

CASTING A DESTINY

The Biography of Chandran Menon

By Savita Bhave* *Translation Nandu Dange

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As some tall cliff, that lifts its awesome form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

Oliver Goldsmith: 'The Village Preacher'

P R E F A C E

By Dr. Neelkanth A. Kalyani

The late Chandran Menon must be counted amongst those rare personalities who possess inborn qualities that go into the making of a successful industrialist. I have had the fortune of interacting closely with him and the privilege of enjoying a close relationship. As a result, I am in a position to know intimately the extent of his vast talents. I can confidently say that Chandran Menon was one of the greatest industrialists that the country has ever seen. It was unfortunate that the relative obscurity of Kolhapur provided him with a rather limited theatre of operations, and he did not get the public recognition that he deserved.

This dramatic biography describes the struggles through which a youth born in a small village in Kerala (south India) landed up in Kolhapur, a small town in the southern part of Maharashtra in western India. A true industrialist has an innate drive for creation, and it keeps him constantly on the move. That is what happened with Chandran Menon: on obtaining his technical diploma, he made continuous efforts to find opportunity. One stage of this journey was the Hindustan Aeronautics project of the late Walchand Hirachand. It is probably here that the seeds were sown in him to dream in large format, to combine industrial endeavour with national service. Over a circuitous route of Bangalore - Khadki (Pune) - Jamkhandi, he landed up in Kolhapur. He came to the attention of contemporary industrialists such as Gadre, Kulkarni, Powar, Mestry, Utkur and Hudli. Menon was always willing to help out with technical difficulties that anyone ran into. It was this virtue that impelled the industrial greats, the late Mhadba Mestry and the late Y. P. Powar to encourage Menon to take the plunge into entrepreneurship, and Menon was ever grateful for the favour done him by these mentors and by the City of Kolhapur.

The formative years of our generation were charged with the winds of the freedom struggle. The charge lasted not just through our youth but throughout our lives. Chandran Menon was no exception. He visualised his factory not just as an endeavour to help the nation: he dreamed of making it a jewel in the nation's crown. The following passage out of the draft that he had prepared as agenda for the Panhala camp to decide industrial policy in 1969 is as relevant today as it was then: "The country is going through a tough phase today mainly due to the twin problems of explosive population growth and a backward economy. If we are to pull out of this phase, our foremost focus has to be on reining in the population growth and efficiently using the available resources for a general enhancement in the standard of living of the masses."

Menon came to Kolhapur and promptly went native. He was supported by the industrial greats in the beginning, but he repaid that debt several times over.

In the first place, he gave a fillip to the modernisation and professionalisation of industry in Kolhapur. Side by side, he was responsible for the growth and progress of several people and institutions, as can be seen at every stage of the narrative that follows.

His feeling that industry was the best field for him, he did not indulge in any unconnected activity. As an industrialist, he rose to every occasion when he felt he was needed, and thus was instrumental in putting Kolhapur on the industrial map of the country.

All the talents of a great industrialist were concentrated in Menon, as can be seen at each step of the story of his life. A crystal clear foresight, the ability to act decisively in adverse conditions, the knack of recognizing talent when he saw it, of nurturing it and developing it for mutual benefit are just a few of these. Industrial activity is inherently subject to cycles, and it is worth learning from this book how to bravely turn adversity into opportunity for further prosperity in future.

Several interesting and touching incidents bring out the human being in Menon. Basically a rugged, practical man, he maintained his humanity and compassion throughout his life. He was full of fatherly affection towards all his people, a trait typical of first generation industrialists. He never made a fuss of anything, and faced each challenge with a cold level-headedness.

A foreigner to Kolhapur, he nevertheless drove his roots deep. In the span of four decades, he had to battle numerous difficulties, overcome several problems. Through all this, whenever he could find the time, he would reach for the stars. He charged through the fields of technology, industrial institutions, innovation, experimentation, exports and a lot more, and left his imprint on each.

This chronicle of the aggressive, innovative and courageous industrialist will add to the pride of Maharashtra. The new generation has a lot to learn from this biography, and I would encourage them, especially those in the industrial field, to read it, study it and contemplate on it. I salute the memory of this good friend.

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F O R E W O R D

It is matter of great regret that I did not have the good fortune to meet Chandran Menon - one of the few heroes of my biographies that I never actually met. My colleague and friend in the Walchand Group, Mr. J. B. Patil, is an admirer of my writings, and it was he who suggested that I write the biography of Mr. Menon. He took me to Kolhapur and introduced me to Vijay Menon and Ram Menon. This was 1999, and we did not know then that it would be a Five-Year Plan. Once it was decided, I speedily got to work. I made several trips to Kolhapur, collected reference material, interviewed people concerned. In a whirlwind ten-day tour stretching from one end of the country to the other, I interviewed several people.

My respect for the late Mr. Menon rose day by day as I began to accumulate data. The thought of not having had a chance to meet such a towering personality saddened me a great deal. But my growing respect inspired me to forge on in my efforts. I was deeply impressed with the widespread love and respect that Menon inspired in all those who had come in contact with him. The people of Kolhapur showered him with fulsome praise. One of them said casually that Menon's leap was so powerful that a short spare moment would see him leaping for the sky. That spontaneous remark practically revealed the core of Menon's inner being.

The book was ready in a year. After Mr. Vijay Menon's clearance, it was handed over to Ameya Prakashan for publication. Matter was fed in, proofs were read and we were at the stage of selecting photographs when Fate intervened. The depression that hits industry periodically set in at the tail end of the century and sucked up the Menon company in its maelstrom. A lock out in the company and the biography of its founder just could just not go hand in hand. The papers were put into cold storage. Three years passed for the depression to clear, and things then began to pick up. The project was revived, and the biography of Chandran Menon is now being published. The journey of the book through to the release was in a way as arduous as the life of Menon himself. But just as Menon's personality eventually shone through, it is believed that this chronicle of his life will emerge popular and inspiring.

This task gave me enormous satisfaction, and if I have succeeded in depicting, through these pages, the Menon who so profoundly impressed me, readers will not fail to be similarly affected. I am deeply indebted to the family of Menon, their friends and associates, Mr. Latkar of Ameya Prakashan and his team, all of whom have played a great role in the completion of this project. I was ably aided in the actual writing by the Bodhe sisters, Vrushali and Shubhangi. Mr. Patil was involved in the project from start to finish. I am confident that this book, which is the fruit of the co-operation of a great many people, will meet with the readers' approval.

— *Savita Bhave*

T R A N S L A T O R ' S N O T E

This project of translation, the first full-fledged book that I did after a series of piecemeal assignments, has been a refreshing experience indeed. The language of the author is so scholarly as to put up a massive challenge. His research into the personality and history (I can only call it that in view of the way Mr. Bhave has studied and presented it) of Chandran Menon is phenomenal. The picture is built up, leading to a canvas that transcends the limitations of biography. The person actually lives, as do some of the detailed scenes, the moods and feelings.

One of the effects of this project on me personally has been a strong feeling of inspiration. It is a feeling that I have never experienced in my adult life. But Chandran Menon's endeavours in times of adversity or of plenty seemed to shine like a light while I was working on this project. The inspiration was phenomenal: it impelled me to work late nights to meet self-set deadlines and this has been an extremely happy and satisfying period in my working life.

Special mention must be made of the expert editing, the valuable feedback and the constant encouragement I got from Gouri Dange throughout the course of this project.

Special challenges were thrown at me through the brilliant metaphor, which is part of the Marathi language. English is a different environment: adjectives and superlatives are not common. In itself, the Marathi metaphor is not translatable. Efforts at bringing out the nuances of meaning have been a heavy task. I have, however, made an effort and I sincerely hope the reader will get the flavour.

— *Nandu Dange*

THE BENCH

Twenty-five years ago Chandran Menon had already made a name for himself as a leading industrialist in Kolhapur. His companies had turnovers running into millions. He had just taken over as Chairman of The Kolhapur Steel Ltd. The company had thousands of farmers and middle class residents in and around Kolhapur as its shareholders. Menon had, after repeated requests from his friends and well-wishers, taken up the arduous task of pulling Kolhapur Steel out of the legal and financial quagmire that it was in. Always one to rise to a challenge, he had taken up the task with his customary zeal, and was now on his way to Mumbai to meet with senior Income Tax officials. He was travelling in the company Ambassador car. His faithful and trusted driver, Maner, and the Chief Accountant of Kolhapur Steel, M. B. Sheikh, accompanied him. Another dear friend of his as well as a director of Kolhapur Steel, Dadasaheb Shinde, was unable to undertake this trip due to personal reasons.

The car left Kolhapur at two in the afternoon, and the plan was to stay at Pune for the night and continue to Mumbai the next day. Menon asked the driver, Maner, to stop for a while at the Shirwal bus-stand, which they reached around 5.30 pm. He pointed to a batata wada (a spicy mashed potato snack) stall nearby. "The wadas here are excellent. Let's have some and then move on." The vendor appeared to know Menon. He greeted the special guest and took up a fresh batch to serve him.

Menon disembarked, said, "Back soon," and walked in the direction of the bus stand. When he was out of sight, Maner lit a cigarette. Sheikh waited in the car. After 10 minutes, when Menon still hadn't returned Sheikh got down and walked around the bus-stand in search of Menon. He was a little worried when he could not spot him even though he had walked around the entire bus-stand area. Maner was sure he hadn't left the stand, since he had been on the lookout so as to discard his cigarette the moment the boss was spotted. Another 10 minutes passed, and the wada vendor announced that he was ready to serve. Sheikh by now was deeply worried. Summoning Maner to go with him, Sheikh searched the bus-stand premises more thoroughly, and to their surprise, they found their boss taking a comfortable nap on one of the benches.

They were perplexed with this unexpected sight. Almost half an hour had elapsed. They were in a dilemma: wake him up and incur his wrath now, or let him sleep and incur his wrath later? They hovered around uncertainly, not knowing what to do. Their movement roused Menon. He walked to the corner tap to wash his face, and led the way, saying "The wadas must be ready." The vendor fried them a fresh lot. Menon then asked for sugarcane juice from the neighbouring stall. After consuming the wadas and the sugarcane juice they

got into the car and continued on their journey to Pune. Menon was probably unaware of the time he had spent sleeping on the bench. But he appeared very relaxed and fresh.

Since Sheikh had worked closely on this project with Menon, he could not resist his temptation to ask the question which was gnawing at him: "Sir, how did you happen to lie down on a bus-stand bench, and how could you sleep so soundly for over half an hour?"

Menon smiled. "That is not so easy to answer. We need to go back about 25 years in time. I had been in Kolhapur just a couple of years. I did whatever I got by way of work, and was struggling for survival. Once I needed to go to Pune in search of work. I had no money in hand, but a truck driver drove me up to Shirwal as a favour. It was past midnight, and the truck wasn't going on to Pune. No conveyance was to be got at that time of night. I stretched out on the bus-stand bench and spent the night there.

"In the morning I had a wash, and as I was drinking a glass of water, the wada vendor gave me a wada free - what motivated him to do that, I do not know, but he did give me a wada. I proceeded to Pune under favour from another truck driver. Whenever I come to Shirwal, these memories flood me. This evening when I was returning from the toilet, I saw that same bench. Lost in those memories, I sat down, then lay down ... and was promptly asleep. And now I am feeling nice and refreshed."

Chandran Menon's rise has been so quick and intense that no one can imagine the trials and tribulations he went through to scale the heights he eventually scaled. At each step in his way he had to face Herculean obstacles, each one of those obstacles had to be overcome with some of the special characteristics of his personality. He had over the years acquired a certain tenacity and purposefulness which held him on course in spite of a life filled with trials and tribulations. Success does not come cheap - it demands vast amounts of courage. Lesser individuals are diminished under its demanding onslaught.

From his humble origins in Kerala, Providence led him eventually to Kolhapur, where he cast his roots. He would throughout his life look towards Kolhapur as a place that nurtured him, a place that accepted him for what he was and a place that provided him with the stage to launch his glorious career. In order to fully understand this exceptional personality, it is necessary to track his entire life. One thing is evident; this human dynamo had very little time to spare. But whenever he had some, he used it to reach out to the sky, yet his feet were rooted firmly in the soil of Kolhapur.



KOLHAPUR'S INDUSTRIAL DAWN

Kerala State is at the southern end of India's west coast. During British rule, the northern part of present day Kerala was known as British Malabar, and the southern part up to the southernmost tip of the peninsula was the princely state of Travancore - Cochin. Near about the border of these two provinces lie two villages, Shrinarayanapuram and Kodungallur. The two are just about eight kilometres apart, but Shrinarayanapuram was in British Malabar and Kodungallur in Travancore. Chandran spent his childhood in these two places. Kodungallur was the larger of the two, a tehsil (an administrative unit) town, and it also had the facility of English education. Shrinarayanapuram was smaller, but was a sprawling cluster of hamlets (similar to those found in the Konkan, a coastal region to the north of Kerala). It was here that Chandran was born on May 10, 1925.

The Brahmins of Kerala are known as Namboodris, and the Kshatriyas are known as Nairs. The two communities have a tradition of intermarriage. The caste of a child is determined by that of his mother, in keeping with Kerala's predominantly matriarchal social structure. Menon's father was a Namboodri, his mother a Nair of the Thotapillil clan. About 10 to 15 generations ago, the Thotapillil clan migrated from southern Kerala to settle in Panangad (the postal name of Shrinarayanapuram), in Trichur district, and thereafter branched outwards. The Thotapillils who settled in Shrinarayanapuram were a wealthy lot, with huge estates that included seven lakes.

The Nair caste was dynastic in nature. Multiple wives was a common practice, and together with a joint family tradition, it led to large households and sizeable dwellings. The region where the Menons settled boasts of several temples including one Bhagavathi temple in Kodungallur. In nearby Irinjalakuda there is a separate temple for Bharat as well as separate temples to the gods Ram, Lakshman, and Shatrughna. A pilgrimage of all four temples, common in earlier times, would take two days; today a car can take you round in a matter of four hours.

A branch of the Menon clan hails from Nandikara, believed to be a derivation of the ancient Nandigram. Legend has it that Bharat took care of brother Rama's kingdom from here, and thus temples to him abound. The ancestors of the Nandikara clan came here as bodyguards in Bharat's entourage, and thus took on the name of Nandikara. It is customary in Kerala to prefix one's name with the initial of one's clan or village name.

The Thotapillil clan had a large house in Shrinarayanapuram. The main room, called the naluket, of this house was large and high-ceilinged, and was surrounded by two-storied apartments. The whole family prayed together, and the clan, known as a tarawad, was headed by the senior most person who

was in a way a princeling. Smt. Kallu Parameswaran, a cousin of Menon's, remembers that it was believed that the head of the family ate out of a huge gold plate: it was later realized that it was highly polished brass. Such a tarawad consisted of a large number of relatives from the mother's side. The widespread estate ensured an ample supply of food, swimming and entertainment. There was a large cash crop of coconuts, and rice and vegetables were home produce. There were few other needs, and the local vaidya (ayurvedic practitioner) took care of everyone's health.

Menon's father was Ramanezhathu Krishna Menon; he looked after the agricultural activities on the estate, besides running a side business of money lending. He had a sound working knowledge of Ayurvedic medicine and also served as the housemaster to the clan's children. He was his father's only son, and had an entrepreneurial bent of mind. He is said to have invented a new method of drawing water from very deep wells over a hundred years ago. When Menon, much later, manufactured his first water pump, people of the older generation were reminded of his father's talents.

Menon's maternal grandmother was an exceptionally pretty woman, and therefore earned the sobriquet of 'Sundarimutti' (lovely Grandma). She had four daughters and two sons. A cousin of Menon's, Saralamma, tells us that his mother was the third of the daughters. She had the title of 'Kunjukutti.' A very religious and serene personality, she was consulted in cases of dispute by people from twenty-five miles around. She suffered from heart trouble, and in view of young children in the household, one of the sisters remained a spinster to look after the whole clan. She was addressed as 'Chittamma', or 'younger mother.' 'Kunjukutti' lived up to 1948, but Menon's father died fairly young at just past fifty. Menon's maternal uncle Karunakaran Menon took over all the responsibilities of the Thotapillil clan. His home was Kodungallur, and Menon and his brother Ram lived there for some time for their education. The British named the place Cranganore.

His classmate and now famous Kuchipudi exponent Padmashree Gopalakrishnan have contributed glimpses of Menon's school days. They were neighbours, and normally set out for school together. Gopalakrishnan would call out to Menon in the early hours and a breakfast of idlis and tea would follow, very often at Gopalakrishnan's place, since the latter's mother had developed a deep affection for Menon.

Historically important a few centuries ago, Kodungallur was a small village when Menon grew up there. The roads were plain mud tracks, and most people walked barefoot. It was quite common to have a wash at a pond near the local temple after school and games. Once after a rather longer session of post-school play, the pair went for a wash to a nearby well, and Menon happened to drop his umbrella in. Gopalakrishnan saw his friend's worry, and plunged in to rescue the umbrella. His friend rewarded his triumphant return with a searing admonition for his reckless bravado!

Gopalakrishnan's father was a pandit (a scholar) and had ascetic leanings. He was a graduate, and also a Theosophist. He shared a lot of his thoughts and

ideas with Chandran. Gopalakrishnan's maternal uncle, Nandiyalatta Madhavan Menon, also had considerable influence on Chandran's young, impressionable mind. Madhavan Menon, as he was known, exercised considerable influence on Gopalakrishnan's father on account of the matriarchal system prevalent in the Nair community of Kerala. This system put greater authority in the hands of the maternal uncle than in the father, and thus when Gopalakrishnan's father sought permission to go to England to study for the IAS, Madhavan Menon, a traditionalist, refused permission. He gave him Rs. 200 and told him "Go and understand India instead." Gopalakrishnan's father duly travelled to the Himalayas, to Kolkata and to the Ramakrishna Math at Belur. The uncle then pushed him into marriage, but he remained rather aloof from marital life. Young Chandran had developed a special respect for the strong-willed Madhavan Menon and was very fond of listening to his thoughts, as if a disciple of a guru.

Chandran Menon in childhood had a maturity beyond his years. He was capable of commanding respect at a young age. Even his peers and relations were wary of attracting his considerable rage and all kept a respectful distance from him. (He expected to be addressed as 'Chettan' – Big Brother – by his younger cousin Kallu. But she insisted on addressing him as 'Chandran', to his considerable annoyance.) In contrast, Chandran's younger brother Ram was very cheerful and light hearted, and his childish capers were an object of affectionate indulgence. He was also of fairer skin. The five year difference in age meant that the two were never together in school. School in Kodungallur was a good six mile walk. The brothers later moved to their maternal uncle's place. School uniforms were not yet in vogue, and shorts and a shirt were common. Children in the higher standards dressed in a mundu, the traditional Kerala attire.

Kerala at that time was influenced a lot by leftist and communist thought. A vast majority of the young men were attracted to that line of thinking, and Chandran was no exception. Ram in fact had become active in the All India Students' Federation, and later in the mainstream Party activities. After Chandran matriculated he went to a distant uncle, Kunjunni Menon, in Calicut, present day Kozhikode, for a two-year, technical education course. During these two years at Calicut his revolutionary zeal got overshadowed by a love for technology and he started dreaming of the miracles of modern technology. It was not that he gave up on socialist thinking – it only stopped being his primary love – years later his socialist bent of mind would surface time and again during his interactions with his workmen.

Menon got his technical diploma in Calicut. At about that time, Bangalore saw the birth and rapid growth of an aircraft factory, started by the great Nationalist and visionary, Seth Walchand Hirachand. Chandran tried his luck at placement here, and was immediately appointed as a shop-floor technician. It was his first experience of employment and of living away from home. He worked as a technician for about two years and that was the time when his technical prowess really took root. Hindustan Aeronautics was a company that the great industrialist Sheth Walchand Hirachand had started by pressuring a foreign power that was in the throes of war. When Britain began to face

German bombing in 1940, the colonial government ruled that the colonies must make preparations to defend themselves, and Walchand was able to get a licence to manufacture aircraft. In just one year, Walchand's younger brother Lalchand achieved the feat of clearing a vast tract of dense forest, building roads, factory buildings and runways; the first Indian aeroplane was ready for trials in 1941. But just then Japan entered the war with the Pearl Harbour attack, and the government took charge of the factory with the view that it would be better to destroy it rather than let it fall into enemy hands. However, with the wane of war pressures, the factory continued aircraft production.

These memories were fresh in the minds of veteran employees like Nabhiraj and Rangaswami, and served to inspire the young Chandran Menon with the spirit of entrepreneurship and nationalism. But he saw that war had severely affected supplies. Quality rice, for example, was not to be got. Everything was bogged down by government red-tape. He learned that conditions and opportunities were better at the old ordnance factory at Khadki, in Pune, and so set his sights there. He landed in Pune and first worked in a garage as a mechanic. His experience in Bangalore helped him to land the coveted post of Tool-Room In-charge with the Ordnance Factory. His technical skills were of such a high order that he was the first Indian to be formally commended for his extraordinary skills by the British head of the plant. Chandran had by that time endeared himself to his subordinates as a tough but fair supervisor. With this recognition from the head of the plant he became a hero to the subordinates and to all the people in the plant.

His stint there was, however, short. With the end of the war, the British defence department did not want an ordnance plant in a colony of the Empire. They went into a downsizing mode. They disbanded the tool-room, as they felt that manufacturing capabilities originated from here. Menon, in spite of his credentials and contributions, had to look for employment elsewhere. A relative of his, Kochappan Menon, was General Manager in a transport organization owned by one Siddharam Sawkar in Jamkhadi in the same state, Maharashtra. Sawkar was a Vadar by caste, and also owned a workshop. He was in need of an experienced technical manager, and Menon duly enrolled with Siddharamappa through the good offices of Kochappan Menon. Both sides were aware that this was a short-term arrangement. A year later, accordingly (1946-47) Menon decided to leave Jamkhadi. Kolhapur was not far, and had begun to be known as an industrial town. Menon went there with the conviction that hard work would provide better opportunities for his entrepreneurial skills. At this point it would be desirable to take a quick look at the industrial and economic scene in Kolhapur up to the middle of the 20th century.

Kolhapur district is blessed with fertile soil and watered by 14 rivers. The second and third decades of the 20th century therefore witnessed Kolhapur coming to the forefront in sugarcane cultivation. The realization that this was a cash crop attracted more cultivators and greater land areas into cane cultivation, and downstream gur (jaggery) manufacture also became a major industry. Improved methods and appliances came into demand. Oil engines

were found to be more efficient than the traditional bullock-driven mode. The English cane crushers made of steel were found to be more efficient for cane crushing than the traditional wooden mills used at that time. Demand for these grew, but they were not indigenously available; they had to be imported from England. In course of time, routine wear and tear created a demand for replacement parts, and farmers usually went to Kolhapur city, where skilled mestris (craftsmen) with an abundance of practical experience, normally employees of machinery traders, reconditioned them. Thus a large business for repair of these cane crushers came up in Kolhapur.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 further changed the situation. The supply routes by sea were disrupted, and increasing cane production pushed up the demand for agricultural machinery and oil engines. The skilled mestris then began to make, first, spare parts for imported machinery, and subsequently, simple agricultural implements. The then ruler of the princely kingdom of Kolhapur, Shahu Maharaj, deserves a huge share of credit in promoting this venture, as he does in several spheres. He built the Radhanagari settlement and a dam across the river in memory of his mother, Radhabai, and enabled irrigation even in the height of summer. With the plentiful availability of water, land under sugarcane, vegetables and other cash crops increased, and the demand for oil engines rose further. Oil engines soon became the mainstay of industrial activity in Kolhapur. Shahu Maharaj also set up a power generation facility using the tail waters of the Radhanagari dam. The availability of cheap power and skilled craftsmen provided a fillip to the industrial activities of the region. Shahu Maharaj also arranged for education and training to children from all strata of society, and a strong workforce thus came into being. The incisive foresight of Dr. J. P. Naik led to the creation of the Shivaji Udyamnagar, for which land was made available at Rs 3 lakh (one lakh = 0.1 million). Naik, an official of the Udyamnagar establishment, put it up by selling his family gold. He also gave away the plot allotted to him to the Kolhapur Engineering Association, and thus the industrial base of Kolhapur came up through a cooperative effort.

The late Sakharam Yashwant ('S.Y.') Kulkarni, hailed as the Patriarch of Udyamnagar, first stepped in as a trader. He took a Mechanical Engineering Diploma in 1918 and worked for a time with some firms in Mumbai. In 1925 he returned to Kolhapur and set up S. Yashwant & Co., promoting and marketing oil engines in the surrounding countryside. He won gold medals in 1927 and 1929 for his display in the agricultural implements exhibitions held in Kolhapur under Shahu Maharaj's initiative. He later went into the manufacture of spares for agricultural equipment, and in 1937 began the manufacture of steel ploughshares, pumps and horizontal mills for cane crushing. He was the first to manufacture the 10/11 horsepower horizontal cold start diesel engine. The massive response from farmers prompted him to set up a cast iron foundry in 1941. In 1947 he converted his S. Yashwant & Co. into a public limited company, Yashwant Iron and Steel Works Ltd. He was sanctioned 25 acres of industrial land. But the plant he built thereon was badly vandalised during the riots that followed the Gandhi assassination, and Kulkarni was forced to put it up for sale. It was bought in 1949 by Seth Rambhai Samani. Kulkarni was actively involved in the formation of The Kolhapur Mechanical Engineering

Workshop Owners' Union in 1940, and later in the formation of Shivaji Udyamnagar.

Another highly respected contributor to the Udyamnagar project was Yashwant Pandurang ('Y. P.') Powar. His father, a poor peasant, sent him to a Polytechnic at Ratnagiri. Here he learnt the basics of technical subjects. But his father's untimely demise forced him to take up apprenticeship with Shahu Mills at a salary of Rs. 3 per month. He moved to S. Yashwant & Co. to work on engine assembly and repairs. In the course of this job, he made necessary modifications and improvements in the 50 HP engine on the Panchaganga river, at village Vishali, Shingnapur, and thus provided irrigation to the surrounding fields. News of the achievement was conveyed to the then ruler, Rajaram Maharaj, who invited him to work. After a seven-year stint with the Maharaj, he set up his own welding unit. Here he invented a method of straightening front axles without heating. This brought him fame, and in partnership with two other entrepreneurs, Yashwant Atigre and Shankarrao Yashwantrao Kothawale, he set up a large manufacturing unit, PAKCO Engineering, the name being drawn from the partners' initials. (Powar, Atigre and Kothawale). Later Powar also started his own United Castings at Vikramnagar. Powar's efforts brought about a great demand for PAKCO oil engines. In 1952 he built a 10 HP engine; in 1953 he launched the production of the 5-6 HP range of vertical engines. The demand for these was so massive that distributors were appointed all over the country. Powar took initiative in the formation of manufacturers' organizations in Kolhapur, in cooperation with S. Y. Kulkarni. A philanthropist, Powar gave help and encouragement to several entrepreneurs and was thus widely respected.

Two more technocrats played important roles in the industrial growth of Kolhapur. One was Mahadeorao Nanaji Shelke, known as Mhadba Mestri. Industry was not his hereditary calling. Starting life as a farmer, he also took up brick laying and worked on the side as a cleaner at an auto repair shop. He became an expert auto mechanic, and was appointed foreman. The outbreak of the Second War saw a shortage of fuel and spiralling prices. He started the manufacture of coal gas plants, and his name became a household word, in line with that of the Kirloskars. He then launched into the manufacture of agricultural implements and oil engines, and started an automobile workshop. These activities led to the formation and growth of the Shelke Group. Interestingly, he fabricated a revolving stage for the play, 'To Mee Navhech' by Acharya Atre, who granted him the title of 'Yantramaharshi' (techno-guru).

The second great Mestri was Mirasaheb Hudli. Starting out as a turner with the Ogles, Kirloskar, Cooper, etc. he rose to the post of supervisor and arrived in Kolhapur in 1948. Many Kolhapur industrialists had no knowledge of manufacturing to drawings, which Hudli was expert at. He created the 'Shiv' engine through this technique jointly with his friend S. A. Patil. In 1952 he started his own small factory under the name of M. S. Hudli and Sons, and after 37 years of service, became a factory owner. His eldest son, Mohammed Hussain, also known as Mohammed Saheb, later became a close friend and admirer of Chandran Menon.

Another noteworthy person who contributed to the industrial progress of Kolhapur was the late Nanasaheb Gadre. After his trading organization was firmly established in Mumbai and the Konkan, he set up in Kolhapur in 1943 and went on to start Gadre Industries. He was active in national and educational movements and was a great philanthropist.

Another man named as the protector and guide to budding industrialists was the trader Seth Rambhai Samani. His father's death forced him to discontinue education and take over the family thread business. As mentioned earlier, he took the bold step of buying the riot-ravaged Yashwant Iron and Steel, and thereafter remained in the forefront of the Kolhapur industrial scene.

Another name that must be mentioned with the above luminaries is that of Vishnupant Utkur. The Utkur clan, originally from Andhra Pradesh, settled near Miraj sometime in the 18th century. Vishnupant lost his father when he was barely a year old, and Vishnu from a very small age assisted his elder brother Shamrao in a flour mill. Shamrao later took up the sub-agency of the diesel engines manufactured by the Petter Company of England, and Vishnupant took the responsibility of building foundations for these engines and pump sets and commissioning the assembly up to the stage of drawing water. So the flour miller Vishnupant metamorphosed into Vishnupant Mestri. His repair experience brought him into contact with the budding industrialists of Kolhapur and at the suggestion of Y.P. Powar, the Utkurs set up a foundry called Central Iron Works at Vikramnagar in Kolhapur.

The English-made 'K' type pump, Pulse Meter, ran on a lower horsepower engine. It was efficient at pumping water, was sturdy and long-lasting. Vishnupant planned the manufacture of a similar pump and began to design a pattern for the pump. Despite several trials he could not succeed. The Kenche brothers who worked in his foundry suggested the name of Chandran Menon as a person who could solve his problem.. Menon accordingly drew up a fresh design. The casing was cast, machined at Miraj and the first fully indigenous 'K' type pump came into existence. It was put into the market as the Utkur pump, and generated plenty of demand. With great effort, machining - capability was developed locally. Unfortunately just about then the Utkur brothers fell out with each other, and Vishnupant was left high and dry. Powar again came to his aid, and Vishnupant succeeded in building the vertical oil engine 'Sarja.'

Thus, Kulkarni, Powar, Mirasaheb Hudli, Gadre, Samani and Utkur were the wellspring of Kolhapur's industrial development during the fourth and fifth decades of the twentieth century. They were the inspiration for several entrepreneurs who came in to ensure the rapid growth of this Udyamnagari (industrial estate). It was at an opportune moment at the end of 1947 that Chandran Menon arrived on the scene, and for the next 15 years he undertook a fierce struggle to establish himself in life as well as to utilize his considerable skills to further the development of this rapidly developing technopolis. His work earned him a place alongside these great men who ushered industrial development into this backward area. He got active

encouragement and support from all the above worthies. We shall cover his steep and arduous climb that followed in the next chapter.



MAKING A MARK

Chandran Menon's early days in Kolhapur are lost in the mists of history, since very few people of that time are around any more. However, there are indications that he worked at repairing pumps/oil engines, tyre remoulding... in fact whatever came his way. He stayed in a two-room apartment at Malati Bungalow, opposite Tararani High School in Rajarampuri. During that period he came into contact with the Utkur brothers through the engineering drawing assignment for the K type "Pulse meter" Pump and stayed on for 2½ years. Just draughtsmanship did not sufficiently challenge the capabilities of this young man and slowly he assumed overall responsibility of all the activities in the factory, which included casting and machining.

In the year 1949-50, Raghav Menon, who worked for the Indian Railways, was transferred to Kolhapur. His wife was Chandran Menon's cousin and the couple moved in with him at his Malati Bungalow apartment. Raghav recalls very vividly the hard work put in by Menon with the Utkurs. He also recalls that Chandran was a very ambitious person with the entrepreneurial spirit burning very bright within him. He always dreamt of establishing his own business. His biggest stumbling block was the availability of capital to support such a venture.

Agricultural activities at Kolhapur received a fillip with the establishment of a sugar mill and consequently a thriving business in the repair of diesel engines and water pumps emerged. Sensing an opening, Menon entered into a 25 per cent partnership with the Utkurs to exploit this business opportunity. Mirasaheb Hudli had a small machinery repair establishment just opposite Menon's workshop. His son Mohammed Saheb had just finished college to assist his father in business, and a strong kinship developed between him and Menon. Menon was then deeply involved in the design and manufacture of Pulse Meter pumps. Hudli had become a regular spectator of the developments initiated by Menon. He was as fascinated by this hard working diploma-holder engineer's technical capabilities as he was with his fluency in English, a rarity in Kolhapur those days. His respect for Menon grew over the years, and it never waned. Even till a few days before his death on May 1, 2004, Mohammed Saheb would fondly recall those formative years.

Due to differences with the Utkurs, Menon resigned his job and then tried an experiment in partnership - he teamed up with a couple of partners and set up a Farmer Corporation to manufacture pumps based on his design. The manufacturing activities commenced as planned but a trader from Sangli let him down in a big way, and Menon found himself in heavy debt. His partners deserted him and Menon was forced to take up employment in order to pay

off his debts. He then took up a managerial job in a workshop in Miraj belonging to the Jamkhandi royal family. The Kulkarni brothers ran that workshop, which produced crankshafts. Menon worked there for some time but the demise of the ruler, devolution of the Jamkhandi principality into the Indian Union and other such issues forced him to return to Kolhapur. But, before that, he was able to pay off all his debts.

Menon had acquired a place in the area of Brahmanpuri while in Miraj. He had also taken with him a highly skilled artisan, Bhupal Mestri, who served Menon very faithfully for several years till his retirement. On his return to Kolhapur, Seth Rambhai Samani invited Menon to take charge of his Yashwant Iron & Steel Works. Around that time, Menon's younger brother Ram had finished his intermediate examination in Kerala and Menon asked him to join him in Kolhapur. Ram joined him as an apprentice at Yashwant Iron and Steel. Menon was not satisfied with employment; his entrepreneurial spirit was not satiated. But starting an enterprise would require capital, and there was no facility of easy finance for entrepreneurs in those days.

He worked late into the night every day, often too busy to eat. His irregular eating habits would take a very heavy toll on his health later in his life. He developed an acute acidity, and later, ulcers. However he continued his hard work. Work had become the most important activity in his life. He used to often tell his associates to work hard without worrying about the results. Results, he said, were bound to come if their work was sincere and goal directed.

He still harboured a keen desire to start his own venture, which he was finding exceedingly difficult, due to capital constraints. He started getting a strong feeling that it would not be possible to start his venture in Kolhapur and that spurred thoughts of leaving Kolhapur to go back to Kerala to start an enterprise there. He also kept getting messages to that effect from his relations there.

His state of mind was not lost on people who were close to him. Mhadba Mestri said, "Forget your depression; I shall give you space and a lathe, and you are free to do business independently." Y. P. Powar, who was already impressed with Menon's technical prowess and had seen this young man's dedication and capability, summoned him and suggested that he start making crankshafts. Menon had earlier supplied high quality crankshafts for horizontal engines to Powar's PAKCO company. With Powar's aid, Menon obtained an order to supply crankshafts to Coopers. He decided to accept Mhadba Mestri's offer of space and a lathe, and thus started the Menon venture. The company at that time was called Menon and Co.

It was a big contract for that period. Menon needed to devote all his time and so decided to relinquish his post at Yashwant Iron and Steel. He started focusing totally on this new venture. The customers were happy with his quality and delivery. Menon had developed the practice of working backward and designing the production processes to meet the customer's quality and cost expectations. He tripled productivity with simple innovative ideas to give

the customer a cost advantage and a reason to purchase from him. Demand continued to rise. Menon now realized that he would need further capital to exploit this opportunity. He purchased land opposite PAKCO. Powar provided him with Rs. 40,000 towards capital. Menon decided to buy new machinery from Punjab. Imported machines, though of much better quality, were way beyond his modest means. He travelled to Punjab and spent a month there getting the sub-assemblies fabricated and assembled in his presence. He knew that the success of his venture depended on the quality of the machines he would have and he left no stone unturned to ensure that the machinery that he purchased met the required criteria. A few of the machines he purchased during that period are still in use today at the Vikramnagar plant of Menon and Menon. With the firm backing of Powar and with the success that he was experiencing, he never again thought of returning to Kerala.

He had decided early in life that he would not undertake to start a family until he was self-sufficient and steady in life. He was approaching thirty. He thought the time was now opportune to become a family man. His relatives in Kerala had also begun to put pressure on him to get married. Proposals had come in from quite a few prospective brides' families, and so Menon went to Kerala to firm up the arrangements. Marriages at that time were arranged strictly on the basis of family backgrounds, and the couple had little to do with it. Meeting, asking questions, assessing compatibility etc. was out. It was presumed that a girl from a proper family, brought up in the right kind of family environment would adapt to the new environment. After marriage she was expected to change to ensure compatibility. Besides, a very strong astrological tradition existed in Kerala. No marriage was undertaken unless the family astrologer announced that the horoscopes matched and that the stars were favourable for marriage. Horoscopes of parents, uncles and aunts were also consulted to find out their influences on the couple. Fixing a marriage did not need the boy or the girl. Parents, uncles, aunts and astrologers took care of everything. Often the boy and girl would meet for the first time at the marriage venue.

Menon's uncle Karunakaran and an aunt had tentatively approved of a prospective bride - a girl from a wealthy family. But Menon was firm that he would not marry a girl just because she was from a wealthy family. He strongly expressed his views, which was unheard of at that time. Credit should also be given to Menon's uncle Karunakaran who acceded to this request. Menon rejected the proposed alliance and was on the verge of returning to Kolhapur when a common acquaintance suggested the daughter of Parameswara Kurup of Kodungallur. The parents were both schoolteachers and met Menon's stringent -requirements adequately. The gentleman accompanied Menon and his uncle to see the girl. Menon accepted Padmini of the Karkitavallil clan. It later emerged that her brother Kartikeyan and Menon were school chums. The eldest, Shivarama Menon was a Malayalam teacher; the second, Kartikeyan, BA, LL. B., worked with Premier Automobiles; the third, Sreedharan, an agriculture graduate, was working as a Block Development Officer in Kerala. Padmini was the fourth, and at the time of marriage she was in the 9th standard: she later completed her 10th. The fifth sibling, Pundarikaksha, was just nine years old when his sister got

married. Years later when he came to Kolhapur to work with his brother-in-law, the people in Kolhapur found it difficult to pronounce his longish name, and he acquired an affectionate short form, Pundi. The name stuck on - later when he rose to a high post in the Menon group, he was affectionately referred to by all the workmen and staff as Pundisaheb.

Once the nuptials were fixed, Karunakaran looked after all the arrangements, and the wedding took place a fortnight later, on 19th May 1954, with about 30 guests from the Menon clan and about 80 from the Kurups' side. The wedding was rather ostentatious by Kodungallur standards.

Ram had stayed back in Kolhapur to look after the new factory. He then went in August to Kodungallur to escort his sister-in-law to Kolhapur. There was already a two-room apartment in Malati Bungalow. The newlyweds settled down in these. Menon and Ram had a friend, Venugopal, staying with them as their roommate. Another two-room apartment, adjoining the existing apartment was taken on rent. Ram and Venugopal shifted there. Raghav Menon was in Kolhapur for a few years by then. His wife, Sumathi, was good company for the newlywed Padmini. A few months later, Ram moved to Oundh, near Pune, to take up a technical training course.

After settling down once again, the pressures of independent business started mounting. With the success of the enterprise the daily workload went up. Menon usually had lunch with neighbouring industrialists such as Mohammedsaheb Hudli and Baburao Arwade. Menon had contracted for a lunch package with an eatery, and that was enough for the two brothers. These young men's idea of luxury was a treat of amboli (rice pancake) and countless cups of coffee at the nearby Sharda restaurant.

At work, any available resource was used for results. Hudli reminisces that a barrel was turned into a cupola to make castings. Menon built up a reputation as an expert pattern maker. He pioneered the tough industry of remoulding tyres. Work held all his attention, and he accepted and successfully executed any assignment that came his way. He had also hired a lathe at Rs 130 per month from Maganlal Kadam, and a lot of work was executed on this machine. Both he and Ram were qualified to take up jobs at much higher income levels, but the spirit of enterprise drove them, and within a year or so, they established themselves. Menon began to be flooded with requests for technical advice.

It was in this jovial and progressive atmosphere that Padmini reported an impending arrival. It was not practicable to go to her parental home in Kerala for the delivery. Instead of that Menon's aunt came to Kolhapur to help. Menon's first son Vijay was born on the 21st of June 1956 and when he was just a month old, Padmini had to undergo a gall bladder surgery at Mary Wanless Hospital, Kolhapur. Menon would take care of the newborn baby, bring the baby to the hospital for his feeds and also take care of his business commitments. The Menon family came out of this crisis successfully and Padmini recovered gradually to play her role in the development of the family.

In 1956 Menon acquired the Desai property in Udyamnagar, and business steadily improved. They bought a lathe of their own. Initially, Menon and Ram did all the work themselves, but later they hired trusted lieutenants. One such person was Anandrao Topkar. His younger brother was a clerk in PAKCO and Anandrao was brought to the factory to meet Powar. Powar's reaction was that he was too young to do heavy work. But the boy confidently assured him that he - could work on the machine. Powar turned to Menon and asked him what he thought. Menon said that the boy appears to be confident and should be given an opportunity. Powar suggested that Menon take him as an apprentice in his shop. Menon took him to his factory and asked him to start working. No application forms were filled, no background check was done, no salary levels were fixed. In short Topkar came to work, and work he got. Salary and other details would follow automatically in due course. Menon took up the responsibility of training Anandrao Topkar personally. He would take long hours to teach the young lad the basics of shop floor working. Anandrao Topkar was a very fast learner and soon become an expert turner. He rose to become a supervisor. When he was offered another job he went to Menon for his advice. Menon looked at the appointment order, tore it up and remarked that he need not worry about anything as long as he was there and Topkar continued to work with Menon for over 40 years till his retirement.

In the year 1958 there were just 9 people working in the factory. Menon had started manufacturing cylinder liners for Cooper and Ruston. Orders had started coming in from Kirloskar Brothers. Besides he also carried out a long list of jobs for PAKCO. The enterprise continued to grow fast. Slowdowns that affected others rarely ever affected the Menon enterprise.

Menon's domestic responsibilities, too, were on the rise. The demise of his sister's husband had prompted him to practically adopt his two nieces, Vijaya and Vasanthi, and bring them to Kolhapur for education and upbringing. In addition, his maternal uncle and aunt had also made his house their home.

The year 1959 saw the beginning of talks about Ram's marriage. A relative on both sides suggested Radhamani, the daughter of Parameswara Menon, from Chentrapinni, a village about ten kilometres from Kodungallur. Since the new factory could not spare Menon, Ram on his own went to Kerala, met, approved of the girl and made the marriage arrangements. They were married on July 11, 1959 at Chentrapinni. Shortly before the wedding, Padmini had given birth to Shanta, in Kerala. Radhamani recounts that by the time she married and arrived in Kolhapur, Menon had acquired a spacious eight-room house in Rajarampuri 12th Lane. The business was doing well, and she saw no tough times. The following year Menon bought his first car, a Landmaster. The family was prosperous, but not really rich. In order to save money, the ladies took turns to go to their ancestral homes every alternate year. (Radhamani's father had been for several years a lecturer in the Nadeshwara College in Sri Lanka. But when the children grew up he returned to Shrinarayapuram for the children's education. He took up a job as a high school teacher at the local school.) Vijay vividly remembers studying in a nursery opposite the present Janata Bazaar at Rajarampuri and his uncle Ram taking him to and from his school in a child basket fitted to his bicycle.

Shri Pyarelal Oberoi was a prosperous industrialist in Kolhapur, and his ancestral business was of buying and selling mild steel melting scrap required by the foundries in the region. Around the time Menon went into business, the talk in town was that 'these people did business with capital borrowed at eight and ten per cent interest. They mostly hire South Indians, and if the time comes, they will desert the Kolhapur people and vanish. Be careful in your dealings with them.' In his typical blunt fashion, Oberoi confronted Menon with this, and equally bluntly Menon responded, "Look, this is business. There are bound to be ups and downs. If you feel that I am likely to run away in times of difficulty, then you are free not to do business with me." The confrontation cleared the air to such an extent that not only did the two become great friends but also developed domestic links.

1960-61 saw the inflow of orders for connecting rods from Cooper Engineering. Parameswaran was the Purchase Manager at Cooper Engineering, and his cordial relations with Menon eventually resulted in Parameswaran resigning from Cooper and joining Menon. He went on to create a special place for himself as a close Menon confidante. Mr. Parameswaran stayed on till he retired as the senior vice-president of Menon and Menon.

In 1961 Ram Menon graduated in Commerce as an external student. A close friend of the family, Baburao Arwade, recalls that since most industrialists in Kolhapur in those days had come up from the labour classes, there was no real method in their work. It was Menon who brought technological excellence and management expertise into Kolhapur.

Another close associate of Menon was Madhu Mestry. After studying up to Standard IX in night school, he underwent training in turning, milling, boring and truck bodybuilding at Pratap Engineering. He then took up a job at a respectable salary of Rs. 120 a month. Word reached him of the quality work being done by Menon in Udyamnagar, and he approached Menon, more for experience than income. Two or three technical questions sufficed to fetch him an offer of a job. Mestry shifted, for a salary lower by about Rs 50. It turned out to be a long and fruitful association. He recently retired from the Group as Assistant General Manager and continues to work in an advisory capacity. One Mr. Patil was General Manager when Mestry joined. He was trained in the US, and engaged in teaching systems management in the company.

Increase in business saw a corresponding increase in allied activities. The Red movement took roots in the organization, led by P. D. Dighe. The Party sent him to Kolhapur in 1948, and he built workers' unions in the fields of sugar, the Press, the theatre. The founder of the labour movement in Kolhapur was Santram Patil. The formation of a union in the Menon enterprise naturally led to a confrontation at the start. But significantly, the workers never had to resort to striking work to press for their demands. In this context, Dighe mentions that where owners are aware that a workers' organisation is an inevitable part of the industrial environment, the need for conflict does not

arise. In the case of Menon, questions were handled in a practical manner, and if conflict was inevitable, it was handled through negotiations and agreements. Some industrialists took an extreme stand and refused to talk to Dighe, mainly as a matter of prestige. With Menon, things always went smoothly. With the increase in the size and extent of the unit, and the shift to Vikramnagar, Dighe's influence waned.

It was around this time that Menon bought his first car. Baburao Arwade quotes some amusing anecdotes in this connection. Ram learned to drive quite quickly, but Menon took longer. He collided with buffaloes a couple of times. Once on the way to Satara, his car overturned in a field, and he was pinned under the crankshaft that he was taking as a sample to the Cooper Engineering plant. Arwade also remembers an accident to his car on the way back from the Vikramnagar plant.

Former Member of the Legislative Assembly from Kolhapur Baburao Dharwade recalls that in 1960 he had approached Menon for an advertisement in his newspaper, and Menon had promptly given him a Rs 25 advertisement – a princely sum at that time. Menon continued to make efforts towards further growth, particularly in building networks. Right from 1958 he was in regular touch with one of the executives at Coopers, T. Nagaraja. Cooper was a very large customer for liners and crankshafts. Menon's quality had placed him in the position of a primary supplier. Nagaraja says that Menon was not satisfied with remaining a supplier – he wanted to become a leading industrialist. He had dreams of setting up an industrial outfit where technology, quality and customer service were paramount. Nagaraja was impressed with Menon's technical knowledge, and after the latter's demise, served for a time as Vice President in the Group.

A group of about 12 industrialists visited Delhi and North India in view of an industrial trade fair around 1960-61, driven in two Ambassador cars. Since Menon was the only English speaker and the only one in Western garb, he had to take the lead. The group visited Agra, Fatehpur-Shikri and Bhakra-Nangal. In their stay in Delhi they had a meeting with then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Menon had carried with him a small traditionally cast lump of Kolhapur gur (jaggery) as a gift. Here, too, it was Menon who took the lead the talks with Panditji. An industrial exhibition was held at Khasbag in Kolhapur in 1962, where Menon was presented with a citation. He nursed a wish to manufacture a product of his own, and was mentally toying with the idea of making a Lister type oil engine in Kolhapur. He had seen an oil engine in childhood, and had expressed his wish to make one on his own to Rolfe Eastman, an American who had come to Kolhapur as a Peace Corps volunteer and had become a very close friend of Menon's.



THE BEDROCK

Ramesh D. Dixit is currently the Managing Director of Menon Bearings. He was a close companion of Chandran Menon in the days when the latter launched his oil engine venture. Dixit matriculated in 1960 and completed a 1½-year draughtsmanship course with the ITI. He couldn't go into engineering due to financial constraints. Kolhapur did not have a comprehensive industrial base then. A government certificate required six months of apprenticeship. Y. P. Powar hired him, but his workshop had no drawing facility. Powar encouraged him to work on a machine. Dixit was earning a stipend of Rs 45. He was still unsure what to do, and one day he was introduced to Menon. He told Menon of his predicament and expressed a desire to work on engineering drawing. Always a good judge of budding talent, Menon offered him a job on the spot, but Dixit saw that Menon's workshop did not have drawing facilities. He carried across his own drawing board and got to work. Menon then had a staff of about 20, and the Lister type engine was under design and development. There was also the routine subcontract job work.

Menon's keen interest in design led him to spend a good three-fourths of his time with Dixit. Six months later Menon shifted his workshop to Udyamnagar - there was a separate room for the design and drafting activity. The workshop had a two-hour lunch break, but Menon would finish in an hour and be back at work. He worked tirelessly, often beyond eight in the evening. James Stamps of the government Small-scale Industries Office regularly spotted out talent and helped promising people. He saw the calibre of Dixit's drawing, invited him for training, which Menon gladly consented to, and trained him fully and comprehensively. In this way, Dixit did pioneering design work for the Menon oil engine venture.

The company normally distributed 20 per cent bonus to its workers during Diwali. Menon and Ram would sit at a table and personally hand over cash in an envelope to every worker. The workmen would stand in a queue to receive the money, a packet containing festival sweets and a cake of soap. Menon and Ram knew each and every worker personally. The workmen strength till 1962 was about 45. This practice continued for a few more years; after that it became practically impossible to continue this method of bonus distribution. However the practice of close personal contact continues even to this date.

Menon was always particular about using things properly, whether it belonged to him or not. On one occasion, when he had to rush somewhere in a hurry, he borrowed Dixit's bicycle – and proceeded to lose it. He went into a flurry, and was very relieved when the object was found! Menon always made it a point to be as careful with other people's property as he would take care of his own. He had expensive tastes but he would take care of his possessions well.

Years later he bought a Rolex watch; he used it for over 15 years till he passed away. Right till the end the watch looked as if he had just bought it.

Madhu Mestry remembers that Menon would often say, "Ours is primarily an agriculture based economy. Why shouldn't we make our own engines and water pumps?" Brands like Yanmar and Tiger used to be imported then. Menon made plans to develop indigenous replacements that would be easy to use and could be conveniently moved about by three people. He imported a horizontal boring machine and a milling machine for the purpose from Germany. He encouraged Madhu Mestry to train himself on these speciality machines. He also encouraged him to complete his schooling and study further. Mestry accordingly completed his SSC externally, and then did a three-year technical course at the Shivaji University. This entailed training from seven to ten thirty in the evenings.

Developing an engine threw up several technical and cost related problems. Menon's standing instructions were to meet him armed with paper, pencil and eraser. He persuaded all his people to be analytical in their approach. He wanted each and every one to think of all possible solutions before zeroing in on the final decision. He had evolved a simple format for this purpose. In one column, list out the gains; in the opposite column, draw up possible losses and the remedies suggested. This systematic approach eliminated any possibility of major errors at a later stage. A decision through opinion sharing and consensus was his management style. The design process was also accompanied by a well thought out planning of the marketing strategy.

Vilas Sawant was another participant in the engine making effort. His uncle held the construction contract of Menon's Udyamnagar unit. Vilas matriculated and worked a year with Yashwant and Co., and then joined the Engine Division of Menon as a helper. For six months he worked without pay. Menon had several times expressed his ambition of building up an industrial group and being counted amongst the Tatas, Birlas and Kirloskars. "That won't be easy, and you know why? My nephew works with you without pay," was the uncle's response. Menon made enquiries and when he realized that the administration people had made a mistake, he immediately ordered a Rs. 20 salary for Vilas, which he later increased to 40 and then to 80. Menon always believed in paying people well and expecting them to put in good work for the company.

Menon usually spent a couple of hours in Udyamnagar every day and the rest of the day overseeing the construction at the new plant at the Vikramnagar site. Shortly afterwards he began to depute Vilas for engine repairs. The areas adjoining Narsobawadi, such as Herwad and Kalwad, had a large population of Menon engines. Vilas and others like him were not even trained technicians; they could at best be called technical illiterates. Realizing that if he expected such persons to be part of the planned growth of the company, he would have to train them to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Menon himself started a training session for these workers, 9 to 11 on Sunday mornings. He personally taught engine assembly, provided tea and breakfast to the boys and made a test case of every customer complaint that came in.

He was firm on the principle that quality is the ultimate goal. He made it a point to take up challenging assignments that nobody else would touch, and complete them successfully.

In a period when Kirloskar engines were denied ISI certification, Menon's adaptation of the Lister - Petter engine, which he had designed on his own, not only received the certification but was also a major success in the market. Menon was skilled at identifying and developing talent. Bhupal Mestry was a constant companion. For several reasons, mainly financial, things did not always work out as Menon had planned. Thus too much planning could not be undertaken, and production targets at times simply meant fulfilling the order at hand, a truck at a time – but never at the cost of quality. He would prefer late shipment to the shipment of a shoddy product.

Around this time, Menon's brother-in-law Kartikeyan came to Kolhapur. Menon had a fond dream of getting his whole extended family together. Kartikeyan was a senior executive of twelve years' standing in the import section of Premier Automobiles. Every visit to Mumbai saw the two brothers-in-law eating out together. At each meeting Menon pursued the idea of Kartikeyan starting out on his own; there was also an open invitation to join him. But Kartikeyan had made up his mind that it would not be appropriate to work for his brother-in-law, besides he was happy with his work at Premier Automobiles. He finally succumbed to Menon's continued insistence that he give up the job and start something on his own. Even when Kartikeyan agreed to Menon's suggestion – at the back of his mind was the conviction that he could get a similar assignment any time he wanted. Menon had assured him of all-round support in any venture. Menon gave him a used lathe, offloaded a good bit of job work and sub-contracted to him some of his engine part requirements. Kartikeyan however was not as ambitious or adventurous as Menon, but he settled himself very well in the venture with Menon's support. The industry he started is considered to be a model, well managed, small scale enterprise.

Menon's Udyamnagar workshop soon turned out to be too small to meet the increasing requirements. Menon was already using the Kadam and Ruikar premises. Earlier in 1962-63, Menon and his industrialist friends like Y P Powar and Vishnupant Utkur had already acquired a large plot of land in Vikramnagar. Menon had procured 8 acres of land – a size which was considered superfluous at that time. Menon however worked towards a long term plan and knew precisely how he would use the land. In time he not only fully utilized this land but he also had to buy 214 acres of land at Amboli to meet his growth requirements.

The award that Menon's Ruston engine crankshaft had won in the Agricultural Trade Fair resulted in a flood of orders for crankshafts and liners from Ruston and Cooper. To meet these growing requirements Menon built a large factory building at the Vikramnagar premise and the operations were shifted to Vikramnagar on January 19, 1964. Menon also continued the earlier operation in the old place in the name of Menon Ancillaries.

The factories put up by Menon, Powar and Utkur were rather large by 1964 standards. Dadasaheb Chougule, a leading present day industrialist of Kolhapur, who at that time was working as the accounts chief with Menon, recalls that Menon was an expert technologist and had a burning ambition of doing 'something different.' Several manufactures were engaged in making the Petter type engine: Menon chose to develop and make the 'Lister Type.' That type was being made at that time in Rajkot, but Menon's product was significantly different. His passion for quality was such that he personally supervised the destruction of anything that did not meet his standards. Chougule says that the Pune-Bangalore industrial belt has seen several industrialists who made money, but there never was a hard-core technocrat such as Menon. Chougule decided to launch his own company in 1966 and Menon gladly gave his blessings. Chougule started a workshop with two lathes and Menon subcontracted a few of his engine components to him to get him properly started.

Around this time, Dixit left in a huff over a minor ego clash, something trivial like the refusal of an office boy to serve him tea, and Menon was displeased. Dixit appeased him with the explanation that he wanted time to study further. Menon then proceeded to provide Dixit with expensive technical textbooks, which he bought in Mumbai. He also kept open an offer to come and work any time during vacations. He had convinced himself that Dixit had not left for the sake of a better salary. Menon held the principle that money couldn't achieve everything. Money was important but it was only a tool to achieve our objectives. Right till his end he would ridicule people who thought that earning money was the sole objective in life.

V. B. Ghorpade's recalls the reputation that Menon had by then built up in Kolhapur. Ghorpade was a senior official with the Bank of Baroda, and had just taken up duties in Kolhapur after a four-year stint in London. His brief was to build up the bank's business in Kolhapur. He initially decided to bring in deposits from prosperous industrialists and collecting detailed information about prospective customers was naturally the first step towards the fulfillment of his duties. He recalls in his notes that when Menon set up his enterprise with one lathe in Udyamnagar, his landlords were unsure whether this 'Southie' would even pay his rent on time. But Menon speedily established his reputation. Ghorpade goes to great lengths to describe in his notes the imagination, foresight, dedication, capacity for hard work, honesty and sheer courage of Menon. He also recalls that even when in financial difficulties, Menon leapt to help when a newspaper published an appeal on behalf of a needy patient requiring major surgery. Time and again in his dealings with people he would show a remarkable kindness – he carried out these acts as a duty without ever thinking of either a short term or long-term personal gain.

The factory prospered and the employee strength slowly crossed 100. Menon then told his close associates – "Once an organization increases in size, the mentality and behaviour of people changes. The new recruits would not know of the hard work that has gone in to build the company to this stage. These men have only seen prosperity; so select a core group of 10 out of this 100

who will stand by us under any circumstances. They would be the company's backbone."

Madhu Mestry recalls that reputation was Menon's main obsession. His goal was always that the enterprise should become an ornament in the country's crown. When he shifted to Vikramnagar, he floated a new company, Menon and Menon. At the earlier premises business continued in the name of Menon Ancillaries and was run by Ram Menon. It had just two lathes and three staff and did job work. Mr. B. S. Bhosale had newly joined Menon. He worked hard in the three years after 1962 and picked up a lot of technical expertise from Menon. Educated just up to 8th Standard, he couldn't even read a drawing. Menon trained him in the newly arrived technological developments such as the reading the micrometer etc. It was this training that enabled Bhosale to reach the level of Assistant General Manager with Menon Pistons.

Another of Menon's contemporaries, Shankar Ganesh Nesarkar, has similar memories to share. He had picked up the turning trade through apprenticeships in Pune and Kolhapur. On his marriage in 1965, he realised the need for a steady berth, and met Menon. The Menon outfit had become famous for precision and accuracy in output. Menon had nurtured the spirit of accuracy and cleanliness in his unit. He would personally oversee the operations at each machine, enquire after the welfare of each worker, understand and implement suggestions. Nesarkar had grown accustomed to working from technical drawings in Pune, and Menon's was the only unit that followed this practice. With any new job on hand, Menon would personally oversee the sample production, at times late into the night shift. He would share tea from his vacuum flask with his workers. He maintained contacts with his old co-workers up to the end. He actively encouraged everyone's personal growth.

The shift to Vikramnagar saw an expansion of his circle. His interaction with new entrepreneurs increased. One of these was Parshuram Vaman Angadi. The two developed such close rapport that any occasion saw the invitation, 'Angadi, tum ao.' (Angadi, you have to come.) Every function saw the request-cum-order, 'Angadi, tum sab karneka.' (Angadi, you take care of everything.) Menon had implicit trust in Angadi's organizational skills and knew that he could leave everything to Angadi's capable hands. Similarly Angadi recalls that Menon readily rushed to help whenever any need arose.

Menon was a reliable source of technical advice and several entrepreneurs of the area have personally experienced it. Many of these people did their apprenticeship under Menon's tutelage and then launched their own enterprises. Menon never deserted anyone dear to him. The example of Dixit goes to show this. He encouraged Dixit to continue with design and drafting and kept up his financial support. Menon started the practice of giving a handbook or manual with each engine, with Dixit's assistance. Dixit finished each of the three years of his Diploma in the First Class and passed out with Distinction. Since his performance qualified him for direct admission to the Second Year for the Degree course, he wished to do that. He was just about 24 at that time. The Karad Regional Engineering College was the ideal choice

and he had worked out the monthly outlay at Rs 80. His father, however, expressed his inability to bear this burden for two years at a stretch, and Dixit was obliged to return to Menon for a job. Menon readily accepted him, with the admonition, "God help you if you leave again." He was appointed at a monthly salary of Rs 350, and at once started putting by Rs 160 every month. At the end of a year, he had enough to pay for his degree studies and met Menon with the request that he be released to do his Bachelor of Engineering. Normally it would have been Menon who got peeved, but this time it was Parameswaran who got really angry. However, Menon at once made arrangements for books and whatever else Dixit would need. Dixit graduated in 1969 and got an immediate invitation from Menon to 'return home.' He was asked if he would manage the new venture in Menon Ancillaries. Dixit accepted and remains with the group to this day. His faithful pursuit of duty resulted in speedy promotions. He has been deputed abroad on many projects and has been instrumental in negotiating some of the technology tie-ups with foreign companies that the group entered into later.

Renowned technologist Dr. S. M. Patil first met Menon when he was with Coopers. Parameswaran was then in charge of the Cooper warehouse. He took Menon along with him to meet Dr. Patil, who realized at once that here was a highly talented young man who was handicapped by the lack of capital. Dr. Patil became the Chairman of HMT. He was in Bangalore at the registered office of the company. Menon was in the market for precision machinery worth about Rs 40 lakh for his expansion plans. Parameswaran again arranged a meeting for Menon with Dr. Patil, who had by then taken a liking for this young man. He had heard of how a Mestry in Menon's employment had been put in charge of the foundry and he admired Menon's insight. He also had full faith in Menon's integrity. HMT was a roaring concern during this period and it only dealt with big names in industry. Dr. Patil convinced his finance chief that it was better to give machinery to deserving entrepreneurs who would later, with prosperity, become long-term customers of HMT - and Menon's requirement was met. Later on, for all his machinery requirement HMT was always the preferred make and Dr. Patil's foresight paid rich dividends to HMT.

During this period, Menon was introduced to a very senior official at HMT, M. S. S. Varadan. Varadan also realized that this ambitious man was in need of precision machinery. He also saw that Menon had seen the importance of training in the use of advanced machinery: equipment was of no use unless there were trained hands to use it properly. Himself a training enthusiast, Varadan was pleasantly surprised at what he heard. Most prospective buyers worried about the cost, and at the most about after sales service; here was someone actually looking at the human resource side. Varadan was even more surprised to learn that Menon had hired a leading training consultant in his factory. But Menon indicated that he was not quite satisfied with the consultant. Varadan then suggested that Menon depute a few selected men to Bangalore for training on the advanced machinery. Menon readily agreed, and went on to suggest that a few skilled people from HMT be deputed to Kolhapur to train his people. He requested Varadan to come personally to Kolhapur to talk to his officers. The intention was partly to gain an insight into the real capabilities of his employees. Human Resources Development

caught on as a valuable management tool from the eighties, but Varadan states that Menon was a good couple of decades ahead of his time in terms of HRD.

Varadan went to Kolhapur, planning for a one-day tour; he stayed back a full three days. There he noticed an unusual trait of Menon: he did not just look after his own interests; he looked to the larger good of industry as a whole. Telex was a new development those days, not known or understood by the Kolhapur industrial community. The communications department was reluctant to provide the facility in Kolhapur unless it got a certain minimum number of subscribers. Menon promoted the facility and its advantages and managed to collect the necessary numbers. Dr. Patil himself visited Kolhapur later at Menon's request. Dr. Patil had remarked to Varadan that this man could not be just described as a successful industrialist; a more appropriate sobriquet would be 'visionary.'

Pundi Parameswaran recalls Menon's actions when the HMT contract led to a loss of Rs 56,000, not a small amount in those days. Menon did not waste his time in recriminations: he decided to cut his losses and raised Rs 40,000 through the sale of accumulated scrap. The machinery in the factory was rather old, but the tooling was ultramodern. Menon also started the manufacture of Petter type engines, close on the heels of his already successful Lister type.

1960 saw the launch of the Peace Corps by American President Kennedy. Their agenda was to send teams of American engineers to provide technical aid and guidance to developing countries. Rolfe Eastman was one youngster who came to India as part of a team of volunteers in 1966. He had graduated from Amherst College in Massachusetts, worked for a time to gather practical experience and then went on to complete his MBA in Financial Management from Boston University. His friend Allen Cohen had contributed to the establishment of the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad while he was at Harvard. Cohen held the responsibility of training the Peace Corps teams that were deputed to Maharashtra and Kerala. He perceived Pune as a centre of learning, but shifted his focus to Kolhapur since Pune was not a designated target area. Five volunteers found gainful employment in his project. The Peace Corps was an all-male outfit since local industry only employed men. The group hired a duplex in Ruikar Colony, which was occupied on one side by the one married couple and on the other by the four bachelors.

A team deputed before Rolfe Eastman's had earlier made a survey and filed a report on the industrial scene in Maharashtra, with special emphasis on Kolhapur. The remarks therein are enlightening:

"Menon and Menon Engineering: this is a medium scale industry situated on the outskirts of Kolhapur city, sandwiched between the United Casting Co. and the Central Iron Works. We had an interview with the Chief, Mr. T. C. K. Menon (as Chandran Menon was known then) and he impressed us as an ambitious and progressive young man. He has recently shifted to more

spacious premises, has installed modern machinery and has a production capacity of 150 vertical pumps per month.

“Menon appears to be fully aware of the work of the Peace Corps. A volunteer in the poultry industry was his collaborator in the setting up of his office. Production threw up a lot of problems and Menon had appointed the consultant R. J. Joshi to sort these out. We felt that Menon’s factory would benefit from the management guidance of one of our team. Working with Menon would be a pleasure and would serve as a good starting point for work in Kolhapur.

“One of the main problems Menon faces is the shortage of skilled machinists. He therefore plans to start his own training course. He has mapped out a course of about six months of training, with a decent stipend. The trainee will be under no obligation to join Menon and would be free to take up employment elsewhere. Menon however says that he would create an atmosphere that would compel trained personnel to stay back and not even think of going away. Even today, if an employee leaves, Menon makes a full enquiry into the reasons and remedies any faults that he may find responsible in his own organisation.

“Experience in other countries and then in India shows clearly how revolutionary and progressive Menon’s ideas are. Nowhere else have we seen any signs of concern for employee welfare. Menon’s plans of a training institute are still just on paper and a trained volunteer from our side to put it into practice is an urgent need.

“Mr. Menon and Mr. Joshi are also at the moment talking with the Engineering College. The intention is that the curriculum should be upgraded in such a fashion that the emerging engineer is fully aware of the industrial scene and technical developments in the region. There needs to be a common language between those who make engineers and those who hire them. This highly progressive outlook is again unique in India.

“Mr. Joshi did his graduate and postgraduate studies in engineering and industrial management in London. In his opinion, it is the mid-level management – the supervisor class – that falls short in the process of communication between top management and the line worker. Mr. Joshi’s experience abroad has convinced him of the urgent need to address this problem and the Peace Corps volunteers would therefore do well to meet him and learn exactly what ails the local industrial scene.”

Observations on Menon’s neighbour and close associate, Mohammed Saheb Hudli, in the same report are also worth noting. It goes, “Hudli started his career as a Mestry. Today he produces 150 flywheels, 300 cylinder blocks, 400 housings and close to 70 connecting rods. He has five lathes, one shaper and one Japanese boring machine and his work runs in just one shift. He has just bagged an order for crankshafts and plans to introduce a second shift. He is fluent in English and eager to modernize his production methods. His machinery is of excellent quality and he would greatly benefit from the help of

Peace Corps volunteers.” This reported mind-set of Hudli is easily understandable when one recalls his close association with Menon.

Rolfe Eastman records his observations of Menon as follows: ‘Menon was a ready learner. No subject was debarred, and his energy and his spirit of enquiry propelled him to seek skills in every field. His discussions with Allen Cohen led him to request the guru to sort out the management problems that he faced in his unit. Menon gave a detailed report of the management problems at his place and requested Cohen to sort them out through a detailed Management Manual. Cohen replied that he could understand the problems, but it was the men on the floor that could sort these out.

Menon began to devote his attention to the overall Kolhapur industrial scene, side by side with his own growth. The Kolhapur Productivity Council had already been started in 1958. The year 1960 saw the birth of a broader-based Kolhapur Engineering Association, which replaced the ‘Kolhapur Mechanical Engineering Workshop Union.’ Menon was an important player in the formation of this organization, along with Powar and Samani. Hemraj Samani recalls that the Productivity Council benefited all Kolhapur industrialists. Menon was obsessed with technical excellence and management and was very particular about discipline and punctuality. He invited foreign consultants to lecture and to conduct workshops; he conducted study tours. The ‘inner circle’ he set up became the centre point of these ventures.

Hemraj Samani remembers a 10-day trip to Bangalore and Madras organized by Menon. A group of about 20 entrepreneurs travelled in five cars. The plan was to study various industries and enterprises and to visit the industrial trade fair held at Madras. Samani says that he got a lot of pointers for running his own venture in the course of that trip. Basically an engineer, Menon had an all-round vision of industrial management. He was keen about worker training and welfare. Kolhapur was till then primarily known as a repair center. It can be said that Menon was responsible for bringing comprehensive technology to Kolhapur. His efforts towards the engineering association and the Productivity Council brought him public acclaim. He later served on the selection board of the University for the MBA curriculum. He was associated with national level organizations such as the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the IIM. His strictness in never compromising on principles fetched him wide acclaim. He was invited to participate in the management of local banks and educational institutions; these activities did not hold his interest for long. He gradually withdrew his attention from the Council and the Association, once these had settled into routine. His interests lay in matters connected with production: technology, quality control and industrial management. In these fields Menon was always available as an advisor, either to individuals or to institutions. Menon continued his allied activities side by side with oil engine production. In 1965 he launched his automotive engine reconditioning division where he installed machinery not normally available with auto workshops.

Oil engines were a roaring business up to 1967. A survey that Menon commissioned Kirloskar Consultants to undertake the earlier year had resulted in a conviction that diesel engines were a growth field. The business

had till then often gone through highs and lows; the impact of the Gulf War of 1967, though, was very hard. Local industrialists did not have the holding capacity to survive through that massive downturn. Engine manufacture factories began to close down and the enterprise eventually moved to Gujarat. The Menon brothers realized that the supply of pistons was rather erratic: prices kept going up. Piston manufacture requires high precision and high levels of accuracy. There were just two piston manufacturers in those days in India: Escorts-Mahale and India Pistons. Both these were in technical collaboration with foreign companies, one British and the other German. The Menon brothers decided that they would start the manufacture of pistons without any foreign help: the venture was started in Menon Ancillaries to begin with and culminated in the establishment of Menon Pistons as a separate unit in the Shirolji industrial estate. Arun Kirloskar was driving by and seeing the signboard of the proposed Piston manufacturing plant coming up in Shirolji, Kolhapur walked in and bluntly asked Ram Menon, who was then sitting under a tree supervising the construction of the factory premises, "Menon, can you make pistons for my Cummins engine?" The Alfin piston required for the engine in question is a complex business: it requires a ring carrier. Menon had nursed ambitions of making this product for a long time. He therefore replied, "If anyone in the country is making these pistons, my unit definitely can." Menon went on to become the first manufacturer of pistons equipped with ring carriers in the country. He acquired a farmhouse plot near the Shirolji industrial estate, opposite the Sakal newspaper office. His efforts of digging a well there were rewarded with plenty of water: The place also became a favourite leisure venue for Menon and friends.

Menon's industrial contacts were also on the increase. Devendra Oberoi's uncle had migrated to Kolhapur after the Partition. The young Devendra went into business with his father and uncle and came into contact with the Menon brothers. He spent hours discussing things with Chavan, Phadtare and others at the PAKCO factory gates. The group regularly had monthly dinners together, normally in the Kolhapuri or Punjabi style. Oberoi took over the scrap business of Iqbal Patel in 1968 and recalls that at that time Menon would personally come over to sell scrap. He had a car, but very often arrived on a two-wheeler, with his brother riding pillion. Casual chats at that time led Devendra's father Pyarelal Oberoi to the conviction that this man was destined to go far. Those times had seen the gradual assembly of a large number of capable technical hands in Menon's plant like Chitale, Tanksale and Dixit. The group would very often walk to Parameswaran's bungalow, 'Jyoti,' and return home late after a badminton session. At such times, Menon made it a practice to drop them at their respective houses in his car.

Meanwhile, the Peace Corps volunteers developed a good rapport with the emerging industrialists in Kolhapur. They had an opportunity to countercheck the observations of their predecessors. Their assignment lasted for two years and they were free in 1968. Rolfe Eastman, one of the team, felt a wish to stay back in Kolhapur and began scouting for opportunities.

There was a strong reason for this wish: his neighbour where he lived was Hanmantrao Tatyasaheb Patil, an engineer handling a senior post at the

sugar mill in Kolhapur. That gentleman had, with the backing of Shahu Maharaj, proceeded to the US for higher education, completed his course and later worked for a decade and half with the Ford Motor Company. He returned to Kolhapur in response to a promise made to the Shahu Maharaj to be available on call. The Maharaj wanted his help to develop the sugar industry in Kolhapur. Hanmantrao Patil had an affinity for Americans as a result of his long stint in that country. The Peace Corps volunteers needed to absorb the local language and this task fell on Patil's daughter, Eastman's next door neighbour. Love arose between the two; the problem was of broaching the subject with the girl's father. Eastman approached Menon. Menon enlisted the support of Udaysinghrao Gaikwad, who later became the union industries minister, and the two talked to the girl's father. They convinced Patil about Eastman's merits and prevailed upon him to ignore the religion angle. The two were married in November 1969.

Eastman's term had expired in 1968 and the next team had already arrived. Rolfe was aware that Menon needed trainers. The two had had several discussions on management issues and had also worked together on several occasions. Menon mentioned that in spite of good turnover, there were periods of financial squeeze. Rolfe, an MBA Finance, was a finance expert and he agreed to study the matter. The diesel engine business was at that time going through a period of recession and strategic action was needed. Just then it became necessary for Rolfe to visit his home in Burlington, Vermont for a month. Rolfe agreed to work with Menon for six months on his return and Menon financed his trip home and back.

Several new entrants joined Menon in the course of 1968-69 and some have recounted their memories. One such was S. R. Patil who joined Menon in June 1968 at the age of about 22. He had worked with the Chougules of Goa for a year after completing his ITI course and had developed good skills as a fitter while the going was good for the engine industry. He assisted Pundisaheb for about two years in new product development. Menon was obsessed with the ambition of developing new products and Patil was equally obsessed with learning. He was inducted into the machine shop; his inability to read drawings became a handicap and he frankly put this up to Menon. His clear admission pleased Menon. Workers were rather wary of approaching Menon, but Menon respected frankness in his people. He told Patil that this very clarity would help him learn. He trained himself in about a month and was posted to the development department. Menon habitually taught any willing student and was always prepared for training sessions, at times lasting a few days. The relationship resulted in a special place for Patil in Menon's esteem.

S. V. R. Rao was a quality control and operations research specialist working in Bangalore. Menon was on the look out for a foundry operations advisor. Rao introduced him to A. V. Kulkarni and in the course of an inspection visit to the foundry where Kulkarni worked, he got to know Kulkarni better. Menon, in his quest for growth, was always on the lookout for fresh talent. He realized that he needed capable people to realize his ambitions and had his eye out for men who he saw as dedicated quality conscious. He had hired Nandakumar, a machining specialist working for Ashok Leyland, and was

looking for specialists in various disciplines. He invited Rao to join him. The prospect of a move from a secure government job to the private sector, and to a new venture at that, put Rao in a quandary. The image that he saw of Menon's attitude attracted him. He spent just three years with Menon before returning to government service, but recalls that those three years (1969-72) were a great contribution to his career. That was the period of rapid development for the Menon enterprise and the two spent hours on end in discussions. Rao believes that Menon and he drew very close to each other during that period. They routinely went out together for their morning walks and had free discussions even on very personal matters. Ram Menon too was a frequent companion and the decision for setting up separate industrial groups arose around then, a development to which Rao was witness. Further steps were taken on the lines of the plans drawn up during that period.

Rolfe Eastman duly returned from the US and went into collaboration with Allen Cohen. Cohen's field was behavioural science. By then, Menon had developed a deep insight into management as a science and had had several interesting experiences of behavioural problems. He therefore readily took to the idea of Cohen and Eastman acting as consultants to his venture. They decided that the new company would invest in the Menon venture and both sides would thus prosper. The Peace Corps was primarily a technologically oriented organization, but Menon had realized that what was needed now was management expertise. This fact had not yet dawned on the rest of the Kolhapur industrial community: the main reliance was on bureaucracy. Unfortunately the government did not see its way into letting Cohen execute his plans, and the company that he had conceived did not come into existence. Menon had however made up his mind to take advantage of Cohen's expertise. He drew up a questionnaire of about 150 problems along with Eastman and organized a three-day workshop to discuss these in detail and suggest solutions to solve them. The whole company leadership was to undertake a three-day sojourn at Panhala, a nearby resort, to tackle these problems and find solutions. Menon by that time had decided in his own mind the corporate objectives of his company. His communication to all his colleagues on August 12, 1969 reads:

"We sat together and had a problem-solving session at Panhala on Friday, the 7th. On Friday the 14th, we are all going to set off from the factory and reach Panhala by evening. I have drawn up a statement of objectives for our company and a copy is attached. We shall have in-depth discussions and the final policy, decided through consensus, will be binding on all in toto." The draft policy that Menon had prepared is as follows:

Thoughts on our Corporate Policy

"Our country at the moment is going through difficult times due to two main reasons: massive population growth and an underdeveloped economy. If our land is to progress, the population explosion needs to be contained and available resources need to be distributed in a way beneficial to all so as to raise the overall standard of living. But we are at the moment faced with the

problem of a vicious circle of population pressures and badly planned economics.

“There is a tendency to look for scapegoats who can be conveniently sacrificed. Private industry and the government trade charges. Workmen blame the managements and managements point fingers at the ‘pampered’ worker class. Even the innocent customer is at times blamed. Public undertakings are projected as unproductive and private enterprise as a source of massive wealth and black money.

“What is this sort of mudslinging and blame transfer going to achieve? We need to have a constructive view. Several people and groups have the genuine intention of solving the ongoing problems and improving the nation’s lot. We must throw in our backing to these. We should support the government’s moves towards constructive moves to enhance living standards. We should similarly collaborate with universities and research institutions so as to convert their efforts into tangible results. We must collaborate with national and international organizations which are working towards the national good. We should deal with other industrial organizations with a healthy mix of partnership and competition, towards the nation’s larger benefit. We should help educational institutions to contribute to the improvement of circumstances. We should look towards improving our productivity and quality of service through our gains, rather than looking at profit alone. We must ensure that there is optimum use of time, capital and equipment so that the customer is served best. In this way, if we ensure that the goals of the Company are the same as the goals of the country, both stand to benefit. Each of us stands to draw the double satisfaction of putting in full efforts towards his Company and towards his country.

“Our goals should therefore be the dual ones of improving the state of the Company and of the nation. This should be the main focus when we deal with our collaborators: improvement in our service capabilities.”

The 14th of August accordingly saw all leading lights with Menon proceeding to Panhala. Joyce Cohen too accompanied the group along with her husband Allen Cohen and Rolfe Eastman. Dilip Mande, an acquaintance of S. V. R. Rao, came as his guest. He had worked at Kolkata and Chennai after his M. Sc. in Mathematics and Statistics. He became Rao’s friend around this period. He had stopped by at Rao’s house at Kolhapur on the journey from Mumbai to Chennai and was introduced to Menon. He was invited to the Panhala workshop and Menon put him into one of the discussion groups. Mrs. Cohen was the group leader. Groups had been formed to discuss various topics and the other members of Mrs. Cohen’s group were Sreedharan, Parameswaran, Murali and Mande. Mande was designated to take notes and Parameswaran to present the results to the meeting in general. In the event, Mrs. Cohen enjoined upon the young Mande to make the presentation himself. By sheer chance, their group’s turn came first. Menon did not agree with the recommendations made by that group, and recorded his disagreement very bluntly. Mande simply recorded that his recommendations had been arrived at through comprehensive discussions. But Mrs. Cohen asserted that since

Menon had made such scathing comments on the group's recommendations, she was forced to defend them. Menon's opinions were not at all welcome, and this could be considered a battle.

The atmosphere got a bit heated up. When asked by Sreedharan, Allen Cohen said he felt a sense of regret. He felt that guests had been mistreated, a thing unknown in Indian culture. Menon was witness to the whole discussion, and his reaction was exemplary. With brimming eyes he said that he had no intention of insulting a guest. Going further, he said he had seen the nature of his own routine behaviour in the Company. Such intolerance is not at all consistent with democracy. Rolfe Eastman recounts that admission of one's mistake was an indication of personal humility. The central personality is looked upon for inspiration and influences all those around him. This provides that figure with opportunities for self-analysis. Menon had set a shining example of setting aside his ego. All ideas that arose at Panhala were revolutionary, with free interchange of ideas and opinions, such as rarely seen even in large industrial organizations. Menon's innovation in calling in experts in various fields for interaction was a rare phenomenon. Even his draft of the corporate philosophy was unique in nature and served to engender the cooperative spirit. All in all, the Panhala workshop can be said to be an important landmark in Menon's career.

His association with Cohen led Menon to the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad. Shortly afterwards he himself completed a course there. He was always on the lookout for new weapons to add to his armoury. The Panhala workshop led to another outcome. Rao was in favour of Mande joining Menon. The fiery exchange at Panhala seemed to have put paid to this idea. But a few months later Mande unexpectedly received an appointment letter from Menon. His experience of Menon's vision and broad mindedness had already impressed him. He felt it a challenge to work in such a progressive organization, and went on to become a major pillar with the Group. Mande recently retired from the services of the company. He was a senior General Manager at the time of his retirement.

Rolfe Eastman married in November. Menon found he had business in the South and planned a trip for the four of them by car. Halfway back, he told Rolfe to proceed; he had made alternative arrangement for himself and the newlyweds should get back to town at leisure with his car and driver, visiting Jog Falls en route, since they needed privacy. Rolfe stayed on until the middle of December and then returned to his home town to continue his education. His association with Menon remained till the end. He had returned for a brief stint with Menon in 1970-71, since Menon continued to need his help.

Menon and Menon Engineering became Menon and Menon Pvt. Ltd. on October 1, 1969. The manufacture of Oil engines was big business in Kolhapur and the Menon account was the heftiest. When Menon converted his company into a limited liability company, his bank, The United Western roped in Bank of Baroda as consortium partner so as to handle the increased liability. The move did not really find favour with Menon; he had old and deep associations with United Western and did not want a third party involved.

Menon's dealings with the bank were normally at the manager or assistant manager level, but he also made it a practice to interact with all the others in the bank right from the Chairman to the staff of the branch which dealt with the account, each of whom he knew by name. Menon also hosted an annual dinner for all the Officers and staff at the branch. Since the RBI guidelines prohibited exposure in a company beyond a particular level, United Western Bank was forced to bring in another bank as a consortium member. That was the time when Ghorpade was posted to Kolhapur to increase Bank of Baroda's business in the region. Sensing an opportunity he promptly agreed to participate in the consortium and thus started the company's long association with Bank of Baroda, which continues uninterrupted even to this day.

Around this time another trusted lieutenant, his young brother-in-law Pundi Parameswaran, joined Menon. He had completed his engineering education from Tiruvananthapuram after he did his Inter Science in Kochi. His father had passed away at the end of 1967, and he was looking around for employment. Menon asked him to join him instead of looking elsewhere. Menon's outfit was quite small in 1968 and it was growing rapidly. Menon did not abruptly load Parameswaran with heavy responsibility. He made up a two-year schedule of hands-on training in all the departments of the company including pattern making, foundry, engine assembly and machine shop. He personally supervised each phase of Pundi's training and ensured that he would acquire the requisite knowledge, skills and confidence; Pundi too put his full faith in Menon in the years of his development. The year 1970-71 was a year of depression, and it was during this crucial period of metamorphosis that Menon got the assistance of Parameswaran.

By then Menon had built a wide spread reputation as a technocrat and entrepreneur according to Dr. Sushilkumar Basu who had taken over as Deputy Director with the CMIR, an associated organization of the National Chemical Laboratory. Its Pune branch was inaugurated at the hands of S.L. Kirloskar, and its technology advisory committee routinely hired industry consultants as members. The committee made recommendations as to ventures appropriate to local conditions. It toured the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa and found out which enterprise was in need of advice and guidance. It also toured industrially upcoming areas such as Solapur, Nashik, Kolhapur and Sangli. Dr. Basu succeeded in getting Menon on to this advisory committee in his capacity as a prominent industrialist in Kolhapur. Menon Pistons had just started then. In absence of a nonferrous foundry in Pune, Menon had seen this as a worthwhile opportunity. On one occasion when Dr. Basu and his team were en route to Goa, Menon invited them for a stopover at Kolhapur and arranged for their stay. Menon played a major role in the establishment of the Kolhapur Institute of Technology. Dr. Basu got excellent support from Menon in all schemes that he planned and executed, until his transfer to Durgapur in 1973.

Dr. T. Ravindranath had undertaken a trip of England and the US after obtaining his doctorate in 1973. He took up duties as a scientist with the National Chemical Laboratory in Pune on his return. One day when he

returned home his wife informed him that his brother was waiting to meet him: it turned out to be Menon. He had come to Pune to meet the Director of MERADO – Mechanical Engineering Research and Development Organization, and tracked down Dr. Ravindranath. The scientist recalls Menon's assertion: "I am not as lucky as you to have had advanced education. Mine has been extremely perfunctory. But people seem to be under the impression that I am highly qualified. Dr. Basu of MERADO is a close friend and keeps summoning me for technical advice."

Realizing that the future of oil engines was limited, Menon had kept his eye out for alternative lines of manufacture. He decided to enter the field of automotive castings. He developed manufacturing lines in housings, gearboxes, cylinder blocks and engine heads. It was from this business that he really took off. It was necessary to expand the foundry and Menon hunted and found experts in foundry sciences. He realized that a large market exists for tractor castings: he undertook a countrywide study tour to gauge the prospects and launched new products in that line. His fondness for state-of-the-art technology drew him into newer and newer areas. He always said: "A man is limited by his mind – a man who dares to dream and puts in the requisite effort would definitely see the fruition of his dreams. Later, however, he may realize that he did not dream big enough." Menon had a rare talent of absorbing and emulating anything new that he saw.. According to Pundi Parameswaran, once Menon had taken up a new field, he never looked back. He would be engrossed in understanding the ramifications of this new technology.



AN ERA OF PROGRESS

Kirloskar Consultants was established as a consultancy arm of the Kirloskar group in the year 1963. They had sent out letters to several companies to generate business. Of the replies they got was a nice letter from Menon and Menon, signed by 'T.C. K. Menon.' Thus began the acquaintance with D. V. Tikekar of Kirloskar Consultants. They also carried out a survey for Menon. Tikekar was impressed by the fact that an outsider was successful in firmly establishing himself in Kolhapur. Menon struck Tikekar as a very civil, ambitious and emotional man. Menon wished to have detailed discussions with the legendary Shantanurao Kirloskar. Around 1970-71, Tikekar took Menon to Kirloskar Oil Engines for a meeting with him. Kirloskar and Menon were both diesel engine manufacturers and therefore competitors, but they had no difficulty in having an amicable dialogue. Right at the beginning of the meeting, Shantanurao asked Menon what the initials TCK stood for. Menon explained that it was a traditional naming system in Kerala where the first letter stood for the family name (Thotapillil), the next letter the person's given name (Chandrashekhar) and the last letter the person's father's name (Krishnan). Shantanurao then asked him if he could address him as Chandran. Menon was very pleased at this friendliness and informality. Menon developed such a close rapport with S. L. Kirloskar that a few years later when SLK became the Chairman of the Indian Diesel Engine Manufacturers Association, he requested Menon to be the Vice-Chairman. They maintained this close contact right till the end. Menon also sent a lot of entrepreneurs to Kirloskar Consultants for help in their new ventures or for solutions to their difficulties.

Around this time, Arun Kirloskar got to know Menon. He had studied in Kolhapur and scouting for subcontractors for Cummins. As narrated earlier, he saw the Menon Pistons signboard and met Ram Menon sitting under a tree. Ram Menon successfully developed pistons to meet his requirements fully. Arun Kirloskar recalls that others kept telling him that the necessary technology did not exist in the country and so he could never get his needs met here, but Menon proved them wrong. Cummins, of course gave full technical support, but Menon was able to make proper use of the available facility and satisfy the customer's needs. While others looked at problems, the Menon brothers were able to look at opportunities. Arun Kirloskar asserts that the assistance of Ram and Chandran Menon was invaluable in the success of Kirloskar Cummins. He also states that he respects Chandran Menon for his capacity for hard work, straightforward nature and respect for commitment. Menon's efforts at developing new customers were ongoing, and M. S. S. Varadan of HMT remembers making a couple of visits to Kolhapur in the period 1970- 72.

The year 1971-72 saw Menon coming into contact with Escorts. S. S. Upadhyay shares memories of this period. He joined Escorts at the Faridabad tractor project after a 19-year stint at Telco, Jamshedpur. While in Telco, Upadhyay had heard of Menon as a supplier of quality components. This was a period when the auto component industry was taking root in India. Till then, all the vehicle manufacturers made all the components themselves - except for parts like tyres, batteries etc. Upadhyay and his team were scouring the country for part suppliers. He had heard that Menon had expanded his range and had now set up a foundry to manufacture cylinder heads. He made a few trips to Maharashtra and visited all the facilities between Mumbai and Kolhapur; naturally he met Menon. He wanted cylinder heads made in a specific time. Menon rose to the challenge and agreed to meet the tough, almost impossible, time targets.

Menon spent a good part of the next three months on the factory floor. He designed the toolings, firmed up the manufacturing processes and finally made the castings well within the specified time limit. However, during the course of trials, a water leak was noticed from the valve seat area. Menon immediately started working on the problem but the problem took some time to sort out. Cylinder heads and cylinder blocks are considered to be the most complex castings to produce and Menon had undertaken to face this challenge when much larger foundries had declined to take it up. Escorts also had a deadline to meet and the launch of their product was getting delayed. Pressures from the Escorts management were increasing, but the learning process had to be completed. A few hot words were also exchanged. However, Menon assured Escorts that he would soon be successful. Work continued at a hectic pace in the Menon plant. Everyone at Menon, especially the owner of the company, was putting in inhuman working hours. Finally they were able to sort out the problem and the first consignment was despatched to Escorts a little late but well within the specified quality norms. Menon had risen to the occasion and saved the day for Escorts.

Massey Ferguson and Punjab Tractors dominated the tractor industry at that time, and Escorts wanted to compete with them. Escorts did not have their own foundry and forging shop; they were the first to look at suppliers to meet their auto-component needs. In fact Escorts could be called the pioneer, who helped establish the auto component industry in India and Menon was probably the first nonproprietary auto component supplier. Initially Menon produced the casting and also rough-machined the part. Finish-machining activities were carried out at Escorts. Later, on the strength of his enthusiasm and competence, he obtained the contract to fully machine the part.

Upadhyay says that after the initial friction, Menon and he became good friends. He calls Menon a true fighter. He had a combination of ambition, the daring spirit and also humility. His keen intelligence and deep knowledge of the foundry and machining technologies helped Escorts in many of their future development efforts. He not only became a trusted and capable friend but also an advisor to a large number of technocrats at Escorts. Development of the Ford Tractor cylinder head was a big challenge and it would be a big contribution to indigenization. The Ford authorities were pleased at the speed

with which Menon achieved the task. Later he also got export opportunities. Besides Escorts, even DCM Engineering products and Ennore Foundries gained confidence because of him. Escorts were able to turn out world-class tractors. The product vastly helped the farmers in the north and south to increase their wheat and rice production at reasonable costs.

People at Menon too have provided some details of the Escorts assignment. Cylinder block production was slow, but the quality was unquestionable. The people from Escorts urged them to increase production; they even conducted a study and provided plans and flowcharts. Menon increased production with their aid, but the levels were still short of Escorts expectations. Menon was a stickler for methodical work. Shankarrao Nesarkar recalls that there was doubt as to their abilities in terms of producing the Escorts blocks in large numbers. Producing a sample at first attempt was fine, but the acid test was to produce these complex parts in sufficiently large numbers to meet demands and to make money. Earlier, challenging jobs like manufacturing WRG housings and trumpet housings had been successfully executed. Menon understood that the real test as an organization was to manufacture a profitable product. He gave ideas, guidance and encouragement to all, admonishing them when they erred, prodding them, encouraging them in their mission. He would be vastly pleased when they succeeded and was free with words of congratulations and praise.

This phase in the development of the company was the most crucial and finally Menon succeeded in his attempts. He upgraded the manufacturing facilities in the foundry and machine shop to make Escorts castings, and began to supply the castings as fully machined components ready for assembly. Mohammed Saheb Hudli remembers that Escorts Managing Director Rajan Nanda was so pleased at the successful and timely development of their complex components that he invited Menon to Delhi for a felicitation and awarded Menon with a citation.

Hakikat Singh, who was later head of tractor manufacturing at Escorts, recalls the time when the components were developed for Escorts. Menon had seen in the year 1969-70 that there was vast potential for tractors in an agrarian economy like India and was therefore looking at opportunities to enter the tractor industry. Hakikat Singh was Tool Room Manager with Escorts from 1965. He had a slight acquaintance with Menon from his stint at the Khadki Ordnance Factory in 1950. He later spent five years in Germany and joined Escorts on his return in 1964. In 1974, Escorts was sourcing tractor engines from Kirloskar and also importing from Germany. Engine manufacture was later stopped in Germany, and technology was not available for indigenous manufacture. Hakikat Singh suggested to Rajan Nanda that they manufacture the engines in-house. Nanda agreed, and a team of six executives left for Gujarat and Maharashtra to hunt for subcontractors. It was known that engine castings were made in these areas. They had a meeting with Menon who undertook to develop the cylinder heads and blocks. However, that involved a capital outlay of Rs 4 million. His proposal was sound but such a large outlay required clearance from the top management and so Menon was invited to Faridabad for talks, which took place at several levels. Nanda was not inclined

to commit such a large amount. Menon was disappointed at what he thought had been a long, wasted trip, and was on the way down the stairs, where he ran into Hakikat Singh. Once they were done with asking after each other, Menon related the entire episode. He then left for Kolhapur. Hakikat Singh met Nanda that evening and raised the topic. Nanda asked him what he knew of Menon. Hakikat Singh gave him his opinion of Menon and his capabilities. After he heard this, Rajan Nanda directed Hakikat Singh to visit Kolhapur and see if something could be worked out. He flew to Kolhapur, and landed there before Menon who was travelling by rail. He made a round of the factory to gauge the possibilities of a solution. Menon was surprised to see him; they then had detailed discussions. Hakikat Singh returned to Delhi and submitted his report. He proposed that part of Escorts projected manufacturing activity be subcontracted to Menon, and that he should also be provided with the necessary machinery. Nanda agreed to the proposal and the association soon began.

Hakikat Singh accordingly despatched some jobs and machinery to Kolhapur. He made it a practice to make weekly visits. Castings development, casting manufacture and machining activities soon started. Just as the first batch was ready, the workers who were then negotiating one of the three-year wage negotiations rose up in revolt. They looked at this as an opportunity to gain a fresh advantageous settlement. They stopped work and stopped the truck that was already loaded with the Escorts blocks. With Menon's permission, Hakikat Singh addressed the workers. He told them that they were putting the cart before the horse. Prosperity would come only after the customer was happy with the product quality and delivery. They should work towards satisfying the customer, and once that was taken care of, prosperity would follow. How could Menon meet their demands unless he got money, he asked. Fortunately, the workers relented and the truck went on its way. That was a crucial moment, since the production line at Escorts was waiting for these components.

After that Menon made further components such as gearboxes and differentials. At one time Menon was manufacturing almost all the castings used in the Escorts tractors at his Vikramnagar plant. He had a burning ambition to prove that he could succeed in any job he was given, and he kept getting more and more work from Escorts. Escorts also gained considerably from this exercise.

Hakikat Singh has also described the factory of those days. The foundry comprised of just one rotary furnace and two electrical furnaces. The ground was not levelled and the mould boxes were laboriously carried about the foundry like animal carcasses. Gradually lines were established and conveyors came up. Progress at Menon mirrored progress in the Indian foundry industry. Menon's foundry was a benchmark for others to follow and the practices pioneered here was soon adopted by all the foundries in India. Thus Menon's efforts not only benefited the tractor industry but it also helped develop the nascent foundry industry which is today considered to be a thrust industry with capabilities to be the most competitive in the world.

The mutual co-operation between these two organizations benefited both enormously, as Escorts did not have a foundry or forging shop then. Hakikat Singh and Menon developed a deep personal rapport and understanding. Both sides were happy to - contribute towards the development of the nation. Hakikat Singh kept Menon informed about all that he saw abroad. Menon not only absorbed the foreign technology but also innovated on his own. He was constantly experimenting with new patterns. He would try to make up the lack of machinery through ingenuity. He had a dream of building up a clean and neat foundry such as nowhere else.

Menon was keenly aware that good toolings are a prerequisite for a good casting, and for this he relied heavily on Madhu Mestry. Menon had great faith in his capabilities; in fact he was personally trained by Menon to carry out these demanding tasks. Madhu Mestry also wanted to prove to his boss that nothing was impossible in his hands. (His rise, starting out from an ordinary helper to the Assistant General Manager of the plant, makes a fascinating story.) The people at Escorts constantly helped in production planning and quality testing. Hakikat Singh remembers that the first CNC machining centre arrived in the factory in 1978. The association and regular visits by Hakikat Singh continued right up to his retirement in 1985.

C. M. Malhotra of Escorts states that they started tractor manufacture in 1972. In 1974-75, the Supply Department was set up. Menon was then making all types of housings – cylinder blocks, cylinder heads; exhaust manifolds of various kinds, transmission gearboxes, differential housings, etc. Menon personally looked into any technical questions that arose and got them solved. He never acted purely as a supplier. A personal relationship arose between the two. Menon was a competent technologist, and a very astute and insightful businessman. Malhotra says he held regular correspondence with Menon, and the understanding between them was such that Menon at times went against the wishes of his own people to complete a job for Escorts. Malhotra just feels one regret, that Chandran Menon did not live to see the final fructification of his efforts.

Anandrao Topkar writes in the October-December '93 issue of Menonchi Manse (Menon's Men): "The foundry was started in 1966, and a large order came in from Escorts for WRG and trumpet housings. 1970 saw a major depression in the industry, but Menon did not retrench a single employee. The Escorts finished cylinder blocks order came in 1975, and the unit progressed rapidly. Menon gave us full freedom in the machine shop. We had the freedom to modify the design wherever desirable. My ideal in the Menon Company was Chandran Menon Saheb himself. It was he who inculcated in us the spirit of working with a view of the Company's progress, and of immersing ourselves in work."

Mohammed Saheb Hudli says that Menon supplied various parts to practically all tractor manufacturers in the country. Menon thus was responsible for putting Kolhapur on the industrial map of India. Menon did a lot of work for the "Harsha-Menon" project at Delhi in 1973-74. Tractor manufacturer Harsha wanted technical inputs for producing a multi-cylinder tractor engine in India

and so approached Menon, who was by that time accepted as an authority on the subject. Menon provided them with all the required information. They wanted to develop a Russian type tractor, and Menon was to manufacture the water-cooled engines for these tractors. Menon prepared a project proposal for the manufacture of these engines. The discussions went on for a long time and the basic project parameters were finalized. Harsha was expected to invest the required funds; when Harsha backed out of this commitment Menon withdrew. Without Menon's involvement the project was not feasible and so the project had to be abandoned.

Menon then continued his focus as a jobbing shop for all the tractor OEMs in the country. He first took up the development of Escorts cylinder heads and cylinder blocks. Pundi Parameswaran remembers that Menon was confident of meeting Escorts needs, but they were sceptical, on the grounds that Menon did not have the necessary machinery. Menon replied: "If necessary I will work with my hands, but I will deliver to your specifications." He signed the contract and returned to Kolhapur with the order and drawings, having committed to submit the first lot in 4 months. He decided set up facilities to manufacture these components cost effectively. As a result of the close friendship that evolved between Menon and Dr. S. M. Patil of HMT, Menon opted for the more expensive, but better quality HMT machines for the project. Good machines and the well-designed toolings, which was Menon's forte, ensured that the customer was happy with the quality levels that he was able to achieve.

Madhu Mestry recalls that during this phase of the company's growth Menon once spent two days and three nights at a stretch at the factory. In this period, he ate what was provided for all, instead of his customary home food. The first thing that Menon did when he arrived at Kolhapur with the Escorts order was to book his passage to Delhi on the day the sample was to be submitted. All other activities were worked backwards to ensure that the commitment he made was kept up. He worked day and night with Bhupal Mestry, Madhu Mestry and others, and completed 250 pieces. He himself rejected 70 of these, and despatched the rest to reach Escorts on the committed day. The whole lot was accepted in toto.

Another important customer, besides Escorts, was Mahindra and Mahindra. Their controller of materials, Rajan Narayan, has recorded in his condolence message for Chandran Menon: "The Seventies were a decade of emergency for Mahindras due to the oil shock. The market for Mahindra petrol jeeps collapsed, and the idea of a diesel jeep was mooted. Mahindra and Mahindra gave the challenging task of making its blocks to Menon. With his patience, hard work, determination and dedication Menon and Menon delivered ahead of time and to excellent quality, and production commenced. Chandran Menon handed over the 1000th block to B. R. Sule, who was at that time the Managing Director of Mahindra, ahead of schedule. Mahindra and Mahindra can never forget that day. Due to the cooperation and guidance of Chandran Menon, the Menon organization successfully stood by Mahindra and Mahindra during a difficult period."

Mahindra Vice President Baptist D'Souza detailed the long and close association between Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M) and Menon and Menon (M&M). He says both Menon brothers were together all the time. The oil crisis of 1973 pushed petrol prices through the roof. Mahindra in those days exclusively made petrol vehicles and their sales, healthy so far, went into a tailspin: from 10,000 units it slid to 3,000. The only solution was to develop a diesel engine: diesel cost just 25% of petrol. Fortunately, Mahindras had a tractor division, and it made diesel engines; however, these were slow speed engines suitable for off-highway applications and were not suitable for automotive applications like jeeps. Tractor sales were handled by Voltas, who were not showing much of interest, and sales were quite sluggish. MICO of Bangalore was approached to study if the fuel injection system could be improved upon. The efforts were successful. The engine was modified the fuel delivery system was upgraded and a diesel jeep was launched in the market. Sales picked up. The company now had to bring down costs and productionize these engines. Nand Koliyar was the Purchase Chief at Mahindra. He made enquiries for sources of engine blocks for diesel engines. He and another official, Welingkar, proceeded to Kolhapur and inspected Menon's works. Satisfied with what they saw, they started discussions. Menon needed some special purpose machines for this. The Mahindra people were so impressed with Menon and his transparency in dealings that they immediately - agreed to meet his requirement. Menon gave them the blocks they required at the price they needed, and the progress curve began to rise. Later, Mahindras launched direct injection engines, where again Menon's support turned out to be invaluable. Since his was not an automotive foundry, castings had to be procured from Ennore. Mahindra had their own foundry but it had limited capacity and was mainly devoted to tractor engines castings. Menon lacked some special machine tools; he therefore carried out 85% of the machining, the final working being done at Mahindra. This arrangement worked without a hitch. Menon was primarily a technologist, not a businessman. For him, quality was supreme. There were occasions when this trait got him into trouble, D'Souza says.

D. R. Swar, currently a Director of Kirloskar Oil Engines, was in those days working with Mahindra. He too has recorded his memories of the period. The idea of fitting a tractor diesel engine to a jeep, to combat the stagnation due to the Gulf War, was in a way like trying to hitch a donkey to a horse carriage. This engine was made in the tractor division. Five or six main parts were made in the unit, and the rest brought in from subcontractors. After modification, assembly and testing, these were tried on the jeep chassis. The venture succeeded and production picked up in the next couple of years. Further development would have needed further capital, but D'Souza, then Chief of Operations, bypassed this by getting more parts made outside. Swar was assigned the task of developing sources for cylinder heads, crankshafts, etc. On learning of the Kulkarni outfit at Ichalkaranji, where connecting rods were in production, he proceeded to Kolhapur. Industrialists like Zanwar, Sakharpe and others were engaged in making parts for the Kirloskar engine. He learned of Menon from these people. He visited the Menon workshop and foundry. It was old fashioned, but Swar saw a two-cylinder block under production for Escorts. A personal meeting with Menon vastly impressed him.

He was convinced that Menon would see any problem resolutely through to the end. It was decided to manufacture the 4-cylinder block here. A lot of people at Mahindra, especially those who had not interacted with Menon or seen the capabilities of his shop, expressed doubts whether this could be successfully developed. Swar was however very confident about the outcome of this venture. He made several trips to Kolhapur in the course of this development. He recalls that whenever he visited the shop, night or day, he would invariably find Menon there working hand in hand with his people. There on the shop floor they would discuss progress and review plans for the next stage.

This frenetic pace of work continued for two years. Swar, Darwajewala and Parasramani were the officers deputed from Mahindra for this purpose. Technology was to be provided by Mahindra, but Menon had the required technical capability and would seek their support whenever his machines proved to be a limitation. Menon looked after tool design, gauging, quality, productivity etc. Initially there was limited scope for new technology, and it was soon clear that the old methods would not give the required results in the required time. Menon met the senior Mahindra personnel at Bombay and his need for additional resources and machinery were studied and ways and means were worked out. Work then proceeded.

When the first cylinder block rolled out, everyone concerned was overjoyed. Machining of these cylinder blocks was carried out outside Mahindra for the first time and the results were better than expected. When production touched 1000 crankcases a month, there was a celebratory function and Mahindra Managing Director B. R. Sule came especially to Kolhapur to congratulate Menon and his team. Pundi Parameswaran had played an important role in this venture. Menon by this time had built a dependable and dedicated team. Menon had a keen insight into the use of human relations in business. Everyone poured his body and soul into whatever had been taken up and they had the determination to surmount any difficulty. Mahindra had ordered a multi-drilling machine for drilling the cylinder blocks. A spot decision was taken and the machine landed at Kolhapur on the third day.

S. W. Welingkar, another official with Mahindra, gives some more information. In order to make the tractor diesel engine suitable for jeep application, it was necessary to increase the stroke volume of the 4-cylinder block. The tractor engine is a slow speed 2300 cc engine running at 1800 rpm, while a jeep engine needed at least 4000 rpm. Normally the engine speed is a design parameter and cannot be increased at will, but the engineers at Mahindra devised ingenious ways to increase the swept volume and speed. These modified engines were fitted on jeeps and the vehicle was brought into the market. Naturally the vehicles were noisy, vibrated a lot and refused to pick up speed. Getting proper cylinder blocks was a big problem. Then Mahindra Materials Manager Venkatachalam, who was earlier working at Cooper Engineering, suggested Menon. He informed the company that Menon already makes one and two cylinder engines. He had his own design for a pump. D'Souza took a spot decision and rang Menon up. Menon and Pundi Parameswaran went to Kandivili to meet D'Souza. They had detailed

discussions and covered all angles. They returned to Kolhapur without definitely committing themselves. For a time thereafter there was no communication, and D'Souza was in a hurry. He loaded a block into his car and drove down to Kolhapur. Menon was eager to take up the challenge, but was also aware of his limitations. He accepted the job in view of Mahindra's enthusiasm. The job was started, and Menon eventually not only machined the cylinder block but also undertook to supply the castings. Mahindra provided all necessary technical support.

M. M. Raiji of Mahindra recalls that he visited Kolhapur at least five times during this period. He saw that Menon was not only technically competent; he also had a keen eye for the customer's wants. This is not true of all suppliers. Menon was open to new ideas and keen on developing himself and his company. Mutual relations and respect developed, there were regular visits between the experts from both the companies. Menon was fond of people and was quick to develop relationships. When the cylinder block finish machining line was established at the Kandivili plant of Mahindra, Sule requested Menon to inaugurate the line. That year the balance sheet of Mahindra also mentioned Menon's significant contributions to the performance of Mahindra and Mahindra.

Madhu Mestry states that when Menon started the Mahindra work, their whole set up was under one shed in Kandivili. When Mahindra rejected some material while processing it on their machines, Menon would show them how the process could be improved. The extremely capable technical team at Mahindra would look forward to a brainstorming session with Menon. Menon provided a brilliant example of how a supplier can be an extremely valuable asset to any OEM. Consequently, a lot of Mahindra work began to be carried out at Kolhapur. Menon helped them locate good suppliers. Mahindra therefore could free up a lot of capacity and manpower in their plant. Menon eventually turned out twice the volumes set as his target. Rajan Gongane, who was working as Asst. General Manager at Menon and Menon, says that Mahindra even got their fixtures designed and made from Menon. Here Menon helped in bringing in advanced technology. Menon never left any stone unturned to fulfil a promise.

Pundi Parameswaran has provided details about the Mahindra deal. Menon and Parameswaran visited Mumbai after the Mahindra inspection, and there D'Souza promised him, "We will not procure a single crankcase outside as long as I am alive." This put a lot of courage into Menon. Some Mahindra officials were slightly sceptical about Menon. They gave a conditional time limit of two months, and Menon completed it before time. Sule himself congratulated him. Menon had made a 4-cylinder crankcase for the first time, working purely from drawing. He supervised each stage personally. He frowned upon running to the client with technical problems and believed in solving them himself.

Another important Menon client was Hindustan Machine Tools Ltd. HMT General Manager Materials S. M. K. Sehgal recalls that tractor manufacturing had been launched in 1971, up to which time HMT was only into machine

tools. Menon began the supply of portals, rear axle housings, crankcases and many such parts. This resulted in Menon earning a big name on the Indian tractor scene. He established himself as an important OE supplier of cast and machined parts. He decided to gradually specialize in the technically high end products like cylinder blocks and cylinder heads and stop the production of other parts. He also developed critical components for the automobile industry and expanded in that direction. Madhu Mestry states that Menon had an excellent judgement of risk, when and where to take it. He undertook the venture of developing the massive 12 cylinder V-type engine block for the Ruston engine. He tried to acquire technology from wherever it was available. For this, he once deputed Pundi Parameswaran, Madhu Mestry and a few others to a tour of some of the best foundries in England and Germany. Ram Menon says that Menon held Shantanurao Kirloskar as his inspiration.

This period saw the first signs of labour unrest. Expansion spurred the demand for higher wages. S. R. Patil, who had joined Menon in his early twenties in 1968, and whom Menon had personally trained to grow, joined the labour movement and became a leader, a development Menon did not expect, or even believe at first. Patil openly led the labour. The unrest led to a 40-day strike in Menon's factory and extended right into the Emergency period that was declared by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. The peculiarity was that the workers let no member of the management enter the gates, but Menon was an exception. Menon would freely enter the premises and carry out whatever work he could do on his own. While leaving the premises he would invite them to check his car, to ensure that he was not ferrying out finished goods. He never let them agitate on the street but trustingly invited them inside the compound. He would always say that these are momentary aberrations in relationships and should be treated as such. Ultimately workmen and management have to respect one another and work together to meet customer requirements. The result was that not a single stone was thrown - a common feature of strikes, not a single glass pane was broken - a common result.

Patil states that he learned a lot during the course of this strike. There was no communication for the first fifteen days; Menon then invited Patil for talks. Patil was sure that he had lost his job. Their one-to-one conversation went on for three hours. Patil was impressed by Menon's capacity to listen patiently. Menon thought for a minute, asked questions for around five minutes and then proceeded to discuss for an hour the mistakes that had inadvertently happened during the running of the factory and the solutions thereof. He also spoke on the need for improvement in productivity. Patil then said he understood the reason why productivity improvements were necessary.

Just as Menon was quick to accept his faults Patil too had to accept the faults of his workmen. Formal talks followed, an agreement was signed and the strike was called off. The agreement was signed at night and in the morning it was noticed that due to errors in some clauses, each worker stood to lose about eight rupees. The Union leader Comrade Govind Pansare felt that once the agreement was signed, it had to be accepted. But Patil discussed the matter with Sreedharan and Mande, who played a significant role in drawing

up the agreement. Patil made the accusation of deliberate manipulation. The other two then called up Menon, who came at once to investigate. They apprised him of the situation and also of Patil's accusation. Menon turned on him and said, "Say that again." When Patil repeated himself, Menon invited Comrade Pansare. After deliberations, he announced a raise of Rs. 15 to each worker as a penalty against himself. He announced this himself in a meeting of all the workmen in a general assembly. But on principle, he expected the agreement to be adhered to fully.

Another principle agreed to was that anyone who resorted to violence in the plant would be summarily dismissed without enquiry. The Foundry Manager, Jagdale, much respected and feared, once hit a man in the factory. Patil promptly informed Menon and held back the workers to await his decision. Menon ruled that Jagdale's resignation should be obtained and handed over to Patil for a decision. Patil asked for three days, and then recommended acceptance. Menon complied.

There are other observations on Menon recorded by people who have come into contact with him. A. G. Palkar of The United Western Bank recalls that Menon had to often go the Delhi for Escorts work. Since the flight left from Pune, he drove down from Kolhapur. On his way to Pune, he would stop over at Satara and spend some time at the Bank before proceeding, a routine which brought him close to all the bank officials.

Padmakar Sapre was doing his CA articleship with Bhagwat & Company after B. Com. Menon invited him to join as Internal Auditor, and Sapre worked with him for about 10 months in 1969-70. He then set up an oil engine parts workshop under inspiration from his father, and moved to his own premises in 1977. He asserts that he was inspired by Menon's methods and handling of people. Menon was educated and fluent in English. He was aware all the time about world affairs. There is a great advantage of having educated people entering industry. Being a technologist, he was fully familiar with accounting and used to devote weeks together to study the balance sheet. He impressed Sapre with his familiarity with the subject, which Sapre found to be superior to that of a Chartered Accountant

Menon had innovative ideas in management, labour matters and all such aspects. He took the lead in arranging Management seminars in Kolhapur, and invited eminent persons such as Dr. S. M. Patil to share their experiences with the industrialists of Kolhapur. He had dedicated himself to the cause of industry in general. He did not bother himself with unconnected matters. Examples abound of industries, which folded up due to unnecessary dabbling in unrelated activities. Raghav Menon too asserts that all discussions with Menon were strictly work related. Menon neither had the time nor the inclination to do anything else. His entire life was devoted to work, which in a way was the most fulfilling thing to do. Most ventures in Udyamnagar had been started by artisans, who needed guidance in technology and management, and Menon was always available to anyone who needed his advice.

Menon's nephew Sachin was studying at Sanjeevan Vidyalaya in Panchgani, and Menon was a frequent visitor. He learned from a Keralite in the school that it had a Keralite dance teacher named Gopalakrishnan. Menon was convinced that this was his childhood friend and went to meet him. He conversed in Malayalam without disclosing his identity: after a gap of 35 years, it was impossible for Gopalakrishnan to recognize his once curly-haired schoolmate. After some banter, Menon introduced himself and Gopalakrishnan was thrilled. Menon became a regular visitor on his trips to Panchgani, and once took his friend along to Kolhapur.

Menon made his first trip to the US in 1975-76. Rolfe Eastman was there at that time, and he summoned Allen Cohen, who had at that time returned to his teaching assignment at the Harvard Business School. Menon stayed with Rolfe, and made a round of the automobile plants in the US. Rolfe says Menon had a dream of making automobiles and would have done it if he had lived longer. Menon also visited the agricultural equipment factories in France. The following summer Rolfe came to India to work for Menon for a time. He wanted to expose his children to the atmosphere of India. Menon was very fond of the children, and installed chicken pens in his garden for the sake of little Ashok. There was an ongoing arrangement of work and money with Rolfe, and he used to visit India practically every year. He would come on a tourist visa, and visa extensions, renewals and conversions were not easy those days. Menon made all the arrangements at great effort, even visiting the Embassy whenever he needed to.

After the end of the labour unrest, Menon decided on some reorganization. For this he invited Vilas Kasute, BA, MSW, then with the daily Pudhari. H. R. Patil was Labour Officer till then. Menon interviewed 25 candidates with a view to new recruitment and selected one Govande. He however left in a few months and Menon called in Kasute. Sreedharan and Parameswaran took a nominal interview, but Menon just asked one question, "Who will you work for?" Kasute responded, "You, since you are paying me." Menon was happy with the reply and hired him as Trainee Labour Officer at a salary of Rs. 500. Kasute remembers his plain speaking leading to disagreements with Menon. Kasute left Menon for a time after four years. The period 1977-80 was a good period in the history of the company, and labour got 20 per cent bonus in each of the four years. Kasute was great at results, and Menon had labelled him a 'go-getter.' Bonus demanded hard cash, which Kasute raised by obtaining advances from Voltas, Atlas Copco, Maruti and other clients.

Rajan Gongane joined Menon on 7 September 1977. He came into contact with Menon from day one, and often incurred his wrath because of his unfamiliarity with Menon's mental set up. But Menon himself explained to him his outlook: treat every mistake as an opportunity to learn, for if you don't learn, you may later make a bigger mistake. Gongane adds that Menon was unparalleled in terms of technology. He would go into great detail into every new job that came up. On being asked about this, he told Gongane that he trusted him to look after most things and did not need to go into them. It was the minor things that Gongane may overlook that he had to look into. Menon's view was that the best way to make a name for oneself in the industrial scene

would be to achieve what no one else could, accurately and in the shortest time. Gongane also recalls that he was ridiculed when he left Ghatge-Patil Industries to join Menon, and this was justified with the then situation at Menon. Even drawing paper was not available, and the reverse side of engine posters were used. Each draughtsman had a pencil to himself, but erasers were shared by two. Rubber stoppers of ammonia bottles were used as an alternative. One day, one of these was inadvertently passed to Menon. He threw it out of the window, and remarked that economy in small matters was out of place. He ordered the drawing office to be properly equipped, at all times. He personally, though, was a very simple man. He comfortably smoked bidis and chewed tobacco with workers on the shop floor. He never moved from a place until a task was completed. A. T. More mentions another success at that time: Menon's autoloaders increased the production at Bajaj twofold, and constituted a revolution. One operator could comfortably operate three machines. Dilip Mande too says that 1977-1981 was a golden era at Menon's.

In 1978, Chandran Menon got the award from the FIE Foundation of Ichalkaranji. Dr. S. M. Patil, the Chief Guest at the function, had stayed with Menon. By then, Menon had started the production of injection moulding machines. The next day, Dr. Patil was scheduled to speak at the Shivaji University. A happy event in 1978 was the marriage of Menon's elder daughter, Shanta. Menon had advertised for this in the papers and the advertisement was seen by Ramesh Narayanan's sister, who was in Mumbai. She sent it to her father. Correspondence ensued; horoscopes matched and tentative selection was conveyed on the basis of photographs. Menon then took Shanta to Kerala for a meeting; the engagement took place in July 1979 and the wedding in November thereafter. Arvind Shinde and his wife, P. G. Kulkarni and his wife and Anandrao Atigre went for the wedding, travelling in an Ambassador car. Plenty of other people had come from Kolhapur. Menon made excellent arrangements. They stayed for four days, and Shinde remembers that Menon spent the whole time dressed in the traditional Kerala mundu (lower body wrap).

Menon then held a grand reception at Kagal for all his friends and acquaintances in Kolhapur. He told them to lock up their homes (i.e. bring their entire families). Kishori Amonkar, the famous classical singer, presented a recital on the occasion. The 40 Acre plot of land at Kagal was where Menon planned to establish the new foundry project. Plans were ready and work was expected to start immediately after Shanta's wedding reception. S. S. Kinkar was the Finance Manager with Menon. The negotiations had dragged for two or three years, since the ownership of the land was distributed amongst a dozen relatives. Meanwhile, land values began to rise, and the owners began to drag their feet. Kinkar and Sreedharan got them together with great effort and they were waiting for Menon. Arriving there, Menon took a spot decision that if they did not want to sell, so be it, we shall let go. The owners left happily. Nobody had the courage to ask Menon why he had acted so precipitately. It was not practical by any means, but Menon often got carried away in this fashion.

In 1978-79, the Government brought pressure on Telco to increase production, since the waiting period for trucks was 2½ years. The main bottleneck for this was the supply of castings, since there were few manufacturers. C. V. Tikekar was given the assignment of locating a good supplier. He was from Ichalkaranji, and started his search in this area. Truck production had fallen, and Tikekar had been given this task by Sumant Moolgaokar in person. The search led him to Menon and the two got along well right from the first meeting. Menon wanted the contract, but was also concerned that other industries in the region should get orders, a sentiment that surprised and impressed Tikekar. He found excellent quality both in casting and machining at Menon's plant. He was also impressed by Menon's dedication. In response to his sentiments, Tikekar spread orders widely in the region. He was aware from Telco's experience that one who tries to grow in isolation remains small. Menon, too, respected the policies and aims of Telco. Around the same time, Menon got new contracts from Escorts in addition to those from Telco. The father of P. K. Srivastava of Escorts, Rajbahadur, was a Minister in the Central Cabinet. But he does not remember Menon ever mentioning political topics; he was single minded in his dedication to work and technology. Srivastava was impressed with the simple frankness of Menon, right from the outset. Both wished for an opportunity to work together. Srivastava recalls that there used to be two types of railway brakes. The railways commonly used vacuum brakes. Escorts decided to run trials of air brakes, which were safer and allowed goods trains of much greater length. Escorts entered into collaboration with Knorr Bremse of Munich, Germany for this purpose. Srivastava felt that Menon could successfully handle the castings requirements, so he spoke to Menon and a team armed with plans duly arrived at Kolhapur. The system was manufactured with the cooperation of three international companies. One critical component, the distributor valve housing, was a very complicated casting. The Railways felt that it would not be possible to develop the complicated distributor valve housing indigenously. Foreign companies offered the technology. Just the pattern for the casting was quoted at Rs. 20 lakhs - an astronomical sum at that time. But the Railways were in a hurry, and demanded a prototype in six months, a demand that even the Railway Board was convinced nobody would be able to meet considering the complexities involved.

Menon took up the challenge. He and his team swung into action. They worked like one family. Menon at once summoned Madhu Mestry and ordered him to start working on the design, which Mestry promptly completed. Immediately after that the patterns and other foundry toolings were manufactured and sample castings were made. This whole process from the start of design to the manufacture of the sample castings took less than 4 months. This path breaking work by Menon and his team proved to be a great morale booster to the Escorts – Railway division and consequently also to the Indian Railways. The railways were able to shift from the unreliable and expensive vacuum brakes to a more reliable and flexible air brake system leading to an improvement in the safety record. This also paved the way for additional railway business for the Escorts – Railway division. The quality of the distributor valve housings manufactured by Menon was so good that the Railways offered to buy them through Escorts. Srivastava states that today

the Railways have over a lakh wagons and bogies fitted with air brakes. Over – seventy five percent of them use Escorts air brakes. Other suppliers were Stode, Westinghouse etc. Later they were developed by other Indian companies, but the credit for the whole development goes to Menon alone. Srivastava often - told the people at Menon that the safety of the Indian Railways today is due to “your castings and our systems”.

Srivastava recalls that Menon had built up a strong team spirit. His fatherly treatment was not just towards his own people but also the young engineers of Escorts. Although he had his eye on every activity in the plant, he gave his people a lot of freedom in day-to-day operations. Another noteworthy aspect of Menon’s principled nature was that, when approached by the Railways to execute their contracts directly, he bluntly refused to deal with them directly in honour of the commitment that he had made with Escorts.

M. S. S. Varadan has described the way Menon had an eye for the progress of others along with himself. He said to Varadan on a visit to Bangalore in 1979, “Your ideas in management should be propagated. Stop looking at it as just a business. Since you are in the field of education, look at the propagation of knowledge.” It was this, Varadan feels that planted the seeds of starting a management consultancy firm in his mind. He was then the President of the Bangalore Management Association and was instrumental in first bringing Peter Drucker to India. Menon had perceived that training was Varadan’s area of strength. Dr. S. M. Patil was a constant encouragement for innovation. He was in full agreement of Menon’s contention that rather than merely exporting machine tools, it would be in the long run more fruitful to export information of these. Menon’s encouragement inspired Varadan to set up on his own. He made one trip to Kolhapur before taking the plunge. Menon did not just give his blessings: he promised him his first contract. Varadan was retained to visit Kolhapur for a few days every month.

That same year Menon went on a study tour of Europe with a group of Indian industrialists. In Germany, he hosted a dinner one evening for a group of about 35 Indians. Bapusaheb Jadhav recounts an amusing anecdote. Expensive cigars were handed out to all, and Jadhav turned his down saying he had quit smoking a couple of years earlier. Menon firmly stuck a cigar between Jadhav’s lips and applied a light, forcing Jadhav to smoke it. Menon then patted him in the back and said, “I admire your spirit. Tomorrow onwards you are back to nonsmoking.” Jadhav says that that was the only smoke he ever had after 1977. Menon had demonstrated his knack of getting close to a person, making it difficult for the other person to say no. In Switzerland Menon participated enthusiastically when the group had a snowball fight. Another industrialist from Kolhapur, Pushpashil Nageshkar was then getting jobs related to the Goa shipbuilding industry. He provided Menon with mild steel melting scrap, and also financial support at times.

A letter written by Menon on 17 June, 1979 to Rolfe Eastman is available. It gives a good insight into Menon’s business and his mental set up. He says:

17th June, 1979

Dear Rolfe,

I wish to give you some lame excuses for not writing to you earlier, which I will do later in this letter. First let me give you some information, which may be of more interest to you.

The incentive system initiated when you were here is quite a success. Today, within a span of one year, we have already covered complete machine shop including services and half of foundry under the incentive system. The complete factory including staff will be covered in 2-3 months time. The whole success of this incentive scheme belongs to you: considering that nowhere in India incentive system has been a success talks for itself.

Regarding production, the line concept, weekly production concept together with incentive scheme have given improved productivity. Today we have already surpassed an average weekly turnover of 4.50 lakhs.

We have successfully separated production and development, which are covered by separate budgets. The management of this is also separated. Mr.Kamath is solely in-charge of production; Mr.Madhu Mestry is in-charge of Foundry Development and Mr.Datar is in-charge of Machine-shop development. Todate I remember your insistence that development should be separately budgeted.

From all our customers we are now receiving development expenditure for each and every parts we take for development. This is in lines with the pattern of development and the development expenditure we received from Mahindra and Mahindra. You will be surprised to know that Escorts are willingly paying advances against development.

Concept of our budget is also taking roots. This year we will be surpassing the budget for manufacturing division for 1978-79 by Rs.5 lakhs from Rs. 2.00 crores to 2.05 crores. I feel happy that the budget was fairly tight and this could be surpassed only through intensive care and follow-up. Budget for the next year i.e., July 79 to June 80 is Rs.3.25 crores, which is under intensive discussion.

This year we will be surpassing the budgeted profitability also by over Rs.10 lakhs i.e. from Rs.25 lakhs to Rs.35 lakhs and odd. Although two more periods (8 weeks) are yet to be finished we are confident about the figure given above. Even I am agreeably surprised that Menon and Menon could show such encouraging performance given the management tools. So thank you.

Slowly but surely we are going into higher and higher technologies and better customers. After you left we added Simpsons, Madras for their latest Perkins engine blocks and heads fully machined: Telco Poona for their complicated gear box(casting & machining) for heavy vehicles. Both the above parties

have given us full development expenses as estimated by us. Within a week or so we will be finalising with Ashok Leyland for some important components. Mahindra and Mahindra is slowly becoming as big as Escorts as far as we are concerned. In this process we have slowly deleted very small customers like HTL Baroda, Punjab Tractors Ambala, Escorts Tractors Faridabad etc. To cope up with our customers' requirements we have taken up a major expansion costing Rs.56 lakhs including working capital. SICOM has sanctioned us another Rs.25 lakhs against this expansion, which is expected to be completed by December this year. By the time you visit us next I will show you around Menon and Menon which I am sure you will feel is a very different company of which you will be proud of.

You will be surprised to know that I am now the Chairman and Managing Director of Kolhapur Steel Limited. I cannot be known by this position for the time being until legal formalities as per the Companies Law are over. But I have, taken over the company fully for management and this had to be done under very pathetic circumstances. Income-Tax department reopened the assessments concerning the last 8 years. In the absence of proper accounting there is at present great difficulties cast on the organization. This, many other irregularities and dis-satisfaction of many workers and staff and even officers are making me struggle hard. I should say that I am slowly but surely succeeding. This case is very interesting and I will tell you more when we meet next. Anyway I am sure that my experience with KSL will sharpen my management skills and I will not have to ask you my old question 'what is management?'

I am dividing my time between Kolhapur Steel and Menon & Menon. Without leaving my chamber at both the places I am learning to control the operations. In KSL I am introducing one by one the systems you helped to lay down. My sense of them sharpened with the experience we gained in Menon and Menon. KSL is on the way to make steady progress. A management culture is slowly being cultivated.

I am planning to reach Dusseldorf, Germany to visit the GIFA-79 exhibition, which is held once in every five years and internationally known for foundry machinery, equipments and latest technologies. Executive Assistant to the Director-in-charge of Mahindra and Mahindra is accompanying me to discuss with their French Collaborators Peugeot. Mahindra has proposed to us that we will make cylinder block and cylinder head for these engines, which will be made in India by them and so the combined visit. The exhibition is from 9th to 15th June '79.

Rajaram is posting to you separately relevant information on progress of production and other aspects to give you more detailed information regarding our affairs. As soon as I get a little breathing time I will write in detail regarding export. One factor uppermost in my mind is that stability and cost goes together. Whenever we machine an item tentatively or experimentally on a temporary basis we are liable to process them on general purpose machines with general set ups. On the other hand if stability is guaranteed we will be able to adopt the pertinent technology and tool up the components properly

on special purpose machine tools where time can be substantially reduced and costs saved. It will also help establish regular supplies to customers. I am firmly of the opinion that the cost will always be in our favour and quality and despatches, can also be guaranteed provided our customer starts with some faith in us. This seems to be crux of the problem. However, I am treating this subject separately in another letter.

My perfectionism is hurting me. I wanted to write to you a more detailed letter in better language. I am not satisfied either with the contents or the language of this letter and I am hurrying so that you will at least get something though late and not perfect which I cannot achieve in time. This in me together with the fantastic burden I am, now carrying delayed this letter. Mentally and physically every day I used to feel exhausted. Reaching KSL before 8 am every day I used to return home almost after 11 P.M. and so day after day, week after week your letter got postponed. It is not because it is not important to me but because it is too important to me and I wanted to do a good job of it which of course I could not do through the above. Please excuse me.

I would like to hear more about the Indian culture of your children and how Slubha got readjusted after returning. I wanted to write more but I am hurrying to some other job. So next time.

*Regards,
Yours sincerely,
Chandran Menon*

Up to 1975, the Menon company's turnover used to be Rs. 70 lakh. It crossed a crore for the first time in 1975-76 and 1.5 crore in 1977-78. The following year saw it doubling to Rs 3 crore. But the accounting year was changed that year. The fifteen months from July '78 to September '79 saw a turnover of Rs 3.12 crore and net profit of Rs 15 lakh. Menon & Menon declared its maiden dividend of 10 per cent in its 10th year, the year ended 30 September 1980. The turnover had been Rs 3.72 crores, but increasing all round expenses had limited the profits to 4 lakhs. Four Executive Directors were appointed to streamline the company's operations. The elder Parameswaran took charge of the Engine division while the younger Parameswaran, the Technical Division. Sreedharan was given charge of production, and Ramesh Narayanan became Executive Director - Marketing. This restructuring could be said to be the result of Menon's discussions with Rolfe Eastman. The Annual Report states that industrial relations in the year remained stable and amicable. Since the earlier agreement expired in June '80, negotiations were held and a new wage agreement was signed from January '81. This increased the financial burden on the company by Rs 5 lakh, with a corresponding reduction in net profit. A pension scheme and a workers welfare fund were started for the first time in that year.

The Delhi Manager of the United Western Bank, S. V. Kulkarni, hails from Kolhapur. He finished his B. Sc., MBA in 1980 and came to Menons for a job. Menon personally asked a few questions and then asked him when he could join: he was appointed the next day. The company was small, and he and

Menon met practically every day to discuss management issues. Menon often dropped him off in the evening after work, and Kulkarni says that their age difference never came in the way of informal talk. Kulkarni left for a better opportunity a year later, and Menon assured him he was welcome whenever he felt like returning. Kulkarni said that Menon had a specially close relationship with the United Western Bank. The Bank had gauged his potential before he had risen to fame and extended financial support, and Menon was keenly aware of this obligation. In financial matters, Menon felt that his cheque should be treated as a draft. Kulkarni says it was highly creditable on the part of Menon to have developed complex pattern for Escorts with the help of untrained workers, through encouragement and guidance. He collected a circle of excellent colleagues. His launching his brother in the pistons line was a demonstration of his skills. In those days, Ghatge-Patil and Menon were the only known names in industrial circles. In 1980-81, Palkar returned to the Satara Head Office of the United Western Bank as Advances In-Charge. In a Consortium meeting, someone came forward to introduce Palkar to Menon. Menon gave him a hug and said that they needed no new introduction. The two had not met since 1969, and the intervening period saw Menon growing very fast, Palkar states.

Abhay Nevagi was another person who came into contact with Menon during the early years. His father was District Magistrate of Kolhapur, and after he finished his LL.B., his father wished him to take up practice at the Mumbai High Court. But Abhay wished to study for MBA. He came to Menon for experience, and the association lasted a lifetime. Abhay Nevagi stuck with Menon even through his tough times as an advisor.

Once a delay in salary led to a flash strike. S. V. R. Rao was then with Menon, and he says the officials could not control the situation. Menon himself came forward. The workers were in assembly and some leader was making a speech to the effect that the strike would continue come what may. Menon lost his temper. He walked up to the speaker and in front of the entire workforce slapped him. He then walked away and nobody dared cross his path. He was skilled at putting across his point. He would say: "When I have done so much for you, why do you do this to the company when it is in trouble?" Udeshkumar of Escorts has faced the brunt of his temper. Twice in the course of arguments Menon threatened to throw him out the window. Udeshkumar was unaccustomed to such language. He realized that it was a common trait among founder-industrialists. They treat their workers as their children and at times chastise them as they would their child. They build up a familial atmosphere and each member is aware of it. Unfortunately, this does not extend to group behaviour — organized labour behaves differently.

Around 1980-81, the union of Comrade Santram Patil began to grow powerful at Menon & Menon. Things like slow down, rejection began to arise, and the company's efficiency suffered. No amount of reasonable cajoling reversed the trend. One day Menon lost his patience. He marched into the shop floor, seized a hammer and started destroying the completed jobs. Workers requested S. R. Patil to intervene, and he ran after Menon. Menon continued his rampage until he injured himself in the hand. He then bandaged it up and

went and sat in his office upstairs. No one dared approach him. Patil finally went up to him and asked, "Are you through?" Menon retorted, "No!" Patil then said, "In that case, I shall surround the factory with kerosene and you can set it alight." Whereupon Menon said angrily, "What other option is left to me?" Patil tried to pacify him, saying that others were unable to understand what he was saying. Due to this strong intervention the situation improved slightly but the underlying unrest created by people who had recently joined the company continued and very soon the situation returned to an unreasonable one. During this time, Kasute felt that Menon was mollycoddling Patil, and affronted, left the job. He set up practice at Nipani. But he was in regular touch with Menon.

In spite of the labour unrest the years 1980-82 was a period of satisfactory progress for Menon & Menon. Anand Borude is now Manager (Development). He joined in 1980 as a Draughtsman. He says Menon was an expert at recognizing talent, as if hunting out diamonds in a mine. The first year he started work on methoding and the casting gating system, and Menon took an ongoing interest, with discussions on various techniques practiced in foundries overseas and their shortcomings. Menon wanted to evolve a company standard. The relationship grew, and Borude was given the additional responsibility of pattern development and layout. Menon always asserted that his team was in no way inferior to others. Anything anyone in the world could do, so can we, he would say.

Menon had an ambition of staying at the forefront. He had plans to enter into a joint venture with Nuneaton Patterns of England to manufacture foundry toolings for captive use as well as for export. Menon always felt that India had an intrinsic advantage when it came to products in which the labour costs formed a large portion of the total costs. Toolings of all types were one such class of products. Unfortunately Nuneaton Patterns, one of the best pattern shops in the UK could not see the opportunities presented by the Indian marketplace. They looked at this proposal as just another way to make short term money and placed precondition of a large order to their shop in the UK in exchange for which they would send experts. They quoted an exorbitant sum, and the idea fizzled out. Almost all the tooling manufacturers worldwide see the opportunities in India now. They now look at India as a long term threat to their business and are looking at ways to align with Indian companies. But at the time when this proposal was mooted this concept was new. Once again Menon was far ahead of his times. Had this proposal gone through, the Menon – Nuneaton Joint Venture would have been one of the largest tool rooms in the world by now.

Never one to let a failure unsettle him, Menon then went on to bag an order from Maruti Udyog – a Suzuki Joint Venture to manufacture cars in India, to produce cylinder blocks for their 800 cc passenger car. These blocks were mainly imported at that time and a small quantity was made at the DCM foundry. This was a complex block and would take the company a notch ahead in technology. Menon was keen on getting this business. It would also open an opportunity in the fast-growing passenger car business. Menon persisted and got the business. However, Maruti gave him six months to

make the sample and said that they would pay him development charges only if he was successful in his effort. Their reasoning was that there were only a few companies in the world capable of manufacturing such a complex cylinder block and they did not want to risk their money on this venture. Developing a cylinder block is a very expensive activity. Menon undertook to pay for the development himself. He was confident of his capabilities and was sure to get the cost refunded by Maruti. Here again he completed the trial order well within the tough time targets set by Maruti. So happy was Maruti with this effort that eventually Menon met over 60 per cent of their requirement from his Amboli plant. Initially Maruti insisted that Menon should personally come to appraise them of the progress, but Menon deputed Borude and other persons who had worked on this project to the Maruti plant in Gurgaon. Borude had finished his BE, DBM while on the job, and was in Menon's special favour. Menon had a knack for recognizing talent and encouraging it. He gave everyone fatherly treatment irrespective of designation and salary. During this period Varadan was a regular visitor from Bangalore. He met Eastman and the two became good friends. Menon was curious to know of developments elsewhere and eager to use the knowledge for improvements. There would be disagreements in the discussions, but Menon liked an open atmosphere. He visited Varadan at his hotel in the evenings and discussed matters of the development of Kolhapur and the country. Often he would visit Shivaji University and discuss matters with the professors.

By then, Menon's son Vijay had returned after completing his education. Menon agreed to Eastman's suggestion that Vijay work in the plant for a time and then go abroad for his MBA. Accordingly, he left for the US in 1981. The following year Menon went there for equipment purchase and made a big tour with Eastman, their wives staying back at Vermont. Menon made a study of high pressure moulding lines and foundry chemicals. The trip, which lasted a good three weeks, included shopping, entertainment, and a detour to meet Vijay at Illinois.

The Company Annual Reports for these two years are interesting. In the year ending 30-9-81 the company's turnover went up 37 per cent to Rs 5.11 crore and profits from Rs 39 lakh to 59 lakh. Dividend was therefore increased from 10 to 12 per cent. The Report carries a colour photograph of the its new building, as also photographs of the 5 and 6.5 HP diesel engines, of the 12-cylinder crankcase and one of 35 assorted castings. Growing orders created a need for more working capital. Stringency in the financial markets left no alternative to approaching the banks. The following year, that is the year ending 30-9-82, turnover had increased nominally to Rs 5.29 crore, but profits had slipped from Rs 59 to Rs 53 lakhs. Increase in the share capital from Rs 25 lakhs to Rs 1 crore led to a reduction of dividend to 6 per cent. Slackening demand for tractors and trucks adversely affected the bottom lines. The concessions announced by the Reserve Bank for the tractor industry was expected to help, but the turnover actually dropped marginally in the year ended 30-9-83, and profit slipped to Rs 43 lakhs. Dividend could not be increased. On 20th June that year, Vijay Menon was inducted as Additional Director. Although the figures slipped in the previous two years, the overall health of the Company was better than in the years up to 1980. The progress

was satisfactory and Menon was optimistic about the future, according to Dilip Mande.

His ambition to reach the top of his field led Menon to keep in touch with top people, and he can rightly be called a 'Man of the Future,' according to Mande. Kirloskar Oil Engines Vice President A. D. Dani was earlier with Telco, and he knew Menon since then. Oil Engines required a 2 tonne, 8-cylinder crankcase. Dani met Menon in 1983; technical discussions took place in Menon's cabin and pattern equipment was made ready in about five months. Madhu Mestry played a leading role in this. He poured the casting at Amboli and in 1984 the semi-finished engine was completed. Two months earlier Menon had visited Kirloskar Oil Engines to see to arrangements. Ramesh Chougule of Kunte & Co., Chartered Accountants was transferred to Kolhapur from Goa, and was associated with Menon since 1983. He handled a lot of activities such as accounts finalization, tax returns, demands etc. There was always a liquidity problem. The Income Tax officer assigned to Kolhapur for 1982-84 was a troublemaker, who created a lot of hassles. Some appeals of those matters, Chougule says, are still pending.

In June 1983, Menon & Menon launched a House Magazine. The first four-page newsletter had the masthead; 'Newsletter of Menon & Menon Pvt. Ltd.' below was a small message, headed by a photograph of Chandran Menon.

The message reads:

"The first duty of any financial organization is the service of society. Our Company has always been trying to meet this responsibility. Service does not just mean service to our customers, suppliers, workers and owners. It also entails service to the citizens living in our surrounding areas and in short any person coming into contact with us in any way whatsoever. This Newsletter is another step in the direction of satisfying the needs of our duties. I dedicate this Newsletter to all those who have contributed to the development and growth of this company, on behalf of all my colleagues and on my own behalf."

This small message brings out Menon's vision and dedication to social duties. The Editorial Board in its elaboration of the intentions behind the Newsletter says, "The last decade has seen our Company progress from 200 to 1000 people working with us. It is difficult to disseminate information to all the divisions by informal means. The Newsletter you now hold in your hands is the result of efforts to build up an efficient and comprehensive medium of information.

"Many of us are talented in the fields of Art and Literature. The inner talents of our colleagues have to have suitable opportunity. Besides, since the progress of our organization depends on the progress of the persons running it, a Newsletter is an excellent medium for personality development." The editorial also carries an appeal to suggest a name for the newsletter. An article on "Yoga and Industrial Progress" was also featured. This first issue of the bimonthly was ceremoniously launched at the hands of senior worker Suresh

Govind Sawant. A photograph of this event, which also shows Varadan and Rolfe Eastman, was carried in the second issue.

The second issue onwards, the newsletter was named Menonchi Manse (Menon's Men). The editorial states that Subhash Desai of the daily Loksatta suggested the title. The issue announces the formation of seven Quality Circles in Menon & Menon, and carries an article on the Quality Circle movement. There is an announcement of the shifting of the SPM Division to Shirolu under the name of 'Menon Machine Tools.' It also carries a profile of the activities and products of this Division, started in 1979 under Pundi.

The salient contents of the remaining two issues of 1983 are as follows. The Engine Division exported 300 engines to Iran in September. The export of the 'Indec' engine by Mahindra & Mahindra is mentioned. There is an announcement of the Employee Development division in the factory. Among prominent visitors there is mention of Mahindra & Mahindra Executive Director Baptist D'Souza, Rao and Venkatachalam of Simpson & Company Ltd, Kurup of Aspic. There is a list of cylinder heads, crankcases, lift bodies, axle housings, oil pumps, flywheels, gearboxes etc. supplied to Telco, Ashok Leyland, Mahindra & Mahindra, HMT, Simpson & Co., ITD and Ruston. Demand for grey iron castings in the automotive industry is 3 lakh tonnes, of which the share of M&M is just 3,100 tonnes. The capacity is being augmented by another 3,000 tonnes through the Amboli project, the newsletter announces.

The Nov-Dec 1983 issue carries a small feature entitled "But we still progressed!" where Menon voices his thoughts: "The engineering industry in our country is going through severe depression since 1982. Demand is falling. We shut down both our oilfired furnaces due to depression and increasing metal costs. The situation gradually improved from May 1983." Menon ends with "We are running our auto components division in the face of great difficulties such as load shedding and other problems. But we are confident that this is a passing phase and we shall eventually overcome ... we are now better off than we were a short time ago. The sky is lighting up. We suffered from the depression, as did all manufacturers in the country. But I am proud to say that we suffered much less than anyone else. Depression is a temporary phase and we have high hopes that we will eventually come out with flying colours."

Menon had the courage to overcome market ups and downs. However, Menonchi Manse itself raised certain questions. Nana Shahane and others have recounted how the management skills and personal powers of Menon were tested to the hilt in the ensuing three years. Repercussions of these were also inevitably seen in the newsletter itself.

Shahane had left Buckau Wolf with the intention of setting up an industrial relations consultancy. Abhay Nevagi was looking after personnel matters at Menon's. Some problems had arisen in the company and negotiations were on with the union. On Nevagi's suggestion, Menon went to Pune with Sreedharan to meet Shahane. They had dinner at the Poona Club, and

Menon expressed his need for an advisor on a retainer basis. Shahane was still six months away from being relieved from Buckau Wolf. A few days later Menon called up Shahane and called a meeting at the Blue Diamond. After a few pleasantries Menon sprang the offer: Shahane was to come to Kolhapur three days a week, in exchange for whatever he was getting here, in addition to travel and stay at the Pearl Hotel. Shahane realized then that Menon was a man who could size up and seize upon a man within a few minutes, or let him go. The deal was agreed on, and Shahane began regular trips to Kolhapur. He spent the bulk of his time for Menon. Shahane fixed a daily routine at the factory, and in Menon's absence, it was Sreedharan who interfaced with him. Shahane states that his involvement in the work was not important; more important was his absorption into the Menon family within a month. On any subject Menon would take a decision only after detailed, all-round discussions.

A year and half passed and Shahane felt that it would be better to shift home to Kolhapur rather than commute. Menon readily agreed and obtained for him Gen. Thorat's bungalow on rent. Menon got the place done up at great expense. Once he had taken to a person, there were no limits how far he would go. Eventually, since Shahane could not agree to the condition of Gen Thorat's wife that he should live with his family, the bungalow could not be acquired for him. Menon did not give a second thought to the Rs 30,000 he had spent on the house.

In 1983, bonus became a major issue in Menon & Menon. Against the workers' demand of 20 per cent, the company had announced 8 per cent. Negotiations began, and officers felt that a compromise figure would be agreed on. Actually even the workers were well aware that the company could not manage 20 per cent, but the leaders held out. Menon got fed up of this impasse, since he could see the damage the standoff was doing to the productivity. He agitatedly marched into the factory and when the demand of 20 per cent was raised he granted it. He was a man of his word. He rushed to Delhi and collected advances from large customers like Escorts to cover the commitment. He was saddened by the fact that his own people refused to look beyond their narrow selfish interests and see the troubles facing the company. In any case, he felt, matters would sort out once the bonus question was settled. What happened was different. He found that the moulds in the foundry were beginning to get damaged, one after the other. He was livid with anger. Feeling that the workers, whose support he was in need of, were themselves inflicting damage, he rushed in and started smashing the moulds himself with a hammer. The stunned workers looked on; a few even apologized to him, but Menon was wild. He then led a couple of them to his office, and sat opposite them with his head in his hands. It took him a long time to regain his composure. The Shramik Sanghatana was active in the factory those days. A few of its leaders led by Santram Patil and P. D. Dighe went round to Menon's house the next morning to apologize. Menon had threatened to close down the plant the previous day. The union leaders begged of him not to close down, not to break machinery. Menon relented, and the workers' leaders too promised that things would improve.

Things improved for a time. This is reflected in the newsletters from the beginning of 1984. The Jan-Feb issue carries articles on industrial safety, and on recurring deposits. It also carries an announcement of being re-christened Menon Parivar. The next, Mar-Apr issue carries an article by labour leader P. D. Dighe on 'The Participation of Workers in Management.' It says that participation is not achieved by selecting or electing leaders: participation should be general, under the inspiration of the idea. Dighe later says that conditions in the country are unfavourable to get such opportunities for participation. Only an active, self-respecting, united and aggressive movement can take up the challenge of participation in the management issued by industrialists and the government. The same issue carries an article by a draughtsman of the company, Bagal, discussing the seriousness of the population explosion. There was an announcement that the next issue of the Parivar would carry a report of the recent trip to Germany by Vijay Menon, who had just returned from a visit to the Hanover Trade Fair. But Vijay himself preferred to write on the problems, issues and questions that faced the workers, rather than about his trip. He wrote on the central idea of incentive in the following issue. The July-Aug issue carries an article describing and giving guidance on the benefits of the Family Pension Scheme. The last issue published under the name of Menon Parivar was the 1984 Diwali Special. This brief four-page issue contains articles relating to Diwali and a few greetings. Labour relations deteriorated again, and the newsletter closed down, right up to May 1992.

The year ended 30 September 1984 was one of mixed success for Menon's. The turnover was Rs 3.32 crore, a good 1-crore increase over the previous year. In fact the previous few years the company had a rising turnover but slipping profits. Income of Rs 40 lakh and outgoings of Rs 41 lakh translates to a straight 1-lakh loss. Dividend was out of the question. The main contributory factor for this was all-round increase in costs. Raw material and scrap prices had rocketed. Power had become costlier. Bloated wages had increased fixed costs. Prices, on the other hand, could not be raised because of the competition. The only two rays of hope were, one, prices stabilizing through sensible government policies, and two, improvement in worker productivity. In actual fact, the workers resorted to a sit-down strike demanding 20 per cent bonus. To protect the company's assets, it was decided to close down operations from 21 October, and a lock out was declared on 1 November. Negotiations were on, and finally there was a breakthrough, and the factory reopened in 4 December. But the lost production was lost forever. Tensions had not eased even after reopening; workers had submitted a fresh charter and were insistent that the new agreement should be implemented from 1 January 1985. They resorted to go-slow tactics to bring pressure on the management.

In the midst of this turmoil, Vijay Menon's wedding was proposed, and took place in November. A girl from the Pillai clan of Quilon had been suggested. The Menons had a preliminary meeting with the girl's father, Lakshman Pillai, and her uncle, P. Gangadharan Pillai, who was head of the family. Horoscopes were checked by the Pillais' astrologer and by Shivarama Menon from Menons' side, and they matched. The Pillais were leading exporters of

cashew nuts; talks between the two business families went smoothly. In the second trip they were accompanied by Menon's daughter Shanta and son-in-law Ramesh. The couple saw each other and accepted, and the engagement took place in August. The date 5 November was fixed for the nuptials.

The marriage was attended by family members from Kodungallur, and also a large number of people from Kolhapur. In spite of the ongoing industrial dispute, several workers' leaders also attended. The marriage took place with pomp and ceremony at the Keshav Memorial Town Hall in Quilon. Gangadharan Pillai remembers Menon's bearing as dignified and sober.

According to Shivarama Menon, Quilon would rarely see a wedding at such a lavish scale as that of Vijay and Preethi. A separate reception was arranged in Kolhapur. Renowned vocalist Chandrashekhar Gadgil presented a recital on the occasion. Looking upon this as an important occasion, Menon had taken special pains for the arrangements. In his usual fashion, he had distributed the responsibilities. Ashok Chitre recalls that although he was yet to join, he was assigned to manage the VIP pandal. Menon oversaw everything to his satisfaction from eight in the evening to seven in the morning, and then went straight to the station to receive Gadgil.

Vijay's wedding was a happy occasion for the Menon family, but it was in the shadow of labour unrest in the factory. In addition, Menon's serious illness had also raised its head, and this marked the beginning of a period of harsh travails for Chandran Menon.



DEALING WITH HARDSHIP

Throughout the important and satisfying events of the early 1980s, like Vijay's wedding, the launch of the Amboli project, etc. Menon was gradually becoming aware of a downturn in his health. The root cause was the unbridled use of tobacco products. He indulged freely in all kinds of tobacco use: smoking, chewing tobacco, and sniffing snuff. Even Rolfe Eastman's small boy would admonish him, "Uncle, this is not good." Menon however continued with his old ways and finally cancer took root — blood started appearing in his saliva and Menon realized what was happening. To mask this fact from others, he took to chewing paan (betel leaf with lime, tobacco and other ingredients folded in. When eaten, the contents turn blood-red in the mouth and mask the presence of actual blood).

On the 25th of January 1985 Menon met Dr. Gogate, a close family friend and a reputed ENT specialist. He told Dr. Gogate that he could feel a lump in his throat and consequently had difficulties swallowing. Dr. Gogate, sensing the worst, fixed up an appointment for Menon with a radiologist to get a barium swallow test done. The report came in on the 26th of January. As this was a holiday Menon was home in the afternoon relaxing after the customary annual lunch with the workmen of Menon Pistons. At 3.00 pm Vijay returned from the doctor with the report, which said that they suspected oesophageal cancer. The next day Menon with Ram and Vijay went to consult Dr. Shahapurkar, an oncological surgeon based in Kolhapur. Dr. Shahapurkar recommended that they immediately consult Dr. Praful Desai of Tata Memorial Hospital, the renowned cancer centre in Bombay. Dr. Prafulla Desai had at that time specialized in the treatment of oesophageal cancer and was considered to be one of the authorities in the field. Dr. Shahapurkar accompanied Menon for their appointment with Dr. Desai. The entire Menon family and Mohammed Saheb Hudli went to Bombay. Dr. Desai conducted a series of tests and finally pronounced that the suspicion of the doctors of Kolhapur was correct. He diagnosed that Menon was suffering from "Squamous cell carcinoma of the upper third of the oesophagus".

Cancer of the oesophagus was a very difficult cancer to treat. The type affecting the lower third was the easiest but Menon had a problem with the upper third. As the cancer site shifted up the chances went down dramatically. Prognosis in spite of the best treatment rarely extended beyond six months. Dr. Vaze, another close family friend, told Vijay to accept the fact bravely and to remember that the odds were heavily loaded against Menon.

The family members consulted Dr. Rajagopal, Mrs. Ram Menon's brother in Kerala, and finally it was decided that Menon should be taken immediately to Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospital in New York City for further treatment. Everyone around Menon was in deep emotional distress but Menon himself was very cheerful. He told everyone that one had to accept what came our

way, but never give up without a fight. He said he had overcome insurmountable odds in the past - this would be just another struggle for him and he was prepared for it. True to his word the fight he put up was unbelievable. It took him the best part of the next year, but he did overcome the threat and he lived over 10 years thereafter, successfully directing the affairs of the family and the company. It was very difficult for people to accept that he had such a serious problem. Outwardly he was in the pink of health - it was only affecting him inside. As with all cancers the effect of the disease and the treatment is seen much later and the person emerges from it as a pale shadow of his earlier self.

While the arrangements for his US trip were being made, Menon started taking radiation treatment at the Tata Memorial Hospital. After the trip was decided, Menon himself reassured those around him that cancer was incapable of killing him: he planned to live to be a hundred! His confidence surprised even the doctors. Vijay went a week ahead of Menon's visit to the US to firm up his appointments with the doctors there and to finalize the staying arrangements. Vijay met Dr. Manjit Bains and fixed up an appointment with him. Vijay also took on a long-term lease a full service, three bedroom apartment just a block away from the hospital. With all these arrangements in place he called his uncle Ram and asked him to bring Menon over to the US. Ram and Padmini accompanied Menon on his trip to the US.

On arrival in the US Dr. Bains of the Sloan Kettering Hospital examined him and told Menon that in view of his strong health and positive frame of mind, he would be able to successfully go through the rigors of treatment. He advised all of them to maintain a very positive atmosphere at home and to look at this disease as just another disease awaiting treatment. Rolfe Eastman, who was now virtually a second brother to Menon, was present too. Mrs. Menon was constantly kept company by Mrs. Eastman.

The treatment started with radiation. After two sessions on the extremely powerful equipment Menon was able to swallow normally. This phase would last around 4 weeks and surgery would follow immediately afterwards. During this radiation phase the entire family along with Menon and Rolfe would go for long walks in the city of New York and also in the adjoining Central Park. Except for the brief radiation sessions, it appeared as if the family was on a holiday. The family would frequent a nearby Chinese restaurant and had developed a very close friendship with the Chinese owner and his wife.

Surgery soon followed and Dr. Bains amputated a part of the oesophagus and spliced together the two ends. During this treatment the family realized with great pride that the head of radiation was Dr. Naidu from Hyderabad, the head of surgery was Dr. Bains from Punjab and the head of pathology was Dr. Joshi from Pune. They took great pride in the fact that the heads of the three main departments in the best cancer treatment facility in the world were Indians. Later they also realized that most of the nurses in the hospital were from Kerala. The surgery was very complex and lasted over 10 hours. After the surgery Dr. Bains personally met the family and assured them that the surgery went on as expected, there were no complications and he was very

positive regarding the outcome of the operation. As expected Menon recovered from the surgery very rapidly and he was pronounced fit for discharge soon.

Chemotherapy was the next line of treatment. The samples sent for pathological evaluation had the cancer cells permeating the entire wall of the oesophagus and had even attacked the lymph nodes. Therefore the doctors felt that Menon would have to undergo chemotherapy. The doctors suggested that after the first two doses in the Sloan Kettering Hospital this treatment could be carried out at any hospital close to New York. It was therefore decided that the chemotherapy sessions would be completed at the chemotherapy centre at Burlington, Vermont, where Rolfe stayed. Menon could thus stay with Rolfe during the treatment, which was expected to take over six months. Chemotherapy is a very demanding treatment. The patient undergoes a lot of psychological trauma. More than the pain it is the effect on the patient's mind that makes it traumatic. Menon accepted this line of treatment cheerfully; however a month down the line it was decided that chemotherapy was doing more harm than good - Menon was losing his hair, his skin was darkening and he was showing signs of a depression— and so the doctors decided to discontinue chemotherapy. Despite the hardships caused by chemotherapy he weathered his illness bravely and lived a good ten years after this to the pleasant surprise of all the doctors who attended on him.

Menon's illness was a severe blow to the company in many respects. His treatment alone had cost between Rs 15 and 20 lakh. In order to save the company from the financial burden, he got together with Eastman during his stay in the US and explored business opportunities. Eastman took up a survey, in partnership with his brother-in-law, of the market for foundry products in the US.. Gopinathan, the brother-in-law of Menon's son-in-law Ramesh, was then in the US for his daughter's treatment. He too joined the venture. They planned their strategies and bagged a large order for castings. Eastman made a trip to draw up the estimates, but the economics were just not favourable, and the matter had to be abandoned. Menon was extremely saddened. He had himself visited a few places and noted matters of potential benefit to the company. He was extremely keen to make a substantial contribution to the company in return for the expense and the time spent in the US. After completing all the treatment Menon met Dr. Bains again and he was declared fit enough to return home. A year had passed since the beginning of the treatment and Menon was now a pale shadow of his earlier self. He had lost over 20 kilos and was very weak. The treatment was over; what was needed now was rest.

Menon's illness had caused deep-felt grief to his people and well-wishers in Kolhapur. News of his impending return was received with great joy. The Kolhapur railway station was packed with his friends and well wishers when he arrived, and his bogie on the Mahalaxmi Express was already packed with bouquets and garlands, since a large number of people had gone to Mumbai to receive him. People were shocked to see his deteriorated health. At the station he told Bapusaheb Jadhav that he would like to ride in his car; Jadhav

was moved to tears with joy. A big reception had been arranged at Menon's bungalow and everyone was urged to have home-made chakli (a savoury snack) and coffee. Among those present, the only outsider to the company or to Kolhapur was U. K. Malhotra of Escorts. Menon embraced him the moment he saw him. They had spent months together developing various jobs for Escorts. He forced Malhotra to stay with him till everyone had departed. Malhotra recalls that he had rarely seen such a massive display of public affection, and the dotting crowd left him spell bound. Menon's determination and grit was still formidable, and he said, "Now I can do anything," while munching a chakli. The doctors had put severe restrictions on his activities, which also included not talking too much, but today was an exception, and a happy one at that.

The doctors in the US had told him that he could eat normal food but he would have to eat smaller quantities 5 to 6 times a day since a large part of his stomach was removed in the surgery. He also was advised to sleep on an inclined bed since the valve preventing the acids in the stomach from entering his oesophagus had also been removed. Menon had by now focused his reading to understand the nuances of his illness. His knowledge on this subject had become quite formidable. In fact he could by now advise people on what they should do if faced with a problem like this. He decided to put himself on a diet of boiled vegetables; wheat and dairy products, meat and all high protein foods were out. Menon enjoyed good food - his personal favourite was the spicy Kolhapuri mutton sukka and tambda rassa. But he was capable of putting aside a personal preference for a larger good. Once he decided on something it was impossible to shake him from his resolve. Menon decided to eat bland food and bland food it would be wherever he went. He would go for parties but he would carry his food from home. People had accepted him as he was and, as always, he was loved for his frankness and firm beliefs.

After a few years Dr. Bains who had operated on him in the US visited India. Menon met him at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, and Bains expressed great happiness at his recovery. He told him that he could eat meat if he so desired but Menon cautiously ate meat just once a month. After a few months he stopped eating meat altogether. He had deeply studied the subject of cancer in his own fashion and designed his own diet. He was also taking other alternative treatments. On his wife's insistence, he spent some time in Kerala. He visited pilgrimage centres and took the traditional treatments. Prof. Namboodripad had a special relationship with Menon, and Menon would consult him regularly when in difficulty. On learning of Menon's illness, he had performed certain specific rituals. Although a Professor of Economics, he was also knowledgeable in matters of spirituality. In consultation with Menon's brother-in-law Shivarama Menon, he would study a problem - economic, domestic or health related - and suggested remedies. Menon himself was largely agnostic. He followed the Vedanta school of thought as propounded by Swami Vivekananda. In fact years earlier Menon had not only read Vivekananda's complete works, but had also made detailed notes on how he could adapt it to his personal life. But he had faith in Namboodripad, knowing fully well that he did not do it for money. His rituals were performed without fanfare. Menon himself had the inner strength of standing up to any kind of

suffering. He had a balanced response to happiness and to pain. In the US he suffered pain stoically, refusing to take painkillers. On his return he had started regular exercise. He would say he had no fear of death.

Eventually Menon did not die of oesophageal cancer; 1 in 1000 cases developed leukaemia – as a reaction to the drugs used in chemotherapy. Such a reaction occurred after around 10 years. The doctors in the US had knowingly taken this risk since they believed that in Menon's case his life expectancy, in spite of the best outcome, did not extend beyond a year. Menon proved them wrong but also fell prey to the 1 in 1000 odds of developing leukaemia. Dr. M. B. Agarwal who treated him in his final stages diagnosed this later development. Although there was a slight change in his outlook after 1986, his fighting spirit remained intact right till the end. C. V. Tikekar said he continued to work hard and travel; and there was no let-up in his enthusiasm. Tikekar also says that there was no sign of depression or resignation. Both kept meeting up to the end.

Since the earlier agreement at the factory had expired on 1 January 1985, both sides had started the formalities of renegotiating the agreement. On 31 December 1984 the union gave the company formal notice of the end of the agreement. The Management responded that it was expected that the work-time equation had to be managed better, productivity has to increase, and quality has to improve: only then could further talks be held. Management also proposed to scrap the incentive scheme. Negotiations went on for several months and when no solution could be seen, the company once again issued a notice of lockout on 31st October. Accordingly, the factory was to be shut on the 17th of September, but just then Menon had returned from the US. Senior labour leader Santram Patil hurriedly met him and requested him to withdraw the lockout notice. He assured Menon that if handled properly the negotiations would be fruitful. In his usual fashion, Menon gave his consent. Negotiations resumed, but when they led nowhere, the union approached the Labour Commission. Two hearings took place before the Commissioner in October. Negotiations were going on side-by-side. They succeeded and the new agreement was signed on 1st November 1985. It was signed by union President P. D. Dighe and 11 union office-bearers, and on the Company's behalf by K. Parameswaran, K. K. Sreedharan, Vijay Menon and the Personnel Manager J. M. Potdar. Abhay Nevagi and Santram Patil signed as witnesses. The agreement was signed in the presence of the Labour Commissioner of Kolhapur, V. G. Mohite, and came into immediate effect.

After the weather had thus cleared a bit, Menon was able to look into the affairs of the company. Improvements in the foundry were his immediate aim, and he assigned Gongane to work with Madhu Mestry. Gongane had no foundry knowledge but was willing to learn. Up to then he was working at Cost Estimation with Datar. As against the micron-level tolerances in the machine shop, foundry accuracies are lower, and Menon was attempting to close this gap. He was convinced that any expenditure on Research & Development was an investment, R&D efforts were all initial failures and very few efforts eventually could be called successful. Due to this deep conviction Menon was never discouraged by initial failure; he believed in trying again and again till

they succeeded. He often took Gongane along to meet customers, and told him he did it to teach him how to interact with customers. Various people have given their experiences in this regard. M. M. Raiji of Mahindra says Menon had no pretensions of greatness, for him his customer was his superior. "Don't hesitate to tell me your exact requirements," was his standing request. He was prepared to go off the beaten track to take up a new job. Which is why it became possible to machine a large variety of castings. Udeshkumar of Escorts said that many of their people would go to Kolhapur, check into Hotel Pearl and have a good time. Udeshkumar himself, however, said that he felt no need to go out for lunch: a working lunch in the factory would do. That was when the practice of having lunch within the factory came into vogue at Menon's. Actually it was a time of slump for the company, but Menon was determined to weather it. He also had the ambition of setting up an advanced EDP department on the lines of Escorts and for this he specially visited MICO for a study.

Mr. Mande talks about 1985 when Menon had bagged a large order from Simpson's for Dry liner blocks. Cylinder liners are of two types - the simplest to manufacture are the wet liner blocks, which has water around the cylinder liner and which are common in tractor engines - while the more complex blocks are the Dry liner blocks which has a special water jacket and are common among passenger car engines. Menon was so far manufacturing wet liner blocks and he always wanted to graduate to the more sophisticated Dry liner blocks and so when Simpsons offered him the opportunity, he grabbed it without hesitation. When production of these blocks started he found that just 25 out of 800 pieces poured were acceptable. But Menon persisted, with the conviction that only if we succeed at this can we ever become known as a manufacturer of all types of Cylinder Blocks and Cylinder Heads and possess an ability to pull out of bad times. He was right, and this was the foundation for the success that followed. The rejections of that time turned out to be an investment.

There were several foundries larger than Menon's who were scared to take on such a challenge but Menon used the team at his disposal and used the technology at his disposal to master this technology. He also had the foresight to develop machining capabilities as he would often say that in future the customers will insist on machined castings and we should right now prepare to meet that need. His went on to become the only non-captive foundry in India at that time to possess capabilities of casting and machining cylinder blocks and cylinder heads.

After his operation, Menon began to tire easily, and he arranged for a place at the factory for periodic rest. But he did not go away from work. Due to his diet, he subsisted on the bhakri and boiled greens he brought from home, but that did not affect his spirits. Mohammed Saheb Hudli says Menon had the ambition of making his the most advanced foundry in the world. He did not believe that foreigners were more intelligent than Indians: what we need to imitate is their self-discipline.

A clear picture of the state of the company emerges from the report for the period ending 31st March 86. Owing to another change in the accounting year, the Report covers 18 months. There were 45 days of closure, with inevitable effects on the production and profits. The 10 months preceding the agreement were those of uncertainty. Workers had maintained go-slow tactics to push their demands, resulting in adverse effects on production and customer supplies. The anticipated increase in castings and diesel engines did not materialize. Input costs continued to rise. The turnover in the 18 month period was 9 crores, but losses rose to one crore, and were aggravated by 68 lakhs of accumulated losses. The company defaulted on mandatory payments of provident fund, gratuity payments and sales tax. The MSEB shut off electric supply due to unpaid arrears, and work stopped on 27th April 1986. The company had to suspend operations in the auto components division at Kolhapur and the go into lock out once again from 13th May.

With this crisis, the proposal to celebrate Menon's 61st birthday with great pomp was cancelled. Dr. S. M. Patil had been invited to the function and had even prepared his speech. But all that was dropped. Menon had informed all business associates of the necessity to suspend operations, says Angadi. He put up a proposal in the Engineering Association meeting and took the opinion of everyone present. Always one to keep the larger picture in mind, he realized that events in one factory affected the affairs of a whole lot of associated concerns. He explained to his associates that there were two unions active in his factory. There was the vicious circle of one side accepting a proposal and the other shooting it down. However, explaining what the crisis implied, he said that if you are deep in a ravine, it also implies that there are peaks to be scaled on either side. A strike or shut down should therefore be taken as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes.

The company filed an application for closure to the Government on 8th May 1986. Menon's stand was, if an entrepreneur could start an enterprise, why shouldn't he have the right to close it down? But the Government later rejected the application. In the meanwhile, as Nana Shahane puts it, it was open war. Since the factory premises were closed, operations were run from the Officers' Club premises. It was planned to remove certain castings and patterns from the premises before actually shutting shop. Knowing this, the workers had blockaded the gates. Even the police were wary of intervention to help remove the loaded trucks. Menon tried to reason with the workers, telling them that if this material were not delivered, six thousand workers at Escorts would be without work; the workers remained adamant. Menon then flew into a rage and got into the truck cab and started the engine. This time, nobody dared to cross his way. Even later, he would arrange for material to be removed during night-time. A plan was discussed to make the castings at Amboli and carry out machining at Menon Ancillaries, but was dropped as economically unfeasible.

In that tough period, his colleagues were often tired, but Menon still managed to look fresh. He continued his regime of Yoga exercises, Pundi Parameswaran remembers. Around that time, Menon had to suffer another severe blow. His brother-in-law K. K. Sreedharan whom he had groomed

personally and who had absorbed a lot of Menon's ideals and policies, died in a car accident. In June '87 he had bought a new car. He even took it to Satara for a meeting with the Chairman of the United Western Bank. The very next day, on his return home for lunch from the factory, the car was involved in an accident near the Panchaganga river bridge, and Sreedharan lost his life. Menon was deprived of a solid support, and it took him some time to recover from his grief. Vijay was still relatively young. Someone asked Menon, "Who will help you now?" He replied, "Don't you worry, I am tough." Pundi Parameswaran then again proved a great help to Menon. He looked after all the affairs of Menon & Menon. He also looked into the export business that had been started in partnership with Menon's cousin Raji Menon.

Suhas Khadke describes how Menon would take carefully thought out decisions even in such a time of crisis. After finishing M. Com. in 1982, Khadke would come to the Menon office for audit work. Kinkar was the accounts chief, and after a time he asked Khadke if he would join, in case he was not doing his CA. Thus Khadke joined as Accounts Clerk. When the factory was to be shut down in April 1984, it was decided that seven people were to be retained to finalize the accounts, and that they should finish the job by November. Khadke was one of those who was retained in spite of being the junior most. He says that this was the single turning point in his life. He came into personal contact with Menon, and Menon's sharp eye picked him out at once. Before the accounts could be finalized, the Maharashtra Government rejected the application to close down the undertaking and ordered the beginning of the restarting process. The whole process now had to be reversed, and the time limit was one year. Kinkar had recommended Khadke to Sreedharan. Sreedharan passed away suddenly.

Menon's capacity for getting work done was phenomenal. At times he would summon people to his house to give instructions. When the factory reopened, Menon decided to promote Khadke and summoned him. When asked how much he expected as salary, Khadke very circumspectly avoided naming a figure. Menon straight away promoted him from clerk to officer. Khadke quoted several instances of how caring Menon was of those around him. When they ate a hotel, Menon would make it a point to order food to his companion's taste. The first time Khadke accompanied Menon to Mumbai, Menon realized he was new to the city, and personally escorted him to the bus stand. When the strike was about to be withdrawn, Menon looked at the future and sent Vijay to Nipani to invite Kasute. When he came for a meeting, Menon held on to him. Menon knew this 'go-getter' could achieve things which others thought impossible, and he was proved right several times since then.

Several occasions arose when money had to be raised and Menon was always fortunate. Every time he was in need of funds it came from some source or the other. Call it good fortune or return on investments made years ago with no expectation of return. He had many years ago bought 30 odd acres of land at Yeshwantpuram in Bangalore to start a foundry project there. The project did not materialize but the investment proved to be useful. About Rs 55 lakh were needed as margin money to finance the Rs 5 crore rehabilitation plans, and the land had to be sold. A Clearance Certificate was

required for the deal, and money had to change hands to obtain one. Menon did not like this and was displeased with Ramesh Chougule. Vijay however backed Chougule. Chougule says he probably was the only man to ever get back into Menon's good books after he was out of favour. But Menon convinced himself that what Chougule did was to the company's benefit.

There are several stories floating around on how the factory actually reopened. The end-March 87 report indicates the following: The Auto Components Division at Kolhapur was closed down on 27th April 1986; end March 1987 it was still closed. In May 1986 the company had applied to the Government for closure. When the application was turned down, the company approached the banks and financial institutions for capital to rescue it. As per the rules, the company was declared a sick unit and Rs. 500 lakh were to be arranged for revival. Negotiations were on with the labour unions. An agreement was signed between labour and management on 9th February 1987. This was signed on behalf of Management by Menon, K. K. Sreedharan and D. S. Mande. From the workers side, the signatories were R. S. Patil, B. L. Barge and other office-bearers, representing both unions. The report also says that after the closure application was rejected by the Government in October '86, a writ petition was filed on behalf of the company in the High Court, and is yet to come up for hearing. But since the negotiations entered into by both unions were successful and a compromise was agreed upon at the end of 1986, this agreement was signed.

The main points of the agreement: (1) Maintenance personnel will be called in and the factory reopened before 1st March 87, and the rest of the workers will be recalled by 15th March. (2) No worker will be retrenched. However, only 667 workers will be taken on initially, and the remaining 352 will be deemed to be on leave without pay. (3) NITIE will be assigned the task of studying the question of productivity and recommending improvements. (4) The recommendations of NITIE will be binding on both sides. Accordingly banks and financial institutions released the prescribed funds, and the factory finally reopened in the middle of October 1987. The Report naturally included a message of profound grief at the demise of K. K. Sreedharan.

Abhay Nevagi says that the banks and financial institutions had in the meanwhile put it up to the BIFR that Menon should file for bankruptcy. Menon was naturally outraged. He remarked that these institutions looked upon it purely as a trade-off and had no intentions of reconstruction. Given the time and freedom, he offered, he could put the company back on its feet by himself.

On the day fixed for the BIFR hearings, Menon was in Delhi. He caught the first available flight back, and once it was decided that the factory was to be reopened, he threw himself into the job and never looked back. Usually he would stay at the 5-star Blue Diamond Hotel when in Pune, but in hard times he resorted to staying at Hotel Sheetal on Fergusson College road. Even after he was operated on, he resorted to travel by bus and then even by auto rickshaw to reach his destination. Work to him was important - how he travelled to his destination and where he stayed was secondary. When they

came to know of the efforts put in by Menon to revive the unit, the bankers on their own decided to provide him with the necessary resources. It is difficult to raise money for a sick unit, and there was a cash crunch. Money was required to get the production going. In addition, several creditors had filed cases. Most of these were new creditors. Those who had dealt with Menon for years did not file cases, did not even issue notices. Menon had called all these people and told them that even if he died, he would leave provisions to see that nobody lost his money. As a result, even a small Rs. 40,000 creditor allowed his claim to lapse due to time-bar. As his lawyer, Nevagi was forced to advise that they start with the counter claim that the money was not owed at all, but Menon ruled that out. He felt that they we should accept their liability and ask for time to repay. He wanted to clear the principle amounts and then think about interest. He had decided to repay even those debts that had been time-barred. He said, "I refuse to die with a stain on my name," and in fact, he eventually repaid all his debts along with interest in full.

Menon faced a lot of humiliation during this time. He had to appear in court as a defendant on many occasions. But he openly accepted his liabilities and refused to use false pretences. The creditors were so impressed with his manner that many withdrew their cases. Nevagi said that the company had no funds even to pay for their travel. Menon was aware that Nevagi was spending out of his pocket, and after a time, Menon recompensed him in full without being asked. Mohammed Saheb Hudli remembers that throughout all this time Menon showed no signs of exasperation. He was firm on not giving in to the earlier conditions put by the unions for restarting the works. He often said, "If that becomes inevitable, then I shall come to work in a sari." There are different versions about how the strike came to be withdrawn.

Anandrao Atigre has said about the situation, "Menon was never one to exploit the situation, he kept worker welfare clearly before him. But outsiders had fired up the workers into making unreasonable demands. Menon turned them down and the result was a prolonged strike. Many workers had to take up alternative, humiliating work and many were consumed in the fires of unemployment. Menon too faced a lot of travails, but he took them in his stride. Later when the workers agreed to return unconditionally, Menon trusted them and withdrew his closure application. Thereafter, there has been no talk of striking work to this day."

S. R. Patil says that all workers regularly approached him for solutions. A year or so later, there was a message about mediation from the Mantralaya. Pansare appointed Patil for the job. P. D. Dighe and Comrade Chavan were also present. The company was represented by Vijay Menon and the Labour Officer. Patil spoke for just five to seven minutes, but the points he raised were such that he received applause from Com. Chavan. Even after many such confrontations, Menon laid his trust on Patil. During the shut out period, Patil set up a maintenance business. On restarting, Menon appointed him chief of maintenance at Amboli. In the middle of 1988, Patil left to set up his own workshop and Menon provided him plenty of ancillary orders. Patil therefore never felt he had left the Group. Com. Pansare says the even in bad times Menon was able to swing a retrenchment deal. He was able to do so

purely on the strength of his personality and past actions. No other industrialist has been able to negotiate such a settlement with the workmen. The worker leaders and their advisors were also happy to get a deserving industry restarted as they were sure once the situation improved they would also be able to make up their losses. He also restarted with lower wages, and fully made up the deficit when times improved.

Babujirao Dharwade was a prominent Kolhapur leader. He states that it was Menon who brought modern methods to Kolhapur, up till then dominated by proprietary and partnership concerns. He pioneered the limited company concept, the foreign collaboration route, the ISO certification concept and modern and scientific management methods. During the strike period, the Menon brothers and Mohammed Saheb Hudli met Dharwade and apprised him of the situation. Dharwade roped in the help of Kalappa Anna Awade and Sushilkumar Shinde. Minister Prabhugaokar also helped. The concerned Secretaries in the Mantralaya held meetings and the reconstruction decision was taken. The factory had at that time two labour unions, those of Com. Santram Patil (Lal Nishan) and Com. Pansare (Communist). A labour cut back of nearly half the work force was agreed to with the consent of both. Extended payment schedules were obtained from the Sales Tax Department and Maharashtra State Electricity Board. A Government guarantee of Rs. 5 crore was obtained through Shankarrao Chavan. The Menons and Sreedharan had to make frequent trips to Mumbai for all these. They often lived in Dharwade's room No. 433 at the MLA quarters and ate the simple fare of zunka bhakar. The factory reopened after seven months of ceaseless efforts.

Menon and Dharwade grew close in this period. Two years later Menon organized a public function in honour of Awade and Dharwade. He referred to them as the gentlemen of the region. After Samani, the industrial leadership of the district fell on Menon. He blended so well that he was seen as a son of the soil. On the occasion of Dharwade's 61st birthday his well wishers gifted him a car, to which Menon was a contributor. Menon organized a flag hoisting ceremony at his factory at the hands of Dharwade's mentor, Madhavraoji Bagal. Dharwade started the Bagal University in his memory, to which the Menon brothers contributed handsomely. Menon has acknowledged his debt to Dharwade in the article he wrote for Dharwade's Gauravika (a laudatory volume published to honour a living person):

"Baburao Dharwade, MLA was the leading light responsible for the reopening of the Menon & Menon plant which was closed for certain reasons for seven months from April 1989. He was saddened that the Vikramnagar plant of a reputed factory such as Menon & Menon was forced to be shut down. He was highly concerned about the unemployment question, and was being constantly being met by the worker with requests to organize its reopening. In order to protect Menon from trouble in his delicate state of health, he made vigorous efforts behind the scenes to lay the foundation for the reopening. He was confident that if he asked, Menon could not refuse. It must be mentioned that Khalil Maner also put in ceaseless efforts towards this goal, but if one were to say that the true architect of the state of grace that Menon & Menon

finds itself today was Baburao Dharwade, it would not amount to exaggeration in the least.”

Mohammed Saheb Hudli says the local people had told Minister Bapusaheb Prabhugaokar that Hudli had Menon’s ear, and so the Minister called up Hudli. Hudli fixed a dinner meeting with him. He then called up Menon. Menon asked him in turn, “What is your opinion?” Hudli replied, “I feel you should respond. State your terms for that.” The meeting duly took place. Menon said, “I want a reduction of 50 per cent in the worker strength. In the face of financial stringency, the government departments should give me concessions or extended time to pay. The banks and financial institutes should be instructed by the Government to grant aid.” Prabhugaokar replied, “I will have to discuss with the unions. I can see to it that you get the Government concessions. But how is the 50 per cent labour cut to be managed?” The deliberations took place on lawn chairs in Menon’s garden. After that people from both sides proceeded to the Mantralaya in Mumbai for negotiations. The 50 per cent workforce cut decision was taken there, as was the plan for its execution. This was the most traumatic event that had happened in Menon’s life. Long drawn out discussions between workers and the management were common. Whenever unpleasant steps had to be initiated there always was a backlash from the general workmen – a demonstration of displeasure. But in this case an extreme step was being taken – discussions were going on for a 50% cut in the workforce and a 20% cut in wages – in spite of that there was no demonstration. Nana Shahane states that never has he seen such terms being put and agreed to. Anyone in Menon’s place would have lost heart and filed for bankruptcy, but Menon reopened his unit on his own terms, and paid off fully the accumulated debts of a few crores. He was admirably supported by the same workmen who led him into such a difficult situation.

Abhay Nevagi states that the liability of a Director in a Limited Company is, technically, limited. The losers are the workers and the creditors. The banks had the recourse of recovering their loans through the assets. Menon could have packed up and left unscathed. But Menon never even thought of that route. There were two unions in the factory, Pansare’s in the machine shop and Dighe’s in the foundry. After the agreement, Pansare’s people felt that they had got a raw deal. They submitted a memorandum to Menon to that effect and a highly disturbed Menon summoned Pansare to see him. They had a stormy, no-holds-barred meeting, with Pansare accusing Menon of injustice to his people. Menon responded that having two unions in one factory helps no one. Pansare gave an ultimatum: “I give you two years’ time, during which you may do any amount of injustice. At the end of two years if there is no solution and my people are still unhappy, I shall come here and create a confrontation.” Menon gave his assurance, and Pansare kept his word: he did not turn up for two years. After he was convinced that Menon had done justice to all, Pansare did not even turn up at the factory gates for a good eight years.

Nevagi says that at one stage during this time, the company seemed to have no future. The factory commenced operations but production was not taking

off satisfactorily. Quite a few customers went elsewhere. Those few who were confident of Menon's capability, held on. But the interest load alone was backbreaking. The banks and financial institutes were bringing pressure on Menon to go in for a merger or sellout. The finance consultant Gajare was of the same opinion: in any case it had been declared sick. Instead of running the unit under crushing liability, sells out on goodwill, encash it and starts a new venture, it was felt. This would have solved several problems: concessions in terms of finance and Sales Tax, goodbye to the claims and cases. But this was not acceptable to Menon. One morning, very probably after a sleepless night, he called up Nevagi. He asked just one question: do we kill or save the factory? Nevagi replied in just one word: Save. Menon gave a sigh or relief. "I am glad," he said. "Are you with me?"

Creditors would start their rounds from 6:30 in the morning. Banks and the Excise Department kept the office phones ringing. Anyone else would have buckled under the strain. But the labour leaders acknowledged Menon's mighty will power. They accepted a 20 per cent wage cut. They agreed to retrenchment of 350 men, an unprecedented show of trust. This helped Menon to hold out. The Bank of Baroda was bringing great pressure to sell, and had even lined up a prospective buyer. Of those around him, 99 per cent were in favour of selling. Menon was ageing, he was suffering from cancer, Vijay was settling in very well at Mumbai in his export business. But Menon called a meeting and announced that nobody should raise this matter in his presence again. "I am not going to kill the baby I have given birth to. I shall revive it." He bluntly asked Gajre, "Are you here for reconstruction or destruction?" Very few could have displayed such monumental courage. In many places, the Managing Director loses sleep if the factory remains shut for four days. BIFR has been made use of by many to dupe banks, to get interest write-offs etc. Menon turned out to be an exception. Very few companies have made it from the verge of bankruptcy and returned to the pinnacle of a sound reputation.

The reconstruction process began in 1988-89. A nine-year plan was drawn up under BIFR. The period of 1985-87 had set the company back nearly ten years. For a company to go into the BIFR was like a patient being admitted to the ICU. But Menon entered the reconstruction phase with a lion heart and through his efforts the company recovered fully in seven years instead of nine - a full two years ahead of plan. Sadly, Menon himself was not around to see the fruit of his achievements. Arvind Shinde recounts a tale of Menon's unceasing efforts. Bharat Earth Movers of Bangalore wanted a Japanese part to be developed in the country. Menon summoned Arvind and said, "Look, there is a slight problem. We just have a part of the drawing, we need to complete the drawing even before we are able to prepare a quote." Menon sat through two nights completed the drawing, prepared the quote and bagged the order. Even today the executives of Bharat Earth Movers remember the occasion with great pride.

The Annual Reports of 1987 and 88 give a clear picture of the progress of Menon & Menon. The closure from April to October 1987 of the Kolhapur plant led to a low turnover in the year '87-88. Even after the agreement, things

were not picking up. The turnover rose in the following year but it was not enough to cover costs and the accumulated losses went up. It took time to regain customer confidence and to get the necessary production increases, but losses went down. Demand kept rising. End March 1989 showed encouraging signs. Performance of the company was ahead of the projections that were made.

But the very high reliance on just one customer, Escorts, was a drawback. Constant trips had to be made back and forth, and there was a 'big fish swallowing a small fish' situation at hand. G. G. Joshi was then the Chief Manager at the Shivaji Chowk branch of the Bank of Baroda. Since Menon was the biggest customer of the branch, 60 per cent of the Bank's business was tied in with him and with Rs.40,000 daily losses, Joshi was in trouble. He was also fully aware that if Menon sank, so would he; encouraged by Menon's transparency in dealings he decided to take some bold decisions. People were wary of raising unpleasant topics with Menon, but Joshi had no problems, and found it very easy to discuss such things with Menon. It helped a lot in decision-making. He accompanied Menon twice for BIFR work, and spent 12 hours at a stretch working side-by-side with Menon. Although Joshi was not on the Menon Board, Menon often called him to meetings as an invitee. That was the period in which he got the real feel of advanced banking practices, Joshi asserts.

Devendra Oberoi gives an example of Menon's dealings. They met at the thread ceremony of Parameswaran's son, and Oberoi mentioned the Rs 27 lakh outstanding. He at once instructed Parameswaran to call a meeting with Mande, Pundi and the Accountant at 10 the next morning, and invited Oberoi at 11. Oberoi arrived, by which time the group had discussed and made their plans. Menon asked Oberoi: "What is your minimum requirement by the end of the month?" Oberoi quoted a figure of Rs 10 lakh. Menon responded, "Not that much; I shall arrange for Rs 7 lakh." Parameswaran intervened and said, "Impossible to raise Rs 7 lakh in a fortnight." Finally the figure agreed was Rs 4 lakh and a half. Menon not only kept his word that month, but also paid regularly as planned and cleared Oberoi's account.

Anil Pandit describes Menon's remarkable poise in all situations. Pandit was a Kolhapur native and after graduating in engineering worked for 15 years with Ghatge-Patil and applied at Menon's for a job. These were the two biggest organizations in Kolhapur. He waited for about ten months, getting no response to his application. His uncle was then the General Manager of Opel Hotel; he had a word with Menon. Pandit was hired within three days, and joined in July 1989. Pandit started in the Marketing division but came in constant contact with Menon, who said to him, "I want a study report on how this company can be radically changed." Pandit's management diploma (DBM) had not escaped Menon. Systems as a concept were nonexistent in industry, and Menon was insistent that it should be brought in. Pandit was no yes-man: he submitted a frank and fearless report and at once became a Menon insider. Menon involved him in every decision taken on the basis of that report.

Abhay Nevagi has given an instance of Menon's courage in the face of extreme adversity. At one stage, even after the agreement, the banks refused to advance funds. Some customers moved jigs, fixtures and patterns out of the factory, and production was badly hampered. Paying even a few thousands had become difficult. A creditor calling himself a close-in associate filed an application in court for winding up Menon's company. Ten other creditors filed civil lawsuits. The Provident Fund filed 14 criminal cases against Menon, also involving his brother, son, son-in-law and brother-in-law. To add to all this, the Maharashtra Government sent him a notice for immediate payment of Rs 12 lakh, with the threat of confiscating the Amboli property on default. All these things happened within the span of one week. Menon maintained his composure. The same week saw a function in his house in which he took part with enthusiasm. He never showed any trace of strain or worry. He never needed to take a single sleeping pill. In the following four years, he paid off all his debts with interest, and all the cases against him vanished on their own.



THE AMBOLI PROJECT

Before the period of trials and tribulations that Menon went through, he had undertaken a very ambitious project. He had completed it and it proved to be useful to face the tough times that followed. Quality castings are made using electrical furnaces. Pig iron and other metallic charge is melted using electric induction furnaces and the molten metal is poured into moulds to get castings of the desired shape. Electricity is therefore a major cost in a foundry. Pig iron is obtained from the smelting of iron ore. Menon reasoned that if pig iron in its molten state could be directly poured into moulds for castings, the subsequent energy consumed to melt it could be avoided, leading to large savings in energy costs. Energy comprises roughly 15 per cent of the cost of a casting and if a large portion of this cost is saved it could help reduce the cost of castings. He discussed his plan with various experts in this field and with their help drew up an ambitious plan. A foundry of this sort had to be physically close to the pig iron smelting plant. He initiated talks with Sesa Goa, a major pig iron manufacturer. He also undertook preliminary discussions with the Chief Minister and other senior officials in the Goa administration regarding the prospect of acquiring land and setting up a foundry adjacent to the Sesa Goa site. However, things did not work out as anticipated, and the matter was dropped.

In his trips to Goa, Menon kept passing through the salubrious location of Amboli. He had grown to like the place and remembered seeing on a trip to Germany an advanced foundry situated in just such surroundings. Anandrao Atigre says that the reason behind the Kagal project being abandoned were the machinations of the local politicians who prevailed upon the Director of Industries to refuse permission, arguing that a foundry in that area would lead to a shortage of farm labour and to the undesirable entry of the labour unions into the sugar mill industry. When Menon therefore named Amboli as an alternative, his friend P. G. Kulkarni talked of an opportunity to buy a good bit of land at low cost. He was a native of Uttur in the adjoining Ajara taluka and was familiar with local circumstances. Menon went to Amboli with Kulkarni, his friend the late Dada Shinde and Anandrao Atigre. The group lodged in the Government rest house. There they met the sarpanch (local leader) and other senior villagers and explained the benefits: fresh employment and business opportunities for the locals. Menon acquired 214 acres of land after a great deal of persuasion. As was his nature, Menon took care that no injustice was done to any one of the original landowners. Atigre remembers several meetings when Menon would sit down with the villagers and share their home-made bhakri. This led to a bond between him and the villagers. Menon also met the erstwhile king of Sawantwadi kingdom and MLA Shrimant Shivram Raje Bhosale in connection with the land purchase and obtained a promise of full support. Later he also succeeded in getting a sanction for the

necessary power supply from the Minister for Industries, S. N. Desai. Overall, Menon was able to build networks at all levels.

Vasantrao Ogle of Amboli, who helped Menon a great deal, provides information on this matter. Menon arrived at the MTDC offices in company of P. G. Kulkarni and enquired about Vasantrao Ogle. Ogle was away at Ratnagiri and only returned at midnight. Menon met him first thing in the morning and told him that he was looking for land anywhere in Gargoti, Radhanagari, Chandgad or Ajara for setting up a factory. Ogle assured him of any amount of land he needed. Menon was overjoyed and gave him a huge hug. He said that he had been enquiring for four days: Ogle was the first who had said this so confidently. After his assurance, he wouldn't mind even if he did not get the land after all. Ogle did not own any land on his own, but was aware of a tract of 14,000 acres of land in Amboli area, where he took Menon along to have a look. Menon gazed around from atop a hill and announced his selection for a location on the border of two Zillahs (administrative units). A total of 500 individuals held between them about 7,000 acres of land. The agricultural practice in this area was of shifting cultivation, i.e. each plot was farmed once in seven years. The tract selected by Menon was rather remote and had not been cultivated for a good 20 years. Ogle expounded on the benefits of industry on that land which would provide employment for local youth.

The Government owned the land and the peasants held the rights. Liaison with the Government was essential and thus Menon extended his stay at Amboli. The whole exercise went on for three years from 1978 to 1981. Ogle gave Menon his constant cooperation. Menon's keen sense of humour made every situation fun, Ogle remembers. When the transactions were finally completed and the time came for the foundation ceremony, Ogle was on posting at Matheran. He came to Amboli on purported sick leave. The Maharashtra Tourism Department Managing Director of that time was also a Menon. Chandran Menon remarked to him, "All Menons are scoundrels." The other Menon responded equally cheerfully, "Does that include you?" At the ceremony, Menon invited Ogle to be included in the photograph, but the fact that he was ostensibly on 'medical leave' forced him to refrain.

Once the Amboli project was decided upon, Menon began the process of assembling manpower at all levels. He had met foundry specialist M. V. Kulkarni once at Madras. His advice was valuable. Menon met Ashok Chitre through P. G. Kulkarni, approved him and hired him for the Amboli project. Chitre was entrusted with a wide spectrum of activities from land acquisition up to start-up. Chitre quotes Menon as saying that the industrial belt of Pune extended up to Kamshet, and if a wave of strikes rose in Pune, it hit the outskirts. He planned a project in an industrially backward, remote area so as to be outside the wave zone if a similar thing happened in Kolhapur. He also got the Pioneer Status Subsidy since he had selected a remote area. Menon carried out a human resource survey from Belgaum to Goa. He also commissioned a contour survey by Khairmode. It was thus with full preparation that he launched the Amboli project.

Menon needed an able personal assistant and one of the staff assembled for the factory, Gavade, suggested the name of Gundu Gopal Naik. A local boy, Gundu had been orphaned at age 10 and had joined a hotel at Belgaum. Menon hired him at a salary of Rs 95. He was instructed to cook meals, in view of his hotel background. Mrs. Padmini Menon and Mrs. Vasanthi Parameswaran taught him to cook the sort of food Menon liked. Menon treated him like a son, routinely referring to him as 'our Gundu.' The boy spent ten years at Amboli with Menon, even at times going to Kolhapur to work for him.

Gundu remembers the early days - when he would light up a primitive stove and roast cobs of corn. Street-side bhajias (fritters) and such stuff, which Menon was fond of, was regularly ordered. He describes Menon as a man of simple habits and needs: he would use the traditional straw rain-drape, which the locals used in that area of heavy rainfall. He at times scolded Gundu, but would soon explain kindly where the boy had gone wrong. Gundu needed money to repair his house, and Menon offered to build him a new house. Gundu on his own said, "We shall see about the new house once the factory begins running smoothly."

C. V. Tikekar says Menon had held Telco as the standard when he started the Amboli project and consulted him on various matters. S. V. Rajan was on the Amboli project since 1978 and remembers Menon's desire for social service. He had the ambition of establishing a 'Menon Nagar' at Amboli on the lines of Kirloskarwadi and Jamshedpur. He wanted to set up a modern habitat in an area where there was a lack of amenities. He also dreamt of a foundry training centre. At the time of the depression, he had called together all his managers and said that it was the time to review the situation and prepare for the future. Rajan marvels at the optimism of a man in such dire financial straits, but realises that it was a result of inborn farsightedness.

Raghav Menon says there were innumerable problems at Amboli at that time. People were not willing to work at such a remote location: the Government had granted concessions but the problem of distance remained. Castings that were produced here had to be transported to Kolhapur. No skilled labour was at hand; men had to be trained from scratch. All of Menon's energy was spent in attracting and training manpower. Yet he invested crores in the venture. The Annual Report of Menon & Menon for the year ended 30th September 1981 says that in view of the increasing demand for castings, a new foundry had been planned at Amboli with an investment of Rs 1.5 crore over the next two years, with an installed capacity of 4,000 tonnes per annum. There would also be a training centre. According to Chougule, Menon had the ambition of taking the initial planned turnover of about Rs 3 crore up to Rs 15- 20 crore in the next four years. Abhay Nevagi says that the investment in the Amboli project which Menon made in the relatively stable period of 1980-82 gave him solid support in the turbulent years after 1984 when labour relations in Maharashtra changed, with radical labour leaders like the late Datta Samant arriving on the industrial scene.

Ogle has given a comprehensive account on the progress of the Amboli project. Plenty of land was available and Menon was insistent that there should be proper landscaping. Ogle pointed out that they didn't have a dedicated naturalist or a 'nature-fanatic' as he called them, at hand, and Menon responded that what he exactly wanted for this job was a 'fanatic.' Ogle then introduced Leo Fernandes, who came to be known as Leo Kaka. A resident of Sawantwadi, Leo Kaka spent 300 days a year at Amboli. He was active in bee keeping with the Village Industries department. He had undergone three years of training in California in the subject. Love of his native land brought him home, and the situation of 'paid idleness' forced him out of Government service. He took up the activity of advising on agricultural development. His association with the Ogle family went back three generations and he took up duties with Menon on the suggestion of Ogle. The two were introduced on the day of the inauguration of the foundry and took to each other at once. Menon arranged for Leo Kaka to be shown the entire area in a jeep by Pundi Parameswaran, and then asked for his views. Leo Kaka recommended that the whole area be planted with local fauna, with a sprinkling of exotic breeds to break the monotony. Menon regularly visited Amboli every Tuesday and a few candidates were presented for the forestation job. Laxman Padwal (who was not anyone's nominee) was selected. He was allotted two acres for a nursery where the planting of seed and saplings began and a bore well was drilled nearby. Construction of the factory began in stages. Rajeev Manohar ran the project office. The area was fenced off using binding wire. Menon began to urge Leo Kaka to come full time from November. He agreed for three days a week; Menon managed to tie him up for four. On the first anniversary Menon publicly declared that Leo Fernandes' presence was a positive influence on everyone around, and Leo Kaka thereafter spent three weeks a month at Amboli.

Menon was insistent on the best quality, irrespective of the cost. He noticed that the pipeline serving the nursery was not quite straight and immediately ordered it to be uprooted and re-laid properly. About 1,000 feet of piping was required for adequate supply to the garden, and Leo Kaka balked at it, on the principle 'cut your coat according to your cloth.' But Menon got it laid.

Leo Fernandes constructed an observation post with attention to normal wildlife haunts and paths, which overlooked a watering point that he had fashioned out of the local rock. Varieties of deer passed there and back with no threat to the nursery. The engineers were about to uproot a tree for a road, but Leo Kaka held them back until Menon arrived. Menon agreed with Kaka and ordered a diversion. Soil from the foundry site was of good quality and the garden blossomed with fruit trees. Menon took great care of Leo Kaka. Once when Kaka got up in a hurry to investigate smoke seen in the distance, Menon held him back with, "You are not to see to those things." In one meeting Menon demanded that he wanted 50 rose saplings there, and not one must wither. He was freehanded in providing whatever was required for such things. Whenever there were visitors from the banks, SICOM, the financial institutions, they were first taken to see the nursery - the foundry activities came later. They would be so charmed that they often ran out of time to look into other matters. Menon often joked to Leo Kaka, "Keep up the

diversionary tactics!" Leo Kaka regularly gifted saplings to the guests and they were also asked to plant trees on the premises.

A couple of landowners objected to the electric supply lines running through their lands. Leo Kaka handled them in his own fashion. Menon always wanted his people to treat Government officials with courtesy. On one occasion, when a batch of cement sacks was delivered, it was found to be two quintals short of the 'way bill' figure. An argument ensued between the supervisor on duty and the driver. The matter went to the police, and then the transporters intervened. The cement department decided to stop cement supplies to Menon. Eventually the matter had to be cleared through much cajoling and entreaty. Menon then reminded his people, "Remember: here, we are in the jungle and we need to have everyone including the animals on our side."

Menon had drawn up a master plan for Amboli. It included a township and a service school. When he was shown the site first selected for the colony he turned it down: it had a clear view of the factory and he felt it would put the residents under constant pressure. He was of the view that workers and staff were not cogs in a wheel. He then made plans to acquire a 50-acre plot at nearby Bhatkar Wadi. Menon had planned a plantation drive right from the start of the project. He toured the adjoining forests in a jeep in company of Mande and Mahesh Bage a photographer specially brought in from Kolhapur. He would instruct Bage to photograph trees and then order selected ones to be planted on his land. Shivram Raje Bhosale had a 35-acre piece of land adjoining Menon's, and Menon had issued instructions to make enquiries if it was available. On hearing later that the land had been cleared of all vegetation, he remarked that now he wouldn't want it even if it were available for one rupee. Menon was a nature lover and he had seen the seasonal changes in the vegetation on his several trips to Sawantwadi. He had ordered photographs to be shot of the changes and had planned a company calendar based on these. He so much admired Leo Kaka's love of nature that he once told him of his intention of erecting a statue of Leo in the jungle.

The entire venture at Amboli was the answer to a challenge, which Menon saw before him. Nature regularly unleashed her fury in the shape of lashing rain and howling winds. But Menon was determined to give his dreams concrete shape right there. What he could see in his mind's eye was globalisation. His ambition was to erect the type of factory he had seen abroad in just such surroundings, to manufacture world class castings and export them all over the world. He also wanted the work culture of the developed countries to be absorbed here, and so took the counsel of his advisor Varadan when he selected people to work with him.

Menon had set norms for recruitment at Amboli and made no exceptions at any cost. The State Minister in charge of Ratnagiri District, Bhai Sawant, sent a batch of a dozen young men accompanied by the Collector and the Police Superintendent to Menon in a vehicle, with a demand that they be hired. Most of these had earlier been disqualified. Abhay Nevagi, Personnel Manager, asked Menon, "Are you firm in your norms?" Menon bluntly told Bhai Sawant not to send people in this fashion: if there were such interference, it would be

difficult to run industry. Menon had a legal advisor, Naik. Bhai Sawant, for some reason, wanted him replaced and wrote to Menon. Menon called him up and told him clearly, "Once I hire somebody, my policy is to ensure that he grows." Menon had the policy of hiring local labour. Bhai tried to insist that he hire from Sindhudurg Zillah. Menon responded with, "Is he a Minister of Sindhudurg or of Maharashtra? If he keeps up the pressure, I am prepared to hand over the keys of the plant to him." Despite such glitches he managed to maintain a cordial relationship with Bhai Sawant. It was at his recommendation that Menon invited the Minister S. N. Desai for the inauguration of the Amboli foundry. On that occasion, Menon joked, "Actually I had no intention of starting a plant here - it was Ogle who roped me in here." In his rejoinder, Sawant said, "Ogle, please rope in another ten such people."

In Amboli too, Menon kept a close and benevolent eye on his people. The lady who cooked for the group once reported late because her sister was ill. Menon at once despatched her back home: the cooking can wait; look after your sister first. He then turned around and asked Leo Kaka, "Didn't you know of Bai's problem?" The evenings when they all sat chatting, Menon kept needling Leo Kaka, a confirmed bachelor, to get married. Ogle laid a wager of one rupee that Leo Kaka would get married. Leo Kaka was the butt of lots of his light-hearted banter. Later when Menon was down with illness, he said, "This is the punishment that the Lord is giving me for having pestered a very good man."

Menon had very specific food preferences. The chapatti (made of wheat flour) was readily available at Amboli: Menon preferred the bhakri (made of millet). His associates Gosavi, Shah and others had a preference for mild food: Menon was accustomed to pungent spicy flavours. He even he ordered chutney specially from Kolhapur for the inauguration ceremony!

Pundi Parameswaran was a great help in the Amboli project: Menon had roped him in right at the beginning. Since there was plenty of space but no amenities, Pundi lived in the Government rest house and commuted to Amboli. He visited his house on weekends, since it was not practicable to move his household to the site. Parameswaran returned to Kolhapur eventually after spending the six-year period of 1980 to 1986 in this fashion. Menon usually threw himself wholeheartedly into any project he undertook. Parameswaran remembers occasions when a good eight days at a stretch would be spent camping at the Meghdoot hotel at Panhala for the sake of the Amboli project. Amboli had a good supply of sand within reach and this was an advantage that could have proved to be a major leap forward in time; however, the unrest in the Kolhapur factory and Menon's deteriorating health came in the way of progress, according to Parameswaran.

The first issue of the Menon & Menon newsletter in June 1983 carries a photo feature on the Amboli project on the back page, under the title, which translates, as "This is how our project is coming up." The editorial begins with the question, "How many of us know that our company is launching into the manufacture of S. G. (Sulphur-Graphite) iron? Are we aware of how the proposed Amboli project complements the existing Kolhapur unit?" The

Annual Report for the year ending 30-9-83 carries an announcement: "The Government of India has granted an industrial licence for the manufacture of three thousand metric tonnes of grey iron and S. G. iron castings at Amboli in Sawantwadi Taluka. This is classified as an industrially backward area of Sindhudurg District, under which certification we have been granted a subsidy to the tune of Rs. 15 lakhs. Similarly, we have also been granted the status of Pioneer Unit under the 1979 plan. We are therefore exempt from Sales Tax for nine years. We have also been adjudged as fit for a special capital incentive of Rs. 25 lakhs. The machinery for the Amboli project has arrived and the building is nearing completion. The necessary high-tension electricity supply has also been connected and the term loan instalment from SICOM has been received. The Bank of Baroda and the United Western Bank have provided us with financial support of over Rs. 72 lakhs and we can say that the first phase of the project is complete."

The first moulding at Amboli was planned for the Dassera festival and work proceeded accordingly. About 20 people had to be shifted from Kolhapur to Amboli. "If you have the will, anything is possible," Menon said. The Nov-Dec 1983 issue of Menonchi Manse gives a front page report on the Vastu Poojan (auspicious inaugural ceremony) of the Amboli project and a photograph of Pundi Parameswaran, 'Father of the Project,' performing pooja of a moulding box. The report says, "This is the very first industrial unit in Amboli area. It will soon change the lives of the people of Amboli. Local people will get employment, their living standards will go up and the disparity between urban and rural life styles will be removed." Vastu Poojan was performed at the hands of Mrs. and Mr. Chandran Menon, and Bhoomi Pooja at the hands of Mrs. and Mr. Ram Menon. Mr. Vijay Menon performed the pooja of the moulding sand mixer, and Mrs. and Mr. Pundi performed the Satyanarayana Pooja. Madhu Mestry carried out pooja of the crane. Vishnu Patil recalls with pride that he performed the pooja of the core sand mixer. There is also a report of a workers' development programme from November 30 to December 4 for familiarizing the new workers with their work and the products. It was believed that this programme would come in useful when production started at the foundry.

The unit required a few experienced people and the question was who would go. Menon gradually built up the team. One of these was K. G. Patil. Menon believed in delegation of responsibility, yet kept a close eye on the developments. He maintained good relationships. His wish was to make money and at the same time ensure that the customer and the workers were satisfied. If on his trip to Amboli, the next day happened to be a holiday, he would urge his people to join him: there was space in the car, he would say. He had deputed some Amboli people for a two-month training course to Madras. He urged everyone to make efforts. If the tenth piece was found faulty after nine good ones were produced, he stressed on the importance of finding out the reasons. Since 1977 he had been carrying out fettling at Kolhapur and he was insistent that fettling should also be done at Amboli. Fettling is the operation of removing the scales and smoothing the surfaces of raw castings. The first few years, raw castings were sent to Kolhapur for this and Menon felt this should be done at Amboli.

Some people have described the inauguration ceremony in detail. The Chairmen of the financing banks, Bank of Baroda and United Western Bank were present; Menon ensured that even in a place like Amboli they were lodged in five-star-like accommodation. The Chief Officers of several customer companies had made it a point to be present. M. M. Raiji of Mahindras remembers that the Menon brothers had donned Kolhapur-style phetas (turbans) for the occasion. Since Menon felt the Amboli project important, it was news about the inauguration that found the pride of place in Menonchi Manse. The Sept-Oct '83 issue featured a report on the first major function at the project. On Independence Day twenty one tree saplings were planted to stress the importance of forest conservation. Managing Director Baptist D'Souza of Mahindra & Mahindra was taken to Amboli in August when he was on a visit to Kolhapur; he praised the rapid progress of the project, which was nearing completion. The telephone service was inaugurated at his hands. The Knight Wegenstein Company of England were the technical advisors to the project, and one of the Directors, Eric Knight, was interviewed for the newsletter when he visited Kolhapur and Amboli. He is quoted as saying: "A country like England where one-third of the capital investment is in industry, nearly 20% of the foundries are shut. America, Germany and France are feeling the pinch of depression. The worst affected is the automobile business and the echoes of this have been felt in India." Speaking of the future of the foundry industry in India, he said, "The output of the foundries here is one-tenth to one-fifth of that in the West. Against the highly automated foundries in the West, the manpower here is five to ten times higher. The foundries here are in urgent need of technical know-how. If the Government gives greater importance to exports, the business has a bright future."

The then Associate Vice President of Kirloskar Oil Engines Shamrao Gokhale has described the Amboli project as a bold step. He had seen that Menon's conviction was that anything the Europeans could do, he could. He had always striven to do something innovative, and underwent untold trials and tribulations towards his goals. Kirloskar's orders were distributed amongst two or three foundries, but with Menon's, Gokhale says, quality was assured. Menon had the same drive that Shantanurao Kirloskar did: getting things exactly the way he wanted, whatever the cost. Many Kolhapur industrialists wondered what Menon would do with such a mammoth project, but they later on realized that it was Amboli that came in useful at times of crisis, and they praised his farsightedness.

T. Nagaraja, then with Coopers, was astounded at the progress of the project, which he visited in 1985-86. Menon told him that he wished to make complex castings, and the latest technology would be the foundation for this venture. The Annual Report for the year ending 30th September 1984 proudly announces the completion of the first phase of the Amboli project; commercial production had commenced from 22nd March 1985. "When there was industrial unrest at the Kolhapur plant, Menon shifted our jobs to Amboli so as to meet our demand, and gave us no hint that he was in trouble," says P. K. Srivastava of Escorts. "I doubt if even Escorts could have stood up to the severe strain that Menon weathered."

The next stage of development at Amboli was the installation of a high pressure moulding line. Eastman recalls that Menon had this in mind right from 1982. He had a dream of building a model foundry on the lines of those in Illinois or Indiana in the States. Since the Government gave incentives to industries located in backward areas, Menon held high hopes for Amboli. His wish was to improve the living standards of the local people. Kakkar of Mahindra, a foundry expert, had accompanied Menon to Germany to inspect the high-pressure line that Menon had in mind. His intention was not to import a new one: he intended to get one made locally to the specifications of the one he had seen at the Hanover foundry. He was fully aware of the adverse effects of the high humidity at Amboli and was determined to overcome that problem, says Kakkar.

Jaywant Yashwantrao Kharade was Menon's faithful assistant in Amboli, and is now Manager. At the time of his interview, Pundi Parameswaran recommended that though a fresher, he should be given preference since he was a local. When asked when he could join, Kharade replied, "Starting tomorrow." When Menon came to Amboli, he told Kharade that when he was the latter's age, he was already employing 1,000 people. He gave his own example to urge Kharade to learn every kind of work. Once, in the monsoons, on the way up a ghat (mountainous road) Menon told Kharade to drive. Kharade admitted that he could not drive. Menon warned him that for the post he working at, it was essential that he learn these things. When Menon got to know rather late about Kharade's planned marriage, he pulled him up for not informing him earlier. Menon not only attended that marriage, but also intentionally promoted him to Officer. When Kharade lost his father in 1988, Kharade immediately went to Ajara to see him.

Around this time, Menon had assigned Vijay Menon to Amboli for a year. Instead of putting him up in the nearby MTDC guest house, he was accommodated in the Supervisors' quarters and worked on the shop floor. Once when the electric supply was interrupted, Vijay and Kharade tramped the forests for 10 kilometres to find out the cause.

Pig iron came to Amboli from Usha Ispat. Menon concentrated on making on ordinary moulding line castings, which other foundries could not turn out even on their expensive moulding lines. He took such jobs as a challenge, a thing that helped him through the period of crises.

Amboli faced a workers' strike on just one occasion. Two labour leaders were found to be sleeping on duty, and were suspended. The workers promptly went on strike. On being informed, Menon sent orders that Kharade was to handle the matter independently with no intervention from Kolhapur. When he arrived there a week later, he said, "We shall do nothing. The plant belongs to the workers; let them decide whether to run it or not." He remained firm on his stand, and the strike fizzled out on its own after 84 days. Menon believed that once a just decision is taken, one should remain firm, and then there should be no backtracking.

He had a soft corner for the people of Amboli. Since fresh vegetables were not available locally, he would cart a boot-load of vegetables in his car on every visit. He would also go personally to Kapiltirth market in Kolhapur to buy fresh vegetables for the locals at Amboli. "Let our people at Amboli have good food," he would say.

In all respects, Menon behaved with affection and camaraderie with everyone. Ogle recalls that on a visit to Amboli during the Kolhapur labour crisis, he seemed to be agitated. But talking about it, he said, "I had nothing to lose, but I did make all this effort just so that about fifteen hundred households had their meals." His tone was that of a father whose own children had revolted. He told Leo Fernandes that he was first a friend and then an advisor. When Leo complained to him about the laxness in the security at Amboli, Menon remarked, "You seem to be obsessed just with the thoughts of the Company." One Diwali, all the responsible people at Amboli made preparations to go home, leaving only Pundi, who offered to remain behind. He asked Menon, "Will Leo Kaka also stay behind?" Menon advised him to talk to Kaka himself. Pundi said to Leo Kaka, "You are not bound by this festival. Will you stay back with me to run this two and half crore unit?" Leo arranged for a cot in his office, and stayed there.

Menon had kept standing instructions to Kharade to stay in touch with the Electricity Board people, since all the supply line to the company ran through the jungles. The cordial relations maintained by him ensured that the Board people were ready to run to Menons' aid at any time of day or night whenever there was a problem. The construction supervisor at Amboli once joked that any time they made a mistake, they covered it up by planting a tree. Menon responded that in that case, they would be raising a whole forest!

Baptist D'Souza was the Chief Guest at the annual function in 1989. A presentation was made on the day after the function and then the guests were to leave. Realising that there was one seat short if there was a driver, Menon took the driving seat himself, jokingly cautioning them that although he was today a driver, he was still the boss. People crowded his car to garland it, and the crowd wouldn't budge even after honking. Menon said, "My car doesn't need a garland. Go and garland the man who invented the car." But people kept coming. Finally Menon gave up, remarking, "Finally I am just a driver. Let these people do what they want."

The issue of Menonchi Manse for December 1992-January 1993 carries two poems in the Amboli section. One, Mugdha Smit is a piece of poetic verse. The second is an affectionate and poetic description of Amboli, its surroundings, its weather and of the plant personified as a motherly entity, by P. G. Gaikwad of Amboli.



TURNING AROUND KOLHAPUR STEEL

The first Chapter made a passing reference to the role of Menon at Kolhapur Steel Ltd. In 1965, a group of leading, enterprising Kolhapur industrialists undertook a bold venture. Kolhapur had cast iron foundries for a long time and they served the demands of the engineering industry of the period. With the evolution of technology, a demand for steel castings grew. There were very few steel foundries in the country at that time. As their supply started falling way short of demand, the industry started increasingly feeling the need for new steel foundries. Meanwhile, it was learnt that Shantilal Mehta in Goregaon, Mumbai held a license for a 'mini steel plant,' and had not been able to set it up. A group of Kolhapur industrialists including Rambhai Samani, Y. P. Powar, Vishnupant Utkur and Dadasaheb Shinde met Mehta and succeeded in persuading him to set up the plant at Kolhapur. All enterprises in Kolhapur were till then either proprietary or partnership concerns. Since this new venture was in everybody's interest, it was decided to float a public limited company. Other industrialists of Kolhapur Parvate, Shelke, Kadam, Menon enthusiastically supported this scheme. Shares in the company were promoted amongst the surrounding peasantry, and the company floated under the Company Law in 1965. It was a pioneering event in the Kolhapur industrial scene.

Shiroli village near Kolhapur was found to be the most ideal location for the plant. A plot of 21 acres was acquired. Bhoomi Poojan was performed on the 25th of December 1965, and the foundation stone was laid. The power substation was erected, and production of mild steel ingots commenced on 1st October 1967. The promoters were aware that the first couple of years would be difficult ones, with no expectation of profit. But the situation persisted beyond that period. The Company kept making losses for five years, with no signs of a turnaround. A reluctant decision was taken by the Board to sell it off. In the search for buyers, Vishwasrao Chowgule evinced interest in buying the ailing plant. His first offer was eight annas (50 paise) for every rupee invested in the project, which in the course of negotiations he raised to 10, and said with finality, "Take it or leave it." The price was based on the book value. In fact the land, building, machinery and raw materials had more than double the value. So Dadasaheb Shinde asked Vishwasrao's brother Yashwantrao who had accompanied him, "Pardon me, but will you sell the Mercedes you have arrived in for book value?" The Chowgules felt this was a grave impertinence and the deal fell through.

Having come back to square one, Rambhai Samani suggested they meet Sheth Lalchand Hirachand and ask for his guidance, or else hand over the Company to him. A delegation from Kolhapur accordingly went to Mumbai to meet Lalchand Shethji. After hearing them through, Shethji said, "Forget the idea of selling the Company. I shall come to Kolhapur and we will decide on the spot." Accordingly Lalchand Shethji came to Kolhapur with his team. He

inspected the plant and went through the records. Company Directors said to him, "The Company is not running properly since adequate funds were not available. We also have an order booking problem. What do we do?" Lalchand strongly recommended that they should not sell to anyone. "As for what to do, I will book your capacities, provide you with good technical people. I will also give you a moulding machine and the money for raw materials." He was as good as his word and in two years the Company picked up very well. Finances began to stabilize. The guidance of Lalchand's colleague K. S. Shah proved invaluable in this regard. But by then Rambhai Samani had passed away.

Jawanmal Gandhi then took up the initiative. He took over as Managing Director and took the Company forward at a good pace over the next five years. In 1971-72 the Company was in a position to declare its maiden dividend and declare a 5:3 bonus. Kolhapur Steel had not only survived but had prospered due to the timely aid given by the Walchand Group. Jawanmal Gandhi was Managing Director for seven years, but during the last two years, a period of economic depression and a prolonged labour strike again sent the Company into deep financial trouble. Outstanding payments to suppliers, banks and financial institutions began to pile up.

The Board of Directors were up against a wall, and it was decided that the only man who would be able to bring the Company back on track would be Chandran Menon. They approached him en masse and entreated him to bail the Company out. This was in 1977-78, when Utkur was the Chairman and Menon the Vice Chairman. Menon had by then built up his reputation as an ambitious and progressive industrialist. He was then busy with his own expansion operations, and he at first replied that he wouldn't be able to devote the requisite time to sort out the problems. He said that in order to turn the Company around it would be necessary to restructure the Management, and that would require sanction from the Board of Directors. He also warned that this would be a long-term exercise, which could not be taken up today and given up tomorrow. But the Board of Directors was insistent. They promised full cooperation and a free hand to Menon. Then Menon joked, "Nobody thought of me when the Company was doing well and now that it is in trouble, you want to throw it into my lap. What kind of justice is this?" But he finally bowed to the pressure of his friends and he took up the Chairmanship of Kolhapur Steel Ltd. Dadasaheb Shinde joined him as Vice Chairman. Menon ran the Company for ten years. In 1990 the Company celebrated its Silver Jubilee, and the Souvenir published on the occasion describes this decade as the 'Golden Age' of the Company.

Rambhai Samani and Menon were great friends and would consult each other in everything. After Rambhai's demise in 1970, his son Hemraj Samani joined the Board. Menon was the Managing Director and he got along well with Hemraj. Hemraj says Menon had started in a limited way to look into matters at Kolhapur Steel in 1975. He was a stickler for details and was methodical in his approach. Hemraj took pointers from his style of functioning. Menon was ambitious. He was prepared to meet the challenge and he had penetrating foresight. All these strengths stood Kolhapur Steel in good stead.

M. B. Sheikh joined KSL as trainee in 1976. The year after there was a month-long strike, and the office of the Company was shifted to the Pearl Hotel. Admittance was restricted to a few select persons. One day Menon arrived there without any advance intimation. Sheikh had not met Menon and in his ignorance asked, "How did you get in here?" Taking no offence, Menon replied, "I am T. C. K. Menon. I have come to meet Jawanmal Gandhi."

In the quarter of an hour of conversation that followed between the two, Menon made full enquiries of Sheikh. What the atmosphere in the Company was like, what Sheikh's aims in life were etc. were discussed. Sheikh was in his twenties then and had heard of Menon. He was rather shaken by these questions. After this encounter, he did not come into direct contact with Menon for a year. The situation was very grim at the time of the 1978 AGM. Several files had gone missing. The situation was beyond Sheikh. Nobody was prepared to face the assembly and a meeting held in the canteen building began to get unruly. Menon stepped in, and handled the situation expertly. Not required to do so by any means, he realized that things would snowball out of control if he did not intervene. He noted several points raised and agreed to do certain things. He stated that the guilty would be punished. After this occasion Menon's involvement began to increase.

After taking over the responsibility, Menon in his characteristic fashion swung into action. He made a detailed inspection of all departments. He held discussions with all departmental heads. He evaluated them and assigned duties that each could readily handle, and in general brought energy and dynamism into the management. He studied the technology and the products. He decided to go in for new products and made the required changes. He began to collect knowledgeable technologists. V. S. Potnis of Bhilai wanted to come to Kolhapur and Menon welcomed him. P. G. Kulkarni, Chartered Accountant and Income Tax Consultant, was retained and all Tax matters were put into his charge. He was given the help of the Accountant and the Purchase Officer M. B. Sheikh. Labour leaders and leading workers were apprised of the situation and the possible solutions. It was explained to them that only when production and productivity went up could there be solutions to the problems faced by the company and the workmen. An idea about the pace of Menon's work can be got in the detailed commentary he has written in the Chairman's message in that year's Annual Report. Rarely does one get to see an Annual Report that shows such deep insight and foresight.

The following are some of the main points that Menon had mentioned in his Chairman's commentary of 28th November 1980: The Board succeeded in maintaining profits at the previous years' level. This in spite of the interest burden going up by 100 per cent. The next step would be the modernization of machinery for which we have to commit ourselves to new technology, the only way to stay competitive. Menon assured them that they would see modernization both in production and in management methods. He also clarified to the shareholders that this exercise would cost money and will take time to show results. Therefore the picture of the Company would not look

rosy for some time to come. But once the moves succeed, the Company would move from strength to strength on all fronts.

Menon provided the necessary facts and figures. Apart from management restructuring, modifications to the factory layout had begun with the help of the National Productivity Council. Retired Railway Chief Engineer Kedari was inducted as General Manager, and Potnis was to join as Works Manager soon. Potnis had 23 years of experience at the Bhilai Steel Plant and hailed from Kolhapur. Menon also outlined the training arrangements made for the Company's technicians, along with details of the new equipment to be acquired.

Menon also described the problems facing the Company and his solutions to overcome them. The acute shortage of water was tackled with help from various cooperative service societies, and Menon records the Company's thanks to them. He described the difficulties faced by the Company due to the 35 per cent power cut imposed by the MSEB, and had expressed his great concern. He also expressed concern at the rising prices of graphite rods, ferroalloys, manganese bricks and steel scrap, and outlined the ongoing measures to tackle this. He described his efforts in the face of the objections raised by the Income Tax Department on the tax accounts of the Company right from its date of inception. He ends the report with the optimism that the modernization programme would bring the Company out of the difficulties in which it finds itself, and it would soon be able to grow and generate more employment.

Former Chairman V. B. Utkur and former Managing Director J. G. Gandhi had asked to be relieved from their positions on the Board of the company on account of health and family reasons, and the Report thanks them for the guidance that they had given the Company in the past. At the very end, Menon asserts that a Company's strength is its people, and he sincerely thanks each and every person associated with the Company in any way.

After taking over, Menon began to go the Kolhapur Steel regularly. The then Accounts Head, Tanksale, associated closely with him. The IT Department had dug up cases right from 1966-67. They had raised objections on every year's returns. The cases for the first five years went into appeal, and the inspection of the later years was going on. The Company's Investment Allowance claim under Section 80J was hanging fire with the CBDT. The Company was making profits, but there were cases pending at various levels, the Income Tax Inspector, ITO, Assistant Commissioner, Commissioner, Tribunal etc. That is why there was fear that things were seriously wrong. Every Director was bringing in his own consultant and trying to save his own skin.

In Menon's second year as Chairman the turnover of the Company went up from Rs 1.5 crore to 2 crore and the profit from Rs 10 lakh to 19 lakh. The Board was therefore able to announce a dividend of 20 per cent the same as the previous year. The Company's 15th Annual Report, i.e. the one for the year ended 30th June 1980, carries a long list of machinery bought and on

order. Both furnaces are reported to have been repaired and were giving standard output, the Report says.

V. L. Potnis joined the Company this year and immediately suggested certain improvements. The Company's castings received Lloyds certification in the same year, which opened the doors of several Government and other customers. The Company changed over from plain carbon steel to advanced alloy steels, increasing its variety of products. Water became available from the Nagaon project, but the shortage of electricity was still worrisome and the factory had to run on two shifts instead of three. Since the electricity problem was widespread, a state-level Committee was set up to look into it. Menon had been appointed on this Committee and he had given it his special attention. The Company decided to install another 200 KVA generator set to remedy the power shortage. This would help the rest of the factory, other than the furnaces, to run continuously. Since the power shortage was country wide, there was a shortage of raw materials. The costs were also rising and the Company was forced to increase its selling prices. But Menon made it clear that these increases had to be rigidly controlled in order to stay competitive. The Company was attempting to get an additional 2500 KVA of power so as to be able to operate the furnaces at full capacity. Money was required for all this, and the report has said that the Company had raised additional short term loans.

Menon always reminded everyone that the Directors own just 11 per cent of the Company while 89 per cent belongs to the common residents of the surrounding countryside. Their interests therefore came first. We have amongst us great people such as Powar and Samani, who must be protected. But Menon did not have the habit of interfering in the Company's working. It was through pressure from others that forced him to take over the reins. He however took great pride in the Company. The houses in the Nagao-Shiroli area are outstanding, and he saw them as a family of 300 which he was looking after.

During this year the Company planned a Community Centre, a separate building, for cultural activities, rest and leisure, a library etc. All this goes to show how Menon made effective changes in Company right in the first two years of his stewardship. Several people analysed the causes of the troubles that the Company landed in. The Company Secretary Mr. Y. S. Dalvi said that although a public limited Company, it was being run as a proprietary firm. For several years it was Powar's Company and then it became Jawanmal Gandhi's Company. Menon had very few shares in the Company as against other directors. Chartered accountant P. G. Kulkarni had assured him that once Menon took the Company in hand, he would see to the rest. Accordingly, Kulkarni took an aggressive stand and skeletons began to tumble out of several closets. Those whose hands were not clean became wary. Menon had just Rs 5000 worth of shares, and was not involved in any other way, and he had a clean image. Sheikh says he held Menon to be his Guru in his formative years. Sheikh and Kulkarni worked very hard to improve the financial picture of KSL. According to Kulkarni, the Company had an intolerably high liability load of Rs. 3 crore. After Menon took over, Kulkarni

took him to meet Income Tax Commissioner Mr. Bhaskaran and appraised him of the situation. Bhaskaran had a clean and honest record, and Kulkarni told Menon that he was going to meet an honest and dedicated person. Menon explained the situation to Mr. Bhaskaran. He told him that this grave matter concerns not just one or two individuals but the livelihoods of eight hundred middle class and lower middle class souls. It is a life-and-death question for hundreds of small shareholders. Bhaskaran developed full faith in Menon in the very first meeting, and later gave his wholehearted help in getting the KSL mess sorted out.

Menon could disburse 20 per cent dividend in his third year as well. The turnover reached Rs. 2.68 crores. About 10 lakhs worth of new machinery was acquired and is listed in that years' annual report. One of the Directors, Dada Shinde, was deputed to attend three foundry-related trade fairs: London, Hanover and Paris. He interacted with several industries abroad to assess export potential, study new developments and trends. The Director General of Supplies and Disposal (DGS&D), Delhi granted accreditation to the Company and this opened up new opportunities. Bhilai Steel Plant, Bharat Earth Movers, Bharat Heavy Electricals and the Kudremukh project were mentioned as special opportunity areas. The report talks about the constantly rising demand for castings, and the consequent augmentation of technical and management manpower in the Company. Also covered are the quality enhancement and the Research & Development efforts. The registration granted by the National Council for Scientific and Research Wing of the DGTD has been recorded. The report brings out the all-round attention Menon was paying to the Company's progress.

A Master Plan was drawn up for future growth, and the beginning was the expansion of the foundry shed. Bulk purchase arrangements were made with reputed companies for uninterrupted supply of oxygen and LP gas, and storage was build for these. But shortage of power and raw materials and rising costs had become a recurring problem. The castings market precluded adequate price increases. Management was hard pressed to fight this problem. Menon's experience came in very useful at this stage. He collected suggestions from the workers and set up an Employees' Welfare Trust, and deposited Rs. 1,13,000 to launch it. It was decided to encourage sports activities, and the workers' teams started showing outstanding performances in sports events. A picnic trip was also organized for the workers.

Mr. Arvind Kashid was with KSL from 1970. Earlier he had worked with Utkur, and was acquainted with Menon since then. He was looking after stores and purchase at KSL. When Menon took over, he promoted Kashid to Purchase Manager. He felt that a known person was preferable for this job to a newcomer. Kashid initially baulked at the responsibility, doubting his ability to handle it, but Menon put confidence into him and encouraged him to start. Kashid handled both Purchase and Stores from 1981 to 1988.

The two years that followed saw the turnover slightly slumping to 2.5 crores and 2.25 crores. Dividend was brought down to 18 per cent from 20. The slowing of the market made the Directors rethink on the pace of development.

It was decided to change the product mix somewhat, with increased production of the more value added steel castings than just steel ingots. Ongoing expansion like a new shed and more bays had to be completed. Since larger castings fetched better rates, it was decided to run both furnaces simultaneously and a transformer had been obtained from the MSEB. But it went out of order and hampered production, so the expansion plan had to be put on hold. Power limitations meant only one furnace could be used, and the MSEB's doubling the tariff all at once threw all financial projections out of gear. A fresh three-year agreement was signed with the union in 1981-82; still in the following year there was controversy on the bonus issue and the factory suffered a two month strike. The bright side at this time was the approval for manufacturing cast steel rolls from the DGTD. Similarly the R&D Division obtained Government recognition. The Community Complex building was also completed.

M. B. Sheikh and V. L. Potnis have described Menon's policies at the time he took charge. When he went to Pune for a planning session, P. G. Kulkarni said that Sheikh was required, and he was taken along. They camped at the Amir Hotel, and together studied the Company's earlier balance sheets carefully. Menon said that the Company had the potential to grow very big, but needed to be managed professionally. Very soon Sheikh was made Accounts chief. Potnis was due to join. Menon said, "We are getting a gold medallist in Kolhapur. Let us give him whatever he asks for. The Company will not grow without such people."

Potnis had several misgivings about leaving a Public Sector job for KSL. The methods and culture were totally different and he wondered what if he could not cope. He therefore requested there should be a 90 day notice clause each way. Menon told him, "The amount that you have been getting at Bhilai will reach your house every month. Whether you are at the factory or not will be irrelevant." The matter was closed at that.

Menon was particular that the Board should not interfere in anything. He was as strong, firm and at times blunt, as he was soft-spoken. He achieved all-round improvement with no benefit to himself. He had a very keen insight into people. He was not very happy with one who had been hired as Deputy General Manager. When Potnis was hired, it was seen that Potnis was firmly in charge, and that Potnis and Sheikh were given the authority to sign cheques. In 1982 when an acute shortage of scrap was felt, the DGM was sent to Calcutta for procurement, but came back empty handed. Menon wasn't convinced. He sent Sheikh who reported that the problem was because MSTC wanted an LC from a nationalized bank. Menon was not willing to change banks just for that; Sheikh was asked to look at other alternatives and he soon came up with the idea to obtain a Nationalized bank's counter guarantee to United Western Bank's guarantee. That satisfied the MSTC requirement and 2,000 tonnes of scrap was promised. The scrap duly arrived in a fortnight, and Menon immediately summoned the DGM and told him his services were no longer required. He instructed Sheikh to send six months' salary and a termination letter to the man's house. Menon suspected foul play on the part of the DGM and thus took this extreme step.

The man in question then set up a firm in competition with Kolhapur Steel. Menon said that Sheikh would be the right man to tackle him and gave him charge of Marketing in addition to accounts. Sheikh pointed out that an Accounts man is generally not given higher assignments. Menon asked him what he was worried about. Sheikh then clarified that an Accounts man can very easily be accused of misappropriation. Menon replied, "If anyone says that, straightaway tell them that yes, you have taken money and given it to Chandran Menon. Then if anyone has the guts to come and question me, let him."

Another favourite concept of Menon's was that of the long rope. He said if given a rope long enough, a man of ability will use it to climb up to success, and we must hold the other end firmly. If he is not capable, he will hang himself with the rope. Menon was always very clear in expressing himself and at times blunt. KSL had applied for a SICOM loan, and the Chairman and Managing Director there was one Mr. Bhagwat. He studied the Kirloskar Consultants report on the Company and asked Menon, "Your personal stake in this Company is very small. If we release the funds and something goes wrong, who will be responsible?" Menon replied very feelingly, "This is a true public limited Company, in which the common man has a stake. Otherwise, it is nobody's child, or the child of a Rakhel, born out of rape." Bhagwat was flabbergasted then, but in due course he released as much money as was required. Sheikh systematically reorganized the Marketing Division and just then the demand for cement plants shot up. Just then Menon had to go abroad for several months for treatment, and the Company degenerated into its old ways. Sheikh felt he could not face Menon on his return; he left KSL in Menon's absence and started a business. Some people started a campaign of reviling Malayalees. When Menon returned, he again carried out a mopping up operation. The Excise Department put up a demand for Rs. 60 lakhs in arrears. Menon felt the need for a consultant and he despatched Sheikh to Pune to meet Dr. B. R. Sabade of the Mahratta Chambers. Dr. Sabade named V. R. Kulkarni, who in turn named Mr. Khosla. Menon told him that he was in this as a social duty. Khosla cautioned him clearly that he could face a prison sentence. But Menon had created a good impression on Khosla, who then worked day and night and got Kolhapur Steel out of the mess.

After 24 years in Bhilai, Potnis faced the prospect of a possible transfer to Durgapur, and which is why he began to think of leaving the Steel Authority. Originally from Kolhapur, he heard of the need of an experienced man at Kolhapur Steel and made enquiries. Potnis expressed his expectation of first class railway fare for the interview, but Menon told him to fly down. Potnis came over, saw the factory and met Menon. Menon told him he must join here and nowhere else. In 1980, the Company had a turnover in the range of 1.5 crores. Menon called together Potnis and other colleagues and expressed his wish to increase this to 8 crores in five to six years. His companions were astounded at this. How was a fivefold increase possible in the period, they felt, and said so. But Menon had outstanding foresight and confidence. He said, "I want this done, and you are going to do it." Kolhapur Steel actually achieved 8 crores in 1985-86, and only then did Menon relinquish his Chairmanship. He remained on the Board for the rest of his life. Potnis says

Menon was alive to the fact that the Company shareholders were very ordinary people with no knowledge of the world. Whenever any prominent person visited Kolhapur Menon would always invite him to the factory. He also arranged for informative lectures by leading lights of industry in the Annual General Meetings. Accordingly, Dr. Kalyani of Bharat Forge, Dr. Joshi of Walchandnagar Industries, Mr. Viren Shah of Mukand Iron and Steel visited the plant. Shah in fact remarked, "What is happening here is what we have been striving for. Villages are being enriched, and local capital is being used locally." Another trait in Menon that Potnis spoke about is Menon's talent of extracting response. However small the person he was dealing with, he would ask for an opinion. It would put the person at ease and he would talk freely. With Potnis' background of a huge steel plant, Menon would ply him with questions. He wanted to start pig iron manufacture at Amboli, and he was pestering Potnis to take him along to Bhilai. Accordingly the two visited Bhilai for a week. Menon wanted to know exactly how many hours pig iron stayed in the molten state, since he had revolutionary ideas in his mind right from 1980. He had firm ideas about management. He would visit KSL at least three times a week. He brought about improvements on both the commercial and technical sides, set up systems and methods. He decided production quotas and goals. He started the tradition of felicitating the child of any worker of shareholder for any achievement in any field. He had grown to know practically all the workers in KSL personally. At the 1983 strike in Kolhapur Steel, Menon had decided not to budge. The Agreement with the union clearly said that bonus would be paid as per the law. But the workers wanted more, and went on strike in November for two months. Menon was determined not to compromise. But in the negotiations, he took care to see that the opposite party did not feel defeated. The workers felt they had gained something; the result was a reopening marked with gusto, and that is how the target of 8 crores was achieved. The Community Centre was completed in 1984 through the efforts of Menon and Dada Shinde. A Maruti temple was built and consecrated at the hands of the Shankaracharya of Karveer Peeth. The hall became available to the public at large at nominal rent, fulfilling a major social need of the area, and increasing the esteem of the Company among the local people. Some Directors raised objections from time to time of the 6 lakhs expenditure, but Menon ignored this. His stand was where would people go each time if we don't provide the facility?

It is worth taking a look at how Menon achieved what he did in the teeth of adversity since 1983-84. In that year Menon raised the turnover, hovering thus far at around Rs 2.5 to 3.5 crore. Profits went up and the 18 per cent dividend could be sustained. The Master Plan for development which had had to be put on hold was revived. Menon bagged a Rs 50 lakh SICOM loan for the purpose. The capital base had to be increased as per SICOM's conditions, and it was necessary to raise long term deposits from shareholders and the public. Both these ventures met with grand success, and development plans progressed well. 3 MVA transformers were acquired at the cost of Rs 3.5 lakhs, and put on stream at the beginning of 1984. This allowed both furnaces to run simultaneously, and bigger and heavier castings could be poured. The Annual Report announces with pleasure a seven and half metric tonne casting supplied to Tungabhadra Steel. The castings

production target for 1984-85 was fixed at 14,000 tonnes, but Menon took the shareholders into confidence and cautioned that this may not necessarily translate into corresponding increase in profits. He assured them of his efforts of maximize profits through cost reduction. A high point of this year is the bagging of Defense orders by the Company. There is also mention of the IBR registration being continued.

The year 1984-85 shows a big leap by the Company. Turnover jumped from Rs 3.5 to 6 crore and dividend could be increased to 20 per cent. Rs 60 lakh were spent on development; details are given in the Report. New development plans included a 12 or 17 metric tonne capacity Direct Electric Arc Furnace, and negotiations with Tata Consultants for further development are mentioned. Castings of 8.5 tonnes apiece and expectations of export business are mentioned. The opening of Sales Offices in Goa and Bangalore is mentioned, as are plans of more such offices elsewhere. Plans to regularly import scrap were announced. Also announced is the formation of an Action Group to study ways of cost reduction and quality enhancement. The appointment of Dilip Gandhi, son of Jawanmal Gandhi, as Additional Director, was also announced.

In 1985-86 Kolhapur Steel achieved Menon's target of Rs 8 crore well within schedule. This was a record of sorts for the Company. Production had been targeted at 15,000 tonnes; it actually exceeded this and touched 16,000 tonnes. Of course, the rise in input costs prevented a steep rise in profits, but the 20 per cent dividend could be sustained easily. All foundries in the country were dependent on imported scrap and Kolhapur Steel was no exception. A well-equipped R&D Centre was set up in this year: a Japanese Metallographic Microscope and an American Direct Reading Spectrometer were procured. This Division enabled the Company to take a lead in exports. On the Labour side, a four-year agreement paved the way for smooth progress.

The year ended June 1987 proved to be the last one of Menon's tenure. The turnover had touched Rs 8.65 crore, but rising input costs had increased expenditure, and dividend had to be cut back to 15 per cent. Development plans had to be slowed down, since there were depression conditions again in the market. Prices were unfavourable due to increasing competition in the steel castings field. A unique feature of the Annual Report was special thanks to the MSEB from the Board of Directors for maintaining a steady supply of power.

Mohammed Saheb Hudli says about Menon's tenure at Kolhapur Steel that earlier Jawanmal Gandhi had once saved the Company; however, Menon had successfully rescued the edifice that was tottering during the last two years of Gandhi's Chairmanship. Although his stake in Kolhapur Steel was negligible, he spent so much time towards the Company that his own business was losing his attention. His health was also beginning to fail. His family and friends therefore prevailed upon him to retire from Kolhapur Steel. Sheikh recalls that the Chairman was always elected unanimously. This year nobody approached him to take the Chairmanship again. The Board of Directors was riddled with politics. Menon was a strong, self-respecting man. With the

feeling that he would not impose himself if he was not wanted, he did not file his nomination at all. It is also true that his illness had also made him a little mentally depressed.

Such was the 10-year career of Menon at Kolhapur Steel. He had taken it up as a social duty, and he revived the Company with dedicated and selfless effort. It was due to him that the once renowned organization of Kolhapur regained its former glory, and brought fame to Kolhapur in the process. At times he neglected his health for his work. Kolhapur Steel was thus an important phase in the life of Chandran Menon.



THE FINAL DAYS

Quite a few people have given their opinions on the strike at Menon's and of the related situation. One of these was the first union leader at Menon's, P. D. Dighe. Nana Shahane was the Company advisor at the time of the 1985 agreement. Since Menon himself was abroad, Vijay Menon used to be present for the negotiations. Dighe's union had insisted that it would only be involved if 100 per cent of the workers joined it, and accordingly the bulk of the workers joined. Menon could see that the agreement was not workable - sure enough finances deteriorated and the plant closed. Just at that time Dighe gradually moved out of the scene due to health problems. He says Menon's was earlier just a small engine making unit, with emphasis on quality. The market then demanded engine-and-pump assemblies and manufacturers who made only engines were gradually filtered out and were reduced to ancillary units manufacturing components for the big companies. Just then, Menon Pistons was set up. Chandran Menon was fully aware of where and how big his target market was. He was aware that excessive growth could lead to bigger problems. The unit was dependent on huge companies like Escorts and Maruti. The oil crisis in the Middle East had a massive impact on the automobile sector. On this background the unit had to be restarted after a long drawn out strike and declared sick. The situation was Rs 23 lakh of capital facing crore in debts. Menon led his Company out of the mess with great courage. It took five years for matters to get back on the rails: Dighe regrets the unfortunate fact that Menon did not live to see the fruits of his efforts.

Nevagi recalls that productivity increased as a result of compromise with labour. The market was also improving. Production increased from 165 boxes per day to 220, and then to 320. Initially, 325 men had been retrenched: 118 were later reinstated. It is noteworthy that production increased even after a net reduction of over 200 men. The question discussed often then was whose benefit came first, the labour organisations' or the Company's, in the long run? Most affirmed the second. Menon was the only one who stuck to the stand that it was the workers who need to decide: he would not get involved. He was of the clear opinion that basically there was no conflict in the interests of both the sides. He felt that it was easier to speak to a few representatives than to explain matters to thousands of workers. His confidence in his convictions helped him to double production with half the work force. He believed that plain sympathy, as opposed to the awareness of reality on the ground, was eventually harmful to everyone. He had recalled Vilas Kasute to help improve labour relations.

The Banks' cooperation was essential for things to move smoothly with the BIFR. It became possible due to the cordial relations that Menon had maintained. V. B. Ghorpade remembers that he had presented Menon's case in Delhi as lead banker. V. S. Kulkarni had by then been assigned to Head

Office. He did as much as he could from there. But Menon did not in any way buckle under the BIFR strain. During a hearing in 1989 in front of Badal Roy, the latter made some observations which Menon did not agree with: he put down the keys to the company on Roy's table and said, "You take over, I shall return home." Menon paid off all his creditors. He would personally go over to hand over drafts of fifty and sixty thousand. His creditors were convinced that Menon would never default on even a five-rupee debt.

Menon continued his efforts towards team building and developing people. An example is S. A. Haladkar, a Kolhapur native. His father was a Lal Nishan official and would often meet Menon. Haladkar graduated in Commerce in 1978, and through his father's contact often played cricket with Menon's team. Kasute hired him as helper from 1980 on the strength of that association. Menon himself was a cricket fan, and when his team won the shield twice in succession, he hosted a party at Danat Hotel. He learned that Haladkar was a helper, and ordered Mande to move him to Planning. He soon began to appreciate Haladkar's prompt action on his production enhancement initiatives. When the Amboli Manager quit, the Kolhapur foundry head was transferred there, and the question arose as to who would fill the breach at Kolhapur. Menon summoned Haladkar and asked him, "Will you run the foundry if I give you charge tomorrow?" Haladkar was surprised for a moment, but he said, "I shall see to the production side, but I am just a B. Com. How can I handle the technical angle?" Menon told him, "You need not worry about the technical side; increasing production requires brains." Menon put him in charge and made him a success. He must have been impressed by the systematic paperwork of Haladkar.

In 1987 there were 540 people working in the foundry and a daily production of just 12 to 14 tonnes. In 1990 the manpower had been slashed to half, and when Haladkar took over, the production had already risen to 22 to 24 tonnes per day of quality castings. Cylinder blocks were the main product. Haladkar gradually absorbed the technology and is today the Deputy Manager of the Foundry Division. He remembers that Menon was fond of people who kept trying: he had a disdain for negative thinking. Menon believed that nothing was impossible. He had a firm grasp of casting technology and was available for advice on technical problems, at times sitting up late nights to sort one out. The pattern shop was his focus of attention in terms of development and so it happened that no assignment ever failed. Menon achieved things that no foundry had ever done before.

Ram Menon took over the operations of Chandra Alloys and Steels in February 1990. It was later renamed as Menon Metalliks. Pundi Parameswaran was put in charge. This venture succeeded very well. Today it employs 130 people and the turnover is seven to eight crore rupees a year. In this way Menon paid attention to diversification side by side with increase in production in spite of rapidly deteriorating health. All his achievements got a fitting acknowledgement in 1990 in the shape of the FIE Foundation Award. The short speech that Menon made on that occasion on 8th March 1990 is available for reference. He has begun, "I still find it difficult to absorb the fact that I have been selected for this award. I have been attending the Award

ceremony for the last several years, and always felt the awardees were such greats that I couldn't even think of comparing myself with them. I had never imagined that one day I would join their ranks." Menon has then presented insightful remarks on the industrial scene. He has regretted the tardy pace of industrial progress and the fact that India is a target of ridicule the world over because of this. "Industry and industrialists do not get the value they deserve in this country. They are looked upon as cruel exploiters. The greatness of Tata, Kirloskar, Bajaj is known worldwide. But the fact that their contribution to the nation is not recognized here is a major drawback in our value system. These people staked everything to put our country on the economic world map. We have ample facilities and excellent manpower. Earlier we were concentrating on political revolution, but in the present century we have brought about an economic revolution through science, technology and information. But we have been unable to see it in the required perspective. We now need to pay attention to these changes and give them their due importance. In the new circumstances the customer is going to be the focus and in the free economy he is going to be king. We have large reserves of enthusiasm, which should be channelized towards alleviation of pain and poverty, towards nation building and resultantly towards service to the universe." The speech amply demonstrates how Menon's nationalist fervour surfaced on every occasion.

1990 saw a fresh agreement through negotiations with labour unions of all the Divisions. The BIFR package is mentioned and there is a guarantee of shouldering the responsibilities that it entailed. Vijay Menon, Dilip Mande, Vilas Kasute, Madhu Mestry and S. V. Rajan have signed on behalf of the Management and nine people including Dhumal, Kumbhar, Patil signed as workers' representatives. The agreement was valid for five years, up to 31st August 1995.

G. G. Joshi says Menon's was the only company that ever got out of BIFR fully. Such examples are extremely rare in Indian industry and it was nothing short of a miracle. Menon never allowed his personal problems, even his health to come in the way of his efforts. On two occasions Joshi accompanied Menon to Delhi for BIFR related work. Menon had such faith in Joshi that he even involved him in business planning. The two worked together for preparing the BIFR application. They were no longer just business associates; their relationship went deeper. Although not on the Menon Board, Joshi was often invited for Board meetings. The Bank had taken some bold steps in favour of Menon. If anything had gone wrong, Joshi's career was on the line, but he and Menon understood each other perfectly. People were generally scared to speak frankly with Menon and this was bad for the Company, but Joshi had no such problems. Menon listened to him and took remedial action. Joshi was Branch Manager at the Shivaji Chowk branch till October 1992 and the BIFR plan was still running. He says Menon's personality was such that wherever he went he managed to get along well with the top people. He was for a time the Chairman of the CII (Confederation of Indian Industries) Southern Maharashtra Zone. He interacted with the top people in industry on equal terms. Joshi was impressed by the fact that he enjoyed prestige even while his business was in trouble.

The BIFR sanctioned the reconstruction and restructuring plan for Menon & Menon on 12th November 1990. The following are the salient features of the plan: The Board came into existence in 1988 and on 17th October 1989, declared Menon & Menon a sick unit under the law. The Company submitted that it was capable of recovering on its own. The main Bankers, Bank of Baroda, submitted a reconstruction plan, which was not sanctioned by the Board. The Board then appointed Bank of Baroda as the Operating Agency and asked for a fresh plan on 6th March 1990, and the Bank complied. Inputs were taken from the Reserve Bank and after studying the Plan and hearing all sides, the Board gave it final shape.

Giving the background, the Board said that Menon & Menon was registered as a partnership firm in 1954. Starting with the manufacture of diesel engines, the firm then went into the manufacture of castings and in 1969 it was registered as a Private Limited Company. In the decade following 1970 the Company modernized its machine shop and expanded its foundry. In addition, from 1980 to 84 it erected a new modern foundry at Amboli with an investment of Rs 2.5 crore. But the performance for the 5-6 years after 1984, the affairs of the Company were unsatisfactory. The production slumped from Rs 9.25 crore in 1984-86 (18 months) to Rs 2.36 crore in 1986-87. It is true that it again rose to 8.5 crore in 1989-90, but the accumulated losses, too, had mounted to 8.5 crore. Due to this, end March 1990 sees total losses at Rs 7.92 and capital and reserves totalling Rs 93 lakh. The Company's debt/equity ratio slid to 6.53:1. The Company's assets are of 2.33 crore, while liabilities were 5.53 crore. In March 90, the Company's capital base stands at Rs 52 lakh, while outstanding loans are Rs 1.69 crore. The Board has analysed the reasons for this state of affairs, the main being: cash shortage due to working capital being used to repay loans, nine months' delay from the MSEB in providing power, labour unrest from 1982, rising interest burden (Rs 1.71 crore in 1981 and Rs 5.51 crore in 1989-90) and constantly rising costs of raw material and other expenses.

The immediate need for finance was fixed at Rs 1.38 crore. The owners were to raise Rs 53 lakh as capital and SICOM, banks and FIs (Financial Institutions) would provide finance of Rs 85 lakh. This way, it was worked out that in five years the production in Kolhapur would rise from 55 per cent to 82 per cent and Amboli from 70 per cent to 90 per cent. Similarly, calculation of annual profits, neutralizing of losses and clearing of loans showed that the Company should be out of trouble in eight years. The Board has also worked out what concessions the State and Central Government, Banks and FI's need to make to the Company. It has also listed the counts under which the labour unions and the employees should cooperate with the Company Management. The primary responsibility for implementation of the Plan was given to the Bank of Baroda, and the newly appointed Managing Committee was to see to the day to day functioning of the Company. A reputable firm of Chartered Accountants has been directed to be appointed Concurrent Auditors to the Company. The Company is expected to draw up a repayment schedule for loans and ensure that it is followed. The Plan was signed by B. D. Gupta and Badal Roy on behalf of BIFR.

Just at this time Menon got a capable colleague to help in supervising the Company's finances. Jayant Herwadkar, CA had been practising in Belgaum since 1973. Herwadkar was making trips to Kolhapur in 1989-90 in connection with a hospital project and was introduced to Menon. He asked Herwadkar if he would be willing to work with him, commuting to Kolhapur at his convenience. Herwadkar began, and gradually streamlined accounting at Menon's. His practice in Belgaum was suffering and Menon was aware of it. Menon once asked him, "How did you agree to come here knowing that my Company is sick?" Herwadkar replied that it was because he was accustomed to rise to challenges, and also because he was happy with Menon's positive response from time to time. After a time in July 1991 Menon particularly called Herwadkar to Kolhapur to discuss matters regarding the foundry project. He met Herwadkar at the Ayodhya Hotel and told him, "I want your help" Herwadkar responded with "Why the word 'help' after such a long association?" Menon explained. "I am in deep trouble and I want your daily help. You are practical and wise. If you are prepared, you can start tomorrow." The Company's state then was such that there was no spare cash, so no raw materials, no production, no sale and hence no revenues. The question was how to break this vicious circle. Herwadkar offered to arrange for raw material through contacts in Belgaum. He was offered 500 tonnes of pig iron per month in place of the current supply of 200 Tons. The combined capacity of the two plants was 600 tonnes. This solution was found by virtue of mutual trust and understanding.

Herwadkar observed that Menon never passed on blame. On the contrary he would say, "There is only one man who makes mistakes in this Company: and that is Chandran Menon." He accepted responsibility for the Company having gone to the BIFR. A big problem those days was to recover dues from customers. Escorts owed a large amount. They said they could not pay since their tractors were not selling. Herwadkar suggested that they sell Escorts tractors themselves. Menon was a bit shaken. He asked who would take that responsibility, and Herwadkar volunteered. He took up a massive sales campaign. 82 tractors and 60 motorcycles were sold and the Company was able to recover Rs 2.60 crore out of its dues from Escorts. Herwadkar casually remarked that Menon liked everything on a grand scale: large car, large factory building, 8 acres for the Vikramnagar plant, 240 acres for the Amboli foundry.

Menon was at this time also taking another form of treatment for his illness. He was already accustomed to Yoga and had trained under Dr. Gunde and Kiran Shinde. The Yoga Institute at that time was being looked after by Shantikumar Wathare, originally from Ashta. He had studied Yoga at Lonavala from 1972-73 and was working for the Ramakrishna Mission since 1978. He was introduced to Menon in 1989, and agreed to guide. Menon would have a bath on his return from the factory and ready himself for Yoga when Wathare arrived at 7.30 pm. Wathare's class was normally of 45 minutes, but he spent about an hour and half with Menon. Menon was strict about punctuality, diet etc. He had acquired a lot of medical knowledge through experience. He was also mildly interested in philosophy but did not

discuss it much. He once had an argument with Wathare on J. Krishnamurthy, and apologized the next day. He would consult Wathare on all health matters. Even if a doctor was to be consulted, he would ask Wathare to do it. He even consulted Wathare on factory matters. He asked, "What does one do if others are not able to keep up with my pace?" He felt that everyone in the house should practice Yoga. Accordingly Mrs. Wathare began to come to guide Mrs. Menon. Since Wathare had just a scooter, he used to drive his wife down and spend time chatting or reading outside till she was done. Menon noticed this and asked him, "Why don't you buy another vehicle?" Wathare said, "I am an outsider. How will a bank give me a vehicle loan?" "Don't worry about that, just get me a quotation," Menon responded. His man later arrived at Wathare's house with the money, and a message from Menon, "The new vehicle must be seen this evening." He had also told Wathare to keep in touch with the factory, since Menon planned to start Yoga classes for his workers. His failing health did not allow him to implement this.

The Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 1990 showed three new names on the Board of Directors: BIFR nominee Ranade, SICOM nominee Bantwal and Maharashtra State Finance Corporation nominee S. R. Karnik. The turnover has gone up to 8 crore, up from less than six in the previous year. About 23 lakh in profits are also seen. The Company's cash losses had stopped due to advance payments from Escorts from September 1989. An order for high-end castings from Germany gives encouraging signs of impending improvement in things. Since the turnover had exceeded Rs 5 crore for three years in a row, the Company was deemed a Public Ltd. Company from 1st July 1990.

The Auditors for the following year (ended 31st March 1991) were M/s P. M. Vardhe & Co., Chartered Accountants. Earlier this function was handled by D. Shinde & Co. The turnover increased substantially to Rs 11.65 crore. Profits were Rs 1.69 crore and accumulated losses were almost covered. Reasons for this progress are cited as both increased production and product diversification. Engine blocks for Kirloskar Cummins and Maruti were been added to the range. Hydraulic Assemblies for BEML was a big success. The product was well received by BEML in terms of quality. BEML were importing the component and had accepted it for a fact that the assemblies could not be made in India. Menon however was able to manufacture these intricate assemblies to their specifications at almost half the price of the imported components. This was a source for big relief at BEML and Menon had become a hero there. Menon was also expecting orders from Adam Opel, the General Motors car division in Germany and CIMMCO International of Delhi. This was the year that the BIFR plan was approved, Bank of Baroda was appointed the operating agency and implementation began.

In 1991, Ram Menon's younger son Nitin was engaged to be married to Sucheta, the daughter of Vasant Rao Mirje of Kolhapur. Mirje had arrived from Nipani and settled in Kolhapur for trade in 1959. He and Menon were nearby neighbours, but each was busy in his own business, and never got a chance to get acquainted. Once Chandran Menon wanted to gift a 90 litre refrigerator, and he went to Mirje's shop. He didn't have this in stock and Menon told him

to obtain one. Mirje was acquainted with Ram in the Lions' Club, but the marriage had been planned by the youngsters themselves. This was the first interstate wedding in the Menon clan, so Menon cautioned the girl about the cultural differences. She responded that this had already been discussed between the two young people. He then said that in their tradition, once the mangalsutra was clasped, the matter was over; the girl's side could then proceed with the ritual as per their traditions. Both sides sat together and decided on the details, and the ceremony went through smoothly. Vasantrao Mirje was impressed by the unity and closeness in the Menon household. He was one of five brothers, and he openly expressed his admiration. Mirje also noticed that Menon displayed no pride in his wealth. He had a clear and open mind, and a helpful nature.

End March 1992 Menon & Menon's turnover took another leap to over Rs 13 crore. New castings had been developed and exports were being attempted to Korea, Taiwan and Europe. A team for Ssang Yong Motor Company of South Korea had visited the plant, and good business was expected from them. The BIFR target of Rs 11 crore for that year had been exceeded by Rs 2 crore. Besides, instead of the expected loss of Rs 2.62 crore, there was a profit of Rs 26 lakh. A productivity-linked incentive agreement was signed with the union in this year. Vijay Menon was inducted as Joint Managing Director from January 1992, and he has signed the incentive agreement along with others.

S. P. Burse, B.Com., M.S.W. joined the Company at the end of 1991. Menon asked him in the interview which department he would prefer: Personnel, Industrial Relations or HRD. He told Burse that qualification does not tie a man to a particular function: one can always pick up any other skill of his choice on the job. Burse was hired as Welfare Officer and later grew to Deputy Personnel Manager. The first thing that impressed him about Menon was his keen concern for his people. Menon noticed even if the Company gardener had a scratch on his finger. He would enquire about him with equal concern as he would a customer's complaint.

The house newsletter Menonchi Manse had closed down during the strike. It was revived in 1992, and Burse was on the editorial board. The May 1992 issue designated 'first' carried a message from Chairman and Managing Director Chandran Menon, which said, "It is a matter of pleasure to restart our newsletter Menonchi Manse. After an 18-month hiatus, cordial relations between workers and the management are taking the Company forward. Our production is on the rise. Delays in recovery of payments are causing some problems. Delays in procurement hamper production. But I am confident that we shall overcome, with cooperation from all." The preface from the Editorial Board says, "Kolhapur and Amboli together should be generating a turnover of Rs 200 to 250 lakh monthly. If we work to make our monthly targets, we can get out of BIFR very soon." The production of 208 boxes of moulding and 212 of pouring in the Foundry Division on 21st May 1992 has been announced as a record. There is also the announcement of the sample Maruti cylinder block being sent, and a pilot batch of 50 pieces being made ready.

Regular orders were expected from May-June. Menonchi Manse, earlier in tabloid format, was now printed in magazine format.

The June '92 issue says, "In the developed world, it is noticed that the worker's contribution to development is particularly valuable. Per capita production contributes to national production and turnover, and this alone can lead to development of the nation. Our products are gaining increasing acceptance in the international markets, and the contribution of workers in this is very important. This will also help the development and elevation of the worker's standard of living." The same issue reports the commencement of supply of Hydraulic Control Lever Assemblies to BEML, Bangalore, for their D-155 and D-355 model bulldozers, substituting for the assemblies hitherto imported from Komatsu of Japan.

The preface to the July 1992 issue says that ours is a developing nation and we have not been able to make proper use of the natural resources, and shortage of capital and equipment hampers industrial growth. Giving the example of Japan, the reasons for its leading position in the world are cited to be patriotism, dedication to work and modern technology. It also says that certain repressive policies of the Government such as sales tax, increase in Excise, increase in power cost is adversely affecting industry and society is suffering as a result. Menonchi Manse decided to launch a feature giving information on Government laws passed for workers' welfare. The record production and reduction in rejection percentage is mentioned. The successful trial of SG Iron production at Amboli is also reported, and hailed as an entry into a new field.

The August issue carries a message from Vijay Menon, which says, "We have with us, and will continue to have, the blessings and guidance of our Chairman and Managing Director Chandran Menon who has built the solid foundation of this structure." In the September issue Vijay Menon writes, "We have gradually started taking steps according to the plans that have been drawn up. Everything cannot happen overnight. Implementation will be in stages." Such passages point to the fact that Menon was gradually withdrawing from the affairs of the Company and shifting more responsibility on to Vijay. In the Oct-Nov 1992 combined issue he has written a comprehensive essay on increase in productivity. It is condensed from an earlier English essay written for the Indian Express. Some things have been treated in a very frank manner. Excerpt: "Practically everyone seems to have the wrong impression of this concept. The State and Centre do not seem to be sincere when they talk about increased productivity. Similarly, some industrialists seem to feel that 'productivity' means that the workers work more and the owners make more money. Workers resist increased productivity because they mistake it for more work for no wages. It is my intention to sort out these conflicting perceptions and put out a clear and consistent picture." The same issue carries a feature by Vijay Menon on 'Mental Strain and its Remedies.' He has also announced that Psychiatrist Dr. Medha Dhananjay Limaye is currently helping workers in the unit to reduce mental strain. The policies and thinking of the father and son are clearly brought out in these features, and are particularly noteworthy in a place like Kolhapur.

Chandran Menon is seen to have withdrawn from active participation in the Company by the end of 1992, in view of his health. A felicitation ceremony for him and Mrs. Menon was organized on behalf of the workers, staff and management of the Company, at the Siddhivinayak Mangal Karyalaya, on 28th December 1992. There is mention of the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Ram Menon, P. D. Dighe, Mohammed Saheb Hudli, K. Parameswaran, and Pundi Saheb. After the introductory speech by T. Nagaraja, there are adulatory speeches by several workers and officers. Menon was given a statuette of a toiling worker as a gift. In his reply speech, Menon mentioned the deep and cordial relationship he had with the workers. The function ended with lunch. The photograph of occasion shows Menon in a Kolhapuri pheta (turban). The issue carries a report held on the occasion of Republic Day, 26th January 1993. (Vijay Menon is reported to have won the Officer-Manager musical chairs event!)

Abhay Nevagi reports, "Menon had decided to make sure that things are going smoothly at the end of 1992 and then hand over the reins to Vijay Menon. He announced accordingly and stepped down." In the course of 1992, Menon had summoned T. Nagaraja through Nana Shahane to help Vijay, and appointed him Vice President. He had conveyed to Nagaraja that theirs was a BIFR Company, expecting to get out of the BIFR purview by March 1994. Of the atmosphere of the times Burse says every time there was any event in the factory a delegation would go to invite Menon. If Menon couldn't come, they were saddened. But as Menon joked, "Running a factory is not a simple job." Nagaraja made a detailed study as soon as he joined. It struck him that Menon was very particular about expenses. Getting out of BIFR was his main aim but he kept pushing his ambition of making world-class products and building a state-of-the-art foundry. He had drawn up a two year plan, under which a Technical Department would build up high pressure moulding, tooling etc. He was also very keen on a Management Information System (MIS). He was always open to new ideas. He was very open and transparent and did not like manipulation. He was a stickler for systems and procedures and on any deviation he would stop work for rectification. On the basis of all these he was confident of getting out of the BIFR by 1994.

In these elevated spirits, the Company achieved a turnover of Rs 14.5 crore in the year ended March 1993. The year had been a difficult one for the foundry industry but Menon & Menon weathered it well and got plenty of support from Maruti Udyog. The 1993-94 budget also gave a boost to industry. According to the BIFR plan the targeted turnover was Rs 12.93 crore. The Company exceeded the target and made a comfortable profit. But just then there was an occurrence that increased general worry about Menon's health. The news published in the Feb-Mar 1993 issue of Menonchi Manse reads: "Chairman and Managing Director Chandran Menon underwent a medical check up with the famous Dr. M. B. Agarwal of Mumbai on 2nd March, 1993. His blood and bone marrow checks have established that he is suffering from cancer of the blood. He has been admitted for treatment at the Breach Candy Hospital at Mumbai on 3rd March 1993. He is being treated with palliative therapy of daily one injection of Cytosine, Aragynocine for 10 days, then rest for 20 days, then

again injections for 10 days and so on for three cycles before blood is checked again. The treatment destroys the disease, but heavily weakens the patient, and has to be protected from infection of any sort. On behalf of all of us we wish our Saheb a speedy recovery.” The tone of the report is that of a family member conveying an update to a worried relative.

One of the contributory factors to Menon’s blood cancer was a reaction to the radiation and chemotherapy that he had undergone at the Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospital in New York earlier. But people close to him refer to the strain and early disappointment over a Maruti Udyog order. A lot of information was drawn from the talks with Mohammed Saheb Hudli. Menon had the ambition of getting into specialty castings. Cast iron cylinder block for the Maruti 800 was one such product, and Menon sent his people. His marketing people were informed at the outset that he could not get the order since he did not have a high pressure moulding line. The Rs 50 to 60 crore of investment for such a line was beyond Menon’s means at that time. Hudli used to supply flywheel assemblies to Maruti. In the course of discussions, Menon threw out the question, what really do these Maruti people want? Do they want the casting or are they interested in the machine that makes the casting? Hudli went to Gurgaon and told the managers over tea that Menon was capable of meeting their needs without a high pressure line. But Maruti were not giving him a chance. Hudli’s confidence prompted the Maruti people to say, “Let him come over once.”

Hudli flew back the same evening and reached home at 11 in the night and unable to contain himself, called up Menon and roused him from bed. On hearing the news, Menon said, “Don’t unpack.” The two left at once and landed at Maruti the next evening. Hudli was impressed at Menon’s negotiating skills at that meeting. Menon told them, “I don’t expect you to take my word for it; I am prepared to prove my skills, but only if you give me a chance. My piano is old but it plays a fine tune. I shall develop the cylinder block to your specifications and in your time frame. You can pay me the development costs, not after the sample is approved but after a pilot lot has been supplied. If I fail, it is my funeral.”

The development of a complex Cylinder Block like the one used in the Maruti 800 car called for an investment of over Rs 25 lakh in toolings and many times the amount in production equipment. But Menon had decided to take up the challenge and no one could now shake him from his resolve. The senior executives at Maruti were left with no other alternative but to accept in the face of such supreme confidence. But they put a condition, “It is now April; if you can supply the block in six months, that is by October, we will accept. Anything that arrives on 1st November will be sent back.” Menon thought for a few minutes, and then guaranteed them that the sample block would be on their table on 15th August. The Maruti people were very pleased, and they gave him the drawings and an imported sample block. Menon and Hudli returned to Kolhapur discussing the project all the way. Menon called a meeting of his core staff. Hudli had advised him, “Explain the full impact of what you have undertaken truthfully to your people, but tell them one lie. Tell them that the committed date is 16th July.”

The full implications of the opportunity and the challenge were discussed at the meeting. Menon explained in detail the requirements: 5 mm wall thickness, dry liner block, necessary degree of machinability, leak proof properties, all would have to be satisfied and Menon ordered a plan to be drawn up. The technical team was strong. They were experts in all the engineering disciplines and were familiar with Menon's insistence on time management. Discussions up to tea time resulted in the deadline of 16th July being accepted. Work proceeded with full zest. All required trials were conducted. Menon personally looked into every aspect and with tireless efforts the samples were ready, not by 16th but by the end of July. A few minor creases that remained were ironed out in a week and a few samples were despatched to Delhi by rail. Hudli threw a party to congratulate all of Menon's people involved in the project.

On 15th August Menon flew to Delhi with Hudli. The samples had already reached Gurgaon and had obviously been liked by the people there. But they were not being taken up for machining, and this angered Menon: Maruti required the hydraulic testing report. Menon had a round of meetings with the concerned Managers. Materials Manager Kapur congratulated Menon. He gave Menon an order for a pilot batch of 500 pieces and asked him to keep the rejection rate low. A Quality Inspection official in Maruti took Menon aside and told him that the rejection percentage of the other suppliers was 12 to 20 per cent. This did not bother Menon because he had planned on 'Zero Defect' operations.

At this advanced stage one of the officials in Maruti again insisted on an HP line at the plant. He offered to put up some finance, and advised Menon to raise the rest through orders from other customers. Menon was sorely disappointed at this about-turn. He was already badly run down by the exertions of the recent past. Yet he went straight to Mumbai. Gongane, Herwadkar and other senior officers were with him. Discussions took place with other experts in the field and after considering all technical and financial angles, it was decided to visit three to four large companies in Europe. Menon left and worked day and night to visit the companies and prepare a project report. He got a message from Maruti that he should also visit Japan. Accordingly he made a 10-day whirlwind tour of Japan. The rushing about in these two tours would have worn down even a healthy man. Menon would get extremely tired but his mind remained alert. But the proposal he had prepared at such great expense and exertion was turned down by Maruti. Even then Menon showed no signs of anger. He felt that everything could not be measured as success or failure: the satisfaction of having done everything, not falling short on effort, was greater.

Rajan Gongane was with Menon throughout the Maruti affair. He said if you plunge into your work, success will follow you. Menon had two last dreams: get out of BIFR and install an HP line. Gongane feels deeply grieved that Menon did not live to see them fulfilled. Gongane says the Chief of the quality department at Maruti, K. T. Jose, was not responding because the Materials Department had given Menon the order directly. His steadfast refusal

outraged Menon. He told Jose to his face, "Your mouth is a garbage bin, but you have a heart of gold. I don't mind if we lose the order, but at least show some recognition for the efforts that we have put in." Finally the sample was accepted, and the pilot order for 500 pieces was released.

Today Maruti buys more than 50 per cent of their requirement from Menon and this has proved to be a good business both for Maruti as well as Menon. Menon was also been honoured with the 'Best Vendor' certification from Maruti in the year 1995 - a far cry from the meeting when Menon's ability to manufacture this component was questioned. Today Menon is considered to be a specialist in the manufacture of Blocks and Heads and no new automobile plant comes up in the country without sending an enquiry to Menon. But the whole affair claimed Menon's life. He had made 3-4 trips abroad, spent Rs 35 to 40 lakh of non-available money, but at the crucial time Maruti did not respond. The block business continued but the joint venture foundry which was Menon's dream did not materialize in spite of his best effort.

In between Menon had been to Kerala and appraised Prof. Namboodripad of the affair, and Namboodripad had performed certain rituals in this context. Nevertheless, Menon failed at Maruti. The Professor says it was a unique failure of his mystical science. Menon was saddened but did not give up. Namboodripad feels that if he had succeeded at Maruti, he would have been happy, and also probably have lived longer. Menon did not seek his help in the last stages, and Namboodripad feels he must have had a premonition of his end.

Arvind Turakhia was with Menon in the marketing department since 1989. Later Menon appointed him as his Executive Assistant and he worked closely with Menon from 1992. He remembers that Menon said a man should be like a Spanish bull: either the wall breaks or his head. Arvind marvels at the fact that Menon kept up this spirit to the end. About Menon's last illness Arvind recalls that after the Maruti affair Menon was planning to go the Kerala for a rest. He stopped over with his niece Savita Gopi in Pune. There he suddenly began to feel weak and Savita took him to Medinova for a check. All tests indicated he was in normal health, but Menon felt that something had been missed out. Dr. Jirge referred him to Urologist Dr. Bapat who tested him and on suspicion sent him to Dr. Agarwal. The Doctor was out of town and expected in the evening. Menon stayed over and met him. He checked Menon and pronounced him healthy. Menon insisted on a bone-marrow test. This was conducted mainly to appease Menon but when the report reached Dr. Agarwal his worst fears were confirmed. Dr. Agarwal called Menon late in the evening to convey this sad news. He also instructed him to cancel the Kerala trip and get admitted to Breach Candy at once. He then underwent chemotherapy, first at Breach Candy and then at Bombay Hospital.

The report on Menon's treatment which appeared in the Apr-May 1993 issue of Menonchi Manse reads: "We are pleased to inform you that Menon's health is improving satisfactorily. His three rounds of chemotherapy are done and he is responding well to treatment. He is also taking Ayurvedic treatment from 69

year old Shivjyoti Dharmananda Swamiji, an Ayurveda Graduate who runs an Ashram 20 km from Quilon in Kerala. Swamiji has conducted in-depth research on cancer, and cancer patients not responding to Allopathy are referred to him from Medical Colleges at Alleppey, Cochin and Trivandrum. Swamiji provides medicines, which he has researched with the help of his wife. Menon Saheb has to take one pill every six hours and is on a strict diet of fruits. His haemoglobin and RBC count has come to normal and he is experiencing the efficacy of Swamiji's medicine. His Allopathic treatment under Dr. Agarwal continues. The Doctor has advised him rest but allowed a little bit of travelling. Saheb's bone marrow will be tested again in June and then Dr. Agarwal will decide on further treatment."

The June-July issue informs of the outcome of this examination. "Saheb's bone marrow was examined on 19th July 1993. The level of cancer cells in Saheb's blood has come down to zero. His bone marrows are functioning normally and all tests are normal. Dr. Agarwal is satisfied with his progress and has stopped chemotherapy treatment for a month and prescribed complete rest for that period. The Ayurvedic treatment will continue. Saheb will soon overcome the dreaded disease and regain his health. He has won this victory on the strength of his belief in man's intrinsic power and his supreme self confidence. The sincere good wishes of The Company, which is his family, shall always be with him."

Vijay Menon had laid down his policy at the time of preparing to take over the reins of the Company under his father's guidance. He had written, "Taking decisions and implementing them are two sides of the same coin. The success of a Company depends on right decisions and equally prompt implementation of these decisions, and this requires the involvement of all constituents of the Company." Vijay enthusiastically continued the development of new jobs. The Feb-Mar 93 issue of Menonchi Manse gives a very long list of these new jobs. As an effort towards maintaining good spirits in the factory, a cultural programme was organised in February 93, at the Keshavrao Bhosale Drama Centre, by the 'Sports and Cultural Association. It featured five-hours of mixed entertainment.

In the Apr-May issue Vijay Menon has addressed a message to the workers in connection with ISO 9002, and also given the draft Quality Policy drawn up in that connection. Detailed guidance is given on what this certification is and why it is desirable to obtain it. The same issue carries a status report on the implementation of the BIFR package. It informs that the banks and Financial Institutions had agreed to the Company's modified demands. Cylinder blocks and heads for the Hindustan Motors Isuzu engine fitted on the Contessa car were in an advanced stage of design and development as per the schedule. The following or Jun-Jul 93 issue carries a report and photographs of the visit of Japan's 'Nissan' officials to the factory. It informs that Nissan was looking at exploiting the Indian market for its mini-trucks and talks were on for developing cylinder blocks.

The Managing Director of Sesa Goa, Antonilio Giradi, visited the factory and said there was ample scope for pig iron supply. The foundry specialist Patrick

Dennis visited the factory to explore the possibility of supply of cylinder blocks for Premier Automobiles, in view of their agreement with Peugeot of France. The machine shop layout was reorganized in July, with attention to present needs and to meet future requirements. The newsletter also reports the publication of a feature on the Company in Business India under the heading 'Growing Despite Setbacks,' and notes that being covered in Business India was considered a great honour in industrial circles.

The new Vice President T. Nagaraja says while speaking about that period, "The Company progressed along the right track in its efforts towards TQM, ISO 9002, HRD under the guidance of Vijay Menon. The Company was not large by automotive standards, but the systems were world class." When Menon invited Nagaraja, the latter asked, "For what duration will you hire me?" Menon declared, "As long as you are around and I am alive." Nagaraja later saw that Vijay Menon was following in his father's footsteps and was emulating the traditions of enterprise, guidance and the willingness to accept risk even in times of depression. Menon had acquired a new assistant in his final days. At the end of 1990, he had hired Vijayakumari as his Personal Assistant. She did not know shorthand at that time. Menon decreed that she must learn in three months, and he followed it up on a daily basis.

When Menon returned to Kolhapur after his treatment he immediately plunged into work, she recalls. He used to come to the office in the mornings, and in the afternoons, Kumari carried papers to his house. In the intervening period he had kept himself abreast of all developments. He did not like people coming to him with just problems; he insisted that they should also have with them suggested solutions. The Aug-Sept issue of Menonchi Manse carried a photograph of Menon after his recovery and said, "We are happy to announce that our Chairman has recovered fully on the strength of his extraordinary will power and the good wishes of people from all levels. He arrived at Kolhapur on 14th August, and visited the plant. After a short stay at Kolhapur, he proceeded to Kerala for rest."

Ram Menon's brother-in-law Dr. K. Rajagopal remembers another dream he nurtured in his last days. He says Menon had practically retired in the last two years of his life. He made several visits to Kerala. While Dr. Agarwal's chemotherapy, Dr. Patel's homoeopathy and Swamiji's Ayurvedic treatment were on, he made up his mind to build a large house at Kodungallur.

Menon's last ambition in life was to build a Victorian-style mansion. S. N. Mani says he had bought a one acre plus plot for the purpose. The land belonged to a relative, and no discussions took place for purchase. Not wishing to take it for free, he asked Mani for advice on the figure. Mani quoted Rs. 10 lakh, and Menon was overjoyed: it was the very figure he had in mind. On his next visit he saw Mani's own large house coming up, and decided to engage the same engineer, P. R. C. Menon, for his own house. He had detailed discussions with the engineer, and ordered books on architecture. Menon planned construction of about 10,000 square feet. Questioning the need for such a large area, Mani and P. R. C. Menon went into details and arrived at a design of about 7,000 square feet. P. R. C. Menon built a model for the

mansion in just six months. He was a professor in the local Engineering College. But Menon had made sketches on the basis of his own ideas drawn from the books he had studied. All the architectural concepts were his own and Prof. Menon says that he himself did not ever study the subject in such great detail. Even when Menon no longer had the strength to go to the site, he planned an outlay of about Rs 30 lakh of investment. Just the foundation stone was laid in his lifetime, but his sons, particularly the youngest son Satish, took great interest in completing the house in spite of the fact that no one had plans to stay in this house after Menon's demise. As with all projects that he had undertaken, Menon wanted this to be the most perfect house in Kerala: Perfect use of light, air, construction materials and a very useful layout. The house is now 90 per cent complete, and is as per Menon's own designs.

Till end 1993 Menon was still involved in the Company. He called S. R. Patil and persuaded him to rejoin. He trusted Patil a lot. He discussed the present state of the Company in detail. Gongane was also present. With the idea that this could be one of his last meetings, Menon shared a lot of his thoughts. Actually Patil had left because of disagreements with Menon over union matters, but with his keen evaluation of people, Menon must have felt that he would be useful to Vijay. Menon was satisfied at the progress the Company was making under Vijay. Vijay was continuing all the policies of his father.

A strong earthquake devastated parts of Latur and Osmanabad districts on 30th September 1993 and thousands were rendered homeless. Kolhapur District decided to adopt one village for rehabilitation and the Daily Pudhari Earthquake Relief Fund was started. The staff and workers of Menon & Menon, Menon Pistons and Menon Bearings collected an amount of Rs. 65,128 for this fund. The Amboli Division contributed another Rs 11,120.

In September, officials of the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. of Japan, Kazubaba and Takao Matsuki visited the Company. They wanted quality castings from Menon's. This year the honour of unfurling the National Flag on Independence Day went as per tradition to senior workman Jitkar. The issue of Menonchi Manse carries a report of a seminar organized in the Company on 'The New Economic Order – Indian Industry and the Worker.' CII Senior Director A. C. Patankar had come specially from Mumbai. The Aug-Sep 1993 issue reports on other cultural activities, sports news and information on new products.

The next issue is a combination Oct-Dec Diwali Special. It covers the Europe tour of Rajan Gongane, Manager Development. Certain prominent Companies had been selected to participate in a Conference organized by the Mahratta Chamber of Commerce, Pune and the Bremen Export Promotion Council, Germany. Menon & Menon was one of them, represented by Gongane who visited Germany and other European countries. This issue also carries a list of 86 Menon & Menon workers who completed 25 years of service up to end December 1993. The oldest amongst them who started working with Menon were Anandrao Topkar, Shahapure, Sarnaik and Sawant. Writing on their behalf, Anandrao Topkar has said, "I joined Menon at

Udyamnagar on 27th December, 1959. I was 17, and worked for one year for experience and did not ask for compensation. There were just nine of us. Chandran Menon would bring work from outside. He and Rambhau would themselves work in the shop. We were making Kirloskar V-pulleys on turret and Anil lathes up to 1960. My salary was Rs. 10 per month. Menon further gave incentive for extra work. We used to make at least Rs. 5 every day through extra work, turning out six extra cranks per day. Then we got orders for liners from Cooper, PAKCO, Ruston and other companies." He ends his small article, "My happiest moment when I dismantled and reassembled Menon Saheb's imported Holden car in 1983." It can be imagined how Topkar's article must have gratified Menon in his last days.

The Oct-Dec issue carries a report of the visit on 7th December 1993 of senior officials from various Japanese companies. They were accompanied by officials from Cenka Exports Co. of Pune. This issue also covers the wedding of Nitin Menon and Sucheta Mirje. Chandran Menon had specially come from Kerala for the nuptials. Even in these, his final days, he was toying with the idea of setting up a food processing unit at Mysore. He also wished to start a small auto unit in Karnataka. Vijayakumari has mentioned his idea of starting small seed processing, chilli powder units in the vicinity of Mysore and settling down there. He probably felt that the Mysore air would do his health good. In addition, he would get the company of his daughter Shanta who lived in Ooty. But suitable land was not available in Karnataka and there were other practical problems. Shanti-kumar Wathare recalls that this had displeased him a lot. Wathare had grown very close to Menon, and although Yoga had stopped, Menon consulted him for diet and routine.

Quality Consultant R. C. Nathan had been introduced to the Menon Company through Nagaraja in 1992. He had conducted a few training programmes for the Company. When Menon returned from Mumbai after his cure, he summoned Nathan from Bangalore and asked him to design a good Management Assessment System. He outlined his requirements and asked him to prepare a note. Nathan accepted, Menon began constant follow-up. Learning that Menon's health had again taken a downturn, Nathan was going slow. It was decided to take Menon to Mumbai again for treatment, but Menon refused to budge without seeing Nathan's note. Anil Pandit, Deputy Manager, Systems assured him that Nathan would be completing his note and arriving in a couple of days. Pandit would carry it to Mumbai and they could complete the job there. Menon finally consented and left for Mumbai. Nathan arrived that same night at Kolhapur. Menon continued to sink in Mumbai, and the work on Nathan's report was left aside. He never met Nathan, and a few days later Nathan got news of his death while he was in Vellore. Nathan says, "Menon was convinced and kept repeating that he would not die of cancer, right to the end."

In Mumbai Menon was accommodated in the apartment at Prabhadevi, which the Company had acquired for a guest-house. Dr. Agarwal was treating him. News reached Kolhapur that he needed blood. Each one felt that Saheb should be cured with his blood. Menon's wife, Padmini, his son, Vijay, assistant Arvind Turakhia, servant Gundu Naik had all accompanied him to

Mumbai. But Menon kept sinking. No amount of treatment or care could save him and he passed away just a fortnight later. After the 1985 illness, Menon had never really fully recovered. He was aware that he was gradually losing his health. He once said to his nephew Sachin at the airport, "Once you have lost fear, death ceases to mean anything." Sachin was at Mumbai for a seminar. It was the last day and after 3.30 in the afternoon there was a discussion session. Sachin skipped it and went by taxi to meet his uncle at around five. Menon was kept in a sterile room. Sachin had a bath and went in. His Aunt and Vijay were just bringing him out of the toilet. He was badly out of breath. He lay down and Sachin began to massage his feet. Mrs. Menon and Vijay were close by. A sound issued from Menon's mouth and that must have been the instant of his death.

The Special Issue of Menonchi Manse brought out on 23rd July 1994 says, "21st March 1994 is a sad day for the Menon Group and the world of industry. Chandran Menon passed away in Mumbai. The leading light of the Group has crashed. The whole industrial world has gone into shock. Eight years ago he had given Death the slip and returned from the US and immediately took up his duties. But his health kept giving trouble. He remained active purely on the strength of his will power. He passed away suddenly on 21st March 1994 at 6.30 pm. On 22nd March the city of Kolhapur turned out in all its might to bid him farewell."

The last rites were to be performed in Kolhapur as per Menon's wishes. His mortal remains were brought to Kolhapur on the Mahindra aircraft. News of his demise had spread in Kolhapur and throughout Maharashtra. Multitudes had arrived in Kolhapur for the funeral. A crowd of 5-6000 people accompanied Menon to pay their last respects. His youngest son Satish had settled in the States and had met his father just a fortnight before. Menon was keen that Satish marry, and had planned advertisements to find a suitable girl. Satish had not yet revealed to his father that he had already fixed up his marriage with a girl in the US. The news of Menon's demise reached Satish through a phone call to the US but was providentially received by his fiancée, who tearfully broke it to him. Satish left for India within a few hours but couldn't attend the funeral.

Dr. Rajagopal has recorded that "Menon was able to win over cancer of the oesophagus but lost the battle with blood cancer. The fact that he survived radiation therapy for nearly ten years should be seen as a medical marvel. He has demonstrated that self-confidence can vanquish deadly disease and sheer will power can hold death at bay. Chemotherapy sapped his strength and he ordered it stopped on his own."

The Annual Report of Menon & Menon for the year ended March 1994 mourns the impact of Menon's demise on the Company and records that the foundry industry would forever remember this great technocrat. That year had seen the Company leaping to the level of Rs 17.8 crore in turnover and clear signs were visible of the light at the end of the tunnel. The Company had shown sufficient profits and more significantly under the shadow of BIFR. Coincidentally, the Company obtained the coveted ISO 9002 accreditation the

same year. It was the first Company in Southern Maharashtra to get this accreditation, and Menon's dream came true after his demise.



THE PEOPLE PERSON

Menon had made it a policy of encouraging young men right from the start of his business. His perception of people was unparalleled. Arvind Turakhia's father had migrated in 1940 from Saurashtra to Ichalkaranji for trade. Arvind was in Kolhapur for education and happened to be Vijay Menon's classmate. His father passed away while he was in the first year of college, and the business suffered a setback. He therefore approached Menon for a job the moment he finished his B. Com. Menon offered to finance him to re-establish his business, but Arvind preferred to work at a job for a few years first. He joined in 1989 as Product Executive in Marketing. According to Jain philosophy, he says, each man's bread is in its preordained place. Happy with his work, Menon made him his Executive Assistant in 1992, and to the end, for over two years, Menon remained his 'friend, philosopher and guide,' and lavished affection on him in the place of his departed father, says Arvind.

Jaywant Kharade was from Ajara near Amboli; he got acquainted with Menon. As soon as he finished his B. Sc., M. S. W., Menon offered him a job at the Amboli project. He explained to Kharade at the outset the circumstances in which the Amboli project was built. Menon believed that to properly train a man, he must be taken fully into confidence. Arvind Shinde remembers an instance that showed what Menon looked for in a man when hiring him. Shinde was present when a recruit, Desai, was being interviewed. Menon was already aware of the man's full background, and asked him just one question: what new contribution will you be making to our enterprise? Desai's reply satisfied Menon and the rest was plain sailing.

Vijayakumari says she was new to office routine and weak in Marathi, but Menon guided her and treated her like a daughter. His work continued even during his illness, and he would summon her home and dictate from his bed. Leo Fernandes had inducted Lakshman Padwal from nearby Gadaduwadi into the project. He did whatever Menon told him and helped in the kitchen. Menon had told him, "This factory is yours." When Lakshman lost his parents, Menon took him into his household and treated him like a son. Every time he arrived at Amboli he first asked for Lakshman, and at the time of returning, would take his leave. Lakshman had fully understood Menon, and knew when to keep quiet. Later Menon took him to work in the canteen. His standing instructions, "Even if I am alone, keep meals for five in readiness."

V. G. Kasute has recorded in his tribute, "You took up the task of improving my personality. Your trust served as the mainspring of my endeavours in today's competitive world, and now I have lost the shelter of your presence. I am reminded of an important lesson you taught me: As long as a man has

faith in himself, the sky is the limit to his progress. Once he loses self confidence, the smallest setback can break his back.”

Ankush Karpe quotes a memory. He was on daily wages at the MTDC. The Marathi film Lagebandhe was being shot nearby, and Karpe was carrying lunch-packs for the crew. A car stopped by him and the gentleman driving it asked for the way to the MTDC guest house. Karpe directed him and the gentleman took him aboard. Karpe’s brother was the caretaker at the guest house, and he unlocked a suite for the gentleman. The man was Chandran Menon. He asked Ankush Karpe if he would join him for a few days. He then suggested that Karpe move to Kolhapur to serve at ‘whatever work arises,’ and Karpe agreed. Menon took him along on each trip to Amboli and taught him to drive. Once the Fiat car Karpe was driving turned turtle and was righted by passers-by. Someone informed Menon, and his response was, “Never mind, something like this is bound to happen at the beginning. Now take the car and go show your father that you can drive.”

Anand Borude is Manager Development with Menon’s. He started as draughtsman. He says Menon had his constant eye on the progress of each man, as well as at his domestic matters, and was ever ready to help if need arose. When Borude lost his mother, he entered Menon’s cabin with a cloth cap on his head. On being told what had happened, Menon immediately lightened the heaviness in his heart with a loving joke: “You must have pestered her to death.”

In Menon’s final illness, people were going in batches to Mumbai to donate blood. When it was Borude’s turn, he was suddenly called to Pune on business, and he was shifted to the next day’s batch. But Menon passed away the same day. Borude is still regretful that he was not able to provide a single drop of blood to the man who did so much for him.

Vilas Sawant of Kolhapur joined as a helper in the engine division through his brother-in-law. He remembers the fatherly treatment Menon gave to everyone. It was never difficult to ask him for a favour. Once a group of people from his area invited Menon over and then requested a gym. Menon asked, “What was the need to bring me here?” He built the gym, but with the condition that it should not use his name. At the party hosted by the workers and staff on the occasion of his retirement in 1992, Menon asked after each and every one in turn, and extracted an oath of commitment to quality. Sawant, who had not even seen a railway train till he joined Menon’s, got the opportunity to travel all over the country for engine repairs, something he considers a great favour from Menon.

B. S. Bhosale is AGM, Technical Services, with Menon Pistons. He was with Menon & Menon at Udyamnagar from 1962. He had daily interactions with Menon until his transfer to Menon Pistons at Shirol in 1970. Menon began to gradually give him responsibilities after the first year. He made Bhosale an engineer, teaching him everything as if he was a student in college. Bhosale even got the opportunity of a trip abroad for an exhibition. This was an achievement in view of the limited resources at hand. “He was a man of clear

thinking and supreme self-confidence. He always said nothing was impossible. Anything that looks difficult in engineering, remember, some man has done it. If he could, so can you. All it takes is hard work," quotes Bhosale. Menon was available to solve any problem. He would stay up nights with his people to sort out a particularly difficult situation, and not move until it was sorted out. Bhosale consulted him often even after moving to Shirol: Menon would always find a solution. Either he would go to Shirol or the people at the Piston Plant would go to meet him at the Vikramnagar plant.

Jayant Herwadkar says he joined the company purely because of Chandran Menon. Menon was always on the lookout for ways and means to benefit his people. He had a strong wish to provide at least one good meal a day at the plant in spite of repeated advice from his labour advisers that such matters have invariably, without exception, led to labour disputes elsewhere. District Magistrate Justice Satyendra Nevagi moved to Kolhapur on transfer from Sangli. His son Abhay was a qualified lawyer, but whether it would be proper for his son to practice in Kolhapur where his father was the District Magistrate was a question. Menon got acquainted with them and realized the problem. He invited Abhay to join him and Abhay was prepared. The elder Nevagi saw in Menon a very straightforward and principled person. He had no desire for popularity and refused to compromise on his principles. He saw Abhay's talents and helped him a great deal. In spite of his youth Menon regularly consulted him. The Company was passing through bad days. Labour unrest was on and the radical Santram Patil was holding sway in the union. Throughout this Menon kept Abhay at his side. When the two went to Pune on business they put up at the Blue Diamond and Menon prevailed on the 24-year-old Abhay to share his own room. Nevagi feels such outlook is indeed a rare phenomenon.

Madhu Mestry was one of Menon's closest confidantes. After matriculating through night school, he learned turning, milling, boring etc. at various places. When he heard that Menon believed in quality jobs, he left a Rs 120 job to join at Rs 70. He recently retired as Assistant General Manager, Product Division of Menon and Menon Ltd. In his experience, too, once Menon approved of a man, he gave him fatherly treatment. He was prepared to give all kinds of help, and his prime concern was for the growth of his people. After Madhu Mestry got a promotion, Menon asked him when he would buy a car. Mestry expressed doubts about the installments. Menon responded that he was confident that Mestry would manage. That was his way of boosting the confidence of his people. As the plant progressed, Menon took pains to ensure that the benefits would reach the very lowest rungs. He always said that he was not going to take the money away with him: what was important was that one's name survived.

Many people have recounted Menon's talent for encouraging people, especially young men, and extracting work from them. G. G. Joshi of Bank of Baroda said that Menon approached him often, disregarding the difference in age and state in life. Joshi would be consulted for any financial transaction. Menon's goal was to pull the Company out of trouble to hand over something sound to the next generation. One of his senior officers once made a mistake

on an excise matter, and so grave was the error that Menon was mired in serious trouble. But after convincing himself that the official had acted in good faith, Menon backed him up to the hilt, and never referred to the matter again. Joshi feels that Menon's affection for his people were his weak point, and that he should have been a little more practical. He never gave marching orders to anyone. Udeshkumar of Escorts says Menon had the ability to listen. He could judge the strengths of a person and put them to use, which is why he was able to innovate and to implement ideas. R. C. Nathan who had a very short association with Menon says that Menon had a soft corner for young people. Whenever they met, Menon would enquire after him and encourage him. Nathan feels this was a major contributory factor to his success. T. Ravindranath has seen several youths being helped by Menon. He quotes the example of Dixit.

Dr. S. K. Basu of MERADO refers to the valuable help he got from Menon. He says, "MERADO's work has now receded somewhat into the background, since the youth of today are convinced that they are experts. They do not want to get involved, to take risks. Actually MERADO approaches entrepreneurs on its own and helps them fully. Several small units in Maharashtra and Gujarat have benefited from MERADO's aid. Even ordinary diploma holders have succeeded in rising to great heights. Menon's recommendation helped MERADO be recognized in several ventures."

Menon never hesitated to give help or guidance. Neminath Mangave, now chief of the Shell Core Division, joined as a common labourer in 1981, and was sent to Amboli in 1983. He came into regular contact with Menon. He says if Menon saw something wrong, he would admonish and then guide. Once he noticed that a worker, Sharad Gawde, was not producing cores properly. Menon personally demonstrated to him how to apply oil and extract the core from the hot core box. "I am going to Amboli and will return in a few hours. Work properly till then. On his return, he checked on Gawde and was satisfied. He checked on Gawade's education and background and ordered him to be shifted to more appropriate work. Gawade was then taken into the time office.

Anandrao Topkar recalls that Menon was always prepared to give advice when asked. "Happy worker leads to a happy Company" was his slogan. If he heard of illness he would visit the man at home. He taught Topkar all about car repairs. He would order Topkar, "Open up the car." Topkar would worry about the loss if he made a mistake. Menon would reassure him, "What is the worst that can happen? If it truly goes bad, we will scrap it." At the outset Topkar couldn't even open the bonnet. But he gradually picked up and when he finally repaired the imported Holden car, Menon was so pleased that he gave him Rs 6000 and sent him off on a vacation to Goa.

Hudli's son Sajid has similar experiences to relate. Hudli had sent Sajid to Menon for six months' training. Menon treated the young engineer as an equal. In this period Menon once set off for his daughter's place at Ooty, and took Sajid with him. On the way he told the driver to hand over the wheel to Sajid. Sajid objected that he wasn't accustomed to driving a Contessa but

Menon said, "There is nothing to fear, go ahead and drive. And mind you, the needle mustn't drop below 120. What is the worst that can happen? You may ram a tree. But this car has a long bonnet, so we are in no danger." And they reached Ooty on schedule. They had lunch at a roadside dhaba. "It is safe to eat here," he said. "These people cannot afford to store stale food in the open countryside. At big hotels that is the drawback."

During training there was once a senior officers' meeting, and Sajid left the room. Menon enquired after him several times until he returned, and then told him, "You are here for all-round experience. You need not leave the room." He then arranged for Sajid's chair right next to his own. Sajid quotes an interesting incident. The two were in the car being driven somewhere. Menon stopped the car and told the driver to get him his special Calcutta paan (betel nut leaf). The driver walked to the paan shop and Menon said to Sajid, "Now watch." In a few minutes the driver came back saying the shop did not have Menon's favourite paan. Menon then got down and told the driver and told him, "Go sit in the back seat of the car in my place and put on this hat." The driver was hesitant but Menon insisted and then went to the paan shop. The shopkeeper told him the same thing: he did not have it. Menon asked him where it would be available. The shopkeeper directed him to another shop at ten minutes' distance. Menon saw a bicycle parked by the shop. He pointed to his car and said, "My Saheb is sitting in that car. He is very strict. If he doesn't get his paan at once, I will lose my job and so will the driver." He pressed a 10-rupee note into the shopkeeper's hand and told him to run across on his bicycle and get the paan. The shopkeeper complied and managed to get the paan within a few minutes, and Menon got it carefully packed. He then told the shopkeeper to keep the change and walked back to the car. "Get down and start walking," he told the driver. "What good is a driver who can't get a paan?" Sajid remonstrated on the driver's behalf, and asked Menon how he had managed it. Menon then told him the story.

Suhas Khadke, Manager Accounts, recalls a similar incident. Khadke and Turakhia had been sent ahead to Pune one morning to make arrangements for a stay and meeting with Government officials. They booked four rooms in Nandanvan, the hotel where Menon stayed regularly. They waited for Menon from seven in the evening: Menon arrived at 9:30, and said, "I am not going to eat; you two have made a major blunder." Khadke and Arvind replied that if he wouldn't eat, neither would they, but asked what the blunder was. Menon told them to work it out for themselves. He sat still till 11:30 and then said, "Let's have dinner at Surya Hotel." Over dinner he explained, "I arrived at Nandanvan at seven and asked for my room. I was told, after checking and rechecking that there was no room booked in my name. I then checked up at several other hotels and then returned here. Let this be a lesson to you: for any booking, write down the man's name first, and then the Company name." Menon had this knack of ensuring that each lesson takes deep root in the other's mind. "From that time on I learned to think before doing anything, and that nothing can be brushed off as 'minor.'"

Shantikumar Wathare recalls an instance when a driver sent to deliver an invitation came back saying he couldn't locate the address. Menon told him,

“Keep driving around till you find it, don't come back without doing the job.” This time around, the driver found it and delivered. Arvind Turakhia recalls that Menon had extended their stay in Delhi by a day just so as to drive a lesson firmly into the other person's mind.

Rajan Gongane recalls an incident in Delhi. It was a Sunday, and Menon needed a pencil; he rang down to the hotel store and was informed that a Kohinoor pencil was available for Rs. 40. Reluctant to pay so much money for a Rs 5 pencil, Menon sent Gongane out to buy one. All of Connaught Place was closed since it was a Sunday. Gongane was in a fix. He finally bought one from the hotel stores and bluffed Menon that it had cost Rs. 10. Menon was so pleased at the saving of thirty rupees that he treated everyone to ice cream. On another trip, he and a group including Gongane, Hudli and others had set out for Delhi by air. At the airport before boarding, Menon suddenly asked, “Are we carrying the Amboli central plan?” Nobody had thought of it. Menon said, “Cancel the trip.” Vijay had come along to see them off. He hastily said he would fax the plan to Delhi the moment he got back. Menon said nothing, and the flight went off with everyone sitting mum. Two taxis that had been arranged conveyed them to the hotel, and when they saw the fax waiting for them, all others heaved a sigh of relief. Menon then opened his mouth for the first time.

Menon was, even in small matters, an enthusiastic guide and adviser. Once, in a Delhi restaurant he ordered his selection and then invited others to order theirs. Gongane ordered Chicken Hong Kong, which he saw on the menu card. Menon then asked him what Chicken Hong Kong was, Gongane replied, “I don't know. I ordered it because it is something new.” Menon recalled the steward and changed Gongane's order to Chicken Masala. “In an unfamiliar place, always order the familiar,” he explained later to Gongane.

Vishwasrao Shelke says Menon always gave proper advice. He never led anyone astray. This is why the Group is unique in Maharashtra. People around Menon benefited from his advice on even very minor issues. M. B. Sheikh remembers once while driving down to Satara with Dada Shinde, the latter began to recount all that he had done for his younger brother Yashwant. Menon cut in, “We are seniors in the household. Doing for others is our duty. What we have done should not be thought about later.”

V. G. Kasute, who left with Menon's blessings and started his own business, says he prospered because he followed the principles he had picked up from Menon. Menon always said, “If one follows a goal with confident efforts, nothing is impossible short of waking the dead.” It was because of such guidance and encouragement, Kasute says, that he never faced failure.

Kolhapur industrialist Bapusaheb Jadhav had observed that Menon's whole life was devoted to the foundry, pattern shop and machine shop. His whole empire stands on those foundations. Rajan Gongane says Menon was prepared to work with his hands to teach another. He would squat down on the shop floor and actually hold a man's hands to train him to remove a core. Any mistake was pointed out directly, not through innuendo. Herwadkar

observes that even if a worker walked into a meeting with a job and a problem, Menon would squat down on the floor with him, understand it thoroughly and sort it out. Devendra Oberoi observes that he never hesitated to use his hands. He would easily manipulate a thirty-kilo job to inspect it from all sides. His hands would pick up sand, and the same hand would then wipe the sweat off his forehead. Arvind Kashid, who worked with Menon for several years, says his enthusiasm and persistence were formidable. If anything went wrong, he would look into it for a solution and not waste time in recrimination. He carried the same philosophy to Kolhapur Steel, where during his daily round he would stop to investigate and rectify anything that was not right.

Arvind Shinde had heard from his father that anyone who met Menon was expected to carry a pad and two sharpened pencils. If Menon went to a wedding feast, he would explain the food values of the dishes. He was fully familiar with nutrition sciences. Menon's technical prowess was phenomenal and drawing was his major strength. He said drawings are the foundation of any job. He taught people how to work out volumes and weights from drawings. Pundi Parameswaran says that the 3 HP engine was Menon's own design. But if he succeeded at something, he did not linger but moved on to the next effort. He was always on the lookout for technical developments and always pounced on any new book that he came across. He used to say that at times, one page could repay the cost of the whole book. T. Ravindranath says he maintained a huge library of books on widely varying topics. Himself a scientist, Ravindranath once got into conversation with Menon on cybernetics, and realized that he was not as strong in it as he thought. Menon had made up for his lack of formal education by deep study.

Menon's insight was equally sharp in several matters other than technology. Mohammed Saheb Hudli was his constant companion. He was often present when Menon dictated letters, and Menon kept revising the draft till he was satisfied. He used to look at it from the viewpoint of the receiver, and once his letter was final, it was perfect to the extent that not one word could be justifiably changed. Menon was fluent at Malayalam, English and Marathi and had a working knowledge of Hindi. Although technology was his first love, he paid equal attention to allied subjects. Marketing was, in his eyes, equally important.

Arvind Turakhia says Menon guided him on the preparation of the Menon & Menon budget for the year 1994-95 just a few days before he died. A skilled technologist, he could quickly grasp a design or suggest improvements. He had seen most of the foundries in the world and his knowledge of foundry sciences was phenomenal. The investigative trait in Menon naturally led him to make an in-depth study of his illness, and he had faith in his inner voice. He knew exactly what was happening to him and so he never made a fuss about it and worked till the end.

M. S. S. Varadan has said that Menon was always attracted by anything new. Varadan had introduced him to several intellectuals and thinkers, and Menon could converse with them on equal terms. Varadan arranged Menon's lectures on several occasions. This went on until 1985 when Menon ran into

health problems. He had consulted Varadan about the education of Satish, his youngest son, and encouraged him to go into electronics, a new field then. Rolfe Eastman says Alan Cohen had made a novel suggestion: for any new activity either call in an expert or learn it yourself. Menon took the second alternative. S. V. R. Rao has noted that Menon was very particular about quality and methods. He laid stress on maintaining proper records. He kept himself abreast of developments in the management field and maintained his 'student status.'

On one occasion, Rao was talking on 'contribution.' Menon walked into his room with some graphs and requested him to explain 'profit planning.' He always wanted to get to the root of any matter. He once bought some expensive core paint, and questioned why they couldn't make it themselves. He read up on the topic, conducted experiments and proved they could. Rao feels Menon was at heart a scientist. M. Shivaraman says Menon was prepared to learn from anywhere, even abroad if necessary, and was prepared for the expenditure. Labour leader Comrade Govindrao Pansare says Menon was an industrialist to the core. The difference between a trader and an industrialist is that a trader looks purely at profit; an industrialist gives priority to capability and quality. Menon was accustomed to actual work. He was familiar with most of the machinery. Having operated most of the machinery himself, he would say that each machine has its own personality, and he was aware of the limitations of each.

Menon was a real enthusiast about novelties. Rolfe Eastman had once brought over a calculator, a new thing here then, from the US. Menon was so impressed that he announced his plan of issuing one to each man in Finance. Rolfe did not see sense in giving each man a calculator. Menon said, "It is good for the atmosphere, I want this Company to advance in technology, though I agree that the cost side must be taken care of."

The arrival of computers was greeted by Menon with the same philosophy, and he stuck to his guns when the high investment was pointed out to him. A. T. More says Menon would consult experts; work very hard to acquire fresh knowledge. He was always looking for growth. When the manpower strength rose from 25 to 100, he was still dissatisfied: why not 200? Why not 500? But he strove to achieve what he wanted with indigenous inputs. More was associated with the Amboli project right from land purchase to launch of production. He says that Menon's action of replacing old machinery with new is paying its dividends today. Due to his penchant for novelty, whenever he heard of a development he would go, or send his people, so as to enrich his corpus of knowledge. His R&D department was therefore world class. He commended richly the positive response that was received to the ISO 9002 Manual compiled by Nathan. The book Udyogratne records that Menon was the first entrepreneur in Kolhapur who enlisted the aid of experts in management to streamline operations. Menon gathered a group of experts around him, sent them abroad for interfacing with advanced foundries and thus created a demand for exports.

Mohammed Saheb Hudli recalls that Menon undertook a study tour every year to study the latest developments, to learn novel methods. He made an in-depth study of how productivity goes up and as a result centered his attention on the science of Human Resource Development. At the outset, people like Hudli were sceptical of management as a science: get up, work, lock up and go home was the norm. But Menon trained all those around him in the new sciences. G. G. Joshi of Bank of Baroda says that all the knowledge of industry, economics and management that he got was through his association with the Menon group. Joshi asserts that Menon was far ahead of his times. It is unfortunate that he did not see the success that he sought in his own lifetime; but he was confident of rapid progress, which would only be fuelled by modernization.

Gangadharan Pillai says Menon was a man with a modern outlook, but by no means an agnostic. He was religious and devout. He was acutely alive to people who had helped him. His behaviour projected virtuousness and clarity. Herwadkar says Menon always admonished him not to paint a rosy picture of the accounts just to please him. His dealings were transparent, and once when someone questioned the authenticity of his balance sheet in the course of labour negotiations, he silenced the opposition with the challenge of bringing in an outside auditor of their choice, to be paid by Menon, for an impartial opinion. S. V. Rajan once asked Menon, 'Why do you always strive for things which others can't achieve and pronounce as impossible?' Menon's reply was that the fruits of success can never be taken away.

Menon had the spirit of encouraging progress. In the Maruti cylinder block case, Menon said bluntly to K. T. Jose, a senior Maruti official, "Look, you need this as much as we do, so don't think we have come here begging." People with Menon were aghast, but Menon was convinced that Jose would understand, and he was proved right. Jose rang up some time later and invited the group for dinner. G. G. Joshi recalls that Menon and Parameswaran would have such acrimonious arguments that the people around would be convinced that Parameswaran would walk out. But that never happened. Menon took care that differences at work did not reflect on personal relationships. He could take failures in his stride due to his supreme self-confidence. He would often say of a venture, "This is not the work of a wise man. It will take a madman like me."

Devendra Oberoi recalls the occasion of the visit of the Batliboi Chairman, Nirmal Bhogilal, to Kolhapur, when Oberoi was the President of the Kolhapur Engineering Association. Oberoi took him to the Menon works. On hearing the Menon saga, Batliboi remarked, "You are a lion-hearted man." Menon responded, "I was half-mad to have ventured into this." Bhogilal clasped Menon's hand and touched it to his forehead. When he emerged from the plant, he told Oberoi, "He is right. No one in his right mind would have taken the sort of plunge that he has." When Menon & Menon suspended operations for a short while in early 1987, Rs 3.5 lakh were owed to Oberoi. When asked, Menon assured him of paying. Other creditors kept pestering Menon, calling meetings. Menon himself expressed doubts whether the Company would reopen. He had two options for survival: sell the land near Bangalore or sell

out at Kolhapur. When circumstances favoured the restart of the Kolhapur plant, he announced at a meeting that Oberoi and Konduskar, two creditors who had never pestered him, would be given priority for payment, and he did it in less than a year and half. Others were in the meanwhile laying wagers that Menon & Menon would never open shop again.

The book *Wisawya Shatakateel Udyogratne* (The Jewels of Industry in the 20th Century) describes Menon as 'A Steel Man with a Velvet Heart.' It goes on to say, "He paid as much attention to human resource development as he did to the capital he invested. His firm, determined and decisive stance projected the impression of ruthlessness, but he was a compassionate and affectionate man. He had brotherly relations with his employees. As regards quality, he had the reputation in industry as 'the man of absolute perfection.' He strove to achieve the distinction of the highest level of quality in the world for his products, and his co-workers experienced this all the time.

Shankarrao Nesarkar says that whenever Menon embarked on a long tour he would call together selected people in the factory and tell them that quality standards must be maintained in his absence and no cause should be given for complaint. Menon despised the concepts of 'rejection' or 'rework,' and thus we were inspired to work for perfection, says Nesarkar. Mohanrao Ghatge, Chairman of Ghatge Patil Transports Ltd., said Menon had his sights set five years ahead. His thinking was perfectly clear. "Any measures that were taken for the workers or even during tough negotiations with labour leaders, his thoughts were progressive and forward looking. This might seem a contradiction, but he had a unique vision of the future. At any stage of production, his demand was always, 'better still.' Rather than saying we learned from him, it would be more appropriate to say we marveled at his intellect. Even during his terminal illness his behaviour was no different."

Madhu Mestry remembers how Menon often reiterated that profit would automatically follow proper hard work. He did not aim at just making money: he believed in earning it. For example, rejections in tractor parts were in terms of microns, and customers were prepared to accept parts with minor deviations as 'A' quality, but Menon insisted on throwing such parts back into the furnace. Similarly, he never accepted an argument that a particular job was out of his range. HMT required hydraulic lift housings, which were imported from Japan. The people at HMT told Menon that he wouldn't be able to make them, but Menon developed them successfully under personal supervision. He also developed an alternative to the imported hydraulic assemblies that were imported from Komatsu by BEML.

Other examples abound. Anandrao Topkar quotes Menon as saying that anything being made in the world, he could make. He could spend days at a time at the plant so as to achieve what he had taken up. He would enjoin upon his people that the Company's name must spread throughout the world, for accuracy was primary even at the cost of lower margins. He would pick up methods from various parts of the world and teach them to his people.

Rolfe Eastman recalls Menon's principle: money coming in should first flow to the workers and then to the Company, our personal needs come last. His personal cabin was frugal with no expensive frills. Menon insisted, however, that the quality of the food served to the workers from the canteen was of the best quality. K. Kartikeyan recalls that Menon was prepared for any sacrifice to ensure the quality of his goods. Even in his final illness, while he was in hospital, he would say, "We have obtained ISO 9002. No more causes for worry."

Menon had high hopes out of everything he did. Small snags never bothered him. Renowned tax consultant P. D. Kunte looked after Menon's affairs 1976 onwards. He says, "Menon never looked upon his factories as milch cows. He felt that he had the ownership rights purely through his own entrepreneurial spirit. The close association that his business had with the automobile sector affected him with all the ups and downs that the cyclical automotive industry went through. Menon successfully weathered them all through his commitment to quality, a trait that was an integral part of his make-up." Padmakar Sapre set up a large enterprise after working with Menon for a time. He proudly says that Menon was the first industrialist to post an advertisement in the Readers' Digest, even when the business was not doing well. He built up a network of distributors all over the country. Sapre says that Menon was always one step ahead in every matter. He had the burning ambition of proving that his foundry was the best, at least in Asia.

D. V. Tikekar of Kirloskar Consultants at his first meeting with Menon perceived him as a friendly, emotional and ambitious man. He realised right then Menon's thirst for growth. He appreciated Menon's success at establishing himself firmly far away from his native land. Tikekar realized that Menon had built up a select group of capable associates and had worked his way up. Menon had ambitions of educating his children in the US. Tikekar feels happy that Kirloskar Consultants lent a hand in the success of Menon. Devendra Oberoi is of the opinion that Menon was never satisfied; he kept setting new goals, chasing dreams. There was a common saying in the Kolhapur industrial circles that the trowel in Menon's hand never rested: it kept laying new bricks. Hudli recalls that Menon finally focused his attention on finance. He would say, "I want to become an Ambani." Hudli says that south Maharashtra had never seen an entrepreneur with as much of foresight, ambition, dedication and integrity as Menon.

Several contemporaries of Menon have quoted their experiences of his policies. Vilas Sawant says that working with Menon was like learning from one's father. Arvind Kashid says that Menon was a stickler for rules, but often showed that rules cannot always be applied stringently: achieving goals was more important. Menon regularly introduced Kashid to big people in business and industry, though Kashid was not a qualified engineer. Anandrao Atigre remembers that when he set up his plant in 1983, he was totally ignorant of technology. The entrepreneurs of that time were accustomed to running their industrial units individually. Contingency funds were unheard of. No provisions were made for spare parts and breakdowns. Menon advised him at that time, "Work out how loans can be repaid from existing turnover. All angles need to

be studied for this. For any project, it is not enough to look to the profits: one has to study the risks, problems and responsibilities.” Atigre says that even many consultants don't have this insight. He goes on to say that Menon always involved anyone he dealt with fully into the matter at hand. He provoked questions and extracted the answers from the same man. “Our critics are our best well wishers,” Menon would say. Some customers had the habit of stating high rejections as an excuse for delays in payment. Menon would deliberately depute Madhu Mestry to investigate such instances, since he was sure that the customer couldn't possibly argue with him.

A.T. More quoted an example of how Menon concerned himself with details not related to work. On an occasion when they dined at a restaurant, Menon directed More to pay the bill in spite of the presence of seniors such as Mande and Mestry. He then raised the question of the tip. On being asked for opinions, they all differed. Menon then explained that all commerce in the world operated at 5% plus or minus.

Once Vilas Sawant had not got the raise in salary that he expected. The matter came into the purview of the senior Parameswaran, and Menon did not think it seemly to interfere. He advised Sawant to start a discussion on orders and complaints, and then “we shall see.” The meeting commenced as planned, and Menon slipped in the question of a raise for Sawant. Parameswaran assented at once. Menon later asked Sawant, “Everything OK, now?” Sawant recalls that Menon never assumed the arrogance of ownership. He is grateful for the fact that Menon elevated him to officer level on sheer merit. Menon always emphasized growth. He said he would go out and get business; Sawant should take care of the rest.

S. V. R. Rao recalls that there was once a dispute between two generations of technicians. The old school that had been involved for years in engine manufacture and the technically trained newcomers were at loggerheads. The stand of either side would have benefited the Company, and Menon handled the situation with finesse and brought about a compromise. Menon never subscribed to the notion that an industrialist was superhuman: he always believed in mixing around and sharing tea and snacks, jokes and banter with his co-workers, says Padmakar Sapre. Menon ensured that the standard of living of his workers improved with the growth of the factory. He also ensured that his family too kept up with the development of his business, and thus all his children grew to be aware and well educated people. Menon had the habit of encouraging and absorbing into his fold people whom he approved of and had the knack of hunting out such people. His circle therefore kept expanding. If his workers had kept faith in tough times and had controversy not arisen, Sapre feels, Menon would have reached unprecedented heights.

Suhas Khadke says Menon had the policy of getting in touch with customers, suppliers and bankers at least once a month, irrespective of workload. When he visited the bank, he did not stop at meeting the Manager: he dropped by the desk of the officer who handled his account and chatted with him. Khadke recalls Menon making a trip to Mumbai purely on a goodwill visit. The result of his human relations exercises was that the work connected with his Group

proceeded smoothly in the departments and organizations concerned. Auditor Vardhe recalls that Menon personally visited the offices of Vardhe within six months of the beginning of audit work with Menon & Menon in 1990. This was a rare phenomenon with other such people. Menon had a keen sense of the relative importance of matters. Vardhe is of the opinion that it is the overall backwardness of Kolhapur that hampered Menon's growth.

R. C. Nathan recounts his first meeting with Menon. He had heard that if Menon did not get a good impression in the first meeting, he would not call a second one. In their first meeting, he realized that Menon was speaking against the concept of systems. But Nathan put forward his views frankly. He outlined how systems helped in practice. He also showed how working habits improved by implementing ISO 9002. After five minutes Nathan realized that Menon was testing him. He then told Nathan he was happy with his arguments, and that he had wanted to gauge Nathan's commitment to systems. Menon was Nathan's second client, and Nathan says the encouragement he got increased his self-confidence. He is now rated as the best quality systems adviser in the country and has 15 offices all over the country.

V. L. Potnis had been persuaded to join Kolhapur Steel Ltd. with a great deal of promises. After a couple of years, Potnis asked Menon how he could make such a bold commitment. Menon told him, "I have seen several summers in business and was confident of better times." In the first six months Potnis got a glimpse of Menon's decisive evaluation of people. He had said, "There are four or five people here whom one has to be wary of. I don't find them desirable for the Company." Potnis was sceptical, but Menon was proved right in a couple of years.

Devendra Oberoi gives examples of Menon's policy in business. Once in the course of a chat, he asked Oberoi what his assets were. He then advised him to raise loans to increase his turnover, since assets appreciate over time, while money loses value. He gave his own example saying that when he bought machine tools, he bought the expensive but high quality HMT make. Others did not show that foresight. Today the value of his assets is higher, and the job throughput is excellent. When Oberoi once pointed out that the payments were not being made as per schedule, Menon summoned Vijay and checked. He learned that Mahindras were deducting the amounts when they made payments to Menons. Menon queried, "If Devendra doesn't give us borings, do we take it from Mahindra? It is not right to involve two parties for the same transaction." He was an open and frank person and never made a secret of anything.

S. W. Velingkar of Mahindras says his company laid great stress on subcontracting, firstly so as to encourage small suppliers to grow, and also to curtail investment, since the financial standing of the company was not strong. Premier Automobiles were the opposite. They never developed small suppliers. Every part was made under one roof at the Kurla works. Mahindras had freely developed subcontractors and thus the company had a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Menon was always alive to the work put in by his people. Once in 1972, a heavily overworked. A. T. More suffered a fit while at his job. Menon immediately rushed him to hospital and told him, "Don't be under any tension about work. I am responsible for everything here, but who is responsible if something goes wrong with you?" Mrs. More asserts that they reached where they are purely because of Menon's backing. Arvind Kashid quotes an instance. The Kolhapur Steel plant had stopped for two days because of a snag in a crane. A necessary part was not easily available. Menon gave his car and driver to Kashid and sent him to Mumbai, where after great effort Kashid obtained the part. Menon was so pleased that he instructed Potnis to give Kashid a promotion.

Ashok Chitre's experience is that when with Menon, one did not feel the pressure of being in the presence of the Chairman. Menon appreciated the fact that Chitre had developed contacts in the surrounding villages at Amboli. Menon would back up Chitre's suggestions. He was fond of sports, and Menon helped him build a volleyball court at Panhala. He also agreed to have a Menon Cup for sports activities. The Menon Volleyball Cup has become a prestigious cup in Maharashtra and all the leading teams of India come to Panhala once a year to participate in this tournament. Menon was honest in financial dealings and expected others to reciprocate. He never agreed to subterfuge, such as evading Octroi. When he went to a hotel he would insist that the hotel people be paid well. He had a deep sympathy for the poor, says Chitre.

Various people talk about their experiences of Menon's policies. When he sent Pundi Parameswaran to Menon Metalliks, Devendra Oberoi asked him - wasn't it wrong to send a relative out? Menon replied that establishing a person in life is a greater responsibility. As Pundi had a stake in Menon Metalliks he would be able to now establish himself and his family very well; Metalliks was a new challenge, which is why he took the decision.

Comrade Govind Pansare quotes an instance of a Junior Engineer who was a little unfamiliar with the activities that he was supervising. The workers were disdainful of his education, and laughed at his mistakes. Menon heard of this and told the Engineer not to go there for a full week. He supervised the work himself and got it done properly for a week. He then handed charge to the Engineer with the admonition that work must continue at that level. Vilas Kasute had the reputation of solving any problem, and Ram Menon would often ask his brother to find him another such Vilas. The relationship between the two brothers was a subject of wonder and admiration for all. Mohammed Saheb Hudli says though it was a family business, the two brothers never interfered in each other's work. Discussions on progress and problems took place every day. Both followed an unwritten rule of not discussing business at home and on holidays. Both were alive to technological developments taking place in the world, and regularly visited industrial exhibitions abroad. G. G. Joshi said the brothers would work in cooperation, but never interfered with each other. Ram Menon said the group had eight companies and each

brother took care of about half. They both attended Board meetings, but neither interfered with the other in day-to-day running.

Menon's personal relationship with labourers and his labour policies are a topic by itself. He paid attention to the smallest worker. He never failed to attend weddings in the households of his people, even a watchman or driver. He visited ill people in hospital. Vishwasrao Shelke once visited Menon's factory and Menon escorted him to the foundry. On his way he stopped and asked a worker for a bidi. The worker felt elated, and Shelke was surprised, but Menon said it was his way of showing affection. Shelke noted that wherever Menon went his workers would come forward to greet him. Whenever it was necessary to summon a worker to his cabin, he insistently seated him in the chair opposite. When the worker hesitated due to his soiled clothes, Menon would say, "That Rexene can be changed at any time."

Arvind Kashid said he had a true concern for the welfare of his people. He was sorry to see them wasting their money on vice, and leaving nothing for the household. Their wives would sometimes be in tears. So Menon distributed Shetkari Sahakari Sangh credit cards to all workers. This card would enable the ladies at home to buy their household requirements on credit from the Sangh and the company would pay the Sangh from the person's monthly salary. Thus at least meals were assured for all. This arrangement continues at Menon's even now. Today Menon and Menon Employee Credit Society handles a large portion of such credit; and the balance needs are met through a similar scheme with the Janata Bazaar. Shankarrao Nesarkar says it was Menon who started uniforms in the factory. He never made compromises on workers' welfare. He started several welfare schemes for workers, not only at Menon's but also in Kolhapur Steel.

Anyone could approach him while he was on the shop floor, and the door of his cabin was always open for any worker. Rolfe Eastman says Menon himself put in very hard work, and expected the same from others. People are often not aware of their capability. He therefore instructed Eastman to draw up a scheme of incentives for work beyond the given target. He nurtured the spirit of cooperation, rather than competition, for increasing productivity. Dr. V. P. Michael, a Professor of Strategy at the Shivaji University, has written that Menon gave priority to his workers. Once he was in a meeting with Dr. Michael and some important guests. A worker walked in with a problem, and Menon attended to him and suggested a solution before he returned his attend to his visitors. Dr. Michael says that his behaviour was the key to his being able to get extraordinary things done from ordinary people. He once went with Hudli to Jamshedpur for four days to study Human Relations. Hudli had business in nearby TELCO, but Menon spent the whole time with S. N. Pandey of TISCO. He got to see why Pandey is considered a widely respected authority on Human Relations, and made certain mental notes on actions to be taken to make each worker feel that the Company was his own.

P. D. Dighe says that at the beginning his union was strong at Menon's. Whenever an agreement was signed with Management, Dighe made it a practice to read it out and explain it to the workers for two hours in each shift.

The union of Pansare was on a different footing. Workers first migrated to him, and then shifted back to Dighe. Later, Dighe withdrew from the scene due to health reasons. When the Kolhapur Productivity Council was formed, Rambhai Samani proposed Menon's name to represent the industrialists and Dighe was elected from the workers' side. Dighe was able to get familiar with Menon's progressive outlook. Mr. S. V. Rajan says when his workers demanded 20% bonus, but the Company was not doing well. Menon told their leaders, "You are aware of the situation. Strengthen my hands and then ask for anything." He had full faith in his people and treated them like family.

Menon disliked idling on the job, and idleness made him angry. Abhay Nevagi quotes an instance. On one occasion, the melting furnace was repeatedly getting punctured. Menon saw what he felt was a man idly loitering nearby. He called him to his cabin and gave him a severe tongue lashing. The foundry manager hurried across to Menon and explained that the man had been posted there to monitor the furnace temperature. Menon immediately realized his mistake and apologized to him. When the man replied that an apology was not necessary, Menon said, "If I have the authority to yell at you, it is my duty to apologize when the occasion calls for it." On another occasion when he slapped the general secretary of the union in front of all the workmen, the staff got worried. Menon called the union office bearers to his room and explained what had happened, and warned that he was prepared to bring him into his room and slap him again. The concerned workman came and apologized for his mistake. Menon forgave him and never again mentioned the incident to him.

At the Kolhapur Steel AGM, among the hecklers who were disrupting the meeting was a local wrestler. Menon threw a similar challenge at him. Aware that Menon was fully prepared to shut down the factory, workers were careful in their behaviour towards him. Even when his workers called a strike and led morchas (protest marches), once Menon appeared on the scene no one dared come face to face with him.

At the time of the major strike in his company, Menon had shown firmness unprecedented in Kolhapur's industrial history. He finally managed to negotiate a workforce reduction, a rare achievement for those times. Once, in the course of the strike, the workers gheraoed (surrounded) G. G. Joshi from the bank. He asked the workers bluntly, "Do you think Menon will starve if this Company closes? He is doing what he is for the sake of you 800 people." It was on this moral strength that Menon dealt with his workers and their union, and never allowed the Company to suffer.

Pansare says the Menon group was never anti-labour or anti-union. The accent was on high production and generating profits, which could then be shared by all. As long as Menon was dictating policy, this was the outlook, which was probably a result of Menon's own labour background in his early days. One example he gave was when a supervisor was beaten up by the workers under him. Menon said he had no use for a supervisor who takes a beating from his men, and removed him. His whole attitude was based on trust, and he was convinced that trust comes through proper behaviour.

Menon had the talent of maintaining relations with various kinds of people. D. R. Bhatia of Escorts was the first man from his Company to visit Menon. Escorts too was in the development stage in 1970-72. Bhatia says that a very deep relationship developed between the two. Bhatia emphasizes that in all his life he did not come across such a straightforward and decent businessman. His personality was truly unforgettable. Menon was a major supplier to Escorts, and Bhatia had occasion to go to Kolhapur about 15 times. His son too was studying in Kolhapur. Menon had told him that he should come and see him regularly. Bhatia remembers Menon once getting angry that the young man had not met him for a long time.

S. M. Patil, chairman of Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT), recounts how Menon's respectful and friendly behaviour benefited him in business. Patil was earlier with Coopers, as was Parameswaran senior. Parameswaran later joined Menon. After Dr. Patil took over as Chief of HMT Bangalore, Parameswaran took Menon over to introduce him and recounted Menon's full story. Patil was so impressed with Menon's respectful behaviour that he immediately arranged for nearly Rs 40 lakh worth of HMT machinery that Menon wanted. Menon invited Patil as Chief Guest at the inauguration of the factory. The two kept getting closer to each other thereafter. Retired General Manager of HMT Tractors S. M. K. Sehgal too says that Menon's all round courtesy was responsible for the cordial relationship with HMT. Sehgal had been to Kolhapur during Menon's bad days and got the portals and cylinder heads he required manufactured by Menon. Menon's frank and open nature and willingness to help contributed to excellent relations with HMT. Menon did not like to create a halo around himself. Mr. Chandramohan, Chairman of Punjab Tractors knew Menon personally since 1976-77. They were very close friends. He remembers meeting him once before that at Durgapur. He says Menon must be unique in Indian industry to remain Chief Executive Officer of a Company for 22 years at a stretch. He got to know Menon as a casting supplier and later Menon's technological prowess engendered a strong personal bond. They corresponded regularly.

Menon behaved with people from every level according to the other's inclinations. Maner, his driver, was with him for several years. He could sense Menon's needs even better than his family members could. Menon bought a new car, and Maner had a serious accident. He was admitted to the Krishna Hospital at Karad, and he hung on till Menon travelled 100 km to meet him in the hospital; after he had seen him, Maner breathed his last. Menon took care of Maner's family. He got his children educated. Maner's daughter, a good student, completed her BE in electronics and is now supporting her family.

Menon was connected with the Oberoi clan from the time of Devendra's father. Once when they met at a function, Menon casually asked what Devendra's father's age would be, and on hearing that he was about to turn 75, asked why it was not being celebrated. Devendra explained that in their belief, in the case of certain people, such celebrations have an adverse effect. Whereupon Menon just laughed. He remembered the date, however, and around that period invited the family to his farmhouse for dinner. There he

garlanded the elder Oberoi, wished him and touched his feet. Oberoi was moved to the verge of tears. Menon explained that since they were going to be away on 20th, he had chosen to invite him that day. Devendra says a man who has started from scratch understands the value of money and of people. He always remembered even the smallest favour that people did him. Margale Foundries was the only manufacturer who made horizontal engine crankshafts. Menon got a lot of help from Margale in the early stages. Later Margale took to drinking, went into debt and his house owner evicted him and threw his belongings into the street. When Menon heard, he rushed over and paid off the house-owner himself. Oberoi says that hundreds of people will have such stories to relate about Menon. He also says that both brothers shared this trait.

At times, Menon's actions were found inexplicable. At a wedding ceremony, many leading lights of Kolhapur society were present, but Menon sat next to his mentor in Yoga, Wathare. Wathare tried suggesting he join his peers, but Menon said, "No, Guruji, this is where I wish to sit." He always did what he felt was right. He had heard of Brigadier A. R. M. Rebello from the director of Menon Pistons, Vijayapalan. In 1990 when Menon was negotiating a foundry venture in Goa in collaboration with Sesa Goa, he invited Brig. Rebello to join him as General Manager. They had not even met. But Rebello had heard a lot of Menon from Vijayapalan, and he replied that he would join if the Government would let him go. The Government however did not grant permission. Rebello was due to retire in July 1993, and at the end of April he was again invited by Menon. Rebello said he would come if his wife liked Kolhapur. Menon then invited the couple to Kolhapur and himself drove them all over town. He then asked Mrs. Rebello if she liked what she saw. When she said she did, Rebello decided to join. Accordingly Rebello sorted out some of his matters and arrived at Kolhapur on 4th January, 1994. The same evening Menon left Kolhapur, never to return.

Kharade's experience is that Menon could judge a man in ten minutes flat, and could also predict how long he would stay. Material used to be supplied to Kolhapur Steel from Amboli. The Amboli weigh bridge reports were once manipulated by the truck driver. Menon's then advisor wrongly suspected that Kharade was involved, and began discreet enquiries. Kharade heard of it and rushed to Kolhapur and said to Madhu Mestry that he was prepared to resign on the spot if there was a hint of suspicion. Fifteen minutes later Menon summoned him and thundered. "I trust you as much as I trust Ram and Viju, and that is your qualification." Kharade was moved to tears. M. B. Sheikh feels that although a lot of people were close to Menon, he had very few personal friends. All the people Menon was acquainted with held him in awe. Sheikh himself was one of Menon's close associates. When he drew a housing loan, Vijay and Pundisaheb signed as personal guarantors on Menon's instructions.

Dadasaheb Chowgule, presently the Chairman of Kolhapur Institute of Technology, says that although he was slightly older than Menon, he felt a deep respect for him. Menon is one of the few people in his life who he holds in the highest esteem. Menon's intrinsic virtue shone out of his day-to-day

actions. Prof. Namboodripad says Menon had reached a pinnacle where very few people reach. Such people are therefore condemned to loneliness. Their problems are also correspondingly big, not easily understood by others. Menon used to say to Namboodripad, you are the only one who can empathize with me. Though he did not have very many personal friends he had an army of people he was a godfather to, people who benefited from his advice, people who he had helped establish in life. During his illness, visitors poured in; Menon never expected it. It was their way of saying thank you. It is said that familiarity breeds contempt, but this did not happen in Menon's case, due to his unique mental make-up.

Vishwasrao Shelke invited Menon for the Bhoomi Poojan ceremony for his 'Parvati' cinema theatre complex. Menon tried to suggest that in view of his poor health Ram should go instead. But he could not break Shelke's insistence and he attended with his whole family. He stood in the hot afternoon sun and even wielded the ceremonial pickaxe with dexterity. HMT had held an exhibition in Kolhapur. Dr. Patil had come down and had stayed with Menon. But he told Menon that he would have his meals at Vishwas' place. Menon queried why, when Patil was his own house-guest. Dr. Patil clarified that his connection with Vishwas went back to his father the late Mhadba Mestry. On hearing this Menon too accompanied him to Shelke's place. Patil had such faith in Menon, that when he needed an expert at anything, he would select a man and send him to Menon for vetting. He described Menon as a 'great visionary' rather than just a successful industrialist.

Menon's loyalty to his organization was total. According to Dr. P. G. Kulkarni, Menon was very straight and honest in this regard. He was of the opinion that any field needs the support of strong character. Menon was a combination of all these qualities. Dr. Kulkarni had in his time interacted with industrialists from the district level to the Tatas, but few were capable of leaving such a lasting impression as Menon, he says. Rolfe Eastman adds that even his aesthetic taste was devoted to the benefit of the organization. An avid nature lover, he was well informed about the surrounding flora and fauna. He felt that a worker surrounded by natural beauty experiences an increase in mental faculties. The signs of his fondness for beauty were to be seen everywhere: in his factory, office, at home. A walk around the factory premises still bears testimony to his attention to minute details. Even there he had managed to keep costs low.

In his personal life, he was liberal with money, but in a principled way. He believed that money was a tool to be used for the progress of humanity. When he took his daughter Shanta to SNT college in Pune, he wouldn't buy her a first class ticket or allow too much of luggage. When Mestry asked him why, he said, "She is yet to get married. She must learn to manage on a limited budget." When he went to Mumbai on business he lived in a clean but simple hotel, the Chateau Windsor at Churchgate. But for meetings with clients, he would book a table at the nearby Hotel Ambassador or one of the five-star establishments. Udeskumar of Escorts said that when Menon came to Delhi for client meetings, he would check into upmarket hotels like Imperial or

Claridges, but would slip into chappals (slippers) and walk into a dhaba for plain food. He used to maintain a good balance between status and economy. Even when he went to the US for treatment, he thought of recompensing the Company for the expenditure for which he set up an export company along with a few others. On the other hand, he planned a good eight-day celebration for the Silver Jubilee of Menon & Menon. But labour unrest and ill health came in the way. He had wanted to use the celebrations as a stepping stone to higher things.

Menon had the skill of carrying others along with him, and thus for any dispute, people would approach him for arbitration. Everyone had full faith in his impartiality and sense of justice. In this connection, Shankar Nalawade has written that Menon worked from beginning to end on the principle of 'live and let live.' Be it disputes between brothers or between partners, Menon would investigate thoroughly and find a solution so that all parties were satisfied and full justice was done to all. Nalawade remembers seeing Menon sorting out highly tangled partnership issues at PAKCO Engineering and United Castings. Y. P. Powar passed away in 1974. In the absence of a competent leader capable of leading the PAKCO group, differences arose among the partners. It was impossible to conduct business together, and it was decided to restructure the PAKCO group and split it amicably amongst the various owners. Menon was entrusted with the job. The ownership of PAKCO was spread over a large number of members of three families, with varying ages, levels of education and temperaments. Distribution with due care of all these was a Herculean task. Menon spent his precious time and through hard work pulled off the feat and helped the three families to set up independent businesses, and also helped them bury their differences. The matter was settled amicably without resorting to the lengthy legal tussles. Menon had been encouraged by the late Y. P. Power to start his business. It was out of a feeling of gratefulness to him that Menon carried out this whole exercise.

United Castings was a partnership firm and the fixed assets were personally owned. Menon arranged things in such a way that there were no legal hassles and increased tax burden. Menon managed all this on the basis of his towering intellect and experience. Even Dr. Kulkarni says had it not been for Menon's intervention, things could have gone to extremes and the concerned families would be still fighting amongst themselves. Thanks to Menon though the businesses are now separate but the families are still together.

Menon's role in sorting out the mess at Kolhapur Steel has been covered in a separate chapter. V. L. Potnis of Kolhapur Steel says Menon has healed several broken companies and organizations in this manner. Bapusaheb Jadhav has remarked that Menon had unparalleled arbitration skills, and could handle any dispute or quarrel. Hemraj Samani has said that Hudli, Ram and he picked up arbitration skills from Menon after seeing the smoothness with which he sorted out the tangle for Atigre, Shelke and others. They would consult Menon for methods of sorting out matters in a just manner, the basis on which action should be taken, and then act accordingly. Hudli also asserts

that Menon was instrumental in arbitrating several disputes in the industrial environment and thus has done Kolhapur a great service.

Many people have voiced the opinion that Menon had the lion's share in the industrial development of Kolhapur. Mohanrao Ghatge says Menon had great respect for the older generation industrialists and often told people that they were responsible in forming him. He was also keenly aware that the beginnings of industrialisation in Kolhapur were the result of the efforts of Shahu Maharaj. Ghatge's Ghatge Patil Transports and Menon's businesses faced troubles at about the same time, and there was constant interaction between the two. Though both were in the same boat, Menon's approach was different. He would say, who do we run the company for? Menon had an emotional involvement in the question. Acknowledging that it was to a certain extent his own fault, he still felt that the fact that his company was in trouble was a negative signal to society. If people who valued their social responsibilities got into trouble with the same society that they had cared for, will future generations be motivated to follow suit? Who should be rehabilitated first, himself, the workers or the shareholders? That is why he was firm in his resolve not to sell out.

When it was pointed out that he gave good advice to others, but did not follow it himself, he would stubbornly say, "I have different reasons." He had taken his business as a social responsibility and he had thus thrown himself to it. He felt that his business was his full time job. He did a few stints with the CII and other organizations but had no real interest in other activities; he was not a member of the Rotary or the Lions Club; he left these things to Ram.

Padmakar Sapre says he learnt a lot from Menon. He says a strong reason for his own development was that he tried to follow Menon's footsteps. Menon took conscious efforts towards strengthening the industrial base of Kolhapur. D. V. Tikekar marvelled at Menon's dedication to Kolhapur in spite of his outside origins. Pushpashil Nageshkar quotes Menon as saying, "We came here with nothing: are we going to carry anything with us? Whatever we create will remain in this soil for the sons of this soil." In this spirit he felt like doing something for Kolhapur, and he did it in great measure, providing employment to thousands in the endeavour.

M. Shivaraman shared his experience that Menon was always prepared to extend help to other industrialists and he made no discrimination by caste, state or language. He always encouraged excellence in work. He never rested until he had finished anything he had taken up. Dr. S. M. Patil calls him the guiding charioteer of industry in Kolhapur, who replaced old methods with modern. Vilas Sawant points out that many children went abroad for studies and settled there, but Menon's came back to join the business. He also says that everywhere one sees examples of brothers quibbling among themselves but the Menons created an ideal like the legendary heroes of the Ramayana, Ram and Lakshman, the only difference was that here Ram was the younger one.

Describing Menon's concrete actions towards the industrial development of Kolhapur, Hudli said he formed an inner circle of selected industrialists. They would have a monthly dinner where Management experts were called in to conduct group discussions on management methods in various countries. This used to benefit young entrepreneurs. Menon himself bore a significant part of the expenses in this effort. Periodically, foreign experts were also called in. Menon started a technology forum, which held timely and disciplined programmes, mainly since Menon himself coordinated them. He was deeply involved with Rambhai Samani in the formation of the Productivity Council. In all this, Menon became a highly respected name, because he kept himself strictly aloof from power politics.

Labour leader P. D. Dighe in his obituary to Menon has written that Menon was not just an industrialist but an advisor and guide to the industrialists of Kolhapur. Arriving from distant Kerala, a simple man single-handedly created a large industrial group. Industries were started here by local workers on small capital base; their efforts for finding new ways laid the foundation of Kolhapur's industrial machine industry. It was on this background that Menon launched his venture. Rather than getting stuck with oil engines, he diversified as much as was possible under the limitations of those days, and we see today the factories he brought to fame.

Menon was prompt in guiding those around him like a family head. Dighe says that he was the official spokesman of Kolhapur industry, and after him this role went to Hudli. Hemraj Samani says that Menon was personally responsible for building up a whole generation of at least thirty to forty industrialists. He took the lead and encouraged the children of his co-workers. He arranged for their training and placement in suitable places. As a personal effort he would take such young people out to see other factories for a couple of days at a time. This provided material and stimulation for the young men to generate their own ideas. These young men formed their own group, which met regularly to exchange ideas. A healthy tradition was started in Kolhapur in which everyone rushed to anyone who called for help. Ram Menon says, "Many people benefited by Menon's guidance and set up their own ventures. Several names can be listed such as Chowgule, Sapre, Momin, Jagdale. Kolhapur was known as a repair centre earlier. Menon first brought mass production technology to Kolhapur. With a towering will power, he would shine with bravery in times of trouble. He had a natural talent for leadership." P. D. Kunte has said that it was Menon who laid the foundation of small and medium enterprise in Kolhapur. It is difficult for an outsider to settle in here, but Menon had sent in roots and was one with the soil. Palkar of United Western Bank says that all the Kolhapuris thought him Maharashtrian. Dadasaheb Chowgule says that everyone in town respected Menon as the man responsible for expanding the industrial horizon of Kolhapur.

Former Nagardhyaksha and the renowned freedom fighter of Kolhapur Keshavrao Jagdale has written in Menon's commemorative volume, "The Late Chandran Menon created an empire from scratch and grew at a spectacular trajectory in the industrial front. He brought world wide fame to the city by sending his products to countries as far apart as Russia and Germany."

When Menon ran into hard times, sympathy was focused on him from all sides. Baburao Dharwade said that people expected Menon to keep doing something for Kolhapur all the time. Everyone felt that Menon would set up a large tractor factory or some such enterprise in Kolhapur. Pushpasheel Nageshekar regretted the fact that Menon was never properly given the honour that was his due in Kolhapur.

Menon's temperament had several facets and people around him experienced these in different ways; and a picture of the personality emerges from their reminiscences. Gongane travelled with Menon on several occasions on business. He asserts that he benefited a lot from the fatherly treatment that Menon gave him. Menon's technological prowess became well-known in the industrial world. He often demonstrated to his co-workers his principle of noticing minor details, which he knew they would miss. Auditor Vardhe had occasion to accompany Menon to Mumbai several times. Menon always ensured that facing seats were reserved for the two, so that the four-hour journey could be used for productive conversation. Suhas Khadke reminisces that Menon preferred to travel the distance by car rather than by rail, since it gave a better, leisurely opportunity for the exchange of ideas, a luxury not available in normal working hours. Menon was of the principle that a journey should be instructive rather than comfortable, and was always prepared to learn from anyone. Khadke remembers that Menon took several decisions in the course of travel.

Menon had his own principles about how to behave with people. He insisted that each man had to be paid his due according to his output. Anil Pandit recalls that Menon could never feign subservience to anyone and was never prepared for compromise. He was a proud man. Losses due to this did not bother him. But he paid attention to detail and he never inconvenienced anyone else. He was disciplined and had time for every activity. Even if he was involved in the most intricate discussions he had the capacity not to ignore other work, however trivial it might be.

M. B. Sheikh spent several years associating with Menon and had observed the details of his mental make-up. According to him Menon also had the ability to look at the big picture. Sheikh remembers him saying, "When you are feeding a whole town, it is senseless to complain that a few papads have been stolen."

He was blunt in his communications with anyone. On one occasion, when he was the Chairman of Kolhapur Steel, he went to meet the Chairman of the United Western Bank, Pandit, in the company of Dada Shinde and Sheikh. Shinde's unit was sick and the trip was for the purpose of obtaining a loan from the Bank for his unit. In the course of discussions Menon said to Pandit, "Your Bank feeds a buffalo as long as she yields milk. Once the milk dries up, you even take away her shed. You don't realize that a couple of years later the same buffalo is going to produce milk again. As long as you follow such policies, your bank is not going to grow."

Menon could also be rather unpredictable in his behaviour. Ankush Karpe recounts a couple of examples. A meeting had been planned at Amboli for Sawantwadi guests. Menon ordered Karpe to fetch Madhu Mestry. Karpe was unfamiliar with the name and face, and didn't know what to do. In the meantime Menon again demanded that Mestry be summoned. Time elapsed and at the lunch break Karpe carried lunch to the boss. Menon pushed it aside and told him that he will not eat till Madhu Mestry was present. This was a time when Menon was very ill and he had to eat on time in view of the strong medication that he was under. Ankush finally located Mestry and brought him to Menon and only then did Menon touch a morsel of food. He had a knack of getting what he wanted and ensuring that no one ever took him for granted.

On another occasion Karpe accompanied Menon to Tillari dam to take a look at the electricity project. The gentleman who was in charge of the survey was notorious for holding back visitors and making them wait for a long time. Menon who was unaccustomed to wait had started losing his cool and when Karpe located the man's boss and told him what was happening, the person was forced to apologize to Menon and give him immediate permission. But by that time Menon had lost his mood. He curtly told the man in his boss's presence to respect human beings however big or small he might be and left the premises. Menon always used to say that he was an artist and his performance would depend on the audience. If he was appreciated he would be able to turn out unparalleled performance, but if he was not appreciated or if the other person could not understand him, he would just turn and walk away.

Abhay Nevagi recalls that Menon was a very kind man. Outwardly hard, he had a soft heart and would succumb at once if he was faced with a hard-luck story. Many people took undue advantage of this goodness. A worker named Madhu Kamble once turned up at work wielding a large dagger. The watchman had him under surveillance since he had been caught stealing earlier. It was customary to deposit such belongings with the watch and ward department before one entered the factory and Kamble was directed to deposit his dagger. When he argued, he was sent away. On this background, he came to the factory again with the sad story of a sick brother and demanded an advance. He was told that there were norms for the grant of such a request, and that his request did not conform to the norms. He then went to Menon's house at eight in the evening and repeated his plea. Menon advanced him three thousand rupees without question. The man then proceeded to boast in the factory the next day that he had extracted money from the big boss when the people in the company had refused. Nevagi who was then handling personnel was extremely displeased. He ordered all pending applications for advances to be sent to Menon for his personal clearance. He was aware that Menon would be infuriated. When summoned, he asked, "If you are going to take these decisions directly, shouldn't all these papers come to you?" On being asked to elaborate, Nevagi related the story of Kamble. Menon apologized and had the greatness of mind to promise that he would not make a mistake like that again.

Anil Pandit too recalls that although Menon had such a good insight into human nature, he had the tendency to blindly help those who had had a long association with him. He listened to everyone, and his next action could never be predicted. Overall, Menon behaved on equal terms with everyone. He did not discriminate between officers and workmen. Outside the factory, everyone was equal. He would often send his car off and then request a passer-by to drop him home. People would be proud to do him that service. His people spoke of Menon in such glowing terms that Menonchi Manse became a standard mode of reference, and the Company newsletter was christened likewise. Any Menon man was perceived as responsible and loyal, a tribute to the culture that Menon inculcated in his men.

Justice Satyendra Nevagi, District Magistrate of Kolhapur, observes that Menon enjoyed immense respect and affection amongst the populace. Even punishments that he meted out were guaranteed to be free of malice or injustice. Nevertheless Menon was not much involved in social work. Several prominent positions in public life came his way but he spurned them. Anil Pandit feels that this was one reason why he did not get the public acclaim he deserved.

According to Devendra Oberoi, one weak point of Menon was that he would take time to trust someone, but once he did, he would trust implicitly. This would at times land him into trouble and several people, from workers to suppliers, took undue advantage of this trait of his. In some ways, he was adamant. He did what he felt was right. His company later became the object of ridicule as 'Menon's old peoples' home.' However, at times his stubbornness paid off. Umesh Bagal says that an ordinary person strives to adjust himself to the world: a stubborn man expects the world to adjust itself to him. The progress of mankind is driven by such stubborn people. Anil Pandit goes on to say that Menon had the spirit of 'I have made this; I shall throw it away if I feel like it. I shall do what I please.' As a result, Menon tolerated impertinence from no one - not from his workers, not even from his customers. Pandit has seen customers being given short shrift if their behaviour was incorrect.

G. G. Joshi feels that Menon did not get the success that he deserved for his prowess. P. D. Kunte's evaluation states that Menon could walk into any field and the aura of his technological expertise would glow bright. The awareness of Menon's achievements was even reflected in the glowing tributes paid to him in the annual reports of large Companies such as Escorts and Telco.

The foregoing details should serve to provide an insight into the achievements and policies of Menon in the industrial arena. His capabilities were an even match to any other major industrialist in the country. His inspiration and role in industrialization was of a very high order. There were very few industrialists on the Indian scene who contributed to growth of industry and the human spirit as Menon did. His true potential was however stilted on account of labour unrest and the limited stage that Kolhapur offered. Had he been in Pune or other such cities, text books would have been written about him and he would have been a national figure. It was therefore felt necessary that his

true self would be made known through this biography for the purposes of analyses by discerning individuals.



TOUCHING MANY LIVES

Jaywant Kharade had once remarked that Menon's exact nature was impossible to gauge. He is right: Menon's personality had such depth and so many facets that no one person could never get to know him fully. It is, however, possible to assemble a general picture from conversations with several people.

Menon always made an in depth study of anything he planned. Arvind Shinde says that once he had settled in Maharashtra, he made a study of the Maharashtrian way of life in all aspects: for instance, he became acquainted with various religious rituals and significant days such as shraadh, akshay trutiya, sankashti etc. When he attended the religious ritual of satyanarayan he would on his own ask for tirtha and prasad (blessed foods). When he visited the locals, he would ask for zunka, thecha, kharda (traditional and simple food items in rural Maharashtra). To get close to the people, he felt, one has to familiarize oneself with their customs. Shinde says that was how he assembled Menonchi Manse.

Rolfe Eastman was a man who had penetrated deep into Menon's psyche. He made a detailed analysis of Menon's personality. Menon could easily get absorbed in various cultures, but was fiercely proud of his country. In the summer of 1967 the two were touring the villages of Madhya Pradesh for selling diesel engines. The area was under drought conditions and water was scarce. Coca-Cola however was available in several places. Menon was aghast with what he saw. "Just look at the difference in management skills. The Government of India cannot provide drinking water to its people but an America corporation can provide Coca Cola," Menon had remarked. In the course of this journey they had to pass through dacoit country, and in contrast with his otherwise lion-hearted courage, Rolfe noticed that he was a little nervous. Rolfe says there is no telling what fears may be hidden in anyone's mind. Similarly Rolfe had seen him worried when once while walking through a tea estate in Kerala his foot was attacked by leeches and the bleeding wouldn't stop.

Menon had a taste for varied food. Mrs. Menon was a skilled cook and she was adept at cooking Kerala style dishes and the more spicy Kolhapuri food. But Menon at times asked her to cook an American meal. Menon was a human spectrometer; he could not only precisely tell what ingredients have gone into the dish but also tell the proportions! Whatever the type of meal he was served, he would invariably mix all the ingredients together to eat. His favourite till his end was rice and curds.

Rolfe says that his wife would always rush in the moment she was called: Menon disliked delays. He was a stickler for perfection and had inculcated in his wife the same values. He was always keen on gaining new experiences.

In America, once they visited an apple orchard and had an opportunity to pluck apples. Visitors to apple orchards could pluck and eat as many apples as they could but they could not take any apples with them. Whatever they wanted to take with them had to be paid for. Menon very enthusiastically plucked the apples and even devised efficient ways of plucking the apples, which greatly impressed the farm owner. Later Menon was informed that his suggestions were implemented by the farm owner with very good results.

Although Menon spoke several languages, he insisted that Rolfe teach him American English. He looked at the American English as the best form of English. He would often comment that the Americans pronounced each syllable distinctly while the Englishmen would swallow a few syllables in between. He found the French system of pronunciation atrocious to say the least!

Similarly, the game of cricket held the least fascination for him. Till the end he never took any effort to understand the game. He always felt that only fools would stand for hours together in the hot sun and greater fools would waste their time and pay money to watch some people make fools of themselves! He always preferred games like football and volleyball, which were fast-paced and ended decisively.

Menon's senior sister-in-law Mrs. Kartikeyan had a profound understanding of Menon's mental make-up. The two shared a deep mutual respect. He addressed her as Chettati Amma, and she used the term Chandra Chettan. (Chettan in Malayalam was a respectful way of addressing an older brother.) She described the support and affection her family got from Menon throughout their lives. Their children were as close to him as his own children. During his illness he had spent about four weeks with Kartikeyans' older daughter, Sheila in Switzerland. Sheila's husband Satish was at that time working on a software project with the Zurich stock exchange on behalf of Tata Consultancy Services. Mrs. Kartikeyan recalls that once she was in Mumbai for an operation on her mother-in-law. When Menon dropped in, there was a delay in opening the door because Mrs. Kartikeyan was suffering from severe backache. She was asked to consult a doctor but she wanted to stall the visit till after her mother-in-law's operation. When Menon realized the situation he devised a small trick and got her checked by a doctor. Based on the doctor's advice he insisted that she begin a course of physiotherapy. Mrs. Kartikeyan recalls gratefully that with her own brother and husband not able to pay attention, Menon had leapt into the breach. Seeing his concern, the nurses were curious to know who he was, and Mrs. Kartikeyan said "elder brother." He loved her two daughters dearly, and often when they were small even groomed their hair for them. He disliked people with unkempt hair and he would tell the girls to dress up properly and comb their hair neatly.

Mrs. Kartikeyan also recalls that Menon loved to live life and he lived it fully. Whatever the problems on hand he would always be cheerful. He would often tell Mrs. Kartikeyan, "Chettati Amma, I want to live a hundred years." Menon would get saddened whenever he came across anyone who was ill. He would always rush to their aid. He had a deep affection for Mrs. Kartikeyan's mother

and happened to be with her at her Alwaye home when she passed away. Mrs. Kartikeyan's younger son-in-law, Kumar, who was Vice President at Kotak Mahindra and who later started his own finance company 'Transwarranty Finance', would visit him everyday at the Prabhadevi flat, where Menon was staying during the last few weeks of his life. He was at that time under the treatment of Dr. M. B. Agarwal. Menon had once remarked that Kumar must have been his son in his previous birth. When Mrs. Kartikeyan went to meet him then, he told her, "I am feeling well now, and will be returning to Kolhapur soon. Tell the people at Kolhapur not to come to Mumbai to see me." This was a Tuesday. The following Monday he was no more.

Menon did a lot for his mother-in-law. Once took four aged women - which included his mother-in-law, his sister and Mrs. Ram Menon's mother on a tirthayatra (pilgrimage). He took them by car from Kanyakumari to Hrishikesh (from the southern tip of the country to the northern mountains) and visited all the important shrines on the way. For two months Menon set all important work aside to take care of these elderly ladies. Menon himself was an atheist, but he did it out of his love and affection towards these ladies. Till the end he took care of his mother-in-law as he would his own mother. He insisted that his mother-in-law stay with him; she too loved his company.

Abhay Nevagi is of the opinion that Menon's helpful nature was a major facet of his personality. Even when his business was facing hard times, he gave Mande Rs. 25,000 to build a house. When Abhay built his own house, he did it in stages, looking to his budget. Menon once came to see the progress of the construction, and realising this fact, gave him Rs. 50,000. Abhay tried to tell him that this was not necessary as there were no fees due to him. Menon dismissed the matter with, "Given our relationship, I should be doing more."

When Shahane wanted to set up his own office, he hadn't even mentioned it to Menon. Menon learned of it and gave him Rs 1 lakh in cash. Shahane had seen that whenever anyone in Kolhapur was in need of help, Menon was in the lead. He worked on several social bodies, but did not want to hold positions. If pressed, he would push it on to his brother, Ram. He would say he did not have the time to spare, but if someone came to him with troubles, he would hear him out for hours and help him whenever possible. The two brothers were temperamentally different but complementary. Ram did nothing without informing his brother, and Chandran never, as an older brother, imposed his will on him. All the people Menon was in contact with were in awe of him, but he believed in giving each one of them the freedom to make their own decisions.

Everybody had something to say about Menon's great love of food. Mrs. Menon learned to cook all the Kolhapur specialities so as to cater to his likings. But whenever he came across anything new, he would ask to be taught how to make it. He was fond of gulamba (home-made mango-jaggery preserve). He was also fond of fruits. He disliked 'five star' food and stored food and particularly disliked waste of food. V. B. Ghorpade remembers that

he was fond of garlic chutney from Ghorpade's house. He had even carried some with him to America.

He had located certain dhabas (wayside eateries) that he patronized during his travels. Madhu Mestry remembers that whenever he went to Satara he would stop by at an old lady's place near Nagthana and order two bowls of curry and three bhakris to be kept ready for his return journey. After having eaten, he would say, "Now I feel I have really eaten. I get sick of eating the same food repeatedly from the fridge." Whenever the fancy seized him he would say to Angadi or Hudli, "Aaj tumhare paas khana mangta hai." (I want to eat at your house today.) He was fond of home food; curry was his favourite, particularly if it contained small boiled onions.

He had expressed his wish that he would some day write a book on Kolhapuri cuisine and he would devote an entire section on the intricacies of cooking the Kolhapuri mutton sukka (dry mutton) and tambada rassa (red curry). He always felt that the bane of Indian cooking was the lack of standardization. The cook would mix the spices based on his experience and estimate. That is why food tasted different at different times. He wanted to standardize the cooking of the mutton sukka and rassa so that it would taste the same irrespective of who cooked it.

Once, on his return from America, he proceeded to Amboli and asked Gundu what was for lunch; Gundu named a germinated grain. Menon roared; "Does a tiger eat grass?" Later, chemotherapy took away the taste in his mouth. He was being plied with wheat grass, bananas and tender coconut, and when he was asked if he was on a diet, he said sadly, "The tiger now eats only grass." Naturally friendly and hospitable, he took great care that his guests were satisfied. If he got angry, he went livid, and everyone was afraid to face his ire. He had set principles about eating. He never tolerated "I don't like this." He insisted that what you don't like should be eaten first. He ate plenty of vegetables in his meals and encouraged his children to do the same. His niece Savita Gopi says, "Uncle said, eating when you are hungry allows you to enjoy it. Food eaten when not hungry is tasteless." It was a pity that towards the end, he could not eat at all. He was particular about detail. He insisted on onions being sliced in a particular way, and had arguments over it, recalls Savita.

Hudli says Menon would drop in at any time for a meal, or call him over to his place. If he wanted to eat at Hudli's place, he would ring up and instruct Hudli's daughter on what was to be made. Menon's intake was moderate, but he ate with appreciation. He was fond of non-vegetarian food. Mrs. Menon was always under pressure until she saw that he was satisfied, remembers Arvind Shinde. Menon regularly ate at his place because he was fond of the various types of usal prepared in the local fashion. He would specifically ask Mrs. Shinde to cook such preparations.

Once in 1970-71, Mr. D. R. Bhatia, head quality control at Escorts, visited Menon's works. A sit-down dinner was planned at Hotel Tourist. Drinks had been arranged for and Johnny Walker Black Label was ordered. When the

bearer walked in with the bottle, Mr. Bhatia at a glance declared that it was a fake. Menon was prepared to take a bet, and the bearer was questioned. When he hesitated, the Manager was summoned, and he admitted his mistake. Menon then certified Bhatia a “true Quality Control man,” and the two became friends.

Menon was ever the perfectionist. Even the application form in which he had requested the state government to close his company had to be perfect. The typing had to be perfect with no mistakes and even the Xerox copies had to be perfect. He personally checked all the Xerox copies to ensure that they were up to his standards. Even garlands and bouquets presented to visitors and guests had to meet his preferences, and Menon was prepared to pay for it. If a letter had a minor error, it had to be retyped.

He had a deep passion for classical music. He liked to listen to Abdul Karim Khan and Pandit Jasraj. Later he also took to Hariharan’s gazals. He was fond of shayari (Urdu poetry), and anything he did not follow he would get clarified from Hudli. When Sachin got married, his father-in-law Parameshwaran Nair used to sing Saigal songs very well. In fact so good was his singing that he was called ‘Kerala Saigal’. Nair was also invited to Ludhiana to celebrate Saigal’s birth centenary and he shared the dais with the then prime minister of the country. Menon and Nair took an immediate liking for one another and they would spend hours discussing Saigal and his songs. Invariably a large part of the time would be spent listening to Saigal songs sung by Nair.

Food and music were his favourite topics when travelling. Philosophy was also a topic for conversation. He appreciated the writings of J. Krishnamurthy and Swami Vivekananda. He also practiced meditation and Yoga under the expert guidance of Mr. Shantikumar Wathare. He had also visited Kaiwalyadham and the Iyengar School.

In 1979 the Menon and Shinde families joined a Raja-Rani Travels tour of Kashmir for 10 days. Menon could not get a seat in the bus since he had booked late, and he travelled by a separate taxi. He would have preferred to travel with the others in the bus. His family always mixed freely with the others on such journeys, and the atmosphere was relaxed and cheerful. The Menon and Shinde families also got very close during this trip and the close bonds remain even to this day.

Once Menon was to be photographed for a portrait to be put up at Menon Pistons. After the photo session he was sitting on the lawn with Prasad Modi and the photographer Mahesh Bage. Bage says he had never seen Menon in such a cheerful and talkative mood, and they chatted away for a long time. They talked about Menon’s very close association with Bage’s father who was at that time the best photographer of Kolhapur. In fact Bage’s father had taken a photograph of Menon with Pandit Nehru when they had gone to Delhi. Menon even advised Bage on what he should do in future. After a long time Menon said, “I am tired. I would now like to go in and rest for a while.” This was during his last days.

When Mrs. and Mr. Menon once returned from a world tour, they dropped by to meet Bage's father, their earlier photographer. On that occasion, too, Menon chatted for over two hours. He had at that time related an amusing incident. At a hotel abroad, they were told there was no accommodation. Menon threatened, "We shall sleep outside on the street and send a photograph of that to India." The hotel management hastily arranged to accommodate them.

Baburao Arwade recalls that Menon was fond of collecting his friends and driving down to Kerala. Most of the cars were old and would give trouble on the way, but the travellers were all from the engineering field, and all young, so they managed! Whenever a car would break down, which was often, the whole team would repair the car. They carried with them all the necessary spares. In fact their spares weighed more than their luggage. The travel took more than twice the estimated time but it was also more than twice as interesting. More than the travels it is the togetherness that was important and the relationships that developed lasted a life time. Later they all hired drivers and this part of the fun of travel was permanently lost.

Menon went all-out to help if anyone close to him was in difficulty. Auditor Vardhe quoted two of his own experiences. He lost his father in 1990 and suffered a large theft of about Rs 80,000 the year after. Menon asked him, "How many clients have you?" Vardhe said, "About 125." "Then divide your loss by that number. Your clients will surely accept their share. We have to bear this loss together." He sent Vardhe Rs. 15,000 with the condition that it is not to be repaid. A few days later, about 60% of the stolen goods were recovered. Menon said, "Taken with the 15,000 I gave you, all your losses are covered. I am satisfied. Don't even talk of repayment." Vardhe once underwent surgery. He was brought home at three in the afternoon. Menon arrived an hour later and chatted with him for an hour and half. The talk had a therapeutic effect and Vardhe returned to work in just a week. Vardhe says Menon routinely asked after people's health and gave encouragement. Ghorpade built a bungalow at Kolhapur in 1984-85, but was unable to live in it since he was posted elsewhere. Menon offered to rent it, and he started a club for his officers. It had facilities for table-tennis and magazines and newspapers for reading. Any guest that came would be accommodated there. Menon had no plans of starting a club; he had done it to solve Ghorpade's problem.

Menon regularly asked Shantikumar Wathare, "Rather than giving individual tuitions, why don't you start yoga classes? Shall I give you a place?" Wathare was a spiritual man and was not bothered about personal fame, but Menon did not agree with this, and he periodically raised the question. A girl related to Wathare had matriculated with a merit ranking. But she was unable to secure admission to the institution of her choice, and her people felt that injustice had been done. Menon made enquiries in his own fashion and informed Wathare, "She was not able to answer a certain question. Her name will appear in the second list." And sure enough her name was on the second list. Whether Menon used some of his enormous influence to get her into the

second list is not known, but a deserving candidate did get into a college of her preference.

Menon was the first to introduce a computer at his business in Kolhapur. When he bought the computer, he asked Wathare whether he knew a knowledgeable man. Wathare sent him a young man named Poddar. But later Wathare realized that Menon was better informed than the boy. Menon tactfully put it as, "This field is so huge that it is impossible to know everything."

Dr. M. N. Gogate remembers that Baburao Arwade was having trouble with his eyesight. He was referred to the famous Dr. Paranjpe of Sangli. Menon himself accompanied the two to Sangli. Vasantrao Ogale remembers that Menon had once taken Comrade Santram Patil to Amboli. He joked, "Let us give Mr. Santram four lathes and make him an industrialist." Santram responded, "We don't build industries, we break them." En route to Amboli and back, Menon's driver Maner had standing instructions to give a lift to any children he saw walking along the road. Once Maner missed some kids, but Menon made him turn back and pick up the children. On a visit to Escorts, D. R. Bhatia told him his son needed admission to the Kolhapur Engineering College, but he could not manage the donation. Menon reassured him, since Ram Menon was a Trustee with the institution. Later Bhatia also tried to get admission for his nephew. This time around, Menon told Bhatia that the donation would have to be paid. Bhatia says Menon habitually asked people, "Koi taklif?" (Any problems?) and ensure that everyone was taken care of. In Shanta's wedding reception, Bhatia and G. K. Soni from Escorts were present. Menon personally saw to their room, car etc.

Dr. T. Ravindranath says that Menon was very proud that one of the Thotapillil clan had learned so much. Many industrialists would visit National Chemical Laboratories but they just asked questions related to their work, and left. Menon had a profound interest in research, and he had a keen insight. When Ravindranath was awarded the 'Ranbaxy' Award, Menon wrote to congratulate him. Once when Ravindranath was on a visit, he was accommodated in Satish's room. Satish was in the 9th standard at that time, and in the morning Menon asked him if he had acquired any fresh knowledge after spending the night in the same room as Ravindranath!

At first Ravindranath was not clear whether Menon was his uncle or his cousin. When Menon performed the ashtamangal ritual, and the family tree was looked up for that, they found that they were the great-grandsons of two sisters, and thus of the same generation. So Ravindranath was right in addressing Menon's father as Krishnavallichan.

Rolfe Eastman gave examples of Menon's sense of humour. Menon once said to him, "I have three ambitions - to achieve your height, your complexion and to have my head covered with hair like yours." He would then add, "It's fun to have impossible ambitions." While in the US, he had located a special phone through Rolfe's brother-in-law, and the man agreed to deliver it in half an hour. The snag was, how was he to recognize Menon? Menon replied,

“When you see a shortish, darkish, bald-headed man, you will know that’s me.” At the time of finalising Shanta’s marriage, Menon had taken Rolfe along, and given him a traditional lungi to wear. Rolfe pointed out that he would still look different, but Menon saw no problem in the matter. Once when he had gone to Kodungallur, Shivaraman Menon decided to perform a pooja in a temple. Menon told him, “First locate the poojari (priest) and hold on to him; he may go somewhere. As for God, He will stay in place.”

On another occasion, when he had come to visit Prof. Shivaraman, the Professor had gone to college. Menon sat down in an armchair outside to wait for him. The Professor’s granddaughter asked him, “Why don’t you come in?” Menon replied, “Grandpa isn’t there.” “But I am here.” Menon was very impressed with the presence of mind of the young girl and he would refer to the incident for many years.

M. S. S. Varadan has mentioned some of Menon’s wry opinions. Of his son Vijay, he said he must come up through his own efforts. Menon strongly felt that each person should earn his place in the organization and one gets what one deserves. Talking of women, he said, “Women find worries necessary. If they don’t have any, they will worry that they don’t have worries.” When a query was raised as to the need of an association, Menon said, “Each man wants to hold a position. That is what associations are for.”

Menon felt a high degree of concern for those around him. Once a group of foreign engineers were on a visit, and one of them began to feel unwell. Menon ordered him to be taken to Dr. Mehta in Kolhapur, and then to specialists in Mumbai if required. The gentleman was back to normal after just one day’s medication from Dr. Mehta. The next day Menon went personally to thank Dr. Mehta. The Doctor says all members of Menon’s household were extremely cultured: no loud voices, no pride of wealth.

Mahesh Bage’s father passed away in 1980, and Mahesh continued in the photography business. He would be a regular at the Company and all photography assignments would only be given to him. Menon treated him with affection as he would his own son. Bage says he learned a lot from observing Menon’s self-discipline and methods. Bage was summoned for all jobs such as product photographs, function coverage etc. He says he also learned customer service from Menon. Potnis gives an instance of Menon’s knack for maintaining relationships. When he came down from Bhilai, Potnis’ only daughter was in the eighth standard. Menon regularly enquired after her. When she became a doctor, Menon was as thrilled as the rest of the family. He could not attend her wedding due to illness, but he went and met her at home later. When Nana Shahane lost his wife, Menon was in the South, and when he heard the news he rushed to Pune to meet Nana, and left for Kolhapur at 10.30 in the night, since he had a meeting the next morning. When asked to rest the night, he replied, “That is what I am going to do. The driver will do the driving; I shall sleep.” S. V. R. Rao said even after he left the Company and settled in Delhi, their relations remained cordial. Menon had put up at Rao’s place with family, and the small house did not inconvenience him at all.

Prof. Shivaraman Menon was Chandran Menon's friend right from 1942. Any time he was at Kodungallur, his first phone call would be to Shivaraman. They would at once get together to drink coconut water. For any function Menon would consult Shivaraman. M. S. Mani of Kodungallur was another old friend. He related an incident of 1992-93. Early one morning he slipped and fell in the bathroom and injured his eye. Dr. Rajagopal performed an emergency operation and decided to move him to Cochin. On checking his condition, Dr. Chacko admitted him to the ICU. Mani did not want to be stuck there and he called up Menon. He would enquire several times a day with Dr. Chacko. Five days passed, and Mani decided to 'escape' from the hospital the next morning. Whether Menon got wind of this or he had a premonition is not known, but that night at 10.30 he called to say he was arriving the next morning. Mani's escape plan fizzled out.

Another incident of the same time: Prof. Namboodripad's father had suffered a second attack and he was to be admitted to hospital. Menon heard of this and arranged to come over and take him to a hospital in Trichur in his big imported car. He went personally to Trichur with Namboodripad's father. He held his arm and escorted him to his room. He stayed back for four hours and left only after thoroughly discussing the case with the doctors and seeing to all arrangements. All this entailed exertion when his own health was delicate. Namboodripad remarks that only a very great person will do all this. When Menon went to Kodungallur during his last illness, he never complained about his condition. People found it difficult to express their sympathy in the face of such courage.

Ankush Karpe says while returning from Kerala, Menon would invariably stop by at Amboli. He would drop his luggage at the MTDC and go on to the factory. He needed two buckets of hot water for his bath, so Ankush would catch a lorry or some such vehicle and go on ahead to make the arrangement. Once the vehicle he had caught developed a puncture, so he stood to flag down the next vehicle that came along, which happened to be Menon's car. Menon stopped and yelled at him. Ankush explained his hurry and Menon told him, "Never mind if the water is not arranged, but don't rush in the way of vehicles."

Arunkumar Das, Architect and Engineer from Mumbai, has recorded in his article in the commemorative issue to illustrate Menon's high degree of humanity: "Mr. and Mrs. Menon and I were in Delhi for a construction materials trade fair. We were returning from Pragati Maidan in a taxi, and the day was extremely hot. We stopped near Connaught Circus and crossed the road to a cold-drink stall. Menon picked up a bottle and re-crossed the road to give it to the waiting taxi driver. 'I wonder how the poor fellow can drive all day in this heat,' he remarked on returning. This gesture has been carved in my memories. Menon did not call the taxi driver over, or send a hotel boy across. I realized then that he was steeped in human kindness, and I experienced several such instances in our long association." He has also mentioned Menon's love of nature. Menon had awarded Das' firm the contract of drawing up plans for an ambitious project on a plot of 200 acres at Amboli in 1980-81.

Menon would collect saplings of various plants on his tramps in the forests at Amboli Ghat. He had an intimate knowledge of the flora and fauna in the area. In Menon's final illness, Lakshman Padwal had been summoned to Mumbai to help out. He took charge of the kitchen in the Company guest house where the party was lodged. Menon liked suran and Padwal cooked a suran preparation. But Menon wanted fried slices: since these are oily they had been avoided. But Menon insisted, so a fresh lot was bought and the slices duly fried. The day Lakshman was to leave, Menon told him, "Today you don't eat at the guest house." He told his driver to drive Lakshman around Bombay show him all the sights of Mumbai, give him a good meal and drop him at the station that night in the car. Lakshman related a few other memories. When he got angry, the right thing to do was hear him out in silence. Once he was through, he would ask, "Now how about a coffee? Are you not angry with me?" Menon went to Amboli once during his illness and said he felt more relaxed there. But he stayed up late and so did Padwal and Bhabhi. Menon was angry with Bhabhi for having forgotten to give him a pill. "Medicines have to be taken on time," he thundered when Padwal interceded on her behalf. Whenever he came to Amboli, he insisted on having Padwal around, holiday or no holiday. Padwal cultivated the vegetables Menon needed. When Lakshman's parents were ill, Menon stuffed money into his pocket before he left.

When he conveyed guests to his farmhouse, Bage the photographer would be taken along. He said to Bage, who was Jain, "I know you don't eat meat." He would then proceed to fetch a bowl of shrikhand for Bage. He treated Arvind Turakhia like a son. Whenever he bought clothes for himself, he would also buy some for Arvind. If he gave Arvind a dressing down, it was so that the boy would learn. He believed that depression should be treated as opportunity. During his last illness he summoned his old, past employees who had left, and begged their pardon.

When Kharade lost his father, Menon held him in an embrace for five minutes. Kharade says the gesture strengthened the feeling that he still had somebody of his own. At the time of the Amboli strike, Kharade set out to return after finishing a meeting, and Menon escorted him to the gate. He then led him back, saying, "It is Dussehara (a festival). Can't rely on getting conveyance. Viju will drive you down to Ajara," and he instructed Vijay accordingly. When Hudli was under severe strain, Menon took him down to Amboli for a week and explained to him some of the basics of meditation.

Jayant Herwadkar says that Menon was a seasoned engineer and had a critical mind. He always investigated anything he encountered thoroughly and found a solution. Once he noticed that Herwadkar's eyes were red. He investigated with surprising thoroughness and found the remedy. Mrs. Menon developed trouble with one of her feet. Menon got the sole of her chappal scooped out near the toes, and she was better at once.

When Prof. Namboodripad developed eye trouble, Menon arranged for his brother-in-law Karthikeyan to take him to Sangli. Menon was then in Europe. It was decided that Namboodripad required a lens implant. Menon kept in

constant touch on the phone and ensure all arrangements were made. He had provided Namboodripad with a trusted lieutenant to accompany him, and he had the advantage of being able to speak Marathi. Menon returned to Mumbai around then and was due to embark for Japan within two days. But he fitted in a flying visit to Kolhapur and Sangli. He was offended that Namboodripad had settled the hospital bills. "In a way, I had not seen him at such close quarters as many others, but our relationship was unique. Very few people would have realized as much as I did that he never mourned even in severe adversity," says Namboodripad. Any occurrence, any problem in the house had to be reported to Padmini and Chandran Menon.

Prof. Shivaraman Menon and Chandran Menon were such close friends that people referred to them as 'Krishna-Arjun.' The Menon couple helped out in the weddings of all four of their daughters. When one of the daughters went to Mumbai, Menon asked his son-in-law Ramesh to familiarize her with the city. At the time of the Babri Masjid riots, Prof. Shivaraman rang up Chandran Menon to tell him that two of his daughters were in Mumbai. Menon went to Mumbai personally to check up and rang back that all was well.

Menon's nephew Sachin says his uncle had a vast store of knowledge and he freely shared it with others. He was an excellent speaker and never read out prepared speeches. He always used the most appropriate words. His excellence automatically attracted a lot of respect and regard. Hudli also adds that his speeches were always carefully considered. Although his style was lively and interesting, all that he said was based on experience, and was systematic and to-the-point. His approach was always moderate. He gave due respect to the man in front, but the strength of his personality was such that he could easily influence people. Dr. M. N. Gogate remembers that his speech at the time of his retirement ceremony was wonderful. He always remembered him as a man of drive. Gogate also says that he was influenced by Menon's philosophical convictions.

Mr. D. V. Tikekar said Menon always regretted his lack of formal education. Tikekar would react, "Industrial prowess has nothing to do with degrees," to which Menon would just smile. Mr. Satyendra Nevagi said that a Magistrate is not expected to build social contacts, but in his relationship with Menon he made an exception.

The Prajapita Brahmakumari society people had invited a group of people from Kolhapur to Mount Abu and both Menon and Nevagi were members. There was a week-long meditation and discourse camp. Nevagi got the opportunity to see several facets of Menon's mental make-up. Menon covered the expenses for the whole group. Nevagi later sent him his share on principle, and Menon accepted it to maintain respect. Several people tried to involve Menon in Kolhapur public life, but Menon was determined to stay away from certain people. Menon was very particular about whom he associated with. People had to earn his friendship. Ram on the other hand, at times looked the other way in his relationships with people. Even such a fundamental difference in temperaments, however, never came in the way of their relationship. Everyone marvelled at the way the two families lived

together in complete harmony. After Chandran Menon's death, Vijay adopted a son-father relationship with Ram. Nevagi feels that this was an ideal that all industrial families should strive for.

M. S. S. Varadan has thrown light on Menon's thought processes. He says Menon was very progressive. His principle was that if money is not properly used it had no value. When Varadan's business began to prosper, Menon warned him that he should not judge success in money terms but in terms of the extent of knowledge he had propagated. Menon could easily laugh at himself. He often talked about how poor he was when he arrived in Kolhapur.

From engineering to food, he kept asking questions on any topic until he was satisfied, according to Mr. Pundi Parameswaran. Mr. Mande says his habit of going deep into any topic made it difficult even for the doctors to converse with him. When his illness took a grave turn, he said even before the doctors did, "This is leukaemia."

Of Menon's convictions, his brother-in-law Kartikeyan said he was not a very religious man. He certainly believed in Providence. He played a large role in setting up the Development Foundation. The project was inaugurated at the hands of economist Dr. V. M. Dandekar. Menon expected Kulkarni to take the lead in public work on the basis of certain principles. Vijay Menon says, that though his father did not have a large corpus of wealth in the conventional sense, he spent enough on public causes to be labelled a philanthropist.

There were times when a certain eccentricity crept into Menon's behaviour. Mr. Narayan Sawant says while meeting him it was essential to be fully informed, or there was trouble. He was a stickler for punctuality, and was insistent that if he wanted something, he must get it. On one occasion there was no tamarind for cooking. Sawant set out in the direction of Ajara on a motorcycle to get it, but it was not available anywhere on the way. That region doesn't even have any tamarind or lemon trees. Finally to his great relief he got it from the house of Ogale.

Once when Arvind Kashid was in Pune for recovery, Menon ran into him at Amir Hotel. When Kashid mentioned that Badshahi serves an excellent meal, Menon at once took him there, and he liked the food very much. He clearly forgot that others were waiting for him at Amir. Once when he was at Kodungallur, work came up at Bangalore. The trains were overflowing. He told Mr. Mani to enquire about buses of the Karnataka State Transport. Knowing that the first seat of KSRTC buses was normally vacant, Mani managed to wheedle it from the authorities. Menon had not travelled by bus for a long time. On return he said the journey was good, but his health deteriorated after the journey.

Anil Pandit says that towards the end illness made him slightly eccentric. He would jump to conclusions, and then it was difficult to mollify him. His temperament became a peculiar mix of love and anger. Nana Shahane experienced that he would get carried away by emotions and go to extremes. Kashid quotes his own example. Problems arose at Kolhapur Steel and

Menon directed that Kashid should resign. Kashid asked Menon for one of the Company's trucks so that he could earn a livelihood. Menon called for tenders and arranged for Kashid to get a truck. About eight months later Menon recalled him, with the offer of whatever he wanted, to rejoin the Company. Kashid joined in 1988; his truck business was also running. Three years passed and Kashid expressed a wish to set up on his own. Menon told him to hold a little longer as he was ill, and they would go into it after his return from Kerala. He then proceeded to summon Vijay and promoted Kashid to Deputy Manager.

Pictures of his domestic life were got from several members of the family. Ram Menon said their mother was deeply religious. She had a weak heart, and so her sister remained unwed to look after the brothers. They addressed her as Chittamma ('younger Mother'). After their mother passed away, Ram came to Kolhapur to work with his brother. Ram's wife Radhamani says Menon used to worry a lot if one of the children was unwell. Because of this Vijay was inoculated for small pox only after he had grown to five. Ram was relatively unconcerned: children are bound to fall ill periodically. Ram's wedding marked the beginning of better days for the Menons. Radhamani says that they were not too wealthy, but did not have to suffer overwork - things were handled by the two sisters-in-law together. The tradition of those days was that the women kept to the background and did not mingle with the men. Radhamani made a trip to Mumbai during Menon's illness. When he heard that she was returning alone by bus, he came out and told her not to travel alone in future. Padmini was Menon's constant companion in his illness, and Radhamani doubts if any woman on earth had done as much for her husband. Menon had done so much for everyone in the household that they all revered him as a god. Radhamani said the younger son Nitin would never bow before God, but he never failed to fold his hands to the portrait of his uncle every day before he left for the factory.

Varadan says that the difference between the brothers was that Chandran was an idealist while Ram was extremely practical. In a way Chandran was a rebel. He preferred to explore new directions rather than tread the beaten path. T. Ravindranath said he realised right in the beginning that one brother had vision and the other was pragmatic: he would implement his brothers ideas. Mrs. Menon says in the early days Menon would work tirelessly day and night. Often he did not turn up for meals, and it was after his wife refused to eat without him that he brought some discipline on himself.

Gangadharan Pillai says Mrs. Menon was from an aristocratic family and she maintained great dignity and decorum as mother-in-law. The couple faced Menon's illness with great courage; anyone else would have thrown in the towel years earlier. Nana Shahane had seen that Menon had a lot of love and respect for his wife. She was able to tell him a thing or two. But Menon was careful not to bring outside troubles into the house. G. G. Joshi feels that Mrs. Menon deserves the credit for keeping the whole family together. Without taking her into account, the picture of Menon's personality would never be complete, according to Prof. P. R. C. Menon. She was the true backbone of

Menon's success. However, she kept herself in the background, and Menon's was the dominating presence.

Mrs. Menon informs us that at the time of Vijay's birth, Vishalakshi Amma, her sister-in-law, had come over to help out. Vijay vividly remembers his early growing years when his father and uncle used bicycles for transport. Vijay was educated first at the nursery opposite the present day Janata Bazaar at Rajarampuri and thereafter at St. Xavier's High School. In between, for a two-year period while he was in the fourth and fifth standard he went to St. Peters High School, a boarding school, at Panchgani. After Inter Science at the Ferguson College in Pune, he joined the Manipal Institute of Technology for a five-year course in Mechanical Engineering. After his graduation he worked for a year at Menon and Menon - then joined the Illinois State University, USA for an MBA. During his growing years, with his father tied up in business, his mother supervised his studies at home. His father would however keep a close watch on his academic performance and would express his strong displeasure if his grades slipped. His progress in College was good, and he never felt any adverse pressures from both his parents. He also felt free to admit his mistakes to his father. Vijay, however, cannot specify or explain how such an understanding arose; it happened so naturally.

Whenever he asked for money, Vijay was always told by his father to take it himself from the wallet in his father's pocket. The responsibility to spend the money wisely would fall on the young boy. Vijay recalls that he would ensure that he spent as little as possible and returned the balance to his father's wallet. His father never asked him for accounts: he believed that trust begets trust. His father had the desire that his son should become a good engineer. After a couple of years at the factory, Vijay went to the US and completed his MBA from Illinois State University. Menon actually wanted him to go to the IIM at Ahmedabad, but readily agreed to his son's wish of studying in the US when the advantages of such a move were explained to him. He just advised Vijay to decide exactly what he wanted to learn, and then go ahead. Even here Menon never spoon-fed his son. He was asked to handle all the admission and visa formalities on his own and thus right from the beginning he developed an ability to sort out his own problems. He also undertook a month-long tour of Europe by himself prior to joining the course in the US.

Even after Vijay started work at the plant, Menon never spoon-fed him. Vijay worked shift duties, and like all workmen his lunch box would come to the factory while his father went home for meals. He got his first vehicle, a motorcycle, after he graduated. Vijay joined formally after his MBA in 1982. His experience is that in spite of his fatherly love, Menon never pampered him; in spite of his strict discipline, he never expected anyone to follow his dictates blindly. Menon expected each and every member of the household to shoulder their responsibilities.

Vijay says he looked upon his uncle as his second father. His cousin and Ram Menon's daughter Savita says, "We had two fathers." Of course, everyone in the house was in awe of Menon. As long as he was around, he expected everyone to be dressed and ready at the dinner table by nine in the evening.

Vijay says the reason they all remained together was because of a shared set of values. Servants in those days were looked after well; they were loyal to the family and they had also become a part of the family. Vijay's uncle Sreedharan was handling matters at the Company in those days. He was a very good human being and epitomized the virtues of a perfect human being, according to Vijay. Sreedharan always said that assisting a man to help himself was better than giving him handouts, and Vijay feels that that was his inspiration. His father expected hard work from everyone. He never tolerated excuses. The younger son Satish is very much in his father's mould - full of dedication once he is committed to something. Vijay never remembers seeing his father confused even in adversity. However, he feels that the credit for maintaining the family unity goes to his uncle.

Vijay's wife Preethi says she addressed her parents-in-law as Achan and Amma ('Father-Mother'). She was in the final year of B. Com. when she got married. Her father-in-law had instructed her to complete her graduation after marriage. For that purpose she studied privately and camped in Kerala from December to March to appear for her exams, she says. Menon held that Malayalam should be spoken in the house, even if Marathi was used outside. He felt that the children should be exposed to the mother tongue. During his rest in the afternoons he would gather his granddaughters around him and tell them tales. The girls would address him lovingly as 'Chachu.' Vijay's elder daughter, Divya, recently came 23rd on the Maharashtra State SSC Board Merit List with 92% marks. The younger, daughter, Shreya, is studying in the Holy Cross Convent at Kolhapur.

Menon's daughter Shanta was educated first at the Holy Cross and then up to the 11th in St. Xavier's High School at Kolhapur. In between, from 3rd to 5th she insisted on studying at Panchgani since Vijay was there. Shanta was Menon's favourite and he could not refuse her request. She soon joined Kimmins High School at Panchgani. After her 5th standard she returned to the Holy Cross Convent at Kolhapur. She later went to the SNTD College, in Pune, to do her B.Sc in Home Science. Menon then went to Kerala for a month to select a groom for his daughter. Shanta's husband Ramesh Narayanan is originally from Kottayam in Kerala. An engineer from BITS Pilani and a postgraduate in foreign trade from the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, he is involved in the cultivation of tea, coffee and pepper in farms that he has developed 50 km from Ooty. Using his in-depth knowledge of the export market, he exports his products all over the world. It was Menon's strong suggestion that led him to give up his job with Advani-Oerlikon to go into business and exports. Menon visited Shanta several times at Ooty but the weather did not suit him - he was frequently laid up with colds whenever he went there. As his only daughter, Shanta was naturally a favourite. Shanta has two daughters, Darshana and Rachana, and Menon pampered these thoroughly. He used to come laden with clothes and toys for them from every trip abroad. Shanta's daughter Rachana too is a good student, and she was on the Merit List of the CBSE 10th standard examination in 2003, with 94% marks. The elder daughter Darshana is in the final year of Biotechnology Engineering. Shanta has now settled in Chennai, so Ramesh commutes up and down from his plantations at Gudalur.

Satish as the youngest was naturally the most pampered. Mrs. Menon went to Belgaum at the time of his birth since the city was famous for good doctors. Satish remembers his father singing him to sleep. Later his father got so immersed in work that it fell upon his mother to take care of everything including studies. Satish was a chubby child and had won prizes in baby shows. But he was troubled by colds and every instance of a cold threw his parents into a tizzy. Someone had cast his horoscope and pronounced that he had to be taken care of up to his 11th year. He was thus never kept alone. He even slept with his parents. Satish was a very mischievous child, but his father's discipline kept him in line, at least in his presence. He therefore never faced the wrath of his father.

Satish was 10 years Vijay's junior. He had a brilliant academic career. He studied at the St. Xavier's High School in Kolhapur and always stood first in his class. He even came on the Maharashtra State merit list for his 12th standard exams. After passing his 12th from New College, Kolhapur, he completed his engineering in Electronics and Telecommunication from the Regional Engineering College at Tiruchirapalli. Later he joined the University of Southern California and did his twin masters in Electronics and Computer Engineering. Menon wanted Satish to come back to India after completing his course in the US. But considering his area of specialization and the opportunities that were opening up in the software field in the US, Satish chose to settle in the US. He set up a computer software business in the US at Irvine in California. For a while he even opened an office in Bangalore. He built up a formidable reputation as a software engineer and had very large organizations as Toshiba, IBM, Rockwell etc. as his clients. He later decided to quit the software services business and focus on developing proprietary software products. He closed the operations at Bangalore and has now focused his attention on developing proprietary software in the field of mobile communications and Internet security. He is married to Vandana and has settled down permanently in the US.

Satish always consulted his father about his education and had Menon's full backing for branching out to new horizons. A Green Card could not be obtained without four years of work in the US, and by then his father too had passed away. He therefore decided to settle in the US. He keeps coming to India regularly but his mother has kept up her regular demand that he return here.

The Kolhapur house had six children, three of Menon's and three of Ram's. But Savita claims she was her uncle's favourite. She had a special equation with Menon. She addressed him as 'Randa-achchan' ('Elder father'), and her aunt as Pappi. Uncle would address her as 'Kutti.' Uncle was very particular about time, and there was no telling what would upset him. He was difficult to approach, as if there was an invisible barrier surrounding him, but Savita would be amused to see the special relationship he had with his mother-in-law. Uncle would freely exchange banter with her and she too would be all smiles with 'Chandran' Overall, Menon spent a lot of time with the children. Savita graduated in Home Science from the SNTD in Pune, and Menon

visited her often. She shares several memories of her childhood. Menon laid great stress on food, and would often say if a woman couldn't cook properly, she was not complete. He would be happy with very simple things, but lack of effort would irritate him.

Her father Ram was a mild mannered man who never hurt anyone. Her uncle Chandran was by contrast blunt and spoke his mind. Savita's marriage was arranged through a matrimonial advertisement. Savita moved to London in 1982 after her wedding, where her uncle visited her in 1984, in the company of his brother-in-law Pundi Parameswaran. Menon's sixtieth birthday was celebrated there and Savita threw a big party. It was around then that Menon's health problem raised its head. Later Savita shifted to Hong Kong, and Menon visited her with Mrs. Menon and Shanta. He spent a lot of time reading, mainly on health matters. Once he realized he had a particular problem, he would get hold of as many books on the subject and understand exactly what is happening. Even experienced doctors would be impressed with the knowledge that he would have accumulated.

When in London, Menon gave money to Savita to visit Italy, which she did with her sister-in-law. Menon never stinted on expense where she was concerned, and he sometimes helped her select what she needed. The latest fashion wear, bell-bottoms and all that. Savita often wondered how he found time to keep abreast of the latest fashions. He preferred bright colours, he said they looked good on young girls - Shanta, on the other hand preferred pale shades, but he would give due respect to the other person's preferences. Trouble would start only if one was found to be careless or negligent.

Anything bought for him he would use with pleasure. Savita once bought him a Bally leather wallet. He used it regularly and showed it off with pride to others. Savita reiterates that she loved him dearly, and his death to her has been an irreparable loss. She recalls how in 1990, while she was building her house in Pune, she lived in a flat nearby. Menon would ring up enroute to Pune and inform her that he would be staying with her. He was very particular about food. On one occasion, he saw Savita's 9-month old daughter, Sanjana, panting. He pushed his plate aside and refused to eat unless the baby was checked by a doctor. She rushed the girl to the doctor next door, who reported that her windpipe had been blocked, and the slightest delay would have put her life in jeopardy. Savita believes that God himself had sent her uncle to save her daughter.

Savita's younger brother Sachin says that his uncle had a special relationship with Savita. He would also freely vent his anger on her. Sachin was the sportsman in the family and uncle had a lot of regard for him. Himself short in that field, he would take a keen interest in learning the intricacies of the game. When Sachin was captain of the school hockey team, Menon had made a special trip to Panchgani so as to spur him on at the hockey finals. Sachin was aware from the start that his uncle was an extraordinary man. Since he was an expert at practically anything, one wouldn't dare speak to him without full knowledge of the subject at hand. He had the uncanny talent of generating confidence. After Sachin graduated in Engineering in the First Division, all had

assembled in Kerala for a wedding. Uncle offered him beer, and Sachin was flustered. "Have it with us and you will keep your limits," Uncle told him. "The right freedoms have to be granted at the right time." Sachin said that knowledge always carried more value than money in the household. His uncle could gauge in a moment if a man had substance or was hollow. There were a lot of similarities between his father and his uncle, said Sachin, and a lot of differences. Uncle was clear and forthright, Father tactful and taciturn.

Ordinarily, just one or two in a thousand can achieve excellence, but uncle expected perfection from all, and this made it difficult for others to keep pace. After Menon's death, Sachin came across a diary containing notes by Menon on how to handle crises in the business. He has put up quotations from it on his table.

Menon's cousin Kamalakshi Amma recalls the times when they all would play together. Towards the end of his life, when he was convalescing in Kerala, he took the lead in building the family temple at Srinarayanapuram. He acquired the land and set up the Bhuvaneshwari temple. Menon had dedicated this shrine to one of his uncles who had been ordered to build a temple by the goddess Bhuvaneshwari appearing in a vision. Menon created history and entrusted the pooja at the temple to Kamalakshi.

Menon's brother-in-law Kartikeyan says that due to Menon's guidance, the family still lives together. Menon commanded respect and he enjoyed seniority in the house. Kartikeyan recalls that Menon was closer to his mother-in-law than her own children. Right till her end she preferred to live with her son-in-law and her only daughter took great care of her.

Younger brother-in-law Pundi Parameswaran says Menon had the talent of getting along with everyone. When the senior uncle Karunakaran came to Kolhapur, Menon never presumed to sit down in his presence. It was an ancient tradition in Malayali families that the younger persons never sat in the presence of elders, out of respect. And here was Menon, well established in business, the provider for the family, not sitting in the presence of his uncle out of respect to him and to the Kerala tradition.

When the whole family visited the temple town of Palani, Parameswaran's father refused to pay for a darshan (viewing of the deity). Menon said that he had expected no less of this principled man who was his father-in-law, an upright school teacher, who lived life on principles. He did not believe in bribing his way into a temple and preferred to stay away. These were the values that Menon imbibed and put into practice throughout his life. He was never afraid of anyone and the reason was that since he lived on principles he did not have to fear anyone.

Dr. Rajagopal is the son-in-law of Menon's elder sister Vishalakshi Amma. He lost his father early in life, and Chandran and Ram Menon took care of him. Dr. Rajagopal says it is impossible to forget the love that Menon lavished on him. He would take Rajagopal and his siblings to Kolhapur for every vacation, where his wife too would pamper the kids, and gifts would be showered on

them. Menon was not just involved in all family decisions: decisions were only taken with Menon's consent. He developed such trust in Dr. Rajagopal that even after he had consulted leading specialists, Rajagopal's opinion would be final.

Menon's niece and Pundi's wife, Vasanthi says that it was uncle who took the initiative in her education and marriage decisions. They would address him as Chettan ('Elder Brother'), and he always had a solution for every problem. Vasanthi underwent a major surgery some years ago and it was Menon who gave her courage. Vasanthi lost her father when she was just seven months old, and it was uncle who brought her up.

Balan Menon is Mrs. Menon's cousin. Earlier they were not much in contact, but later Menon bought about six acres of land for coconut cultivation, and Balan Menon was put in charge. Menon grew friendly with Balan and appreciated his forthright views and his frugal and principled lifestyle. He asked him to send his children to Kolhapur for employment. His eldest son Kaladharan ('Hari') and his wife Kumari are with the Menons in Kolhapur. Balan speaks with much gratitude about Menon for all that he did for Balan's family.

P. Parameswaran Nair is Sachin's father-in-law. He came into close contact with Menon through a common taste for music. Menon was a great fan of Saigal and Pankaj Mullick, and Nair was an exceptionally talented singer capable of singing Saigal's songs to perfection. So good was he that he came to be known as 'Kerala Saigal'. On witnessing his performance at Ernakulam, Menon had remarked, "Who says Saigal is dead? Here he is before me in person." Nair remembers Menon as a warm, affectionate man with a great fondness for the arts, philosophy and excellence. His was an all-round personality, qualities to be found in one amongst a million, says Nair. He considers the close relationship with the Menon family his good fortune.

Pundi's son Rohit tells a great many tales he remembers of him. Menon insisted that children should be well groomed and well dressed. At mealtimes he would jocularly say, "We should eat rice. It is the Sardars (Sikhs) who eat chapattis." Rohit addressed Ram Menon as Rampapa and Chandran Menon as Chandapapa. Once in childhood he decided to make a table fan, and Menon assigned one of his engineers to help him. Rohit was at Sanjeevan Vidyalaya, Panchgani for studies, and Menon would regularly send him greetings. Rohit broke things in his childhood, and Menon had nicknamed him 'Drohi' (rebel) - a play on the pronunciation of his name as well as an indication how he tended to destroy things around him in his attempt to mend them. Menon had a keen sense of humour. Once, in the course of a quarrel, Rohit pinched his sister hard on the arm, and she developed a welt. She showed it to Chandapapa, who said, "Now tell him to pinch the underside of the arm, so that the welt will smoothen." Menon paid a lot of attention to detail. He would eat with such relish that one felt each item must be delicious, and be tempted to try it oneself.

Pundi Parameswaran built a house in 1989 and Menon once went to see it. Standing on a landing in the stairs, he pointed out what nobody had noticed: there was variation in the tread heights of the stairs. He made the contractor correct the mistake. At the housewarming ceremony, he presented the family a large dining table. Rohit says with emotion that it was a daily reminder of Menon.

S. N. Mani calls Menon 'an institution'. He had a talent for attracting people. Starting a business in an unfamiliar place like Kolhapur was quite a bold step. People from Kerala regularly visited him for employment. Initially Menon rarely went to Kerala, but he made several trips later in life. Mani too had cancer and was surprised that he survived Menon. "When I first met Menon, some of him embedded itself deep in my psyche, and our wavelengths matched. Each time I met him thereafter; I got a lot of affection and strength. His death is like the loss of a part of my soul," says Mani with deep emotion. "It is true that people with a heart of gold don't stay around for long."

Jayant Herwadkar, too, was overcome with emotion when he spoke of Menon. He says Menon was like the full moon (Chandra), giving refreshing light. He faced untold difficulties in business, but did not let them shake him. he said. Patience, courage and the ability to jump at opportunity were the secret of his success. Similarly, his nature of bonding with people and lavishing his love was the secret of his popularity.

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AFTER MENON

On 3rd September 1994, a special issue was published of *Menonchi Manse* as 'ISO 9002 Special.' The Editorial states: "Publishing this Special Issue on the heels of the 'Chandran Menon Memorial Issue' gives us mixed pleasure. It was the Late Chandran Menon's fond dream that the parent Company, Menon & Menon of Vikramnagar, Kolhapur should get this certification. He also had the ambition of being the first in Southern Maharashtra to be so honoured. It was he who had sowed the seeds of this effort, and kept the goal in sight even through the Company's sick period. Providence had other plans, and took him away before he could see the fructification of his dreams."

Vijay Menon took untiring efforts towards furthering and realizing his father's ambitions. The ISO team studied the workings of the Company for three days, 9th to 11th June 1994, and certified it. The award ceremony was planned for 3rd September 1994. The Board of Directors meeting held on 25th May 1994, after Menon's death, appointed Ram Menon as the Chairman and Vijay Menon as Managing Director of the Company. Ram Menon, therefore, accepted the Certificate from the Chief Executive of BVQI, P. B. Warriar. Present at the function as special invitees were United Western Bank Chairman, P. N. Joshi; Controller of Materials of Mahindra & Mahindra, Rajan Narayan; Sarva Shramik Sangh Official P. D. Dighe. In the Special Issue, Vijay Menon has given a detailed commentary on the progress of the Company and the future endeavours planned. He had fixed March '96 as the target date and had expressed confidence that public perception of the Company would change after that date. He has also expressed the hope that if efforts continued on those lines, it wouldn't be long before the Company became the world leader in castings. Articles expressing determination towards these goals by T. Nagaraja, Vice President - Operations, R. C. Nathan, Consultant, A. A. Pandit, Senior Manager and other senior officials also appear in this Issue.

The 1994 Annual Issue of *Menonchi Manse* announces the frequency of the newsletter being changed to quarterly. It also announced the ISO 9002 certification of Menon Pistons, on the heels of Menon & Menon. Kirloskar Cummins CEO J. T. Dewing was present at the ceremony, and the accompanying photograph shows the next generation Menons, Sachin, Vijay and Nitin. The issue also carries a photo feature on the signing of the Wage Agreement of 2.10.1994. The issue of Jan-Mar 95 reports a blood donation camp organized on the occasion of the first death anniversary of Chandran Menon. It also announces the selection of Sachin Menon as the Managing Director of Menon Pistons on 1st February 1995. The next issue, Apr-Jun 1995, reports that work was on towards obtaining the QS 9000 certification for the Amboli Division. It announces the selection of Vijay Menon as Chairman of the South Maharashtra Zone of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII).

Along with other news the issue reports that the contract with Jain Securities had resulted in the smooth flow of finances, and record production levels had been achieved in Kolhapur and Amboli Divisions. The section on new developments describes the 145 kg, 6-cylinder block developed for BEML, and the 5-cylinder block taken up for production for Mahindra & Mahindra. A report covers samples of two types of housing being developed and sent to the IPI Inc. of the US. The expansion at Amboli has been described, with the plans to increase capacity from 300 to 600 tonnes.

The Annual Report for 1994-95 records a significant rise in turnover to 23.4 crores, and a corresponding rise in profits. It says that all round improvement in the automobile sector has contributed to the growth of the Company. There are details of the improvements achieved in day-to-day operations, and of the success in development of the water pump. It is reported that targets under BIFR were well achieved, and the responsibilities thereof were expected to be completed at the end of 1995-96. Menon & Menon therefore shows excellent progress under the leadership of Vijay Menon. From July '95, Menonchi Manse became a monthly.

R. D. Dixit has summarized the progress of the Company thereafter. He says that after the demise of Chandran Menon, Ram Menon overcame his grief and took care of his family and workers in a fatherly manner. Through his natural gifts of organization and leadership, he led the Company in its path to progress.

Menon & Menon later became the first company in India to get QS 9000 certification. While ISO 9002 was a generic quality system standard, QS 9000 was a more demanding auto industry specific quality system standard, evolved by General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. This certification is mandatory for becoming a supplier to these three large automakers. Thereafter the doors of the entire Western industrial world have opened to Menon & Menon. All this has been achieved through the single-minded purposefulness of Vijay Menon and the hard work of all his people.

The HP moulding line coming on stream at the Amboli plant paved the way for mass production of cylinder blocks and heads. As a result of the large capacities that have been created it is now possible to meet the huge requirement of components from leading customers such as Maruti, Mahindras, Tata Motors and Escorts. In addition, plenty of capacity is available for exports, which is being utilized by companies in the developed countries such as the US, Germany and Italy.

A technical tie-up was signed between Menon Bearings Ltd. and King Ltd. of Israel in 1992. This is the first Public Limited Company in the Menon group. It launched into the manufacture of bearings, bushes and thrust washers in 1993, and set a record of sorts by starting its first manufacturing year with exports. Every year after that has seen a rising growth curve, consistently exceeding targets by wide margins. Menon Bearings is one of the few companies that has given dividends to shareholders consistently from the first year of its inception. Menon Bearings maintained high profits and dividends

even in the midst of the depression that had gripped the medium and large scale sectors. With an export target of 25% production, the Company regularly exports to countries such as the US, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Israel. The credit for this progress goes to a great extent to the foresight, transparency of style and team spirit of Joint Managing Director Nitin Menon. The Company obtained ISO 9002 certification in 1997 and later the QS 9000 certification.

The second phase of the expansion at Amboli was completed in 1999, and the same year saw a wave of depression sweep the automobile industry. Major customers slashed their requirements by over 70% and the plant found it difficult to run even at 30% capacity, and in the following two years the situation deteriorated further. The Company made aggressive efforts in developing new customers and maximizing exports. But with each new customer that was added the requirements from existing customers fell further. No improvement in the situation was in sight and so the company decided to suspend operations at the Amboli plant and shift all the manufacturing activities to Kolhapur. The following very radical steps had to be taken:

1. Stop production at Amboli.
2. Shift all the jobs and the workmen at Amboli to Kolhapur.
3. Draw up a rehabilitation plan in collaboration with banks and financial institutions.
4. Take the suppliers into confidence and clear their outstanding in installments.
5. Augment exports and increase the customer base.
6. Sell off unnecessary assets.

These measures have helped the company return to profits in the year 2003-04 after a gap of three years. Further progress is expected in the year 2004-05. The management team at Menon & Menon has been strengthened with the appointment of Anil Patil as the Executive Director and CEO. Patil was earlier the chairman of Ratnakar Bank, a large scheduled commercial bank based in Maharashtra. J. S. Konkar and R. C. Nathan have joined the Board as independent directors.

Konkar was the Dy. CEO of the John Deere Joint Venture in India. John Deere is the largest tractor company in the world and has a joint venture with Larsen and Toubro in India. Before that Konkar was the CEO of TENGL, a large subsidiary of L&T and a joint venture with Caterpillar of the USA.

R. C. Nathan is a quality system consultant and is an acknowledged authority in his field. He has offices at over 15 locations in India and 3 countries. Nathan is a consultant to almost all the leading companies in India.

The company has been recently certified to the TS 16949 standard. Some of the other achievements:

1. It became the first Company in India to be certified to the QS 9000 quality system standard.

2. ISO / TS 16949 certified by Underwriters Laboratories Inc, USA.
3. Quality Award from the Auto Component Manufacturers' Association, in the year 1995-96.
4. Entrepreneurs International ABEE Quality Award, the same year.
5. Productivity Award from the National Productivity Council, 1994-95 and 1995-96.
6. Best Vendor Award by Maruti Udyog, 1995-96.
7. Golden Peacock National Quality Award for Heavy Industries, 1997.
8. Special Certificate of Commendation for Outstanding Achievement from Arrow Specialty Co of Oklahoma, USA.
9. Foundry of the Year award instituted in memory of the Late Lakshmanrao Kirloskar, from the Institute of Indian Foundrymen, 1997.

Adverse circumstances have interrupted this winning tradition in the intervening years. The foundation is strong and the company is bound to return to its award winning ways in the years to come.

In 1996 Menon Pistons surprised automobile and engine manufacturers worldwide by entering into technical collaboration with Izumi Industries of Japan, and demonstrated its technical prowess. Due to this, Menon's pistons are now even exported to Japan. Earlier, Russia was the sole export customer, and this flow had dried up after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But Menon's revived the export activity after six years of untiring effort. Menon's are now OE suppliers to American companies as well as Japan, and have entered an established marketing chain in the US; five to six container-loads of pistons leave for the US every year. In 1995 when Menon Pistons went public, the shares were sold at a premium. In 1997 Menon Pistons Ltd. bagged the coveted QS 9000 Certification. The Company has built up a formidable reputation for quality and promptness under the able guidance of Managing Director Sachin Menon. The Company is able to deliver on demand, and the JIT (Just In Time) methodology has been implemented. Chandran Menon was fully conscious of the customer as the most important component of industrial endeavour, and he put in full efforts to keep the customer as the focal point of all production activities. His goal was always to exceed customer expectations, and this is still the central philosophy of the Group. After Menon passed away Ram Menon felt that Menon Pistons did not have the capability of satisfying the demand for piston rings, in India and abroad. To bridge the gap, Menon Piston Rings Ltd. was set up at Toap-Sambhapur, near Kolhapur. in 1995-96. It is equipped with a state of the art foundry, precision machinery, surface treatment plant and Swiss plasma coating machinery. It makes a wide range of piston rings, and the present turnover is Rs. 12 crores.

Apart from engineering and automobiles, the Menon Group is a force to reckon with in the field considered to be a fundamental necessity today: Computers and Information Technology. Chandran Menon placed great emphasis on moving with the times, and all the Group companies make use of the latest technologies available. True to the spirit inculcated in him Menon's younger son founded Nuntius systems in the US. It is a specialized software production company and has prestigious names like IBM, Intel,

Rockwel, Toshiba etc as its clients. Satish is now well established in the software field.

Just as it requires strength to keep an industrial group moving forward, it also requires a great deal of dedication. This generally flows from the founder and emerges in the shape of the culture of an enterprise. These qualities of Chandran Menon have flowed in full measure into his descendents, and as a result of his values being continued after him, his Group is maintaining its character and progress. In the first decade of the new millennium, the Group is poised to transcend the borders of the state and the nation - and bring to fruition Menon's dream of pre-eminence.



Annexure 4

M O R E I S L A M I C T H A N I S L A M Cheraman Masjid - first mosque in India

Cheraman Juma Masjid – the first mosque in India – proclaims Islam took birth in India after earning the goodwill of the ruling kings and not as history books teach by talking the language of the sword.

The Cheraman Juma Masjid – named after the then ruling dynasty of Cranganore, is more of local as its name suggests than the Persian it is made out to be. Islam, which was gaining 'popularity' in Persia, found its echo in India's then port city in AD 629. The Cheraman king – the then ruler of Cranganore – allowed the newly converted traders from Arabia to settle down in his kingdom of Mahodayapuram. The so-called legends like the King giving away his sister as bride to the traders' group leader and the then ruler, Cheraman Perumal, embracing Islam after meeting the Prophet, however, add strength to the theory that the local kings were impressed by the way of living of the 'aliens.'

The local tradition is as clear as light. An unstinting ruler of the state allowed the mosque to be modelled on the lines of his mansions.

The site, is apparently one of the highest points in his state (remember Muziris, the earlier avatar of Cranganore, of which even King Solomon could not help but mention the wealth and knowledge in his Song of Songs, is reported to have perished due to a deluge).

From top to bottom, the entire structure is local in nature with Irimullu (one of the hardest of woods) towering as beams.

Divided into many rooms, the mosque has the traditional Indian lamp in its plagiarized form. Of course, the purpose was to aid the reading of the scriptures. And the practice is still on.

But when it comes to art the hosts stuck to their tenets. The art forms inscribed on the pulpit are strictly in tune with the Islamic norms.

Says president of Cheraman Juma Masjid Trust, V. A. Ibrahim, "The art, made out after churning out natural colours, does not represent any form. But for all these, this is just like any other mosque without any specialities." The Trust boasts of preserving the tombs of Malik Dinaar, the first priest and his wife.

Today, Sunne (a Christian) guards the history marriage of Hinduism and Islam on the outskirts of Trichur district in Kerala.

This was the second time Kodungallur – as it is known today – playing host to the birth of another Asiatic religion in India. In AD 52, one of the Disciples of Christ, Thomas, had landed on the shores of Muziris and sowed the seeds of Christianity in *Ind* – the richest country in the world then.

Buddhism is present here. According to historians, the present day Hindu temple of Mahakali in Kodungallur was once a Buddha *vihar*.

No travel is complete without a surprise: According to legend, Kodungallur is the centre of the earth and the universe.

In a recent study, the ASI has discovered the lost debris of the Muziris city, which throws light into the past glory that was *Ind*.

Midday, June 2004.

ANNEXURE 1

C O R P O R A T E M I S S I O N

We, the members of the Menon group, dedicate ourselves to the service of the Indian Nation, through industry. We will strive to create institutions of excellence, which will serve as role models in terms of product quality, customer service, employee relations, and integration with society.

We will strengthen the institutions by the use of honest business practices, to maximize efficiency and profits, as only those that are strong will be of use to society.

**CHANDRAN MENON
CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR**

CASTING A DESTINY



The Biography of Chandran Menon

By Savita Bhave Translation: Nandu Dange

ANNEXURE 2

MENON FAMILY TREE

Krishnan Menon - Kunjikutty Amma							
Vishalakshi Amma-Bhaskaran Menon		Chandran Menon-Padmini			Ram Menon-Radhamani		
Vijaya-Rajagopal	Vasanti-Parameswaran	Vijay-Preethi	Shanta-Ramesh	Satish-Vandana	Savita-Satish	Sachin-Gayatri	Nitin-Sucheta
Mini Chitra Pravin	Neeta Rohit	Divya Shreya	Darshana Rachana		Arjun Sanjana	Sharanya Devika Nivedita	Aditya Anshul

ANNEXURE 3

MRS MENON FAMILY TREE

Parameswara Kurup - Kochammu Amma													
Shivaraman Menon-Bhama				Kartikeyan-Padmini		Sreedharan-Kalyanikutty			Padmini-Chandran Menon			Parameswaran-Vasanti	
Sarasa-Gopi	Sujata-Mohan	Sathi-Vijay	Suma-Ravi	Sheila-Satish	Leena-Kumar	Mini-Prakash	Malini-Prakash	Vinod-Sindhu	Vijay-Preethi	Shanta-Ramesh	Satish-Vandana	Neeta-Raman	Rohit
Veena Vaishakh	Rahul Vishnu	Lakshmi	Vivek Meera	Shruti	Aryan Sidhant	Sneha Shreyas	Prateek Prajot	Nikhil	Divya Shreya	Darshana Rachana		Varun Vedant	



ISO 9002 Certificate Ceremony, 3rd September 1994.
 (L to R) Rajan Narayan, P. N. Joshi, Ram Menon,
 P. B. Warriar, P. D. Dighe and Vijay Menon



Partial View of the
 administration building
 of Menon & Menon



Inauguration of a new
 lathe at the hands of
 Y. P. Powar



QS 9000 Certificate Ceremony, 13th July 1996.
 (L to R) Sachin Menon, Shivalingaiah, Ram Menon, Ronald Nardi
 (MD, General Motors, India), Malcolm Cameron, (QAS Australia),
 Vijay and Nitin Menon



Inauguration of Sangli
 Distribution office



Mahalakshmi Bank
 officials being shown
 a new machine



Menon addressing the workers' meeting. Ram Menon seated at extreme right, Y. P. Powar next to him



M. S. S. Varadan being welcomed at the plant



Addressing the industrialists of Kolhapur. Rambhai Samani and Vasanttrao Ghatge are also seen



Felicitation at the hands of Mr Vishnupant Utkur. (From left) Nana Tendulkar, Utkur, Menon, Dada Parandekar



View of the machine shop, in 1968

...and now (2004)





Annual Day speech to Amboli workers



Restarting operations at the Vikram Nagar plant.
(from left) Ram Menon, Kalappaanna Awade, Bapusaheb Prabhugaonkar, Menon and Baburao Dharwade



Ram Menon pays his respects to Menon's bust on the latter's first death anniversary



General Body Meeting of Kolhapur Steel Ltd.
(L to R) Nivasrao Pawar, Hemraj Samani, Dadasaheb Shinde, Menon and Potnis



Dilip Mande speaks at the inauguration of Supervisor Training Program.
(Seated) Marathe, Menon



Nana Shahane addresses the workers. Gokhale, Menon and Kshirsagar look on



Meeting with Pandit Nehru in Delhi. Menon, Utkur, Powar, Angadi, Dada Shinde and others



Visiting team from Mercedes Benz, Germany, being shown the Company's products



Visit of Yeshwantrao Chavan, then Chief Minister of Maharashtra



Bhoomipoojan of the Vikramnagar site at the hands of Mrs. & Mr. Menon



Felicitation at the hands of Rahul Bajaj at the FIE Foundation Awards



Bhoomipoojan of the Engine Division site



Reply speech to the felicitation at the FIE Foundation awards. Lakshmanshastri Joshi, Hastimalji Firodia, Rahul Bajaj and Raja Ramanna at extreme right



Discussion on the Amboli project with Minister S. N. Desai



With the original landowners of the Amboli site



Inspection of the plant by Dr. S. M. Patil. K. Parameswaran on right



Inauguration of the furnace at Amboli



With Mr. Kinkar of Ruston & Hornsby



Kolhapur industrialists on a tour to North India. Vasu Powar, Menon, Satappa Patil, Y. P. Powar, Kerba Patil, Shankarrao Kothawale, Vishnupant Utkur, Dada Shinde and others



Visit of Economist Dr. V. M. Dandekar and Industries Minister Udaysinghrao Gaikwad



The group in Delhi. (From left, Bottom Row) Vasu Powar, Y. P. Powar, Menon, Chedda, Kerba Patil (Top Row) Vishnupant Utkur, P. V. Angdi, Kerba Patil's son-in-law, Satappa Patil, Dada Shinde, Shankarrao Kothawale and Bage



Welcoming a senior executive from Sinto Kogyo of Japan



United Western Bank Chairman P. N. Joshi being shown the Company's products



Briefing Jamshedji Godrej



With Mr. Vinod Doshi of Premier Automobiles. Ram Menon on right



With the officials of Kunkel Wagner, Germany. Parameswaran on left



Sheth Lalchand Hirachand visits the plant



United Western Bank Chairman A. G. Pandit being shown round the plant



Vasantao Ghatge with the Menon brothers



The Menon clan.
 (Standing from left) Dr. Satish Gopi, Sachin, Gayatri, Vijay, Preethi carrying Shreya, Nitin, Ramesh and Satish;
 (second row, from left) Savita, Mrs. Ram Menon, Ram Menon, Menon, Mrs. Menon, and Shanta;
 (third row, from left) Arjun, Divya, Rachana, Sanjana, Darshana



In a traditional
 Kolhapur head-dress



On a trip to Kashmir



At his desk



During a Japan trip



K. Vijayapalan,
Director,
Menon Pistons,
felicitating Menon



Vijay and Preethi
at their wedding



Being welcomed by
Anandrao Topkar



Younger son Satish
with wife Vandana



Menon with
Vijay and Sachin



Mrs. and Mr. Menon
perform a *Pooja* at the
Engine Division



Menon with
Vijay and Arvind



Menon brothers and their wives embark on a foreign tour



Welcoming Minister Digvijay Khanvilkar. Ram Menon (centre) looks on



The send-off.
(From left)
Pundi Parameswaran,
Vasanthi, Mrs. Menon,
her mother, Menon,
Sreedharan and
Kartikeyan



(From left)
Baburao Dharwade, Ram Menon, Bapusaheb Prabhugaonkar, Vijay Menon, Kalappanna Awade and Menon at a get-together in Kolhapur. Also seen in the background are Mohammedsaheb Hudli, Dada Chougule, Khalil Maner, Kasute and others



With the Governor of Madhya Pradesh



Ram and Menon with daughter Shanta and son-in-law Ramesh



Discussions with Minister Kalappanna Awade



Mrs. and Mr. Menon
embark on a world tour



The *Pooja* at Amboli.
(L to R) Mrs. Menon,
Menon, Vasanthi, Ram
Menon, Mrs. Ram
Menon, Padma and
Dada Shinde's daughter



Being seen off
at the airport



HMT Chairman,
Dr. S. M. Patil, Chief Guest
at a function in Kolhapur



At the Unknown
Soldier's Memorial
in Prague

Outside the Company stall at the
Industrial Fair. (L to R) Ram Menon,
Powar, the designer and Menon



On the backdrop of
the Taj Mahal



A Pooja at the Menon works.
Menon's sister Vishalakshi
can be seen sitting in the
background



The Ram-Lakshman team — but here, Ram is the younger!



Speaking at a function in Kolhapur. Rambhai Samani presides



Mrs. & Mr. Menon



Speaking at the Basic Development Foundation



With the close-in family: Menon, Mrs. Menon and Satish sitting, Vijay and Shanta standing

In true *Kolhapuri* fashion. Managing Director of Mahindra & Mahindra, Baptist D'Souza and A. G. Pandit, Chairman, United Western Bank sitting, Parameswaran and Vishnu Patil standing



Row of grandkids: Sanjana on Darshana's lap, Divya, Rachana and Menon



Mohammedsaheb Hudli speaks at a felicitation ceremony. (Seated, from left) Mrs. Menon, Menon, P. D. Dighe, Ram Menon, Mrs. Ram Menon



Mrs. Menon's Family.
 (From left, standing) Prof. Shivarama Menon, Kartikeyan, Sreedharan.
 (Sitting) Father - Parameswara Kurup,
 Mother - Kochammu Amma, Pundi and Mrs. Menon



Mr. and Mrs. Menon
 with his mother-in-law



Blessings from the
 mother when embarking
 on a venture



The Menon Family.
 (Standing from left)
 Preethi carrying Shreya,
 Vijay, Ramesh Narayanan
 and Shanta.
 (Sitting, from left)
 Darshana, Menon,
 Rachana, Mrs. Menon
 and Divya



In company of grandkids:
 Divya on arm, Darshana at
 the side