

# Mitticool Mansukhbhai Raghavjibhai Prajapati

## Playing with Clay to inspire generations

How does a nondescript young man from Rajkot in Gujarat, facing the most adverse circumstances, make it to the Forbes list of seven Most Powerful Rural Indians? Here is the inspiring story of Mansukhbhai Raghavjibhai Prajapati. Read it to understand that when you take adversities in your stride, and have confidence that you will make it, no matter what, you can live your dreams and imagine the best for yourself.



“Never think about failures. Never give up. Put your heart and soul into what you want to do. Always follow the right path and have patience. Keep working hard”.

- Mansukhbhai

### Days of struggle

From a small village, Nichimandal, Mansukhbhai was more interested in playing cricket than pottery work which was the mainstay of his family. In 1979, their family faced a terrible plight when they lost everything they had, after the Machhu Dam collapsed and their village was inundated with flooding waters. Mansukhbhai's father decided that the family would relocate to Wankaner, where he took up a job as a mason. Despite the financial problems they faced, Mansukhbhai's family continued to encourage him to complete his studies, but he failed the tenth standard examination. In desperation, he took up a small job in a factory. But in his very first month on the job, his left eye got severely injured while working inside a chimney. This led him to quit his job in the factory and start a roadside tea stall, but even this was not to last. Embarrassed by persistent taunts from his acquaintances, he shut down his small business. As providence would have it, his uncle who ran a rooftop tile manufacturing business offered him a job as trainee for a meager Rs. 300 per month which Mansukhbhai took up. This was a turning point for the young man as he began to learn more about the craft that made him who he is, today. Reflecting on his days of struggle, Mansukhbhai says: “I failed the tenth standard. But I was not disappointed as I knew that I was capable of starting all over again”.

### Beginning of change

After working with his uncle for three years, Mansukhbhai felt capable of starting a business of his own. He was also becoming tired of the routine at the tile manufacturing company. “I was fed up,” he says, and I wanted to start my own factory. But there was no way I could do it without resources”. So he went ahead and took a loan of Rs. 30,000 from a local moneylender to establish his own manufacturing unit. He realized quickly that innovation was key to succeed in any business. Hence, he worked to develop a machine that could help him make 600 tawas (cooking pans) a day, instead of the 100 tawas that were made manually. It was a great beginning. “I also made a clay mixing machine. Till then, clay used to be mixed with legs..this machine reduced workload and improved efficiency.

### Journey of success

In 1995, Mansukhbhai worked to invent a clay water filter. It was a huge success, especially in rural areas. Luck favoured him when a person who was settled in Nairobi, Kenya, sent him an order for 500 water filter units. “I was excited. I sold them, making Rs. 1 lakh

on the first sale. It was a great start for my new product.” Mansukhbhai ventured further to develop newer products through innovation and perseverance. He designed cheap non-stick tawas priced costing Rs.50-100, way below the price at which these were available in the market. Mansukhbhai has sold nearly 50,000 tawas until now. But not without applying rigour to ensure the right quality product. Mansukhbhai recalls how he had to experiment and make over 1000 tawas before he managed to perfect the product. In 2009, Mansukhbhai made the first clay pressure cooker. “It comes with a whistle too”, he says with a smile.

### The Mitticool story

In 2001, Gujarat suffered a massive earthquake and he distributed earthen pots to survivors. A local newspaper carried photograph of family with the pot which carried the caption: “a poor man' refrigerator. It struck Mansukhbhai then that he should try and make a fridge for those cannot afford to buy one. It required a lot of experimenting and he began working on the prototype in 2001. Finally, in 2004, the product was ready for the market. He had to take of loan of Rs. 10 lakhs for the refrigerator project. It now sells at Rs. 2500 and takes 10 persons an entire day to make one fridge. The product has won accolades from across the globe. Mitticool, as the cooling product has been named, is able to keep milk, vegetables and fruits fresh for 5-7 days. It runs without electricity and has a water chamber on top with a storage unit below it.

There is no stopping Mansukhbhai bow. Next on cards is a Mitticool home which lighting and cooling will be entirely natural, with no electricity requirements. No wonder then, former President APJ Abdul Kalam called him a true scientist at a function to recognize his achievements.

### Life lessons from Mansukhbhai

People who considered him as incapable, now look up to him. They say: “you are the pride of our community”. For a school dropout, he has achieved a feat that many in the world would envy. While, Mansukhbhai remains unassuming, he also says that he is not concerned about the money his innovations bring him. His ambition, he says, is to make low-cost and eco-friendly product for the masses. His work has been showcased at the University of Cambridge and his products are exported to 41 countries, worldwide. He is now hoping that a retail giant like Big Bazaar will become willing to sell his products. This will ensure a greater reach across India. His firm, Mitti Cool Clay Creations managed to break even in 2010. The company is growing at 15% annually and he posted a turnover of Rs. 25 lakhs in 2012. For more on Mansukhbhai and his amazing journey, log on to: [www.mitticool.in](http://www.mitticool.in)

