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BEYOND THE ROYAL VEIL

ABOVE: Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur - at his ancestral palace, Shambhu Niwas, during his birthday celebrations. Traditionally a ruler's birthday was a very illustrious event for the people and a time when the King would give audience to his subjects.



INTRODUCTION

BEYOND THE ROYAL VEIL IS A DOCUMENTARY THAT TAKES US INTO THE LIVES OF TWO MEN FROM THE INDIAN ARISTOCRACY; SHRIJI ARVIND SINGH MEWAR OF UDAIPUR IN RAJASTHAN AND THE YU- VRAJ (CROWNED PRINCE) DIGVIJAY SINH OF WANKANER IN GUJARAT. BOTH MEN HAVE UNDERTAKEN A PERSONAL MISSION WHICH IS TO PRESERVE THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE TRADITIONS OF THEIR ANCESTORS.

BOTH HAVE INHERITED HUGE ANCESTRAL PAL- ACES WHICH REQUIRE CONSTANT UPKEEP AND RESTORATION WHICH IS PROVING TO BE AN ENOR- MOUS FINANCIAL BUR- DEN. THIS DOCUMENTARY DEALS WITH THE WAY IN

which both men have sought to raise revenue in order to pay for the upkeep of the palaces so that they can keep the traditions alive.

The film serves as an interesting case study in culture, marketing and the tour- ism industry. The strategies adopted by both men are quite different and provide an opportunity for students to look at the difficulties associated with maintaining the integrity of traditional culture whilst using it as a means of raising revenue which will ultimately lead to its preserva- tion. The heritage will be preserved but what form will it take?

The film also contains springboards for discussion and research on Royalty and modern society which has relevance for Australia and the republican debate.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This film would have relevance for senior secondary school students of Econom- ics, SOSE and History. It would also be valuable for post secondary studies in the areas of Business, Marketing, Tour- ism and Hospitality.





Photographs: Sanjay Singh Badnor. TOP-BOTTOM: •LEFT: **The film crew with Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar at the palace in Udaipur during his birthday celebrations** - Directors, Catherine Marciniak (L) & Sarina Singh (R) with sound recordist Bronwyn Murphy; **Sculptures** - Intricately carved stone elephants adorn the City Palace in Udaipur; **Wall painting** - An exquisite wall painting at one of Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar's palaces in Udaipur. Traditionally, the Indian Princes were prolific patrons of the arts and specially employed artisans to

create unique styles of painting.

• RIGHT: **The palace at Udaipur** - The palace at Udaipur has become one of the biggest tourist drawcards in India, attracting over 100,000 visitors each year. Overlooking Lake Pichola, the palace was built in stages by various Maharanas and today it is the biggest palace complex in Rajasthan; **Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur** - He is the head of one of the oldest ruling dynasties in the world; he is the 76th in this lineage.

CULTURE	HISTORY	FACTS	TOURISM
What is the main religion in India?	Which countries have colonised India?	How does the Indian parliamentary system work?	What are the most popular travel destinations in India?
What are some other religions?	Who were the Indian princes? When and how did Islam come to parts of India?	What is India's main industry now?	Why is it popular with young people today?
What is the caste system?	What changes occurred during and after British rule?	How many states in India?	What kinds of things can you do if you were to travel to India?
What is the role of royalty in Indian society?	Why was India a popular place to travel during the 1960s?	How many languages are spoken in India?	What is Bollywood?



ABOVE TOP: **Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar learning to fly** - For time out Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar takes flying lessons. He had an airstrip built near his family's old hunting lodge and he allows himself a one-hour lesson most afternoons; **BOTTOM TWO: Wall paintings from one of the Udaipur palaces** - Exquisite wall paintings at one of Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar's palaces in Udaipur;



the centre of political influence and often the guardians of culture and heritage. In 1947 the Indian government abolished aristocratic powers and many palaces were sold or fell into disrepair.

SHRIJI ARVIND SINGH MEWAR

Udaipur, in the desert state of Rajasthan, is also called the 'dreamy oasis' as it contains Lake Pichola, a gentle respite from the parched earth of the desert. There are two major complexes in Udaipur; the City palace complex and the Lake Palace. The palaces belong to the Udaipur Royal family and were once the seat of political power. In the sixth century the kingdom was given to Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar's ancestral family by a holy teacher who advised the family not to hold the kingdom as owners, but to be responsible for the people and the land on behalf of the God Lord Shiva. Shriji's family ruled the region of Udaipur in Rajasthan for 1400 years. Refusing to bow to British and Muslim invaders, the family held onto their palaces and is still the oldest running dynasty in the world.

Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar is one of India's most successful hoteliers running a chain of ten hotels some of them

INDIA

Divide into small groups and choose one of the four topics below (see chart 1) to research. The questions may help to guide you.

Present the answers to the class.

THE INDIAN ARISTOCRACY

Up until two generations ago, India was divided into more than five hundred feudal kingdoms each ruled by a royal family. These families had total power over the life and death of their subjects. They continued to be powerful during British rule and remained so until India became an independent democracy. Taxes, collected from subjects, paid for the palaces and lifestyle of the families who in turn, were responsible for looking after the region and the people. The Maharana was the highest court to whom people would go to request a solution to their problems. Royal palaces were also

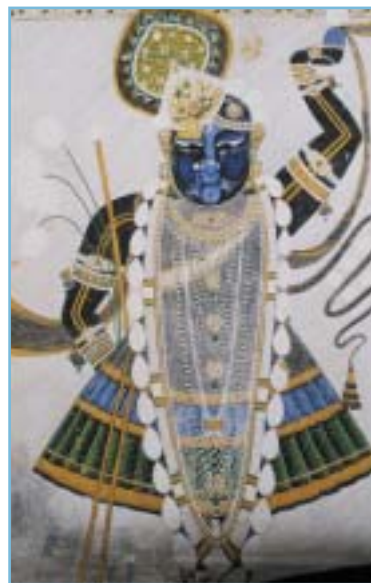


converted palaces that cater for tourists wishing to experience traditional palace life.

In 1984 Shriji inherited one palace hotel after he was appointed heir by his father. His elder brother, who was expected to become heir, separated himself from the family apparently not wishing to take on the encumbrance of maintaining the palaces and keeping up the traditions.

Starting from the one palace hotel he inherited, Shriji realised that the only way to maintain his family's traditions and keep the palaces from falling into ruin, was to corporatize. He decided against refurbishing it into a western style hotel so it was kept according to the opulent style of the traditional Indian aristocracy.

The driving force in Shriji's life is to prove to his father that he made the right decision in appointing him heir. In 1968 he was sent to America to work in the hotel industry. This move was unheard of in Royal circles. Shriji took on the challenge and started working from the bottom up so that he could gain a strong sense of the way the industry worked. This experience seems to have given him a sense of what the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: **A wall painting from one of the Udaipur palaces** - An exquisite wall painting at one of Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar's palaces in Udaipur; **Lake Palace Hotel on Lake Pichola, Udaipur** - Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar's Lake Palace Hotel on Lake Pichola was one of the first palaces in India to be converted into a hotel. Shriji's father, Maharana Bhagwat Singh, turned the Lake Palace (built in 1754 as the royal summer residence) into a luxury hotel in 1961; **A wall painting from one of the Udaipur palaces** - Painting of deity, Sri Nathji, on the wall of the City Palace complex, Udaipur.





business needs to survive and prosper. Shriji's success has led to Udaipur being one of India's prime tourist destinations attracting over one hundred thousand visitors each year.

Despite the success of his business enterprise, Shriji is caught between the conflict of how to maintain the cultural integrity of his position and the reality of doing business in the twenty-first century. The juxtaposition of his role as Maharana, where he is seen by the locals as a leader who will solve problems, and his role as the aristocratic judge of a male beauty pageant, clearly makes him uncomfortable. However, perhaps his willingness to accept the diversity of his new roles is a factor that has contributed to the success of his businesses.

DISCUSSION

CHARACTER

When asked about having the title of Maharana, Shriji says:

The Indian parliament have abolished titles and we are trying to live in the past. It augurs nothing. Personal ego is a distraction. Who you are, what you are, and what you do is what matters. Prefixes and suffixes will not get you anywhere in this day and age.

- How would you describe Shriji?

- What is his philosophy?
- How important is the Maharana to the local community and why?
- Shriji says *he has many hats*. What are they?
- Why is he uncomfortable judging Mr International?

BUSINESS

Shriji brings in consultants to talk about his business plan. He says his mission statement is *'From Feudalism to Corporatism'*.

- What does he mean by this and how has he achieved this aim?

Shriji suggests, *'It's up to you, the employer to make your staff upgrade skills, gain confidence, learn initiative and speak English.'*

- Do you agree with this?
- How does he try to implement this into his business plan?

Many of Shriji's staff come from the local community. One of the problems is that they know they're working for Royalty so they wait to be told what to do. One of the local workers in the hotel says of Shriji, *'When I see the giver of bread I bow out of respect. He is our leader.'*

- What would be the difficulty in

running a business with this attitude?

- What would you do to develop initiative in the staff?
- Are there limits to commercial development?

YUVRAJ DIGVIJAY SINH

The palace of Wankaner is located in the state of Gujarat. It was built in the early twentieth century and is the ancestral home of the Yuvraj (crowned prince) of Wankaner, Digvijay Sinh.

Yuvraj Digvijay Sinh has been a politician in the state and national parliament for most of his life and as a result, his palace has been largely neglected. Having retired from politics, the Yuvraj has made it his ambition to restore the palace to its former glory so as to preserve his cultural heritage.

Wankaner is in a semi desert pocket in an industrial part of Gujarat. It has a vast collection of stuffed trophies of wild animals, as well as the largest collection of royal photographic portraits in India. The Yuvraj's father also has a collection of antique cars in his garage. In its heyday, the palace was the hub of the local community and the guardian of culture and tradition. Now it rarely receives visitors and is in need of a great deal of repair, especially after it was recently hit by one of India's worst earthquakes.



LEFT TOP-BOTTOM: **The palace at Wankaner** - The striking palace at Wankaner is in the semi-desert country of Gujarat state. The foundation stone was laid in 1907 and the palace took around 20 years to complete; **Sarina Singh** - Director, Sarina Singh, at the Wankaner Palace; **Catherine Marciniak** - Director, Catherine Marciniak and sound recordist, Chris West, at the Wankaner Palace.

THIS PAGE TOP-BOTTOM: **The royal family of Wankaner** - Maharana Raj Sahib

Shri Pratap Singh (sitting), Yuvrani Vibha Singh (right), Yuvraj Digvijay Sinh (middle) and Bhanwar Kesri Sinh (left); **India's oldest Maharana and his son, the 15th Crowned Prince of Wankaner** - Maharana Raj Sahib Shri Pratap Singh (R) and his son, Yuvraj Digvijay Sinh, give audience to the people of Wankaner on the auspicious occasion of the Hindu New Year.





ABOVE: **Yuvraj Digvijay Singh of Wankaner** - Yuvraj Digvijay Singh has spent much of his life as a politician in the state and national parliaments but is now determined to restore his neglected palace and sees tourism as the answer.

RIGHT: **Inspecting earthquake damage at the palace in Wankaner** - Yuvraj Digvijay Singh shows the film crew the palace damage resulting from the devastating earthquake that hit Gujarat in January 2001.

Wankaner is the last palace in India that still has a completely separate women's palace or *zenana*. Indian royalty used to observe a special form of purdah where the women would live separate to the men inside their own palace. Today, the crown Prince's wife, the Yuvrani Vibha Singh, who was once a model in New York and advertising executive, lives alone in the zenana.

The palace is well away from the tourist trail, located within sight of an industrial zone, in the middle of drought prone arid land and falling to pieces. It stands in stiff competition against the beautifully positioned and restored palaces in Udaipur. The family must develop a marketing pitch that would attract visitors away from Udaipur to stay in the palace.

Yuvraj Digvijay Singh is passionate about his quest to preserve his heritage. The contrast between Yuvraj Digvijay Singh and Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar is quite distinct. Yuvraj Digvijay Singh seems to have a sentimental attachment to his past whereas Shiji seems to acknowledge that the only way forward is to adapt to the changing perceptions of the role of Royalty. Yuvraj reflects on the past and says that the older generation instilled in them, the theory that *'God is reflected in the human being but there's a little more reflection of that God in you than in others, because the colour of your blood is different.'*

DISCUSSION

- Compare and contrast Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar and Yuvraj Digvijay Singh.

Yuvraj Digvijay Singh's marketing pitch is that the palace has an extensive collection of royal photographic portraits, stuffed animals and a zenana. The aim is to attract women travelling alone to stay at the zenana and encourage people interested in cultural heritage to view the portraits.

- Is this enough to attract tourists away from Udaipur?

The palace does not appear to be equipped with computers. Letters are dictated to a secretary who types them up on an old typewriter. The workers don't wear uniforms and the first guests to arrive are served tea in old china cups instead of coffee, and some broken biscuits.

- What impression would this have made on you? Would it have been better to wait until the palace had been restored before accepting guests? Why? Why not?

At Udaipur, Shriji holds a televised Mr International competition at his palace and agrees to judge it. In Wankaner, the first two tourists arrive to stay at the palace in the belief that they would be staying in the zenana. However as one of them has a boyfriend, they cannot stay there.

- Was this a risk or a decision that in the long term would preserve the integrity of the zenana and the business?
- What do these two incidents tell you about the way in which the two men do business?

The royal jeweller comes to the palace to show the tourists his merchandise.

- Describe the differences between Indian taste and German taste.
- How does this scene reflect the cultural differences between the two cultures?
- Does the cultural difference impact on the way the palace should be marketed?

At Hindu New Year, local people come to the palace for an audience with the royal family.

- Describe how the role of the royal family has changed on this day.

PROJECTS

TOURISM AND MARKETING

You have the task of revitalising a small country town so that it doesn't die out.

Develop a Tourism strategy to keep the town alive.

Follow these guidelines:

1 RESEARCH

Find a small country town in Australia.

- Research the history of the town before European settlement and after.
- Find some memorable events that took place in the town (before or after European settlement)
- Interview some town identities.
- Research the town industries.
- Explore the architecture of the town and the local geography.

2 MARKETING THE TOWN

Develop a mission statement and a marketing pitch to sell the town to tourists.

- Prepare a brochure advertising the town
- What information would go on the front page and at the back?
- Are there any negative aspects to the town and how would you get around them?
- Sell your pitch to your class and vote on the best pitch. Discuss what parts attracted or turned you off the town.

THE ARISTOCRACY

Research the answers to these questions:

- What was the relationship between Royalty and the people in the past in different countries?
- What is the role of royalty in the country now?
- How do people relate to the royal family?
- Is there a republican movement in the country? How strong is it?
- How is the Royal family portrayed in the media? Does it affect the way you think about them?

The following words are titles bestowed on certain members of the aristocracy (see chart 2).

- Research the origins of these titles and draw a diagram explaining the hierarchical system
- How do you get a title now?



- What role does each title play?
- Do all countries with monarchies have these titles?
- What are the equivalents in Europe, Africa and Asia?

The following texts are some examples of stories that contain aspects of the relationship between the aristocracy and the people who surround them. Watch them and make a note of the rules and regulations that govern behaviour patterns towards servants.

- Pride and Prejudice
- The Edwardian house
- Upstairs, Downstairs
- The Last Emperor

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King	Lord
Queen	Maharaja
Prince	Maharani
Princess	Emperor
Duke	Empress
Duchess	Maharana
Earl	Sovereign
Baron	Monarch
Knight	Governor General
Peer	Count
Sir	Countess
Lady	Dowager