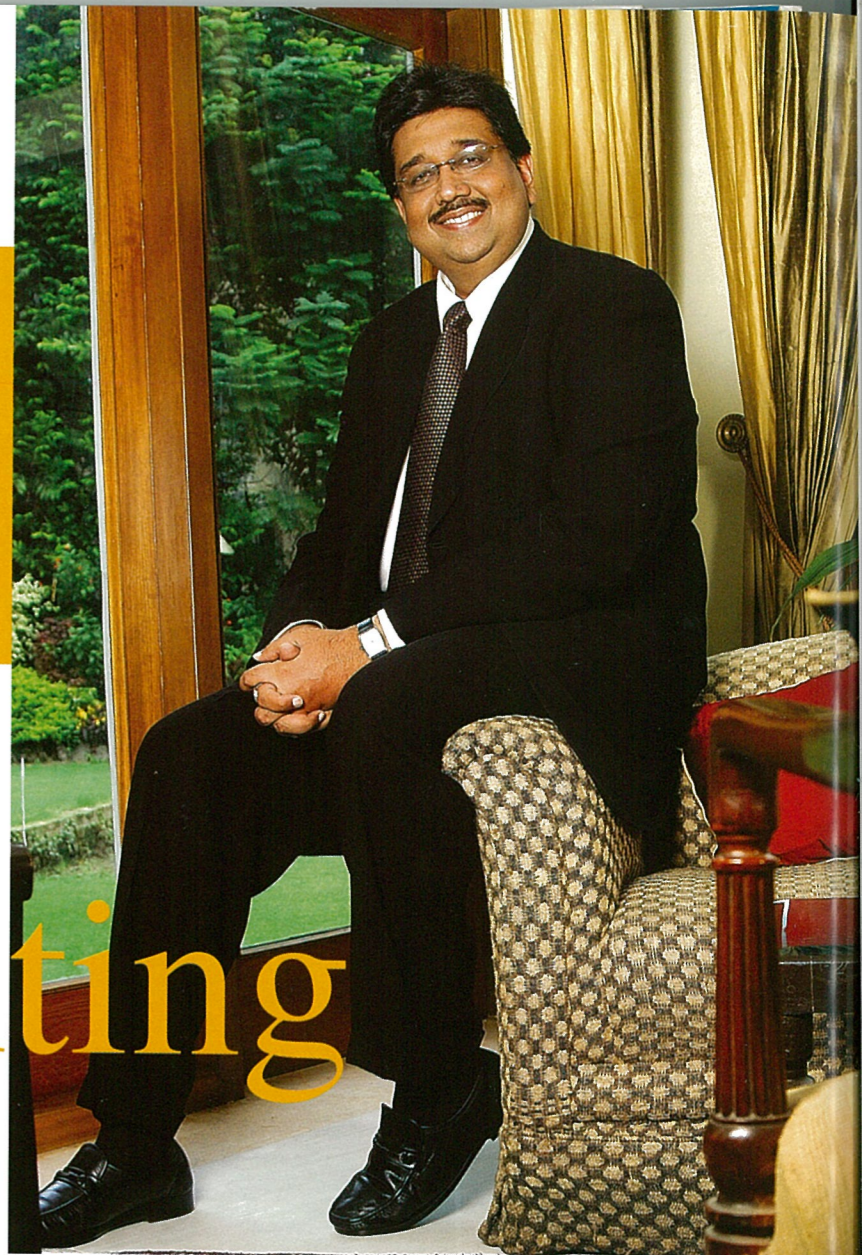


He is the person building Kolkata's journey to progress. Astute business sense coupled with a strong creative instinct and above all, humble attitude and self-determination mark **Harshvardhan Neotia's** footsteps to glory

TEXT | SUPRIYA NEWAR

PHOTOGRAPHS | SAYANTAN SARKAR

Cementing SUCCESS



He has always been and will perhaps continue to be one of the best-known faces of Kolkata. Be it the 'arty' circuit, or a crème de la crème gathering, a serious business meet or a Tollywood jamboree, Padmashree awardee Harshvardhan Neotia stands virtually and figuratively taller than most.

However he is quick to brush aside all such compliments: "My family has always been inclined towards creativity and art. That automatically helps one broaden one's horizons and make friends beyond the world of enterprise." As is well-known, Harsh has been greatly influenced and mentored by his uncle Suresh Neotia, a prolific art-collector. His maternal uncle Narottam Seksaria on the other hand, honed his business and analytical skills.

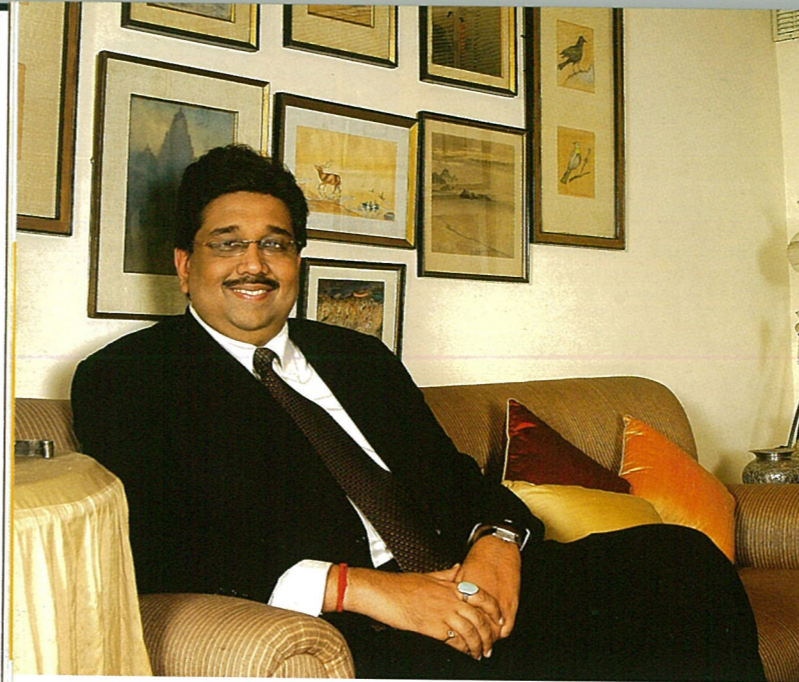
No wonder then that each of Harsh's projects have received many accolades. He has roped in great architects like Charles Correa and Balkrishna Doshi for designing, a feat few have been able to achieve. From his weekend getaway Ffort Radisson and the heritage park Swabhumi; to his condovilles that changed the way Kolkatans lived to his latest mall, City Centre, Harsh has married public and private enterprise with

enviable aplomb. His Bengal Ambuja continues to break ground with several more housing projects in and around the city. And with his newly formed Ambuja Realty (a private enterprise), he's all set to step out of Bengal and leave his imprints in Raipur, Amritsar and Khanna in Punjab. Read on to find out what sets this real estate developer apart from his contemporaries.

QUALITY AND TIMELY DELIVERANCE

Critics say he is just another builder, but the hullabaloo that every project of his creates belies the notion. "I have never aspired to be the greatest or the biggest builder around, says Harsh, with his trademark humility. "Neither have I ever professed that I am numero uno. Our success lies in having created some quality offbeat projects, raising the bar continuously for our investors and customers. Moreover we have always delivered whatever we've promised, which I realise is a bit of a rarity. Therefore we have come to be respected as credible and transparent builders."

"In fact, instead of the status of the biggest developer, I would much rather that people know me as a compassionate, caring



and a sensitive human being," he adds.

But wouldn't such a stand make him less aggressive as a businessman? "Not really," insists Harsh. "I am excited about all projects. But I try not to get emotionally attached to a contract. Also, I try to keep the passion of the work away from the reward."

INSPIRATION FROM THE GREATS

Harsh's influences adorn the walls of his chambers. "These four men have greatly inspired me," says the voracious reader, pointing to the pictures of Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi. "I have read their works over and over again."

Speaking of his chamber, one can't help but be distracted by its subtle grandeur and class. In a wooden finish sprawling room on the 7th floor, overlooking a green patch, Harsh sits on a large mahogany paperless desk with certificates, honours and trophies dotting the background.


He is proud of his family background and attributes most of his success to them. But is quick to add, "They are also my strongest critics and the critique is a part of the support."

Though the city that he grew up in is fast changing, he remains extremely positive about Kolkata. "It is on the right track and is steadily shedding some of its erstwhile weaknesses, becoming a far more energetic city with the right balance of enterprise and culture." Would he then raise his twins, Parthiv and Paroma in the city of joy? "Undoubtedly," he states.

TEAM BUILDING

Speaking of his personal strengths, Harsh for once, sheds his modesty. "I am probably good at building and dealing with teams and also have a good sense of aesthetics. Plus, though I am not an original thinker, I have a knack of absorbing varied matters, analysing them and then applying them to a given situation." And his weakness? "Physically, I am plain lazy! Also, sometimes in the process of being nice to many, I end up paying more time than required to inconsequential matters," he reflects.

So does being instantly recognised and noticed in a crowd, mobbed by the media wherever he goes leave him craving for anonymity? "Not really; It might be a minor irritant at times, but it can be easily tackled," he comments as a person who obviously wears his stature and success very easily on his shoulders.

As time goes by, Harsh Neotia's competitors and other industrialists will probably script greater success stories and report larger profit-making ventures. But he will always have the honour of making the erstwhile dodgy business of real estate utterly transparent, of thinking out-of-the-box, of creating with a passion, and of keeping the faith in tumultuous times. His talent is not limited to launching unprecedented real estate projects. His true hallmark lies in having won the hearts of diverse people. And that despite his towering success, he has managed to maintain solid ground beneath his feet. 

ABOUT THE PROJECTS

Swabhumi

*Kolkata's answer to Dilli Haat.

*A heritage plaza, that showcases the diverse arts and culture of the country with a focus on Bengal.

*Swabhumi was built on reclaimed wasteland, flanked by waterbodies and lush greenery.

Efort Radisson

*Started the concept of weekend getaways.

*Conceived a fort-like resort that would be the city's first weekend getaway on the banks of the Hoogly.

Housing

*Pioneered the concept of public-private enterprise and has built several housing projects in Kolkata and the rest of Bengal including Asansol, Durgapur, Siliguri, Shantiniketan and Bardhaman.

*Of all these projects, 'Udayan, The Condoville' has been the most exalted of the lot and has won several awards. HUDCO, India's premier urban development authority declared it a 'model housing project' for all states and conferred the citation of appreciation for 'the lead given in forging public-private partnership in housing' to Harshavardhan Neotia. He was then conferred the Padmashree in 1999 by the then President of India, KR Narayanan.

City Centre

*A retail project that has changed the way Kolkata shops.

*An architectural splendour by Charles Correa.

*Such was the success of City Centre Salt Lake that a new centre is being planned at New Town. This time the architect is Kapil Bhalla.