Parsis prepare for a philanthropic embrace

The last thing Jimmy Mistry, Managing Director, Della Tecnica, a 34-year-old business baron sitting alone at the top of a 200-crore turnkey solutions industry, needed to do is set up an NGO, the Parsi Resource Group (PRG), with eyes trained on their youth, priests and fire temples. Perhaps, it is the last thing he is expected to do. On the eve of the launch, he took some time out of his 24-hour busy schedule to speak to Kenneth Lobo.

Where and how did the idea germinate?
It was a culmination of personal events, a bit of soul searching and scratching beneath the surface. Other communities have weekly gatherings where there is an opportunity to pool in not only money but resources as well. Parsis meet, what, three or four times a year. Full-time priests earn meagre salaries which are not sufficient to support their families. The youth are apprehensive about taking up entrepreneurship as they see unsuccessful people all around them. Parsis have become a working community with cushy nine-to-five jobs. But no one can be successful without being unsuccessful. We want to provide more positive examples for the youth so they are tempted to be entrepreneurs. But they can’t do it suddenly. It’s like milking a cow once in three weeks and expecting it to yield all that milk at once.

How do you aim to action your idea of ‘stop talking, start doing’?
We borrowed the supply chain management idea from the ant community. The first step was to register volunteers. From the coverage in ‘Ham-e-Jamshed’, a Parsi newspaper, and through word-of-mouth, people from all walks of life have responded. Housewives form the backbone of the project, doing all the research work and helping with mentoring the youth and students. Eminent personalities from the arts, business and the sciences have also stepped forward. Next, we registered resources, as this will bring in aid. The PRG will look to its high-profile members to secure good job openings or sponsor higher education. We also have adoption schemes for students and agiaries. Now, we have begun registering the youth. Even if it’s something as simple as doing up a CV, so it gives someone a better chance, we want to do that.

Where does the Parsi Resource Group fit in among the other trusts that operate in the city?
There are about 50-60 trusts in the city doing some good work, but the Parsi Resource Group exists in a space of its own. Last month, we persuaded 350 priests (mobeds) to gather at a function, something that hasn’t been done in 100 years. We managed this as we have no political affiliation or economic gain in mind. I’m neither an extremist nor a reformist. When you treat people with extreme dignity and extreme respect, they will respond.

One of the issues with NGOs is the lack of transparency and accountability.
We’re setting up a strong financial committee headed by Neville Durasia, Director of KPMG. The aim is to have a team of 8-12 people who will take time out from their jobs each month and audit every penny that is spent. Collecting money from day-one is unwarranted. We are carrying out detailed surveys among the youth, the priests and the programmes are implemented, we will begin accepting donations.

Any roadblocks you might encounter?
No, in fact, we have received a warm welcome from the community. In the long run, and we are looking at longevity. The schedule is planned one year in advance - 1,000 youth, 500 mobeds and 15 agiaries, our reputation will precede us. Internally, it was like setting up a 150-piece orchestra, with every piece from a different part of the world, but we’ve coped.