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## CASE STUDY OF MRS. VAIJAYANTI RAJENDRA PAREKH ... A CIRCUMSTANTIAL WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE CHALLENGING BUSINESS OF BUILDING AND LAND DEVELOPMENT



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### ABSTRACT

This is the study of a circumstantial woman entrepreneur from the city of Pune who was compelled by circumstances to take up the reins of her family business. In doing so, she became India's most outstanding woman entrepreneur in the 'male dominated' business of construction!

**KEYWORDS :** *Kitchen to Construction.*

### INTRODUCTION :

The case highlights her undying spirit that propelled her to explore the environment around, exploit opportunities, fight odds, innovate and thus succeed

in her entrepreneurial venture.

An in-depth study of her life, struggles and achievements was undertaken by this researcher, the details of which are as follows:

### FAMILY BACKGROUND AND SCHOOLING:

Vaijayanti Parekh, nee Neeta Shah was born to Jain parents Tarachand and Sheela Shah in the year 1956 in Dist. Nipani, Karnataka. Her father was a farmer and her mother a housewife. The Jain culture being conservative, the women lived in purdah. They were not allowed to visit public places like schools, colleges, market places and even if they did so, they had to cover their face with a veil. However, inspite of the cultural and religious limitations, seeing Vaijayanti's deep desire to study, her parents sent her to school. She proved to be a different child, for she completed her schooling and even went upto the Junior college level. Besides studies she was also interested in sports both indoors and outdoors. She represented the "Shivaji University" in Carom competitions. She also played badminton.

### MARRIAGE AND HIGHER STUDIES:

After the completion of Junior College, her father got her married to Mr. Rajendra Parekh, a broad minded, affluent businessman from Pune. Like her parents, her in-laws too were staunch Jains. However, seeing her thirst for learning, her husband allowed her to pursue studies and complete her BA. She was further interested in doing her Masters, but Rajendra insisted upon her studying law,

which he thought might be useful to her in future. What is not surprising is that though the husband had a progressive outlook, Vaijayanti had to adhere to the dress code of the Jain community, which at times made her uncomfortable and conscious in the college environment. Her married life thus, found her playing dual roles that of a student and a housewife. What was remarkable was that she executed both the roles effectively. She was an ideal wife and daughter in law who attended to her domestic duties with diligence. She was blessed with a daughter and a son.

Her Husband, Rajendra was very active and enterprising. In the year 1983, he widened the horizon of the family's construction business. He often discussed business matters with the family and encouraged Vaijayanti to participate in these discussions. He strongly felt that women should be aware of matters that concerned them. He sometimes even casually mentioned that she should join the family business, to which she would jocularly reply, "What role can a women play this male dominated business of Construction?"

#### THE FATAL ACCIDENT AND TURNING POINT:

The Parekh family being religious, often visited holy places. On 29th May, 1985, twenty nine members of the Parekh family headed for Mt. Abu in Rajasthan. On the way back, the bus in which they were travelling met with a fatal accident. Thirteen of the twenty-nine members died on the spot. The deceased included Rajendra Parekh, his parents and also Vaijayanti's parents among other relatives. Vaijayanti and her daughter suffered minor injuries while the son, escaped unhurt.

The world around Vaijayanti, who was just 28 suddenly crumbled. The accident left her with two little children and the business organization to be taken care of.

#### AT THE CROSS ROADS:

At the time of his demise, Rajendra Parekh had two ongoing projects viz. 'Rohini' at Wanwadi and 'Champarashtra' at Hadapsar. People who had booked their flats and shops were panic stricken at the news of the builder's death. They feared that since there was no male left in the family, the ongoing projects would be left unattended and they would lose their money. This feeling of insecurity that brewed among the investors led to protests. Vaijayanti was compelled to go to the office and face the protestors. Her relatives and friends at this stage, advised her to sell off the assets and pay the investors. The balance could be invested and the interest thus earned could become a source of income for the family. On the other hand, the staff urged her to complete the dream projects of their Boss, assuring her of their undaunted support. Prominent among the staff members who encouraged her to take over the reins of the business were Mr. Hamid Shaikh, a typist and Mr. Janardhan Shivsagar, the supervisor. Mr. Ajay Saswadkar, the legal advisor of the business also extended his full fledged support.

#### THE GREAT DECISION:

Almost six months passed and Vaijayanti continued to find herself in a confused state of affairs. Meanwhile, the protests from the investors took a turn for the worst. Despite Vaijayanti's requests for some more time and assurance of protecting their interest, the investors stooped to stone pelting at the office. At this stage she strongly felt something had to be done. The first option was to shut the business, but that she thought, would put an end to her dear husband's vision and dream projects. Though the relatives supported this option, she went against them and chose the second option of continuing the family business of Construction.

### CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED:

The first major challenge that she encountered was that of getting the business transferred in her name. The business was a partnership firm in which Rajendra Parekh was an active partner and his mother, a sleeping one. In the absence of a Will, it was difficult for Vijayanti to get the business transferred in her name. At the same time, she also faced criticism and stiff competition from her male counterparts, who discouraged, dissuaded and even mocked at her for attempting to run a male oriented business. Ignoring all, she moved towards her goal with utmost dedication and sincerity. The relatives had, by now, distanced themselves from her, except a maternal uncle who supported her during the initial stages. It was her loyal staff, her hard work and total commitment that kept the mission on. Along the line, Vijayanti also realized that it was necessary to get support of the Corporators / local politicians and so she joined politics.

Her struggle and efforts finally bore fruit when her maiden projects, 'Rohini' and 'Champaratna' achieved completion. Her investors appreciated and applauded the commendable work. This gave her the first major break in the line of construction and also served as an incentive to continue and expand the same business. Now there was no turning back for Vijayanti. It is said, 'success begets success' and this was true in Vijayanti's case too. She subsequently undertook a number of residential and commercial projects. Some projects worth a mention besides Rohini and Champaratna are Nitiraj Construction at Vishrantwadi, Sheel Tara at Bajirao road and Viraj Gardens at Ranjangaon.

A law graduate, from a non-engineering and non management field could achieve this unique success on account of her grit and fortitude to face all challenges. All this put her into the limelight and prominent promoters and builders began to respect her and accept her in the field.

### LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM VAIJAYANTI'S PHILOSOPHY AND PRINCIPLES IN BUSINESS:

- Always have a vision, a plan and a road map to where you wish to take your business
- Always give your best as there is no substitute for hard work
- Work with complete determination and dedication
- Believe in yourself and work with a fire in your belly – never let your motivation die
- Do not fail to take inspiration from those doing better
- Good intentions automatically help one do well, which in turn benefits the Society as a whole.
- Treat your employees and associates like members of a larger family. This brings more prosperity and efficiency in the Organization
- The best media to promote your goods and services is the 'word of mouth publicity'. She believed that one satisfied customer was equal to seventeen salesmen.
- Never fail to take social responsibility. There is always a give and take relation between your Organization and the Society around. You must give in order to receive.

### AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

An individual's hard work and talent is always appreciated in the form of awards. Vijayanti too received as many as seventeen awards for the valuable contributions made by her to the Society. Organizations and associations like the Maratha Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture and Industry (MCCIA), Jain Samaj, Jain Samaj Society, Pune Municipal Corporation etc. felicitated her with awards. The Mahatma Phule Award and the Babasaheb Ambedkar Award also fell into her lap. Actor and politician, Mr. Sunil Dutt felicitated Mrs. Parekh at a function organized for the differently abled, for her social work.

A major award, 'The Best Builder Award' given to her by the Builders' Association was like a

Lifetime Achievement Award – the most satisfying one for Vijayanti, as it came from the very same competitors who once scoffed at her for entering a ' male dominated field of construction'.

The Central Government of India approved a documentary on Vijayanti Parekh's achievements and contribution to Society. Numerous articles and write ups have been written and published by authors like Surekha Shah, Jyoti Prakash Shah. Media coverage too, has been given by various news agencies. Her social work and contribution to politics has been highly appreciated.

#### END OF LIFE'S JOURNEY:

From 1985 to 2004 Vijayanti not only ran the business successfully but also took it to a higher level carving a niche for herself in the field of construction. However, from the year 2004, on account of indifferent health, the business started slowing down. She suffered from an attack of jaundice but soon recovered. But in 2005, when the problem recurred, the brave soldier succumbed to the illness. With the end of Vijayanti's life, a curtain was also drawn on the family's construction business. Her son Vishal today, runs a transport company.

#### THE LEGEND LIVES ON:

##### LATE VAIJAYANTI PAREKH'S MESSAGE:

Mrs.Vijayanti Parekh loved to say the following to the people who asked her the secret of her success:

- Always keep your antennas on and be sensitive to the needs of the people around you. It is important to be a good human being before being a successful business person, politician, professional etc. Do as much good as you can for the Society.

Vijayanti's life has been a saga of inspiration to women. Her struggles, fortitude and success speak volumes. Her message to women in particular is:

- Empower yourselves financially, emotionally and mentally. There would be elements in the Society that would try to demoralize and demotivate you. If you think you are right, stick to your guns and move forward with courage and determination to taste the sweet fruit of success.

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