted a lifetime. Not keen on studying, Mohan ended up cutting classes and playing cards with his friends. He was not enthusiastic about joining the ICS, a rare attitude for that era, and instead racked his brains about how to marry Padmi Advani. As Bhagu said, "One day I had a chat with him and discovered that his heart wasn't in it. Not for him the staid and cushioned life of a civil servant. His spirit craved adventure."

The Chinoys, family friends of the Advanis, owned Bombay Garage, which had the agency for Frigidaire refrigerators. Bombay Garage wanted to select a youngster to send to London for a year's training with Frigidaire, and Bhagu requested his friend, Mamli Chinoi, to give Mohan the job. When Mohan heard about it, he accepted with alacrity. Now all that remained was to obtain Tolasing Advani's permission. Much to the brothers' surprise, their father agreed. Mohan sailed for London on October 20, 1934, and thus began his career.



Mohan Advani with his D J Sind College friends



# EARLY YEARS



Boating on the Thames

Mohan spent nine months at the Frigidaire factory in London, training in commercial refrigeration and airconditioning, then a sunrise industry in India. He was one of the first Indians to obtain training in these fields, and Frigidaire was the best place for this: in those days, it was such a strong brand that it was synonymous with refrigerator.

Mohan returned from London in August 1935 and joined Bombay Garage as Sales Manager, on a salary of Rs 250, and a car allowance of Rs 75 for the Chevrolet that Bombay Garage gave him to use.

By this time, Bhagu was transferred to Bombay,

and the two brothers began to live together again. Bhagu married in 1935, and a year later, Mohan married Padmi. In an era of arranged marriages, theirs was the only love marriage in their two families, and in their immediate community. Responsible behaviour, not convention, informed their lives. Throughout his life, Mohan's thinking and actions would often be outside the box.

The two brothers continued to live together after marriage, at Mahim. A close-knit family, they lived together for nearly thirteen years. Considering Mohan's long working hours, this was a good arrangement, since Bhagu, who loved children, could devote more time to the five children that they had between them.



Tolasing Advani and his family in Karachi





Top: The young Mohan and Padmi. Below (from left to right): Mohan and Padmi with their first child, Suneeta; Bhagu's daughter Anjali, Suneeta, Ashok and Suneel (standing)



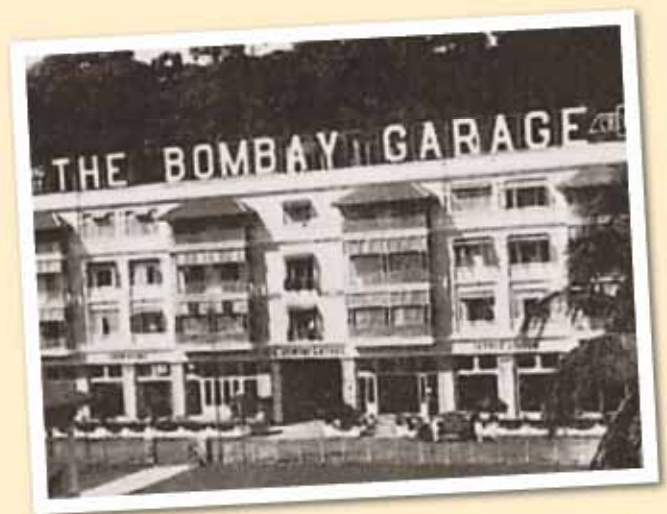
Mohan working hard at Bombay Garage

In 1940, Tolasing Advani passed away in Karachi. By this time, Mohan and Padmi already had a daughter, Suneeta; a year later, they had a son, Ashok. Over the years, the joint family shifted several houses and by the early 1940s, they finally moved to Alcazar building on Gamadia Road in Bombay.

These were difficult years. Firstly, the world was in the clutches of the Great Depression, and government restrictions on imports of various goods, including refrigerators, meant that business at Bombay Garage had slowed down. Then came the Second World War, which severely endangered commercial shipping. Like other

Indian importers, Bombay Garage found their business in the doldrums. The young and energetic Mohan, tired of twiddling his thumbs, decided to quit. In his own words, "I left Bombay Garage on April 24, 1943, because of lack of activity. Generally speaking, there were no imports other than military requirements. I began to look for something worthwhile to do."

He had a brief stint in a metal foundry, but the war cast its shadow on this venture too. In the middle of September, not even five months after he had left Bombay Garage, Mohan resigned once more. But this time, he had his own plans.



# A SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE



On September 27, 1943, Mohan Advani started Blue Star Engineering Company, reverting to what he knew best: airconditioning and refrigeration. He set up shop at Contractor Building on Nicol Road (now Ramji Kamani Road) in Bombay's then most elegant business district, Ballard Estate. Coming from a family of professionals, Mohan became a businessman at the age of thirty, with a bank balance of Rs 2,000, and just two employees, that too in the middle of the Second World War.

His two employees were an office boy, Dattu and C H Krishnan, who had followed him from Bombay Metal Corporation. As Krishnan recalled later, he started out as the new company's "secretary, accountant, salesman and manager, all rolled into one."

✿ Why 'Blue Star'? In Mohan Advani's own words:

*"When I decided to go into business on my own in 1943, I cast about for a name for my proposed venture – a name which could be branded into public consciousness, a name capable of being translated in recognizable form and distinctive colour, a name that could be blazoned against the sky as from a neon sign, a name which would be unusual, short and memorable."*

Wanting a name that symbolised the kind of business he wanted to build, he arrived by a process of elimination at 'Blue Star'. It speaks much for the man that he wanted the Company to be distinct from himself, larger than himself, and hence chose, not a name like 'Advani & Co', but Blue Star.





Since the government had banned imports, and with no new equipment available, Mohan decided that Blue Star would initially buy, recondition and sell used equipment. This spirit of enterprise and working innovatively around obstacles was the hallmark of many future ventures that Mohan Advani would undertake.



Ashok Advani and Nanik Vaswani

✿ Shyam Narain, who worked for many years in Blue Star, says:

*"It was an exciting experience to work with and for him. His vital imagination could see tremendous possibilities in the future, where others saw the risks. He could see latent opportunities where others saw merely the impediments. His quality of leadership was a surging force that would not stay contained in the petty details of day-to-day routine."*

In early 1944, the Bombay government requisitioned the office at Ballard Estate. Blue Star shifted to Lakshmi Building on Pherozeshah Mehta Road at Fort. For a brief period, Mohan even rented a suite at the Taj Mahal Hotel as a personal office.

Blue Star also started marketing Maple Tobacco cigarettes under the 'Blue Star' brand name, but within six months, Mohan decided to opt out, having accurately gauged the market. "I realised that in the cigarette business a small enterprise could not compete with established giants. So I closed it down and concentrated on airconditioning and refrigeration."

✿ Nanik Vaswani shared a warm and close relationship with his father-in-law, Mohan Advani. President and Vice-Chairman of Blue Star for two years, he described MTA's business philosophy:

*"Entrepreneurship? The word must have been coined for him. He had the foresight to identify and explore new opportunities. Blue Star was highly successful in its initial field, airconditioning and refrigeration, but Mohan Advani was not content to rest on this success. He was always looking for new opportunities to build on the core business. Not all of them were successful, but he knew when to pull the plug and when to persist."*



Contractor Building at Ballard Estate





MTA with his staff, outside the Forbes Street office

This ability to discern and assess opportunities served him and Blue Star in good stead. By the end of 1944, the Company shifted to Forbes Street at Kala Ghoda with a staff of about a dozen. This small team worked extremely hard for Blue Star to succeed. Krishnan recalls: "I would reach the office from my home in Vile Parle at 8 am and each evening MTA used to drop me at Grant Road station so that I could catch the 7:55 pm Virar fast train home. I worked all Sundays."



Mohan and Pami with Suneel, Suneeta and Ashok

✿ Ashok Advani recalls how hard his father used to work in those days: *"When we were very young, my father was a somewhat remote figure. We loved him dearly. But he was always so preoccupied with the Company and his work. He would leave early in the morning and come back late at night, so we never got to see enough of him. On occasion, his conscience bit him and then it was a treat to go off on a holiday together or sometimes a picnic - it was great fun and a rare event."*

By late 1944, as the Allies were on the offensive, Mohan Advani accurately sized up the situation. He realized that the armed forces would require a large number of vehicles to move troops and materials. He seized the opportunity to set up two workshops, one in Bombay and the other in Pooná, to recondition used automobile equipment,







as well as to recondition steel ammunition boxes. As Mohan said, "We grew because we didn't sit back and wait for plums to fall into our laps. When we saw our opportunities, we reached out boldly and seized them. It required foresight and a lot of hard work. During the war, despite many difficulties we made slow but steady progress in our airconditioning and refrigeration business."

As the war was ending in 1945, Mohan Advani again gauged the strategic impact of international political events on Blue Star's position. He saw clearly that energies and resources would now be diverted from the war effort towards peacetime activities such as the manufacture of consumer goods. He saw that the US had emerged as the most important and largely unscathed economy, and that that was where he should go to find business opportunities to leverage in India. But he also knew of the long delays in international communications: correspondence would take too long. As he remarked later, "I figured the only way to arrange for quick deliveries of urgently

needed equipment was to make a trip to the United States."

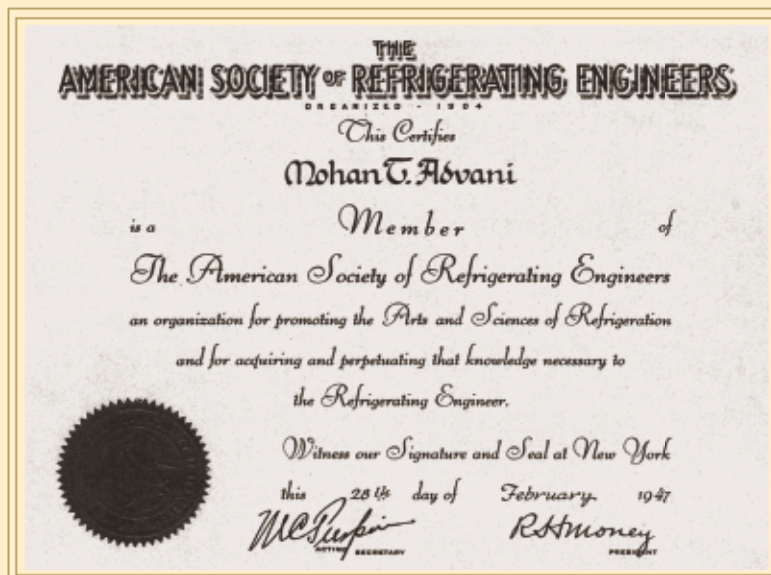


Portrait of MTA by Karsh of Ottawa, the famous Armenian-Canadian photographer

In heady anticipation of business growth, and because Blue Star was doing well, Mohan opened the first branch in Madras in May 1946. However, civilian travel to the West was disrupted, and it took time for his efforts to bear fruit. In

September 1946, Mohan Advani finally left for the US to obtain selling agencies in India of prominent American manufacturers of airconditioners and refrigeration equipment. He knew absolutely nobody there. As he recalled later:

"The post-war era was upon us. Clearly, one had to seize the future. I emptied the corporate bank account and set off on an odyssey to the West.





I flew off in a converted Lancaster bomber, entertaining grave doubts about the future of avionics throughout the flight. It took three uncertain days to get to London and crossing the Atlantic was nearly as difficult as getting away with the Crown Jewels. For three weeks I cooled my heels in bombed-out London in a winter of record-breaking severity and strict rationing of daily necessities, but finally I made it to the States.”

Gulab Ramchandani, who spent 33 years with Blue Star, describes MTA’s chutzpah in business: “After he’d paid for his airline ticket, he hardly had any money left. But he went there and took a suite at the exclusive Waldorf Astoria Hotel and started phoning various companies for distributorships. They agreed because India was a closed and unknown market then, they hadn’t done business with India, and here was somebody wanting to do business, living at the Waldorf Astoria and inviting them to his suite for discussions!

“MTA ordered all the modern refrigeration equipment – ice cream makers, soda fountains, display cases, bottle coolers, deep freezers, ten here, twenty there. Then he phoned us and said, ‘Listen, I’ve committed us down the drain. Will you please sell them before the shipments arrive?’ He sent us a bunch of literature, we opened a letter of credit, and we sold the first shipment at 100% mark-up even before it arrived.”

It was also then that Blue Star began to manufacture ice candy machines and bottle coolers. A pioneer in the manufacture of electrically operated water

coolers, the Blue Star brand would become so strong that it would be synonymous with water cooler.



Padmi Advani with Ashok and Suneel



Ram Malani and Gulab Ramchandani were among the first to join Blue Star in 1946

✿ According to Ram Malani, one of Blue Star’s first employees, who literally saw the Company grow from scratch:

*“MTA was essentially a marketing man yet he took up the challenge to design and develop the first water cooler manufactured in India. I believe this single act laid the firm foundation for Blue Star as a manufacturing company. The Company later exported the know-how and earned valuable foreign exchange. MTA must get the full credit for this.”*



Looking back, MTA would say of the wildly popular popsicle of that era,

*"We started off making machines that made popsicles. Ice candies, they called them in those days and I like to think that quite a few of our younger executives first met up with Blue Star quite unknowingly, over an orange popsicle..."*



The Advani siblings: Ashok, Suneeta and Suneel

The year 1947 brought a long-awaited independence to India, but also the trauma of Partition. In September 1947, the Advani family in Karachi decided to migrate. When their relatives arrived in Bombay, they stayed with Mohan and Bhagu at their flat in Alcazar. As Bhagu recalled, "Alcazar was a very big flat and we accommodated many, many refugees. We all slept on the floor. Then I asked the landlord for use of the vacant second floor flat, so some people slept there. We shared everything until gradually everyone got settled."



# BLUE STAR RISING

In 1948, Mohan made another trip to the US and obtained the sole agency of Melchior Armstrong Dessau, a well-known manufacturer of refrigeration and airconditioning equipment. The know-how picked up from this association was invaluable.

✿ Henning Holck-Larsen, co-founder of Larsen & Toubro Ltd, remarked:

*"He was an entrepreneur with an unusual vision. He saw the need that existed in the refrigeration and airconditioning field and valiantly set out to fulfil it. I had an opportunity to watch during these years, how, from a very modest start, he managed to carve out for himself and for Blue Star a very good share of the business in large airconditioning plants and to acquire a reputation for efficiency and quality."*



MTA with his growing Blue Star family, at the Colaba shed

Around this time, Blue Star had leased a bamboo shed, covered with sheets of tarpaulin and galvanized iron in the Ahmedi shipyard in Colaba. This shed, with a few offices built inside, had the Sassoon Docks on one side, and a garbage dump on the other. In Mohan Advani's own words, "The shed was smack in the middle of a fishermen's wharf. It leaked with abandon during the monsoon and it took all our ingenuity to keep afloat while producing popsicle machines and bottle coolers, and reconditioning refrigerators." Mohan looked back on it as a fun experience—they were simultaneously "telephone operators, salesmen, mechanics, stenographers, general handymen and expert repairers of leaky roofs", whatever it took at any time.

"A lofty optimism ruled the day," he said, "but our ambition, while vast, was wholly untempered by experience. Perhaps it was just as well. We plunged in where angels would have stepped back hastily."

A V Deshmane, an ex-employee of Blue Star, described how, despite the less-than-ideal working conditions, the staff were galvanized into putting their best into the Company:



"Blue Star was a relatively small company in 1963 when I joined. My cabin was extremely small, hardly six feet in width and ten feet in length. However, I soon discovered that all of us faced the same problem. Jotsing Advani, our legal adviser and brother of our Chairman, also had a very small room. Yet nobody really bothered. We were so absorbed in the work that the physical shape, size, comforts didn't really matter. Status consciousness was totally absent. We could go to anyone without fear or formality and we would not be the least surprised even if the Chairman, M T Advani, or Managing Director, B T Advani (BTA to one and all), just walked in, stood or pulled up the one and only spare chair in the little room..." This was inspiring leadership of the highest order.

He continued, "On one side was a fish market, on the other a garbage dump. We would often get terrible headaches because of the obnoxious stench from both sides. However, everyone used to be in high spirits. We ate lunch together, sharing

each other's food. We always had pressure of work and urgent deliveries for exports or for new instrumentation panels or for development of new models. There was excitement all around. I think all of us enjoyed that exhilaration of making things happen, sharing the growth and prosperity of the Company, doing a dozen things at the same time at breakneck speed. Though physically we were always totally worn out, few ever remained absent. No one really wanted to miss the action."

✿ A A Fazalbhoj, past President, Refrigeration & Airconditioning Trades Association, Bombay, described Mohan Advani's gift of leadership:

*"Mohan was the central figure who attracted ambitious young men by his magnetic personality. He picked them with discerning judgement and placed them in key positions. He transformed this select cadre of young engineers and organizers into a very capable, hard core group which today controls the enterprise with smooth efficiency."*



Gobind Advani



Jotsing Advani

It was in the late 1940s that several bright young men joined Blue Star – Ram Malani who later became Chairman and Chief Executive, Gulab Ramchandani who rose to Executive Director, Atu Shivdasani and J Fritschy, the Swiss engineer. All three of MTA's brothers also joined and contributed immensely to the Company: Bhagu, who would later succeed Mohan as Chairman & Chief Executive; Jotsing, an experienced lawyer, who made vital contributions to the



MTA had hired CH Krishnan at Bombay Metal Corporation a few weeks before he founded Blue Star

fledgling Company's stability and legal structure; and Gobind, the youngest, who joined at the bottom and worked his way up the ladder, and created the Export Division. Along with CH Krishnan, they were all capable professionals, many of whom would spend decades with Blue Star. The company culture of addressing employees – even the Chairman or the Managing Director – by their initials also embodied a spirit of informality and accessibility.

✿ Suneel Advani comments on the strong unity of the extended Advani family:

*"My father was the third brother, but he had that charisma and inborn talent for leadership that had people follow him, including his two elder brothers. He was the boss, but he was always appropriately deferential to them, but the fact is that they accepted him as the leader and didn't mind at all. The relationship between the brothers was excellent. I cannot recall any family politics, ever! It was quite remarkable, and for that I compliment all the wives. The normal human urges like greed, envy or jealousy never seemed to get in the way."*



BTA and MTA



✿ As Hiroo Advani, BTA's son, would remark later on the close working relationship between his father and MTA:

*"It was funny. MTA was the Economics graduate who became an engineer by experience, understanding the intricacies of refrigeration and airconditioning. Dad, on the other hand, who graduated as an Engineer from Faraday House became the finance and commercial man, the administrative man, the personnel man.*

*"The two brothers were as different as night and day. Dad was conservative, very solid, very cautious. He was not given to flamboyance or impetuosity. He wanted to analyse and think things through and only then take decisions. Uncle Mohan on the other hand, was adventurous and impulsive. He would say, 'Oh come on, let's do this, this is a good opportunity.' Somehow there was this wonderful chemistry between the two because they loved each other so much and there was this tremendous reliance on each other's abilities - Dad's on Uncle Mohan's intuition and MTA's on Dad's ability to analyse. But they never held each other back; if MTA felt this was a great thing and he must do it, Dad would say, 'Alright, let's go!' They complemented each other completely.*

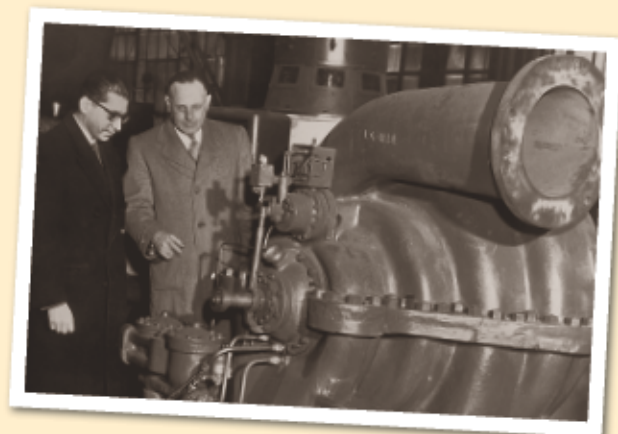


This capable and talented group formed the first generation management team that many other Blue Star employees would work under, including the second generation team of Raj Seth, Hiru Jhangiani and Shyam Narain – professionals all – who joined in the early 1950s.



Shyam Narain, who joined in 1951, later became a board member

In 1950, Blue Star completed its first central airconditioning installation at the Shangrila Biscuit Factory at Bhandup, Bombay. The following year, the Company was appointed the sole distributors in India for Worthington Corporation, a prominent



At the Worthington factory at Harrison, New Jersey, 1951



Mohan with Mr and Mrs Morton Berger of Worthington

American manufacturer of refrigeration and airconditioning equipment. This gave Blue Star a firm footing in this field. By now there were branches at Calcutta and Ahmedabad, apart from the first one at Madras.

#### ✿ Morton R Berger of Worthington

Corporation said that MTA was his finest teacher in matters of business:

*"Mohan was unusual in this day and age - a truly honourable person. I can never forget the numerous discussions he and I had over business ethics; briber or bribee - to do or not to do. I particularly remember a negotiation for a major project in New Delhi. We wanted the contract very badly indeed, but the final decision was 'No' due to the necessity of corrupt practices. His astuteness in business however needs no comment as Blue Star itself is proof of his acumen."*

Not all Mohan Advani's ventures were successful. Blue Star was severely hit by the countrywide recession in 1953-54, and just one year before,

Ram Malani tells us, he had embarked on a rapid expansion spree beyond the financial capacity of the Company. "MTA took full responsibility for this debacle and did not hesitate to reduce his own remuneration very drastically, leaving most of the staff untouched."

Learning from these mistakes but yet wanting to grow faster, Mohan decided to diversify yet again and, in 1953 obtained the sole agency of Schneider-Westinghouse, a leading manufacturer of heavy electricals in Europe. The management team decided that a low risk strategy was to take agency lines to import, sell and support the equipment of foreign manufacturers. This required little capital and was relatively inflation proof. All the same, Blue Star also started manufacturing commercial airconditioning equipment.

## BLUE STAR



Raj Seth joined Blue Star in 1952

✿ Raj Seth, a Blue Star veteran, remembered when MTA and his wife visited the US to meet current business contacts and expand Blue Star agencies. MTA was keen to visit Minneapolis Honeywell (MH), which was then famous for its process control instrumentation, also used in airconditioning.





Raj Seth recalled:

*"One Sunday, MTA and his wife took the day off to watch a ball game in Minneapolis. MTA got talking to his neighbour, who was keen to know more about India, seeing Mrs Advani dressed in a sari. During their talks, MTA asked whether he knew anyone at MH since he was keen to see their factories. The genial neighbour said he did know people there and would arrange a visit the very next day. True to his word, MTA got a call within two hours from a young gentleman who said he would pick up MTA the next morning and take him to see the factories.*

After walking through many miles of factory floors and meeting dozens of MH staff, he was then taken to meet his escort's boss. Raj Seth continued,

*"Walking through a long passage, they came across a door marked Paul C Sharpe. MTA was agreeably surprised to see his neighbour of the ball game, who happened to be the Export Manager of MH!"*

Honeywell signed up Blue Star as its exclusive distributor for India.



At the Calcutta workshop in 1957. From left to right, in garlands: Atu Shivdasani, Morton Berger of Worthington, MTA and Gulab Ramchandani



Mohan and Padmi Advani with Paul Cran Sharpe of Honeywell, who became a close friend



Gulab Ramchandani, BTA, MTA and Ram Malani hosting a delegation from the GDR in 1962



Kasturi Buildings

Through the 1950s and the 1960s, Blue Star grew from strength to strength. Apart from Honeywell and Westinghouse, it tied up several

international distributorships – including with Perkin-Elmer and several German Democratic Republic product lines—with MTA’s salesmanship and charm playing no small part.



MTA at his desk at the Kasturi Buildings office

In 1960, its income crossed Rs one crore, and four years later, staff strength crossed 1,000. In 1952, Mohan Advani had the foresight to lease the Kasturi Buildings office at Churchgate in Bombay, which continues to be the corporate headquarters to this day. In 1960, he again acquired an entire floor, at Bandbox House in Worli, to accommodate the Company’s expanding staff. This office still houses the top operating management groups today.



Padmi and Mohan cut the cake at Blue Star's twentieth anniversary celebrations



At Blue Star's Silver Jubilee celebrations at Shanmukhananda Hall in 1968 (from left to right): Bhagu and Parpati Advani, Mohan and Padmi Advani, Ruki and Tula Jagtiani. Jotu Advani is first from the right in the row behind

❁ Suneeta Vaswani, Mohan Advani's daughter, remembers the acquisition of the Kasturi Buildings:

*"Dad was always thinking bigger and better. I remember his two-room office in the Taj Mahal Hotel and the one in Forbes Street. And I remember when they moved to Kasturi Buildings. That was a big day. He took great pride in personally designing the interior space, a deep interest which led to a deeper interest in architecture and his eventual construction of Olympus. He would also buy works of contemporary Indian artists for the office, a practice not common at the time. His interest in design and art deeply influenced my brothers and myself and we all share this legacy of my father."*



In 1965, Techniglas Pvt Ltd was set up to manufacture insulation material, but with an unviable manufacturing process, this proved to be a failure. In 1969, manufacturing operations were shifted from the Colaba shed to the new Thane factory, and in the same year, Blue Star went public. The first airconditioning and refrigeration company to be listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange, its maiden issue was oversubscribed ten times. The Hewlett-Packard distributorship started in 1970. By 1972, Blue Star's total income had crossed Rs 10 crores, and the staff strength had doubled to 2,000.





Blue Star represents to us one of the vast fields in the tremendous economic growth experienced by India during the past few years.

We consider an outstanding and extremely important contribution to this growth. It has not only added to the wealth, but greatly contributed to improvement of health.

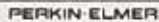
Our long association with Blue Star has been most gratifying and mutually rewarding.

Westinghouse Air Conditioning Company, USA



Automation — a key technology in the industrial and economic development of India. Honeywell is proud to be associated in this connection by Blue Star Engineering.

Honeywell Inc., USA



Being on the leading line of analytical instruments in the United States, and through its association with Blue Star Engineering Co. The Perkin-Elmer Corporation has been able to play a significant role in the scientific and economic progress of India. Its instruments, providing accurate results to probe into the basic chemistry of life, help meet the challenge of India today and tomorrow. We hope the combination of India, Blue Star, and Perkin-Elmer will continue to be a successful formula and that Blue Star will enjoy another successful year of success.

The Perkin-Elmer Corporation, USA



Cambridge Filter International is pleased to be represented in India by Blue Star Engineering, and to have participated with them in serving the needs of the chemical, pharmaceutical and chemical industries which are so vital to the developing economy of India. We, in the United States of America, look forward to continuing this effort with Blue Star.

Cambridge Filter International Corporation, USA



As pioneers in the development of direct reading spectrometry and as leading suppliers of this type of instrumentation in India, we at Applied Research Laboratories look forward to playing an increasingly important role in India's developing industrialization and growing quality requirements. In offering our friends at Blue Star our hearty congratulations on reaching this important milestone, we are sure that the coming years will show their even greater involvement in the supply of instrumentation to India's industries.

Applied Research Laboratories Ltd., UK



If business machines from the German Democratic Republic help increase efficiency in Indian banks, Government departments and commercial offices, the credit is shared as much by Blue Star as by Siemens. In India, Germany is a through Blue Star's vast distribution network that our electronic and electrical business machines reach all parts of India. It's a real great pleasure in wishing these good wishes on their 25th anniversary.

Baummaschinen-Export GmbH Berlin, GDR



Thanks to our material, being machines are employed today in India, in industrial plants, in colleges, in polytechnics, in research laboratories — all due to Blue Star, your able distributor in India. On their 25th anniversary, we extend our congratulations to Blue Star and look forward to many years of fruitful cooperation.

Dezi Frammechank-Optik GmbH, GDR



We congratulate Blue Star on the completion of 25 years and we proud to be represented by them throughout the country for refrigerators marketed by them under the brand name Leonard.

Kel-Inator of India Limited Faridabad



We commenced manufacture of IE brand refrigerators three years ago. We are proud of our association with Blue Star who, as our exclusive distributor, have given the full backing of their reputation and experience in leading a viable market for our products.

Instrumentation Engineers Hyderabad



The remarkable wide acceptance of our entire range of Howell products — portable control valves and solenoid valves — in the short span of six years, is a large measure due to Blue Star's excellent sales and application engineering capabilities in the field of process control instrumentation. We congratulate Blue Star on their Silver Jubilee and look forward to a continuing association in the service of Indian industry.

Ashok Sunil & Co. Bombay



## PARDON US IF WE WAX SENTIMENTAL You see, we are 25 today

Normally, we don't get sentimental. Except when some of our friends pay us the finest compliments there is...remembering us. The past lags at our memory and we look back to September 27, 1941. When, with just three men, we began doing business, reconditioning and selling refrigeration equipment.

We recall, too, the momentous day in 1945 when we switched from reconditioning to manufacture, and were the first in India to produce water coolers. And the exciting days of subsequent growth when we began making ice candy machines and bottle coolers.

That's not all. We wanted to do much more — and did. We realized that the immense growth of Indian industry would be immense in size and complexity. And felt impelled to contribute to this development significantly. We anticipated industry's vital needs for sophisticated equipment... planned, designed and expanded to satisfy them. We strove to help industry improve production, increase efficiency, reduce costs, eliminate waste.

Today, with a staff of over 1200, we operate out of offices in nine principal cities, and through a widespread network of dealers. An expanding line of products and specialized services useful to industry, education and research, help add momentum to the technological revolution taking place in our country.

When we look back we are awed to have many friends here had a hand in making all this possible. Our employees and dealers, whose competence and co-operation have lent us strength. Our principals, whose quality products and business integrity have helped us add prestige to our name. Our customers, whose support and confidence have helped us reach twenty-five — and stay in business!

When our valued friends have done so much for us, is it possible for us not to be sentimental? We'd like to be able to do more for them than simply be grateful. We rededicate ourselves to an even greater effort to better serve their interests. And of the community at large.

Looking ahead, we see tremendous advances in technology and science opening up new vistas in space and on earth which are perhaps an indication of the profound, ever starting, challenge and responsibility the future may bring. We, in Blue Star, accept the challenge. The responsibility. And with the help of our valued friends we shall achieve greater things.

Who says there's no place for sentiment in business? It binds us all closer.



BOMBAY • CALCUTTA • DELHI • MADRAS • KANPUR • HYDERABAD • JAMSHEDPUR

Another milestone: Blue Star celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1968





Hiru Jhangiani (inset) and three of his landmark projects

✿ Hiru Jhangiani, who worked at Blue Star for decades and retired as Executive Director, reminisces about the days when Blue Star was growing by leaps and bounds:

*"In 1971-72, Blue Star received its largest order ever, up to that time, for an 1,800-ton central airconditioning plant for the Air India headquarters building at Nariman Point, Bombay. It was a proud moment for MTA and a feather in the cap of the young company he had created. The order had been approved by Air India Chairman, JRD Tata, whose business empire included Voltas, the undisputed leader in the airconditioning business up to that time. The Voltas management found it difficult to swallow their loss of pride.*

*"Around the same time as this order, Blue Star also clinched orders for several other tall buildings coming up in Bombay at the time. The Oberoi Hotel, the Indian Express building, both next to the Air India building, Jaslok Hospital at Peddar Road and OCS (later VSNL) at Flora Fountain. MTA was personally involved in both the latter projects - behind the scenes, of course - and I used to have long phone conversations every evening or meetings at his home. In spite of his failing health and restricted movements at home, he took tremendous interest in all these projects and personally corresponded with Worthington to help us to manufacture the large heat exchangers for the centrifugal chillers in India for the first time.*

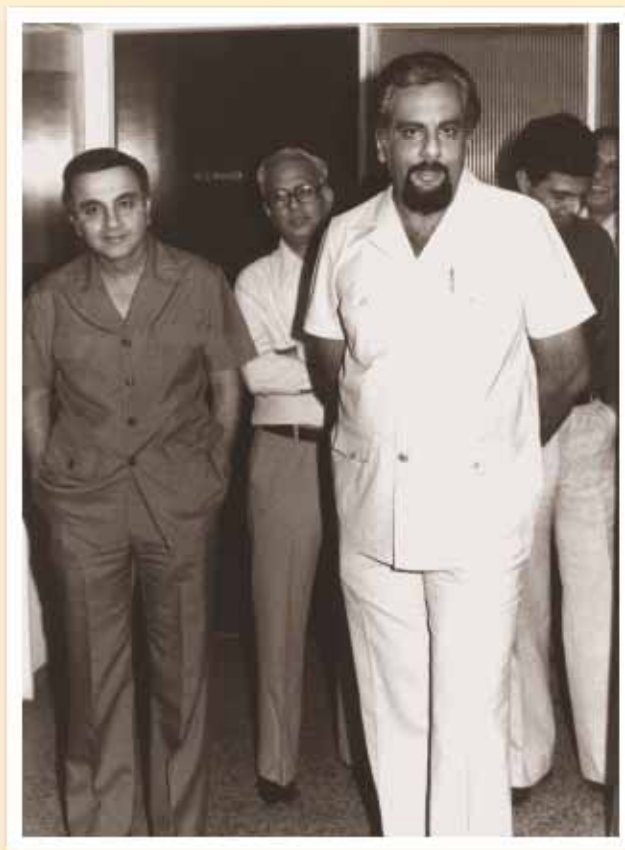
# A MAN OF VISION AND VALUES

In 1973, on Blue Star's thirtieth anniversary, MTA remarked in an interview, "I could keep quoting the statistics endlessly: we've grown from a two-man, hole-in-the-wall operation in a leaky shed to a 2,000-man, all-India enterprise; our annual income has increased from Rs one lakh to almost Rs 15 crores. And so on. But I'm more proud of our intangible assets: We are a thoroughly professional organization; what we do, we do well. We are dedicated to excellence. And most important, we have maintained the personal touch, the intimacy of a small company, the sense of belonging. This feeling of camaraderie amongst our employees, of all working towards a common purpose is our most precious asset."

✿ Mehru Mansukhani, who worked at Blue Star for decades, said that MTA radically influenced the course of his life. He remembered not only his quick temper, but also his humility: *"On one occasion MTA flared up and fired me severely, when I was not at fault. On the next day he came into office earlier than usual and called me to his office. He said he was sorry and apologised for 'unnecessarily firing me'. He said that I was right and he was wrong! A chairman apologising to a rookie temporary, apprentice! Unheard-of in those days.*



Bal Malhotra (above), Mehru Mansukhani and Nimo Punwani (together below), all Blue Star veterans





✿ Kumud Shambhu, who joined Blue Star's legal department in 1973, recalled later: *"Blue Star was then a small company. MTA, our Founder-Chairman, was first a loving, caring person and then an employer. MTA cared a great deal for the well being of his employees. One day I was sitting in late to complete some work. It was about seven pm and MTA was leaving. He saw the light burning in my room, and came in and told me to stop my work whilst he waited for me. He said it was unsafe for a lady to go home late as there were recent reports of unpleasant incidents. He waited till I packed up and dropped me in his car right up to my house. Such was his concern and care for his employees."*

He set great store by high quality. As he was to remark on Blue Star's Silver Jubilee in 1968, "Twenty-five years ago I set out after a dream that existed but vaguely in my mind. Others, intelligent, ambitious, competent, joined me in my little venture and helped give tangible shape to that dream and transform it into satisfying reality. But throughout these many years there was one part of the dream about which there was no vagueness – the determination to stamp Blue Star in the public mind as a modern, dynamic organization that delivered the goods, unfailingly, efficiently, without compromising on product or service quality. If today customers turn to Blue Star with confidence, it is because they know that the spirit that moves us is our dedication to customer satisfaction."

For him, the quality of its goods and services was the bedrock of Blue Star's name, and he had an eagle eye when it came to even the smallest details. According to Guri Khanna, he personally supervised the purchase of wood for, and the design of, the office furniture. Hiru Jhangiani also recalled how, as a new employee, he spent many long evenings with MTA, working out all the small details for the design of a 25-ton water chilling plant for Rogers, the aerated water manufacturer in Byculla. MTA worked tirelessly to iron out even the tiniest of glitches, and could also be extremely demanding of his people in this respect.



✿ Gulab Ramchandani recounts MTA's high standards:

*"He'd trust you with decisions involving crores of rupees. But there were some things he would never trust you on entirely. As, for instance, the accuracy of the Blue Star logo on a newly painted signboard. If he came across it, his eye would automatically check it for accuracy. If there was the slightest discrepancy, God help the man who allowed the sign to be put up. It was this that taught us to stay on our toes in matters of detail."*



✿ His son, Ashok Advani, describes his father's values in the work place:

*"MTA was a perfectionist. He insisted that a job must be done correctly and this is a trait that I have inherited from him. He respected the dignity of people, no matter what their position. He gave fair opportunities to all employees based on their capabilities rather than any family relationship. Thus professional management found early roots in Blue Star. He liked a friendly, informal work place but could not accept sloppiness. He respected the law and adhered to basic ethical principles. When he made a commitment, he did his utmost to honour it. These are some of the qualities of MTA which I try to adhere to."*

Even where his sons, Ashok and Suneel, were concerned, he made it clear that nothing would be given to them on a platter, and that they would have to work their way up in the Company: and

that is exactly what they did after they both joined Blue Star in 1969.

✿ Ashok Advani recalled when, as a child, he had accidentally broken a vase at home but was too scared to own up:

*"MTA was a wonderful role model. He had a way of teaching important lessons without lecturing. He realized that one of the kids was responsible. So he told us a story about the famous American President, George Washington, who received an axe as a birthday present from his father when he was a young boy. He was thrilled and keen to try out the axe. In his enthusiasm, he quietly chopped down his father's prized cherry tree in the garden one day. His father was furious and asked George who could have done such a stupid thing. George realized his mistake and was honest enough to say, 'Father, I cannot tell a lie. I'm sorry I was the one who chopped down your tree.'*



MTA and BTA with staff on the 21st anniversary

*"That simple story taught me one of the most important lessons of my life. I admitted that I had broken the vase and was mildly reprimanded for it. But the way in which he taught us to be honest and accept responsibility for our actions was something I will always remember."*









✿ His daughter, Suneeta Vaswani, recounts how she learnt strength from her father's strictness:

*"I grew up with parents who were loving parents, but also were strict disciplinarians, wanting to make us stronger, more adaptable individuals."*

*"While in college, I took extra classes and so I had to leave home early and return late. Although we had two cars and two drivers, he insisted that I take the public bus both ways. Likewise, when my father decided to aircondition our entire flat, he decided that the only part of the flat that was going to remain without airconditioning was my bedroom."*

*"His reasoning on both occasions was that I should not become accustomed to luxury, in case I could not have it in the future. No amount of my rational arguing had any effect. I continued to ride the bus, he stuck to his plan and proceeded to exclude my room in the airconditioning plan. This was his idea of making sure that I could face whatever life had in store for me. At the time, I felt very deprived and unhappy."*

*"Today, I am very grateful to my father for adhering to his principles, because I am able to handle less-than-perfect conditions. Fortunately, I have not had many occasions to be put to the test, but when I have, I have faced the challenges unfazed."*

With a personal donation, Mohan Advani had set up the Blue Star Educational Trust for the

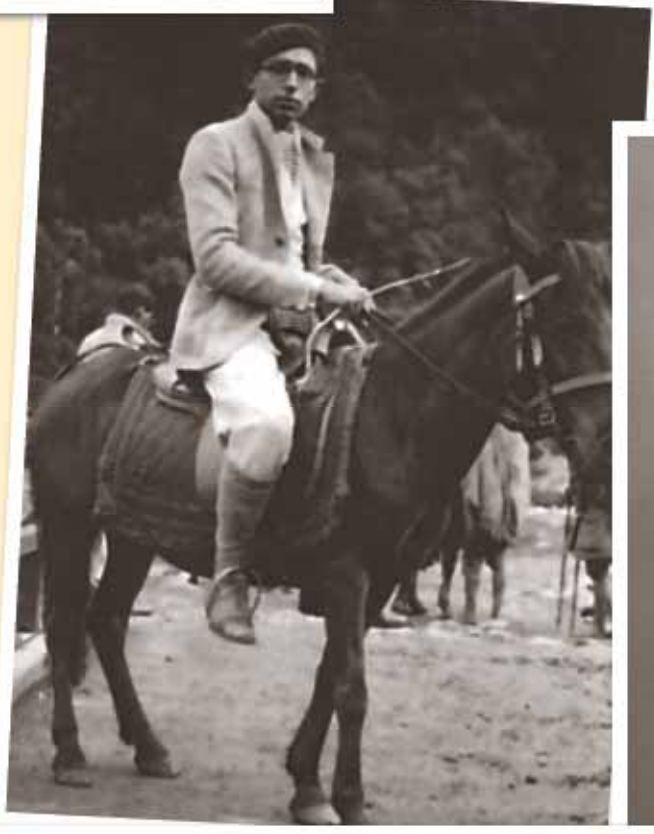
education of the employees' children. Yet his vision extended beyond Blue Star and his employees: he was also keenly aware of the country's problems. After India's war with China in 1962, he exhorted Blue Star's staff to conserve resources as a measure to contribute to the country. And in 1966, after the Indo-Pak war of 1965, the Company donated Leonard fridges for military hospitals and water coolers for jawans. Money collected for Puja in Blue Star's Calcutta branch was donated instead to the National Defence Fund. All these measures laid the groundwork for Blue Star's future corporate social responsibility work.

✿ S Mani, who joined Blue Star in 1968, recalls:

*"In the 45 years of my professional career, I can count less than ten individuals who guided me to succeed in whatever I do. The most significant guru for my professional learning was MTA. I was so grateful to him for moulding the formative years of my career that when my son was born in 1975, the name that came spontaneously to my mind was Mohan."*



MTA with P S Ramnath and P V Ramana in Secunderabad in 1966



Moham. Adra



BY APPOINTMENT  
44 CHAMBERS STREET, NEW YORK  
CORPORATE  
RATES: \$100.00  
\$25.00 PER HOUR - \$10.00  
\$5.00 PER HOUR - \$5.00  
HOTEL PRADA  
RADIO CITY



# LIVING LIFE TO THE HILT

Mohan Advani loved life with a passion. Possessing a sense of humour and an infectious joie de vivre, he believed in dressing well, eating well, living well. The Advani home always had good Goan cooks, well trained in Sindhi cuisine as well, for this was Mohan's favourite food. He insisted on the importance of dressing well in terms of his business image. "Your clothes can give the impression that you are somebody – or nobody," he said. A member of several prominent clubs in Bombay, he loved playing golf, which he did every weekend.

He had an infectious sense of humour and the ability to laugh at himself. Pratap Gidvani, a childhood friend of Suneel's, would later recall MTA telling him an anecdote about an American businessman who introduced himself as "Mr. Ellington .... but don't confuse me with the dook". MTA narrated how he joined in the general laughter without a clue as to who the "dook" was. When he heard that the reference was to the great jazzman Duke Ellington, he slapped his thigh and roared with laughter at himself.



✿ Suneel Advani says of his father:

*"He simply lived life to the hilt. In his later years, I lived with him and often accompanied him on his travels. In all things, he always exhibited a sense of style and elegance that was very international in flavour. And only the very best would do for him. He always travelled first class and stayed at the top hotels. He had a lifelong love for big American cars going back to the 1930s. While daily office wear was crisp white cottons in un-airconditioned Bombay, formal wear was Savile Row suits, Swiss cotton shirts and Sulka ties. The watch was Rolex, the cuff links Cartier, the shoes Italian. His trademarks were Scotch whisky in the prohibition era in Mumbai, and foie gras and Gorgonzola and Danish blue cheeses, whenever he could lay his hands on some in that era of shortages. He was extravagant but, at the same time, remarkably generous. His idea of giving me a good time as a student in America in the 1960s was to spend \$200 on a custom-made suit for me."*

✿ Ram Jethmalani, the renowned lawyer and a good friend of Mohan's, recalls:

*"He was an excellent host and charming company. He enjoyed himself and made everyone around him share his zeal for the good life. He was great fun. He had a puckish sense of humour and would regale us with his jokes."*





A large-hearted man, his many acts of generosity, big and small, are still remembered by his relatives, friends and colleagues. After Partition, he gave jobs to most of his displaced relatives and many other Sindhi refugees, thus ensuring their livelihoods.

✿ Ram Malani recalls how considerate he was:

*"Towards the end of his life, when he was suffering great physical agony, he became even more conscious of the suffering of others and worried about their seemingly trivial problems. One day, during a milk shortage, my wife happened to mention that she was not getting enough milk for the children. He promptly took it upon himself to make arrangements for the supply of milk every day. Though sick and bedridden, he personally ascertained that she got the milk that she needed. A small thing in itself, but that is how he endeared himself to those who knew him."*

Mohan had a passion for travelling, and travelled to various parts of India in his youth, and to various countries across the world in later years. He also made it a point to learn a few words in the local language, whether Japanese, Italian or Swedish.



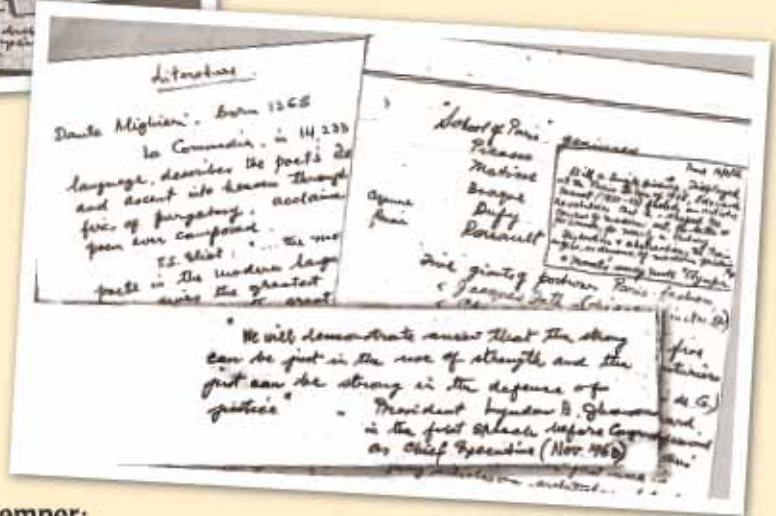
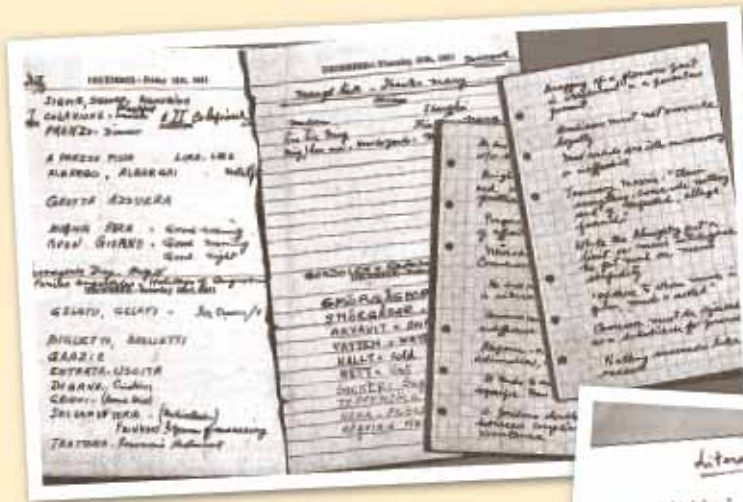
Padmi and Mohan being seen off at Santa Cruz airport by (left to right): Ram Hira, S Ganapathy, S Iyer, B K Garudachar, Gulibai Advani and BTA



Padmi and Mohan with the famous Clark Gable and actress Marilyn Maxwell on board the HMS Queen Mary in 1948



Mohan and Padmi in a Tokyo restaurant, 1956



Anjali Taraporevala, BTA's daughter, reminisces about her uncle's mercurial temper:

"Uncle Mo used to get angry at the drop of a hat, but he cooled down just as fast. Uncle Mo couldn't stand things being done the way they shouldn't be done, and on such occasions he'd chew up the person. I remember once I was on the telephone doing homework with a friend. Uncle Mo kept trying our number to speak to Dad but our line was engaged. He drove all the way to Alcazar and, as he came in, he glared at me, as if to say, 'What's wrong with your phone?' As soon as I saw him, I banged the phone down and fled!

"His favourite adages were 'A place for everything, and everything in its place' and 'If you have nothing to do, don't do it here.' They truly reflect his personality.

MTA's notebooks show his eclectic interests

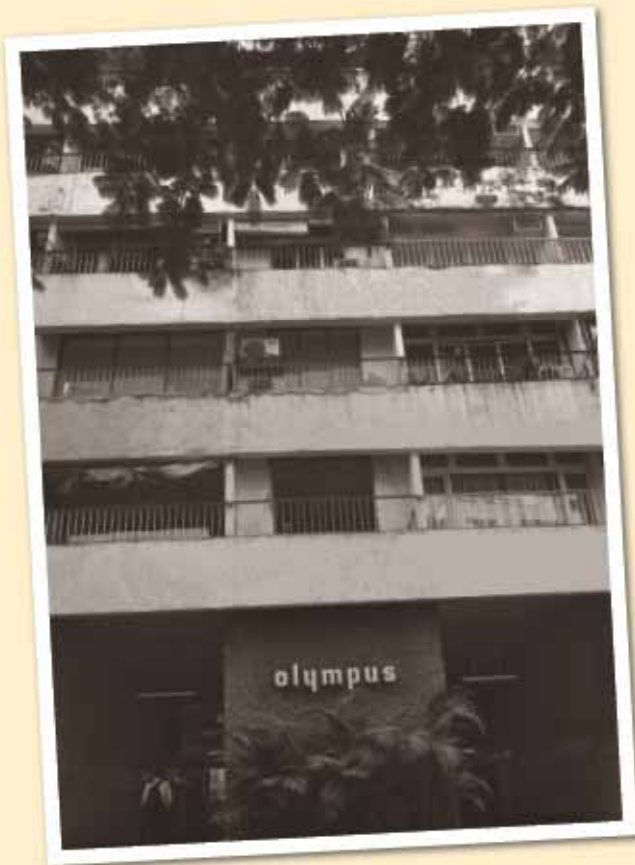
A multi-faceted man, Mohan had varied interests. Having learnt the violin in his childhood, he also had a keen eye for modern Indian art, collecting works by Ara, Gaitonde, Shanti Dave in the 1950s and 1960s. Fond of photography since his youth, he was behind the camera for most of his holiday photographs in his later years. On one of his trips to the US, he bought himself a movie camera, which he used to make home movies.

In 1957, he took on a new project, something completely unconnected to Blue Star. The Company was doing well, and Mohan Advani felt comfortable enough to leave its running to his capable team.





After Partition, his family members settled in Sindhi colonies where refugees could get apartments at low rates. Now he wanted them to have better apartments. He always had a passion for architecture and interior design: he participated in designing the Advani bungalow in Karachi, as well as all the Blue Star offices. Now he threw himself with great ardour into this new project, the construction of an apartment building at Altamount Road: Olympus.



Olympus was completed in 1960

MTA was blessed with a life partner who helped him realize his dreams. Having lost her father at the age of three, Padmi Advani grew up into an independent-minded, thoughtful woman. She

was a trailblazer in her own right: in 1935, she was the first woman to act in a Sindhi play, bringing the curtain down on the era when men essayed female roles. Giving by nature, she had clear priorities: to help and support her compatriots displaced from Sindh after Partition; and to support her husband in whatever way she could help him succeed. Ever the elegant and gracious hostess when entertaining Blue Star's business clients, she made Mohan's life as stress-free as possible when it came to domestic matters, and also filled in for him in his parental duties, so that their children might not feel his absence. Padmi worked at a Blue Star financial subsidiary for the last 25 years of her life, rare for women of her generation. Like her husband, she was meticulous about punctuality. Not given to extravagance, she would rather donate to a good cause.

Mohan and Padmi Advani both attended the D J Sind College in Karachi; both their fathers, also alumni, were involved in the management of this college at different points in time. After Partition, the professors of the D J Sind College founded Jai Hind College in Bombay in 1948, and Mohan Advani became a member of its Managing Board in 1954. In 1971, he was elected president of the Managing Board, a post he occupied until his death in 1974. After him, Padmi Advani also became a member of the Managing Board of Jai Hind College, a position she held until she passed away peacefully in 1991.







# FLYING TOO CLOSE TO THE SUN

During MTA's lifetime, personal fitness through exercise and diet had not become part of public consciousness. Development in medical technology in pharmacological products and equipment had not begun its acceleration, which it did in the 1990s. His obsession with work took its toll on his health which had become vulnerable as early as the late 1950s. He had a tendency to black out and lose consciousness for minutes at a time. This happened at the driving wheel of his car in the early 1960s when, in a state of unconsciousness, he drove across Hughes Road in Bombay and crashed. The car was destroyed but he emerged unscathed. Visiting New York to spend time with Suneel in 1967, he lost consciousness on two successive afternoons at lunch. Comprehensive medical tests could not detect any abnormality.

In January 1970, Mohan Advani was on a business trip to Baroda, when he suddenly had a heart attack. With him were Suneel, Gulab Ramchandani and Gulab's wife, Ratna. In those days, Baroda offered neither cardiac care facilities nor frequent flights to Bombay. It was only the next day that they could fly him back to Bombay and admit him into Breach Candy Hospital.

He had barely recovered from this when, two months later, important negotiations were to be

concluded with Hewlett-Packard, for Blue Star to be appointed their exclusive distributors for South Asia. Padmi and his children were totally unable to prevent him from delegating this work in order to avoid travel. Despite ill health, Mohan, who had been working towards this important deal for several years, insisted on attending these meetings. While using Gulab as his chief negotiator, he nevertheless flew to Delhi for the final round of discussions. He succeeded in negotiating a lucrative distributor agreement with HP, a relationship which lasts to this day. But unfortunately, he had another massive heart attack there.

Suneel Advani says: "After the HP negotiations, it was downhill all the way in terms of his health. He never really recovered from this second infarction in Delhi. For some time he attended to his office work for only a few hours a day, and then after a while became almost bedridden for the last few years of his life."

When the year 1974 opened, Mohan Advani was 61 years old, and Padmi was 59. His family had really grown: all three of his children were married. His daughter Suneeta and her husband, Nanik Vaswani, had two sons, Sanjay and Dinesh; his son Ashok had two daughters, Anissa and Rohina. A fifth grandchild was on the way:





Nargis, Suneel's wife, was then expecting their first child, Sunaina, who would be born on February 15, the day after Mohan Advani passed away.

✿ For the first three years of their marriage, Suneel and his wife Nargis lived with his parents. Nargis Advani has fond memories of her father-in-law's concern for her health while she was undergoing a difficult pregnancy:

*"We were both restricted to bed in our respective rooms since doctors would not permit us to get up. He was at one end of this elongated apartment at Ocean View, and I at the other, pregnant." So he would phone me on the intercom every day to tease me and enquire about my health. He was so ill, and yet he was so thoughtful and playful. Returning home from work every evening, Suneel was torn between first turning right towards his father's room, or left towards mine.*

*"When I was well, MTA used to ask me to cook for him and I'd prepare Sindhi food and nourishing soups without fat and salt. Mummy looked after him so devotedly when he was ill. They loved each other very much. They both had fiery tempers which would cool just as fast, but they got along beautifully.*

On February 13, 1974, he dictated letters to his secretary up to about four in the afternoon. An hour later, he suffered a fall in the bathroom. Doctors were summoned immediately, and in



some time, his pulse picked up. But again, after 11.30 pm, he began to fade away, and soon after midnight, on February 14, with his last words, 'Hare Ram', Mohan Advani passed away.





MTA with his long-time secretary, S Ganapathy

- ✿ S Ganapathy, who had been MTA's secretary for almost three decades, wrote in his letter of condolence to the Advani family:

*"It was characteristic of MTA that he should pay as much attention to the fixing of a paper clip as to the mammoth problems of a growing organization like Blue Star. For the 27 years that I served as his secretary, I never once felt like a subordinate. It is a measure of the man's greatness that he treated everyone like a member of his family. MTA was not merely my boss but a benevolent friend, philosopher and guide. He was a gentleman to his fingertips. Any time of the day the door of his office and any time of the night the door of his house were open to one and all."*

Mohan Advani's death was a great blow to the innumerable people who loved and looked up

to him – his family, his many friends and the staff of Blue Star. His wife, Padmi, was devastated. Hundreds of people lined up in the compound of Ocean View to pay their last homage to this man they loved so much.

- ✿ BTA paid tribute to his beloved younger brother:

*"Being young, Mohan had a certain freshness, characteristic of the young, which accounts for his urge to do things differently. He was a perfectionist and very quality conscious. He never compromised on his convictions and never consciously harmed anyone. There are men who abound in that mysterious, inexplicable attribute called charisma. Mohan was one among them. He had that ability to dream big and make that dream come true."*



BTA and MTA shared a deep bond of love and respect for each other throughout their lives



# DEATH IS BUT A WORD...



MTA being interviewed on Blue Star's 30th anniversary

Just months before he died, in his interview on Blue Star's thirtieth anniversary in 1973, Mohan Advani had said: "What of the future? We have, like all good organizations, drawn up objectives and plans. With luck these will be met. But I feel that what will help us most is our sense of belonging. We have pulled together through good times and bad. We shall do so in the future. Ever mindful of an unspoken objective, never stated in corporate plans, but believed in by each one of us – Blue Star, first and always."

Mohan Advani would have been happy and proud to see Blue Star today: India's largest central airconditioning company and the industry leader in commercial refrigeration. The seed planted by him has grown into a mighty oak, and is growing still.

✿ His friend, Keshub Mahindra pays tribute to him:

*"It was in the latter part of the forties that I met Mohan when we were both embarking on our industrial ventures. With much faith and perseverance, Mohan, believing in the power of technology to bring about rapid societal changes, set about seeking it for use in his business. He planted the seeds which enabled Blue Star to attain the finest of technologies in the years to come and emerge as the leader in their industry. He set standards of corporate behaviour with emphasis on ethical values and practices which are respected by his successors."*

After Mohan passed away, his brother BTA became Chairman of Blue Star. He in turn was succeeded, first by Ram Malani, and later by Ashok and Suneel. Today, Ashok Advani, non-executive Chairman, has retired, while Suneel Advani, Executive Vice-Chairman, is semi-retired. Satish Jamdar is Managing Director, and Vir Advani – the third generation – is now Executive Director.

Given the high value that education held for Mohan Advani, and in accordance with his will, a special diploma programme in medical electronics was started in his memory. And on September 27, 1993 – the date of Blue Star's Golden Jubilee –



Mohan T Advani Chowk in front of Kasturi Buildings

the traffic island opposite Blue Star's office in the Kasturi Buildings at Churchgate was named Mohan T Advani Chowk.

Mohan Advani is physically gone but he remains in the heart and soul of Blue Star. He was Blue Star, and Blue Star is him – his values, his style, his dynamism. His light still shines on, undimmed. As the Scottish poet, Thomas Campbell, wrote:

"And is he dead,  
whose glorious mind lifts ours on high?  
To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die."









# MILESTONES

- 1912, November 11 Mohansing Advani born to Gulibai and Tolasing Advani in Hyderabad (Sindh)
- 1934 Graduates with a BA (Economics & History) from the D J Sind College, Karachi; goes to Poona; goes to London to train with Frigidaire
- 1935 Returns to India to work with Bombay Garage Ltd in Bombay
- 1936 Marries Padmi Achalsing Advani
- 1939 Daughter Suneeta born
- 1940 Tolasing Advani passes away
- 1941 Elder son Ashok born
- 1943 Resigns from Bombay Garage Ltd
- 1943 Founds Blue Star Engineering Company
- 1944 Younger son Suneel born
- 1946 Makes first exploratory trip to USA
- 1947 Blue Star commences manufacture of water coolers and ice candy machines
- 1950 First Blue Star central airconditioning installation at Shangrila Biscuit factory at Bhandup
- 1951 Blue Star appointed sole distributors for Worthington Corporation
- 1954 Blue Star starts signing agencies with Honeywell, Perkin-Elmer, Schneider-Westinghouse and other international companies
- 1960 Builds Olympus
- 1967 Gulibai Advani passes away
- 1969 Blue Star goes public; Thane factory inaugurated
- 1969 Ashok Advani and Suneel Advani join Blue Star
- 1970 Hewlett-Packard distributorship starts; Blue Star commences airconditioning of high rise buildings
- 1974, February 14 Mohan Advani passes away



# SPECIAL THANKS TO



Ashok Advani,  
Gobindsingh B Advani, Hiroo Advani,  
Nargis and Suneel Advani, (late) Sharada Dwivedi,  
Pratap Gidvani, Girish Hingorani, Harish Jagtiani, Kamal Jagtiani, Shobha Jagtiani,  
Ram Jethmalani, Hiru Jhangiani, Guri Khanna, Keshub Mahindra, Ranajit Majumdar,  
Ram Malani, S Mani, Mehru Mansukhani, Sangeeta Parameswaran, Nimo Punwani,  
Gulab Ramchandani, P S Ramnath, Dipak Reshamwala, Raj Seth,  
B. Thiagarajan, Devi Vaswani, Suneeta and  
Nanik Vaswani.





**BLUE STAR**