

The Cosmic Man

I never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work.
—Plato

Breathe deeply and take a moment to live these visuals in your mind.

A thatched-roof mud hut on its last legs turns into an enchanted mansion one day, and inside it wine and dine some of the world's famous and most beautiful faces on a regular basis.

A child who walks four miles barefoot to school and back for years now owns a fleet of expensive cars, including recent Rolls Royce models.

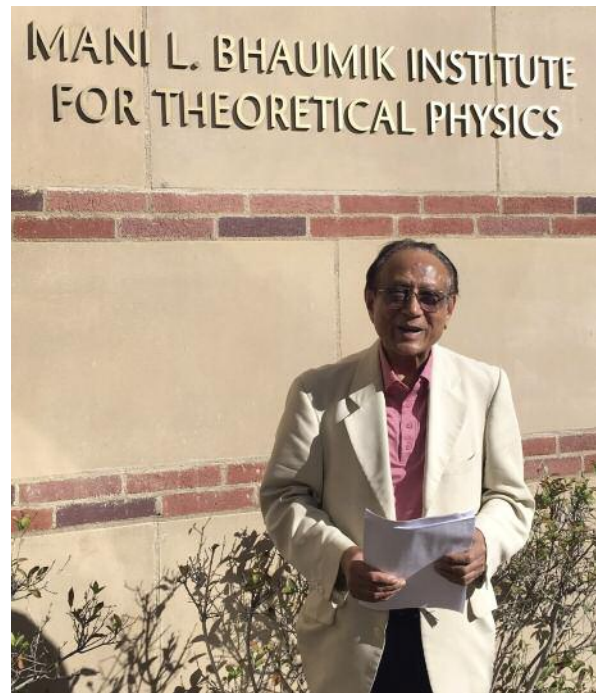
A student who cannot afford next-to-nothing school fees begins to regularly donate millions of dollars for research to top institutions around the world.

You've just visualized in a nutshell the life of Dr Mani Bhaumik, inventor extraordinaire, epitome of philanthropy, visionary par excellence and a bestselling author. Not surprising, since his invention of efficient excimer lasers led to Lasik vision correction that has given new sights, literally, to tens of millions in the planet.

As Plato would say, neither Mani Bhaumik's inventions, nor his good life, came by accident. He'd to work very hard for it, and he loved working so.

DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD, STUDENT DAYS

Mani Bhaumik was born in famine-ridden Bengal, in undivided colonial India. Most of the days he'd go to sleep with his stomach less than half full—the family that included Mani, his parents, and six younger siblings, had to actually scrounge for food with the famine claiming over three million lives. He first got to wear shoes when he was all of sixteen. Growing up, rags on the floor constituted his bed. In 1942, 11-year-old Mani witnessed his grandmother die in front of his eyes. It was a tragedy that filled up every corner of his heart, for she was the lady who would constantly give up her share of the family's frugal meal so that young Mani could put some food inside his belly, and survive. His father, a school teacher, was almost always not available, for as a freedom loving citizen taking on the force of the British Empire, he was constantly on the run, and mostly underground. But in the little time he would spend with Mani, his father would teach him the values of learning, and the importance of being the best he could ever be. Those lessons were emblazoned



in Mani's heart for ever, and enabled him to dream big. He would eventually go on to turn his mud hut existence into a life inside a Beverly Hill mansion, and buy many more houses in Los Angeles. Rags to riches—that is what Mani Bhaumik's life is all about.

If he hadn't secured a scholarship, Mani would not have been able to attend college in Calcutta. He attended the famous Scottish Church College and when he first landed in the erstwhile capital city of India in British days, Mani was awe-struck. He would later go on to say that for him it felt like landing in Paris or London, Calcutta was grand in so many ways with its large boulevards, defining architecture, big markets, and a thriving culture. He was blessed to be mentored by the legendary Satyendra Nath Bose, co-founder of the Bose-Einstein condensate and Bose-Einstein statistical theory. He was also fortunate to be initiated in physics by Professor Debi Prasad Roy Chaudhury, also a student under Bose. It was while attending a lecture series by Nobel Laureate Paul Dirac in 1950 that Mani realized that an abstract quantum continuum produces fundamental particles that pervade the boundless Universe. Dirac himself would name the class of



particles that obey the Bose-Einstein statistics as bosons, after Bose. Mani considers it one of his life's greatest privileges to have met Bose in his heydays when the world was beckoning him from all corners.

Spirituality and philosophy began to interest Mani Bhaumik somewhere along the line. It was then that he realized that all he had learnt had a cosmic connection, and that the Vedas had described them as one abstract reality. He would put it thus: "In quantum physics, we find the unified field theory depicts the blueprint of the Universe. According to Vedas, Lord Brahma is the Creator of the entire Universe. Don't you see physics and our Vedic heritage as two sides of the same coin?"

He goes on to add, "This unity of Brahma and quantum physics is very reassuring for me. This shows how ancient Indian spirituality is anchored in modern science. Concerning this topic my paper *Unified Field – the Universal Blueprint?* was published in the International Journal of Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences in February 2000. That was one of the 50-odd papers I have published in professional journals over the years," he said in an interview. You can view his publications in his website drmanibhaumik.net

SPURNED IN LOVE

After his Masters in Science, Mani began teaching. His father had wanted him to do so. It was around this time that the first Indian Institute of Technology came up at Kharagpur. The IIT system in India, created on the lines of MIT, has over the years given many jewels to the world. Mani was one of them. He was the first one to obtain a PhD from this system. And *Dr* became affixed to his name.

When the boy from Midnapore arrived in Calcutta

he not only fell in love with the beautiful city, but also a girl from a high family. When he mustered courage to propose marriage to her, it was rejected. Apparently, Mani's lack of social and financial status was the reason why the offer was spurned. It was a shattering, yet life-changing moment for the trusting Mani. Years later when he would return from America, the family of the girl would approach him, offering their daughter's hand. By then in Mani's mind, things had changed. Once smitten in love, he decided he would focus on his work, and quietly turned down the offer. He's remained a bachelor since.

LIFE IN THE USA

Mani Bhaumik won the prestigious Sloan Foundation Fellowship to conduct post doctoral research at the University of California in Los Angeles. Even though the scholarship amount of USD 6,000 per year was significant, he would not get any of it until he would appear at UCLA. He faced an irony of acute shortage of funds when it came to paying for his airfare to the West Coast. He knocked on the doors of wealthy acquaintances in Calcutta, but the city's elite let him down. Then the money was raised from least expected quarters—fellow villagers were so proud of Mani that they decided to pull out money from their measly savings and help him. Every small pie counted, and finally there was enough for Mani to buy his ticket to the USA. His life was about to change once more.

At the UCLA, he opted for electronic energy transfer as his area of research. This was to open up the world of lasers before his eyes. Laser was a relatively new subject and had come into reckoning only around 1960. Remembering his father's enduring wisdom of being the best that he could be, Mani notched up as many as 12 patents in the field. One of them was the patent for the Excimer laser for Lasik, which is used extensively in eye surgeries. He started working with Xerox in the firm's quantum physics laboratory in Pasadena, where he became the head of the chemical physics laboratory to work on liquid lasers. He then moved to the Northrop Corporation and became the Director of their corporate laser technology laboratory. His scientific peers honored him by electing a fellow of both the American Physical Society and the Institute of Electronics and Electrical Engineers in recognition of his valuable contributions to the field of lasers. For his path-breaking research he was given stock

options in both the companies. He would soon become one of the richest scientists of the day. His mud hut story was now a reminder of how the wheels of fortune could change. He also was dating a girl for the first time in his life.

FAST TRACKING HIS CAREER

In 1965 the Indian Government was looking to create a Foreign Scientists' Pool, a kind of a brain bank that is a topic of discussion in India these days. But frustration crept in early as Mani found that the fundamentals of research, including equipment, were grossly missing in the fast moving laser technology. Disappointed, he bought a ticket back to the USA, this time joining Northrop, the second largest defense contractor in the USA at the time. To work with them he had to acquire American citizenship. Here he multiplied his earnings. Having invested wisely in stocks and property, by age 55 Mani had created enough assets to ensure that he could retire. By then he had six houses in the Los Angeles area.

The boy, who had always remained hungry during his difficult childhood and nearly died during the famine of 1942 in Bengal, was now a jet-setting stalwart in his field. He had the lifestyle of the rich and courted the famous. Breakfast in London, lunch in Geneva and dinner in Monaco was a reality that Mani Bhaumik began to experience. The globe-trotting genius was seen in the company of beautiful women. Among others he dated the Budapest-born actress Eva Gabor, sister of Hollywood actress Zsa Zsa Gabor who was married to famous hotelier Conrad Hilton. He would go on to date actress Roberta Collins and then Catherine Oxenberg. He was on the programme *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* which had a huge viewership. His Bel Air mansion is where the famous Beverly Hill Cops II was shot alongside several commercials. His neighbours included legends like actors Marlon Brando, Jack Nicholson, Shirley MacLaine, and singer Janet Jackson.

When riches flow, and name and fame are at their height, it is imperative to fight hard to stay grounded. Mani Bhaumik never lost sight of where he came from. He had been asked to clean toilets at a camp in honour of Mahatma Gandhi in Bengal. That had been an occasion to meet the great Mahatma, and get to see how he functioned with simplicity as his hallmark. During his days among the best of Hollywood, his soaring life style and fame, Mani

Bhaumik began searching for cosmic answers to the way his life had shaped, from utter poverty to the heights of riches. He was to get many answers in later years which he has put down his two best-selling books, *Code Named God* and *Cosmic Detective*. To ignite interest of young minds in quantum physics and cosmology, he has also created an award winning cartoon series, *Cosmic Quantum Ray*, that has been distributed world wide

GIVING BACK

Mani Bhaumik has established an annual International Award at the Institute of Neuroscience of the University of California for demonstrating the best evidence for conscious mind on healing. Most recently he is planning to institute a chair for studies towards the goal of deciphering the origin and the nature of existence of consciousness for improving the quality of our lives.

In June 2016 he made the largest ever donation of USD 11 million to UCLA's Department of Physics and Astronomy. UCLA has honored him by establishing in perpetuity the Mani L. Bhaumik Institute for Theoretical Physics, a center of excellence where physicists from all over the world will meet to create an atmosphere of excitement and enthusiasm for advancing the latest frontier of physics. Since 1999, Dr Bhaumik has been funding the education of brilliant but impoverished students from rural Bengal to study medicine, engineering and science. He has funded the fully air-conditioned auditorium at his alma mater Scottish Church College and started a library in his village. An educational foundation set up by him has recently acquired 15 acres of land in the heart of Kolkata to set up a world class IT-oriented research university. He has been providing funds to award merit scholarships every year at the three high schools he attended in India apart from donating generously to the building funds of Krishnaganj High School, Matangini Hazra Girls High School and Kanktya Community Center in West Bengal. He has been bestowed the Padma Shri by the Government of India as well as the Prabashi Bharatya Samman.

The great Greek philosopher Plato would be proud of where Mani Bhaumik is here today. The name, fame and glory that have become the renowned polymath's constant companions are a result of hard work. He could not have got all this in one lifetime just by accident. ■