

Bharat Ram

(Speech delivered during Dr. Bharat Ram's 90th Birthday on 15.10.2004 at Hyatt Hotel, New Delhi)

The unique presence of captains of industry, eminent jurists, scientists and political leaders bear irrefutable testimony to the adorable qualities of Head and heart of Dr. Bharat Ram.

His life is one of achievement and fulfillment. Unlike his father Lala Sri Ram who struggled to build up the Delhi Cloth Mills and reached resounding success Dr. Bharat Ram was born into the industry. But unlike wasters who liquidated great assets bequeathed to them, Dr. Bharat Ram led a model life and equipped himself academically to handle the legacy and expand it over new regions. Though, a son of the Master of a well-established industry, he started his career as an apprentice and rose by sheer dint of hard work and ability to the position of the Managing Director.

The DCM progressively switched on to sophisticated areas like chemicals, fertilizers, automobiles, electronics and nylon tyre cord etc., A large measure of credit for the diversification goes to the initiative and enterprise of Dr. Bharat Ram. Very soon DCM group became one of the top ten industrial Houses in India. It was increasingly realized that mere land, labour and capital did not help industrial development. Even with abundance of these, the enterprise may fail unless well-trained managers apply their skills. The Indian Management Association played a leading role in training skilled managers. Dr. Bharat Ram was one of those who gave great impetus to the Management training programmes. I have a hazy recollection of my choosing in association with the then D-G of the CSIR, Dr. Bharat Ram for the award of the Best Manager of the year.

Dr. Bharat Ram is a progressive thinker. During the Mid sixties and seventies, there was a wave towards associating labour with management. Government encouraged the idea and appointed labour representatives in the Boards of Public Sector units.

A number of companies elected one of their workman to the Board of Directors. Dr. Bharat Ram was almost the first leading industrialist to do so. The experiment failed, as the labour representatives used it to voice their demands instead of suggesting improvements in production processes methods etc.

I have ever been of the view that a person who established an industry and provided employment for half a dozen persons did far greater service to society than the man who preached socialism day in and day out. Equally I have been of the view that agriculture how so ever well attended and well provided cannot sustain 70% of the population of India. Agriculture is inelastic; it cannot expand like an industry or services. The law of diminishing returns operates sooner in agriculture than in other sectors. The remedy is to transfer at least 20% of the population out of the 70% now dependent on agriculture to the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. The present burden of population on Agriculture cannot be sustained by Agriculture. A well conceived programme of large, medium, small and rural industries must be launched to absorb the excess burden on agriculture.

I hope I will not be misunderstood as denigrating the value and importance of agriculture. Far from it, agriculture is the back bone of our economy and must be provided all help and assistance. All that I am saying is that it cannot bear the burden, which it does now and rural poverty cannot be eradicated by depending mainly on agriculture.

Post war independent India faced acute shortages. Apart from necessities of life like food, we lacked tools of development like adequate capital resources, strong stock market,

adequate domestic savings, venturesome entrepreneurs and industrial raw materials like steel, the backbone of industrial activity etc. I had faced all these and more when I was industries minister in then Madras in the fifties of the last century. There were no takers of a project like the Neyveli lignite. Costing over 180 crores of 1950 rupees not the present depreciated notes, it was beyond the reach of Private Sector. Government had to step in and undertake the projects like steel, fertilizer, power and other infra structure requirements of the nation. The Public Sector assumed primary role in the national economy. We followed the Soviet pattern but failed to follow it fully. In the Soviet pattern of Public Sector, there were no strikes, no go slow or work to rule. Labour was fully committed to maximize production. Stakhanovites, (those who increase production) were hailed as heroes of Soviet Labour. It is not necessary to paint the picture of Public Sector in India. Looking back, none of us had the wisdom to say “No Public Sector unless identical conditions were accepted”.

Despite the rigorous control during sixties and seventies of the last century, Dr. Bharat Ram showed great resilience and went ahead with his expansions and new ventures. This may be said of most of the industrialists gathered here. As chairman of the federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, he became the spokesman of the industrial class and presented their views with moderation and sobriety. He did not believe in confrontation with the government and never created controversies. As President of International Chamber of Commerce he enhanced the prestige of Indian Business among the international community. His scholarly, gentle and suave and dignified demeanour brought him many friends in India and abroad. That the Government appointed a non-official like Dr. Bharat Ram as Chairman of the Public Sector unit, Indian Airlines, bespeaks the regard that the Government had for Dr. Bharat Ram.

Dr. Bharat Ram is a multi splendoured personality. His interest in education, science and technology, social issues like population problems of India and passion for flowers, particularly Roses, is reflected in the institutions he served in various capacities. The National Rose garden he created at Delhi will continue to exude the fragrance of his memory for ever and ever.

Finally, Dr. Bharat Ram approximates to cardinal Newman’s definition of a gentlemen, soft-spoken, kind and compassionate, ever conciliatory, never disputatious and virtuous at all times.

May I bless him with the time honoured verse

*Sathamam Bhavati
Satha ayush Purusha ha
Aayush yavendriye
Pradirishta thi*

May you live hundred years endowed fully with all your faculties.