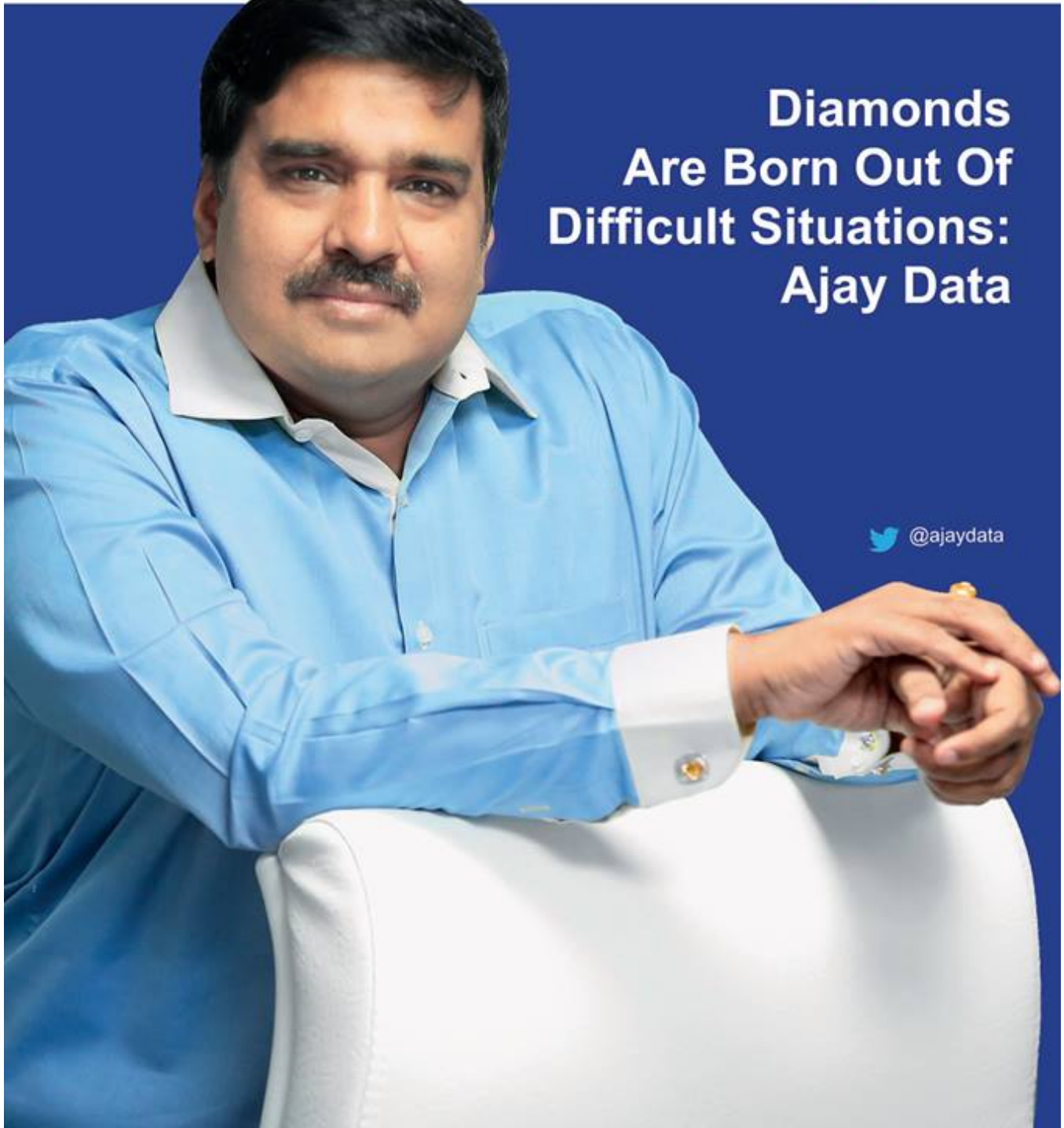


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**Diamonds
Are Born Out Of
Difficult Situations:
Ajay Data**

 @ajaydata

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Diamonds Are Born Out Of Difficult Situations: Data

Moolchand G Chahar @ BR Bureau

Sometimes names dictate the destiny. Dr Ajay Data's tryst with data-driven information technology bolsters this belief further. With his overseas education and global outlook, Data could have seen his future in his fam-

ily businesses like many scions of business families. But he chose to branch away after a pit-stop at his father's business that included ceramics and edible oil. It was a decision not for the weak souls to take. It needed courage and convic-

tion. But the Khairthal (District Alwar) boy had them in full measure and took to the IT industry at a time when e-mail was unheard of.

But it was not easy, certainly not at the beginning. While he was doing MBA, his family

A fashion designer, innovator, mentor, sportsman, and a successful IT entrepreneur, Dr Ajay Data is called by some as the "Father of Internet" in the state. He started Data Infosys at the age of 26 in 1999 when Google was alien to India and mobile phone calls would cost Rs 16 a minute. It was not a conducive atmosphere to start a business, especially in the IT sector. But Data preferred to branch away from his family business to chart out a path of his own. Today, his company, which launched the first ISP services in Rajasthan, employs more than 1000 people, and is counted as one of the top IT companies in the country

got an opportunity to take over Jaipur Glass and Pottery. The ceramic unit used to manufacture electrical insulators. As a family business he got an opportunity to try his hands on. The sick unit became a profitable venture. "I started my business career at the bone china crockery factory. During that period I completed my MBA (Computer Applications) and also did my doctorate in Electronic Data Processing," recalls Data.

He studied IT, and developed a liking for it. One day, when he saw an advertisement of renowned Internet & technology MNC in a local daily, he felt it was his true calling. The advertisement was for a partnership business. He was just 25 years old then. "I applied for the opportunity and started following them. They called me for an interview. As I went there I saw a lot of people from Jaipur sitting there as well. In evening, I was informed about my selection and was invited for a dinner at the Jaipur Palace. After finalizing the details I was about to sign up with them with Rs 1 lakh. But later on, I came to know that's a distributor agreement. According to me, a partnership means, you are doing it together.

Distributorship means you have to move from door to door. That was not acceptable to me and I said no. As we were having good running businesses at that time, doing a job as a distributor was not appropriate for my family. It is not something right or wrong; it is just that there were better things for me to do. But my reluctance to accept the offer did not go down well with MNC people. The vice-president of the company got irritated and said 'Ye teliyo ka dhandha hai, ye technology ka dhandha hai' (Its not normal oil business, its technology business). It was a Saturday evening and that hurt me a lot because he talked to me in a derogative manner. I couldn't sleep that night. I called my father telling him that I needed one month to decide as I was very curious to start an ISP business," says Data.

Dr. Data visited many places in India just to know what ISP is all about. Some weeks later he called his father and shared his views that he wanted to start an ISP business.

"I also called the MNC people and shared it with them and asked whether the agreement is acceptable or not. But they laughed at it and cut the

call. That's how Data Infosys was established in 1999. Today, I can say that Data Infosys exists but they don't," says Data.

Then Data got an opportunity to start first Internet services in Rajasthan. "It was early days then for internet services and there were no private players offering that. Satyam offered it in Chennai but we started it first in Rajasthan," says Data.

A fashion designer, an innovator, mentor, sportsman, and finally a successful business entrepreneur known as the "Father of Internet", Ajay Data started the IT company at the age of 26 years. "It is not the words that break you down, it is the way you carry them." However, it was a huge challenge to start an internet business at that time. Having no Google, no map, no ATM, with mobile phone calls costing Rs 16 a minute and with not much information about the business posed several hurdles. It was not a conducive atmosphere to start a business.

"I used to travel by bus and spend the nights on the road side hotels with something like Rs 200 a day. I had dinner for almost a year outside home. Today, I feel it is a blessing in disguise. It's a blessing in the sense that you are taught the right lesson in a difficult way and that nothing is easy," explains Data.

Data always believed in doing something new and challenging even though he had the family business to fall back upon. "If you need to do your family business, you can contribute and grow there. There is nothing wrong in that. But you will always be under the shadow of your father, no matter how hard you try to be your own man. I wanted to do something different and unique and to prove myself being something different from the society and family.



Ajay Data with chief minister Vasundhara Raje

Rajasthan is far more behind in terms of where the state should ideally be. We need better ecosystem here, stronger support from the government, improved climate to learn and work, and better opportunities. Today, IT is no more a specialized field. It is required by every office in different forms. There are hundreds of companies in Rajasthan. But we need more and we have the capability.

Technology was a good move. It was not only a good business by itself. It now helps the entire family business," explains Data.

In the initial days after Data Infosys was set up, he had to burn the midnight oil. "There are hundreds of people who fail. It involved lot of risks and challenges. We worked very hard, tirelessly for several weeks and months. Often, we would find that there was no time to go home and sleep. We slept on chairs wherever there was a break. This was a learning process. If there is a will to do something different, there are no other options left. The only option is to try, all by yourself. It was a trial and error process. We went through every cycle of the phase which was critical. I would like to say that the best test of the human race would be to put them into the most difficult situations. The problem is we do not put ourselves in difficult situations.

Most of us seek comfort zones. The moment we put ourselves in such comfort zones, we do wrong things, the things we should not do. If we put ourselves in difficult zones we would be coming out like diamonds. There are no shortcuts to success," explains Data.

When Data started the company, the startup concept was not there. But he feels that Data Infosys is the perfect example of a startup.

"Startup is something that you do in a unique way that no one has done before. It should be innovative and also changes people's lives. Data Infosys qualifies in all the three respects that a startup must have. It is actually the true startup of the state. Startups are meant to do something innovative. Data Infosys is the original startup out of Rajasthan. The only thing is that there was no startup concept at that time," adds Data.

Data adds a new spin to the current breed of startups. He is critical of the companies burning through huge amounts of cash every day and losing every day. "Some people are just here to make money with the aim to become a millionaire overnight. That is the reason they are starting startups. The moment one develops the intention of becoming millionaire overnight, the premise becomes wrong. In any business where money becomes the main driver, the business becomes second priority. One has to create a business model where the focus should be on product or service not on money. There are three reasons why a large number of startups fail. First is the derivatives of original ideas are packaged as innovation. Second is not having a proper mindset and love for the original idea of the product. Finally, a startup should not depend only on one person. It is a little risky. One needs to find a right co-partner or co-founder," explains Data.

Giving a message to the new generation entrepreneurs, Data says one should have a 'never-say-no-to-any-challenge' attitude. Giving an example of Michael Jordan, he says, "Never let others decide your value. The only problem

Data's Contribution To City

- First internet and public Wi-Fi
- First Email Service
- Founder of TiE
- Founder of EO
- Anchor of Data Security Council of India
- Founder Trustee of GMCKS Pranic Healing Foundation
- Chairman, PHD CCI
- Spreading art and culture through Jaipur Citizen Forum and RasKalash
- Mentoring students and entrepreneurs
- Investing into startups

is we all know our capabilities but forget them when we become greedy. Everything depends on choice and it is something that everyone has."

On Rajasthan's potential, Data says we are far more behind in terms of where we should ideally be. "We need better ecosystem here, stronger

support from the government, improved climate to learn and work, and better opportunities. Today, IT is no more a specialized field. It is required by every office in different forms. There are hundreds of companies in Rajasthan. But we need more and we have the capability. But sadly that is not happening."

Like every successful entrepreneur, Data has his role model and it is none other than Bill Gates. But he also likes Gates as a person. "If you see the real sense of technology in this world, without Microsoft, the world doesn't exist. This is the company which has given so much to the world. If Microsoft were not there, it would have been almost impossible for other companies to exist. 97% of the companies use Microsoft. I love that company which started from a humble background," feels Data.



Ajay Data with father Babulal Data, mother Mohini Devi, sister Nidhi Prakash, brother Deepak Data and sister Vidhi Bhramandam



(Left) Ajay Data with father Babulal Data and brother Deepak Data

(Below) Ajay Data with wife Nidhie A. Data, sons Dhruv and Rishab



startups, when asked about his next move in life he says he is far behind his goal. "Yes, I may be successful in the eyes of people but in my view, I have a lot to do. Sometimes people judge you by certain parameters. But you have your own expectations. My goal is always to be happy. This is a technique that has to be learnt," adds Data. Besides success, Data has many dreams which he holds very dear to his heart. While he is enjoying his journey, Data says being happy is a priority in life. ■

About Data Infosys' profitability, Data says he started the company with an investment of Rs 40-50 lakh. However, he said, by the time the operations started, he had recovered that amount. "Firstly, we sold everything in advance. It was on 18th April, 1999 we had the full money in our hands. There was a vacuum in terms of the presence of IT companies. It is a product that everybody wanted. At the age of 26, making my own identity and getting so much of recognition was outstanding. People used to look at me with an impression of a Jaipurite rising so high in a field like IT. It always motivated me to move further and do something better. I never focused on money. My only goal is to influence people. At present, the compa-

ny is providing services to more than 1100 million people. Sitting in Rajasthan, we have become India's largest serving company. I started as one-man army and today we have team of 1000 people," explains Data. Speaking about his family life, Data says that he owes a lot to his better half who stood by him during the initial years of the company. "Till five years of my marriage, I had not taken a single leave. I had a chat with her about building the company and she extended her full support unconditionally. Throughout the journey, she stood by me. My parents and specially my younger brother Deepak are my pillars of strength," reminisces Data. While he is the most sought after speaker and mentor for