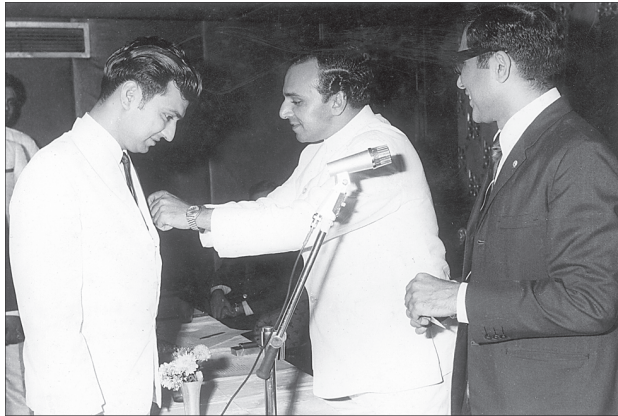


CHAPTER 5

GROWING UP WITH  
JUNIOR CHAMBER



Nanik being sworn in as President of the  
Wadala Junior Chamber.





Before getting into the narrative of Nanik's business endeavours, it is appropriate to talk about an organization that played a dominant role in shaping the man that he is today.

In spite of his business acumen, Nanik was painfully aware of the fact that he had not completed his formal education. This made him shy and reserved, making him feel that he was not competent enough to interact with the educated classes of society. He marveled at speakers who spoke and gave presentations with natural ease in front of large audiences, and wondered if he would ever reach such levels of confidence and poise himself.

Nanik also wished to act upon his yearning to contribute to social welfare. This desire was kindled when he experienced family hardships in the wake of the Partition. He felt empathy for the underprivileged in their trials and tribulations. Moreover, the social disparities he saw firsthand

in Ghana had left a deep impression upon his mind. Nanik felt that such disparities could be bridged only if the affluent realized and fulfilled their obligation, to give back to the society from which they had taken so much.

Nanik looked out for an avenue that would help him overcome his personal inhibitions and at the same time give him an opportunity to do social work. *Junior Chamber* became the perfect channel. It served as a ‘finishing school’ that fine-tuned Nanik’s personality and taught him how to champion social causes.

The *Junior Chamber*, that later came to be known internationally as *Jaycees*, is a non-profit organization that was established in 1920 in the United States. It gradually grew to have a global spread. In India, Segunde Mapa in Calcutta founded the Junior Chamber in 1949. The organization gives young people, irrespective of colour, caste or creed the tools they need to build bridges of success for themselves in areas of business development, management skills, individual training, community service, and international connections. It provides opportunities for them to develop personal and leadership skills through service to others. For more than eighty years now, the *Junior Chamber* has been a force for good, and its presence can be felt in all walks of life.

## B e c o m i n g P r e s i d e n t

The year 1968 — a year after Nanik’s marriage to Geeta — a point in time when he was struggling to establish himself financially. Nanik relates: “A group of people got together under the leadership of Gangaram Joshi to start the *Lion’s Club of Wadala*. Joshi was one of the past Sheriff of Bombay

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and had fine leadership qualities. He was elected President of the Club, and I was appointed Treasurer. The Club engaged in community development projects, a sphere of activity close to my heart. But due to the priority of running my business, I was able to spend limited time with the Club.”

A few months down the line, a dispute arose that split the members into two factions. Many members resigned from the Club as a result of this. Nanik continues: “I kept supporting Gangaram Joshi. He led us to form the Wadala Junior Chamber. Gangaram Joshi was the President and I served on the managing committee. I continued in this capacity in addition to fulfilling my private business responsibilities.”

In 1971, Joshi took ill and had to discontinue as President of the Wadala Junior Chamber. The quest for a new President began. Nanik was unanimously elected to fill the vacant post.

“I had no choice but to accept this responsibility, although it went against my own wishes. I had a wife and a young daughter to support; my time and energy was consumed by my struggling business. I had pressure on the home front too, with my father wanting me to take up the traditional family business. Moreover, I was a novice compared to Gangaram Joshi. He had excellent oratory, networking and social skills. He had financial muscle. I had none of these qualities. Understandably, I was a little anxious about leading the Wadala Junior Chamber,” Nanik admits.

## Fulfilling His Pledge

Circumstances quickly arose that tested the new President's leadership qualities to the hilt. War broke out between India and Pakistan in 1971. Bombay became a vital point of transit for the *jawans* (soldiers). Daily, thousands of them left Bombay's railway stations to serve on the nation's border. Thousands returned by rail to the city from the war front en route to their various destinations.

“Those who went made great sacrifices. Some of them never returned. The ones who did were either exhausted or wounded. I felt that something must be done to help them.” So Nanik called an emergency meeting of the Wadala Junior Chamber. The question of how best to help the *jawans* was seriously discussed. It was unanimously decided to run a canteen that would serve refreshments to the soldiers in transit. Since Dadar was one of the major railway stations of Bombay, it was decided to set up a canteen at Dadar Railway Station.

The managing committee next considered the question of raising funds for the project. Nanik relates: “To give out free refreshments to thousands of troops at Dadar Station was not an easy proposition! Considering my own delicate financial situation, I was hardly in a position to put my hands in my pockets and contribute. One of the members of the managing committee announced that he would be happy to donate Rs. 10,000 — a significant sum in those days. Yet another member who was closely affiliated with the *Jana Sangh* (currently known as the *Bharatiya Janata Party* — one of India's main political parties) volunteered to erect a canopy to house the canteen.”

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Nanik approached the railway authorities with details of the plans and they agreed to extend their full support to this project of the Wadala Junior Chamber. Help also came from Manohar Kotwal, a leading union leader at the Bombay Port Trust. He offered a ground floor flat, very close to Dadar Railway Station, where food could be conveniently housed. “With such enthusiastic supporters,” says Nanik, “the managing committee felt elated and assured that the project would run smoothly without a hitch.”

Losing no time, he convened a press conference to announce the good news. There was an impressive turnout by members of the press. Nanik’s statement was greeted with a lot of interest and excitement.

This was soon followed by a sober question to the President: “*How long will you be able to run this Canteen?*”

“*As long as the war lasts,*” was Nanik’s passionate and emphatic reply.

The news was given tremendous coverage by the media. In just a few days, the Canteen, powered by 250 zestful volunteers, was ready to roll. They worked selflessly day and night, many of them without a break. More and more people approached Nanik, expressing their desire to enrol as volunteers — such was the fervour to help the *jawans*. Nanik was informed by the railway authorities to gear up for a trainload of soldiers arriving the next evening at Dadar Station.

At this juncture, Nanik approached the Wadala Junior Chamber member who had promised the generous sum of Rs. 10,000. The man responded: “What’s the hurry?”

“He sent us a bagful of sugar. Yes, that is all we ever got from him,” Nanik sighs at the recollection.

The failure of this member to honour his word threw the Canteen’s plans into disarray. The day saw Nanik spend hours on the phone frantically calling up friends — pleading them to donate generously. By evening he was able to collect Rs. 7,000. “It was a huge relief!” Nanik explains. “With this money, we were successful in catering to the first trainload of *jawans*. Volunteers even went inside the trains to reach out to those who were badly wounded, to pep them up. They were given medicines and served refreshments. Some volunteers even sat down besides the *jawans* to write to their families about their welfare.”

Nanik illustrates the eager and willing spirit of the volunteers who were ready to do tasks considered menial, in the service of the *jawans*. Shanti Sagar (son of the leading film producer-director, Ramanand Sagar) served on the managing committee of the Wadala Junior Chamber. He asked Nanik what his duties would be in the scheme of things. Nanik told him that he would have to wash the innumerable cups and plates after they had been used. Shanti Sagar religiously carried out this important role.

“Yes,” Nanik recalls pensively, “such was the commitment on the part of the volunteers! All the *jawans* as well as onlookers were happy and impressed. We received a lot of praise.”

“Right after we catered to the first train of soldiers”, Nanik resumes, “the railways told me that another trainload of *jawans* would arrive the next day. Taking care of the first trainload had nearly exhausted all the funds. That whole night I stayed awake thinking: Here I had spent the greater



part of my day, pleading with and begging people who were slow to respond. The very thought of repeating the same exercise was nightmarish indeed! I just could not think of anybody else whom I could approach or call for aid. I was already beginning to regret my word that I had given out at the press conference.”

The following day Nanik had to wade through the same process of contacting and pleading people for funds. He managed to raise Rs. 10,000 that met the expenses of supplying food to the second train full of troops. “With the fresh inflow of cash and food, we were able to welcome the train. This time too, everyone commended us on the excellent job that we were doing. The soldiers had smiles on their faces. They totally appreciated the Herculean task we were accomplishing. Passers-by showered us with praise. As I stood watching all this, I could feel the overwhelming burden of a piece of paper that I was clutching in my hand. My own words kept ringing in my ears: *As long as the war lasts*. The brashness of that statement was now hitting me with full force. I felt an enormous amount of strain and despair, which I could not share with anyone. It was such a stifling feeling. I knew I did not have the strength to carry on any more. I was on the brink of calling a second press conference to retract my words and admit defeat, when God sent some help.”

A gentleman came up to congratulate Nanik as he stood there confronting his anxious thoughts. Warmly, he commended Nanik with what must have sounded like just another round of praise: “I have personally seen the hard work you and your volunteers are putting in. All of you deserve nothing but admiration for your courageous and selfless service.”

The tribute had little power to quell Nanik's fears. But there was something about that man and the manner of his speaking that made Nanik want to confide in him: "This Canteen — I don't suppose it is destined to see the light of another day. We don't have the kind of finances needed to cater to another train full of troops anymore. See this list?" Nanik asked, as he opened up the sheet of paper that was in his hand, "We require Rs. 15,000 for these food items if the Canteen is to remain functional even for the next few days. And it was our resolve that it would run and serve the troops for the full duration of the war. How and from where can we get such money?"

The gentleman looked at the list and saw the genuineness and magnitude of the young man's predicament. Looking up in a manner that inspired hope, he said: "Don't worry! What you fear will not happen! The Canteen shall continue as long as our troops are in battle."

Nanik met his words with silence. Was this just another reckless assertion unaccompanied by the power to deliver, or did the man really command the authority and wealth to make it happen?

"Do you know who I am?" the man asked, as if he had read Nanik's mind. More silence — the two had never met before.

"I am Devji Ratanshi, President of the *Grain Merchants' Federation*. This fine work that you are doing — *we* should have done it as our responsibility towards our *jawans*. As President of the Federation, it is my duty to ensure that food is properly distributed all over the country. As I said, this Canteen will continue to run. You can count on me."

Taking the list, the gentleman proceeded to go his way. That evening, two trucks arrived at the Canteen's storeroom at Dadar. They were full of food items like grains, tea, biscuits and flour. Devji Ratanshi had sent them.

There was no lack of funds thereafter. Contributors queued up to help Nanik. Medicines, food, blankets and voluntary help kept rolling in; so much so that some donors had to be turned away! "I then realized that for a good cause, there is no dearth of funds in God's Bank. It's an unlimited account!" This has since then become one of Nanik's favourite mottos. The seeds of faith and determination had been sown — Nanik would later go on to form a social organization of his own: *Priyadarshni Academy*.

### In the Limelight

The Wadala Junior Chamber became an elite Chapter, carving a proud name for itself. Three national awards plus an international award added to its aura. "Our Chapter was a role model for other chapters of the Junior Chamber." Nanik explains why this was so: "We did things with such harmony and team spirit — whether it was training young members, boosting their confidence levels with various projects, or inculcating in them a strong faith in teamwork. There were no ego problems. No one hankered for a post. Other chapters had to advertise to get members whereas we were screening those who wanted membership with a view to restricting the number of members. And this was quite amazing in view of the fact that while other chapters were charging Rs. 200 to Rs. 250 as their annual subscription fee, our charges were pegged at Rs. 1,500, a premium in those days. What also helped is the tremendous amount of press

coverage we got. Handling the media was, in fact, an important skill that we learnt which really helped me later when I started Priyadarshni Academy.”

All India Film Talent Contests — probably the largest contests ever organized at the time — were another facet of the Wadala Junior Chamber’s activities. The nationwide media accorded them a fanfare of proportions reserved only for the release of a prospective blockbuster movie. Talent contests were organized essentially as a fund-raising drive. The fee for screening each application was fixed at Rs. 25 — and there were literally thousands of applications. “Such was the volume of responses we received from aspiring contestants, that a postman once had to bring us our mail in a taxi!” says Nanik.

The proceeds from the above fees were sent as aid to the bereaved families of *jawans* from all three branches of defense, who had lost their lives in the 1971 Indo-Pak war.

The Junior Chamber’s *All India Film Talent Contest* was regarded as a nebula where cosmic stars were born. Winners of the contest were guaranteed entry into the Indian film industry, where fortune awaited them. There were long queues of eager people waiting for tickets at Shanmukhananda Hall, the venue of the Contest. All seats were quickly sold out.

The glitter of the contest was the subject of one of the celebrated quotes of Nana Chudasama. Nana is the past Sheriff’s of Mumbai, and World President of *Giants International*. His quotes are widely popular and keenly anticipated by Mumbai’s citizens. They have been publicly displayed on banners outside his Marine Drive office for more than three decades. Wittily referring to the fame and

fortune awaiting the Contest winner, that particular quote read: “If you want to become an Income Tax VIP, join the Wadala Junior Chamber Film Talent Contest.”

Nanik invited T. A. Pai, then Railway Minister, who graced the function as Chief Guest. Some of the industry’s most renowned filmmakers were also there, like Ramanand Sagar, Shakti Samanta, and Pramod Chakravarty — along with a galaxy of glitterati. A. Pillai, the editor of the popular movie magazine *Screen* also came. Ameen Sayani, one of India’s renowned commercial broadcasters, was master of ceremony. Shanmukhananda Hall was packed to capacity. There were hordes of excited people surrounding the complex in the hope of seeing the stars.

The late Amjad Khan, who went on to become a movie superstar, topped the All India Film Talent Contest in 1971. Khan played scores of roles as the bad guy. The villainous character of *Gabbar Singh* he played in the blockbuster movie *Sholay* made him a legend. Javed Khan, Tariq Shah and Priyadarshini were other contestants who won and eventually made it big in Hindi cinema. “The deal,” explains Nanik “was that the winners who entered the industry would pay five per cent of their first five years’ earnings to the Junior Chamber.”

Footage of the contests was shown as part of newsreels in cinema halls. Events like these brought the Wadala Junior Chamber into the limelight.

It was no easy feat for Nanik to be so involved with the Chamber while taking care of the demands of his business. It was only through great time management and motivation that he was able to attend to the work of the Junior Chamber. “I think what kept me going were the various

awards that our Chapter bagged. It felt wonderful to be recognized. The appreciation for our efforts provided me with a feeling of deep satisfaction. This elation was sometimes greater than what I felt after conducting a good business deal.”

### Scaling Mountains with a Song

The once shy Nanik now blossomed into a real ‘people person.’ Such indeed was the change in him that he was now looked upon as an excellent resource person and a brilliant organizer by other members. They had implicit faith in his persuasive powers. Whether it was a minister, an industrialist, a film star or a social activist who had to be invited and whose presence was required at a Chamber event — the task was assigned to Nanik. He was always chosen to break the ice and follow it through.

For Nanik, however, one formidable bastion remained to be conquered — his fear of speaking in public. Even though he could now approach and talk to the biggest of celebrities with ease, he would literally break into a cold sweat when asked to talk in front of a large audience. “I think the roots of this fear were in the fact that I was not a graduate. Inwardly, I felt a void when I compared myself with others who were highly qualified. I had tried to bridge this gap with a lot of reading. I was more than aware of what was going on around the world. Even then, I felt that it would be better to stay out of the public eye than make a fool of myself,” Nanik recalls.

Now, of course, he has no such hesitation. Today, even when he is called on stage to present his views on issues not

directly related to his business and his social interest, he is able to hold his audience. He has always been a fast learner. “It does not take me more than five minutes to understand the topic and formulate my own perspective. I never go blindly by what others say.”

As Nanik himself remarks, a Sanskrit proverb has proved true in his case:

*Mookam Karoti Vachalam Pangoom Langhayate Girim  
Yatkeripa Tamaham Vande Parmanand Madhavam*

With the blessing of the Lord, even a mute person can become an excellent orator, and even a lame person can scale mountains. Only the blessings of the Lord can make such things possible.

Usually, a President of the Junior Chamber serves for just a year, and after his tenure expires, another individual takes over. Nanik was compelled by the members — much against his own free will — to serve three consecutive terms as President of the Wadala Junior Chamber, from 1971 to 1973. This in itself speaks volumes of how much his contributions were valued.

From 1974 onwards, Nanik continued to associate with the Chamber as past-President till he turned forty — after which he bid it *adieu* and concentrated on business. He explains: “*Jaycees* is meant for young people, a place where they learn valuable lessons in life. My time with *Jaycees* instilled in me a tremendous sense of confidence. It gave me numerous, invaluable opportunities for self-development. For my part, I left no stone unturned in making the Wadala Chapter world-class.”

## Success is Our Birthright

Nanik concludes: “Organizations like these help us give back to society what we have taken from it. One cannot be selfish and simply keep withdrawing from the resources of the people. One must contribute by way of community development projects and enrich the lives of others. The fruits of success taste sweetest when shared with many others.”