



मैं

एक जीवनयात्रा



**Dear Bhai,**

I know we've left things a tad late; we should have spoken to you when we had the chance. But truth be told, we had never even imagined that you would leave us bereft so suddenly. Be that as it may, every single word of this book is yours. Our very objective in bringing out this book was to revive your old memories as you looked back upon your life through its pages, and while doing so, we hope that you would enrich us with some additional vignettes that those memories brought up...

Bhai, it was looking at the way you conducted your life that we learnt many valuable life lessons. Throughout your life, you never ever abandoned your principles, never took recourse to wrongdoing even in adverse times. I have often wondered how you were able to pull off this extremely difficult feat. However, since I have been privy to every detail of your life, I have been able to find clues to this question's answer somewhere in my memories of your life's struggles and its challenges. Naturally, I speak only for myself when I say this. The larger question before me was how I could present your life's journey to others, so that they too could benefit from your exemplary life.

**This book written by Rajesh is the perfect vehicle!**

Actually, it was Rajesh's intention to bring out a book like this to mark your seventy-fifth birthday, but this idea had not appealed to you then. You had kept a detailed account of your life for our benefit; however, only we family members had access to it. We could not present you with a complete written version in your lifetime, and it is a matter of deep regret for us.

When Raju took it upon himself to write your life story, he brought it to life so vividly that we felt like it was unfolding before our eyes!

Bhai, there are many others like us who have witnessed as well as been an integral part of your life's journey. If you had looked back upon your own life's journey, you would doubtlessly have been better able to recount every such person's role in it. However, since it is us who have undertaken this responsibility, it is quite possible that we may have, unknowingly, forgotten to mention one or more of these people. Nevertheless, even after accounting for this shortcoming, we are sure that this written account of your life, of all the struggles you undertook and obstacles you overcame, will contain much that has the potential to inspire not just our generation but also the next.

I have no doubt that this endeavor has your blessings.

**Jayant**



Hirabhai Shah was the founder of 'Jairaj & Company', a business establishment dealing in rice grain. Bhai lived a long, eventful life spanning over 80 years, of which he gave seven decades to this business! He entered the rice grain business at a very young age and countered many challenges to achieve unprecedented success in the field...

This book outlines the journey through which the man, who was known as Hirabhai to his contemporaries, became simply Bhai for one and all. It outlines the good deeds, the struggles and the eventual virtuous path he chose, all of which made him the much loved, much revered personality that he became later in life. 'Brother' is 'Bhai' and 'sister-in-law' is 'Bhabhi' amongst Gujaratis. When Hirabhai migrated from his native place in the state of Gujarat to Pune in Maharashtra, all his new acquaintances started calling him 'Bhai' and his wife Kanchanben was popular as 'Bhabhi'. So accustomed were the couple's kids to their parents being called Bhai and Bhabhi that they too started addressing them as such, and slowly, Hirabhai became Bhai for one and all! More significantly, he was addressed as such because of the warmth with which he interacted with everyone.

Inspirational stories of people who had to leave their native lands and make a fortune in a foreign place are hardly uncommon. However, the average person labours under the fear that he cannot even hope to reach the dizzying heights of success that the protagonists of these stories have scaled and thus cannot really draw inspiration from such stories. This is where Hirabhai's story is different. Every single person following his success story will be able to identify with him and seek inspiration from his various life decisions. Indeed, there have been many who have actually been inspired by Hirabhai's life story and after reading this book, I have no doubt that countless readers will be similarly motivated.

Although Bhai's story ostensibly appears to be about his rise and success in business, it is by no means restricted to this aspect. It also tells of the close relationships he forged with people in the course of his professional journey, of those he sought inspiration from—people who were instrumental in developing his personality. It speaks of his social work as well. But above all, it is the story of a tenacious, optimistic, ambitious yet extremely principled man. Telling the story of how this man straddled his business and his personal ethics is his eldest son **Rajesh Shah...**



### **गुरुदेव श्री श्री रविशंकर से आशिर्वचन**

सुंदर शहर का निर्माण,  
सुशील समाज का निर्माण  
और सुदृढ़ चरित्र का निर्माण करना आवश्यक है ।  
स्वर्गीय हिराभाई ऐसे काम में रत रहें ।  
और उनका परिवार भी इसी पथ पर  
सदैव अग्रेसर रहें ।

सप्रेम आशीर्वाद,  
**श्री श्री रविशंकर**

# The Struggle



*The temple on the banks of Sabarmati in Pedhamali village*

Pedhamali.

A small village in Gujarat's Mehsana district.

A village situated on the banks of Sabarmati, the river which has become immortal in history due to its association with Mahatma Gandhi. It is a picturesque place, housing a small, close-knit community of around 250 people.

At the village square is located a huge banyan tree, around which all the villagers congregate and exchange news and gossip. Nearby are located several shops and houses of varying sizes.

At a distance of about 250 metres from the village is located the Sabarmati river, the village's lifeline. The residents in the 27 villages surrounding this river form our community: the Kantha Sattavis community. All the villagers depend on the river water for their daily needs, and come to the river's banks daily to wash their dirty vessels and clothes and to get their supply of drinking water. People of all castes live here in harmony.

My great-grandfather, Kachardas Shah, owned a sprawling house in Pedhamali. A jeweller dealing in silver and gold ornaments, he was a well-respected man in the village. He was so extremely well-off man that he





*Kachardas was a respected figure in Pedhamali, who owned a sprawling house there.*



*The temple served as a common meeting place for all the villagers*

could afford to keep not just an army of servants, but even horses and elephants! This enviable wealth had not come to him easy; he had earned it through the sweat of his brow.

My great-grandfather had two sons, Dahyalal and Manilal, both born with silver spoons in their mouths. Since the family believed in diversifying their business interests, Dahyalal and Manilal did not join their father's gold and silver business but migrated to Pune to float their independent grain trade endeavour. This enterprise had their father's complete support. Between the three of them, both the businesses were doing very well: great-grandfather's in Pedhamali and the brothers' in Pune. It was around this time—on September 07, 1933—that my father, Hirabhai Shah, was

born to Dahyalal and Dahiben.

A number of incidents occurred in my father's infancy that snatched away all the riches the Shah family had enjoyed thus far and literally brought them onto the streets. I remember my father telling me about these, a lot of which I still recall:

*'My father and uncle had settled in Pune, and their business was going*



*great. I was two at the time, and my elder sister Manvanti was four. Both my father and uncle would frequent Pedhamali, where they would with great satisfaction witness us siblings thriving under the benevolent care of our grandfather, and then return to Pune. But these happy days were not to last. My father fell seriously ill. All kinds of treatments were sought, to no avail. His condition kept deteriorating till he was completely bed-ridden. My grandfather was getting him treated at Pune since better medical facilities were available there and he would not have been able to make the trip to Pedhamali in his condition anyway. However, in spite of my grandfather's best efforts, my father did not make it. The harrowing experience of witnessing his own son's death became my grandfather's unfortunate fate. My mother too was shaken to the core by my father's death. As for me, I remember nothing of his passing since I was just two years old.*

*After my father's death, my grandfather took on his role as well. He had always been a loving grandparent, but now he did his best to compensate for my father's absence too. He put his own sorrow aside to give my mother moral support. He showered my sister and me with love and fulfilled our every want. He also ensured that we received a sound education. His support greatly helped my mother recover from the shock of my father's death. And as for me, the extra attention and love I received from my grandfather brought us closer. He was so protective of me, he never let me go anywhere alone, never let me out of his sight. I loved to go by the riverside, and longed to do so on my own, as the river was situated so close to the village. But he had strictly warned me never to go there, and so I didn't. However, I never really resented not being able to go, because barring this one thing, grandfather never refused me anything. He would fulfil my slightest demand and ensure that everyone else did the same. Nobody could scold me; anyone who dared to do so would get an earful from him! My father's untimely death had made him extra sensitive towards me. I too derived great solace in his company and loved snuggling up to him. I felt totally safe and secure when he was around'.*

It was his grandfather that enrolled Bhai in school at Pedhamali. He took a keen interest in his schoolwork, and would keep track of what was being taught on a daily basis. He also ensured that his indulgence with regard to all of Bhai's whims did not extend to his studies. Bhai would report everything that transpired in school to both his mother and grandfather every day. His mother was reassured about his education and general upbringing because of the close attention his grandfather paid to both. But this reassurance was not to last for long: when Bhai was seven, his grandfather passed away, and once again, the household was plunged into gloom. Bhai's biggest source of strength was snatched away. His death heralded the onset of a very dark period. Bhai describes it as such:

*'With grandfather's passing, my nine-year-old sister Manvanti, my mother and I were orphaned in the real sense of the term. My mother had no idea*

*about how to handle grandfather's affairs. It was just us three living in that huge, sprawling house. Our only support after grandfather was my uncle, but he was based in Pune. My mother was at a complete loss to handle the situation. Two young children and such an extensive estate...it wasn't humanly possible for her to pay the requisite attention. At such times, your own relatives are nothing short of vultures. They came swooping down upon us, and under one pretext or another, took away all our material assets. They didn't even spare our house! They tore it down, citing the possibility of termite infestation. Things came to such a sorry pass that we, the rightful owners of such a large property, found ourselves living in a small room in front of our erstwhile house. Where we used to dine on the choicest of food items earlier, we now could not even afford two square meals a day. My mother soon ran out of money and was forced to take up cooking and cleaning jobs in the village to put food on the table. I too pitched in by taking up a part-time job at a timber warehouse. I used to bring home a few slivers of wood from there, which would serve as fuel for cooking our meagre meals.*

*Our hand-to-mouth-existence notwithstanding, my mother kept our education going. Both my sister and I continued our studies, and did odd jobs after school to contribute towards the household expenses. In spite of all our joint efforts, we could often only afford to eat once a day. On some days, we didn't even have that. We would then have a glass of buttermilk and go to sleep. The buttermilk did nothing to douse the fire in our stomachs, but what choice did we have? All we had was each other, and we clung together desperately.*

*Around this time, I got acquainted to some sadhus (holy men) and got the opportunity to serve them. I started doing odd jobs for them, like serving their meals, bringing them water, carrying their luggage, pressing their feet, etc. Their company benefited me a lot, as being learned beings, they influenced my mind positively and showed me the right path. Therefore, even though my family situation was bleak, just being in their presence imparted me with the requisite self-confidence to face my troubles'.*

Thus, two difficult years, full of hard work and strife passed. Bhai was now nine and his sister Manvanti was eleven. Bhai's primary education was complete. Just when life seemed to have settled down on an even keel, their mother fell ill. Two years of relentless hard work and strife had taken toll on her health. She had been so preoccupied in ensuring the well-being of her children that she had almost neglected her own health. That monsoon, she fell severely ill with fever. There was no money at hand for her treatment, no one even to give Bhai and Manvanti moral support in this difficult time. Bhai knew of a physician who lived across the Sabarmati river, but it was raining so heavily that crossing over to fetch him was impossible. In desperation, Bhai stood at the edge of the river and shouted for him for a long time, but the stormy wind scattered his voice and it did not reach the physician. Finally, the inevitable happened...

*'My mother died in our arms that night. For us, it was darkness both within and without. We felt like there was just no respite for us...first father, then grandfather, and now mother...we felt truly abandoned.*

*Someone wired the news of our mother's passing to my uncle at Pune. He and some other relatives came to Pedhamali to meet us. Someone suggested to my uncle that since we were his brother's children, he should take us back with him to Pune. And thus Manvanti and I migrated to Pune'.*

Since his father had lived in Pune before his death, Bhai was naturally curious about the city en route there. There was a world of difference between the present Bhai and the Bhai before his grandfather's death. The biggest change was that there was nobody alive now who would cater to his whims and fancies; he would now have to earn his keep. As it was, by now he was used to a life of hard work.

A whole new world awaited the brother-sister duo in Pune. Everything was new to them: the language, the place, the people...They had no choice but to adjust themselves to their new surroundings. My aunt used to help her uncle's wife in the house, while Bhai used to do odd jobs. To his great relief and joy, his uncle got both him and his sister admitted in the municipal school nearby. They would both attend school in the morning and then help around the house on returning home. In whatever free time they could get, they would study.

Bhai's uncle ran a small grain store near Tulshi Baug. He was a small-scale grain merchant and creditor. The shop did well enough to meet his family's needs. With Bhai's help, his uncle's business started to grow. Bhai was now admitted to the R. C. M. Gujarati School near Daruwala Bridge, as it was near his uncle's shop. He would rise at 4 a. m., open the shop, clean it and the front yard, and then dress for school. But this hectic schedule would tire him out and he found himself unable to concentrate in the classroom. His teachers would pull him up for inattentiveness. Moreover, on account of having to go barefoot, his feet would be sore from being pricked by the stones on the road. He would shiver in the winter because he had no sweater. However, to his immense credit, never once did Bhai complain, nor did he demand anything from his uncle. After returning home from school, he had no time to even rest a little; he had to go back to the shop after lunch. Sometimes, when there were too many customers, he even had to bunk school. But Bhai never allowed anything to come in the way of his duties at the shop. He never once gave his uncle a reason to reprimand him. On the contrary, he took a keen interest in the working of the shop and soon became an expert bookkeeper. He was always on tenterhooks lest his uncle reprimand him, and so he favoured the shop's affairs over his school and slowly became more interested in the former than the latter.

Mr Dadawala, a Gandhian, was the principal of Bhai's school. It was around 1945-1946, the pre-independence era. The independence struggle was at

its peak. Whenever Gandhiji visited Pune, Mr. Dadawala would take some of his school's students to listen to the great man's speeches. Gandhiji had called for a boycott on both the British and their language. So great was Gandhiji's influence on Bhai that he stopped his English education! He even went as far as to bunk school in favour of spinning khadi yarn on the charkha! As a result, he failed his seventh standard examination and that was the end of his education. However, he had been careful not to neglect his duties at the shop while undertaking all the aforementioned activities.



*Bhai (in the second row, fourth from left) with his classmates in the RCM Gujarathi High School*

Bhai's formal education ended in 1947, the same year that India won her independence. Gandhiji had played a major role in this victory, a fact that further deepened the leader's influence on Bhai's mind. Now that his school days were behind him, he was giving all his time and attention to his uncle's shop. While he was still a tender youth of 14, he was extremely mature emotionally; a result, no doubt, of having to grow up before his time due to unfortunate circumstances. His uncle had now started entrusting him with the job of delivering groceries to various households on his bicycle. This resulted in him cycling anywhere between 25-30 km a day! This was quite torturous during the summer, but there was an upside to it. The people he was delivering the groceries to were all rich and influential, and a result, he was introduced to the creamy layer of society. One of these households was the revered Kesariwada, and thus, he became acquainted with Shantabai Tilak, Jaywantrao Tilak's mother. She was very appreciative of this young boy's hard work. Later in life, Bhai met and cultivated the friendship of many stellar people, and the seed of all these associations was sown during these days of delivering groceries.

The biggest lesson he took away from this experience was that if you did your work sincerely and well, you gain the respect and friendship of good people. Independence and discipline were already his forte. He now made a conscious decision to add sincere, good work to his arsenal. I believe his dedication to doing any job he took up to the best of his ability stemmed from these days.

Bhai was exposed to many new things by virtue of staying in Pune. His grandfather had bought both a house and a shop here by way of investment, and so Bhai was already indirectly connected to the city. The habit of hard work that his circumstances had enforced on him in Pedhamali got properly channelised in Pune.

Constant work tires the body, but exercise strengthens it. Bhai realised this fact at this young age and started making time for exercise, even coming to enjoy it with time. Every day, without fail, he would make two trips up and down the Parvati hill. He also started working out at the Samarth Vyayamshala or gymnasium. He worked up his strength to the point that he could easily do 200-250 sit-ups at one go! In addition to all this was the enforced exercise of cycling. The net result of all this vigorous activity was that he developed a lean but muscular physique that enhanced his personality. His good looks and pleasing persona coupled with his good behaviour ensured that he was well received by all his customers, a fact that definitely benefited his uncle's business. Bhai had always believed that



*As a youngster, Bhai used to stroll in the markets of Mumbai during his stay there; that helped him hone his business skills.*

if you give good to the world, you receive good in return. His belief was now being vindicated and thus took firmer root in his psyche. Around this time, the desire to become financially independent was also germinating in his mind, but his limited education was proving to be a barrier. But eventually fate smiled at him; his uncle's daughter and her husband Popatlal Jivraj Shah agreed to let Bhai live with them in Mumbai, and so his uncle decided to send him there. Thus, a new Mumbai chapter started in Bhai's life.

Being used to hard work, Bhai adjusted comfortably to Mumbai's hectic pace. After settling in at his cousin's place,

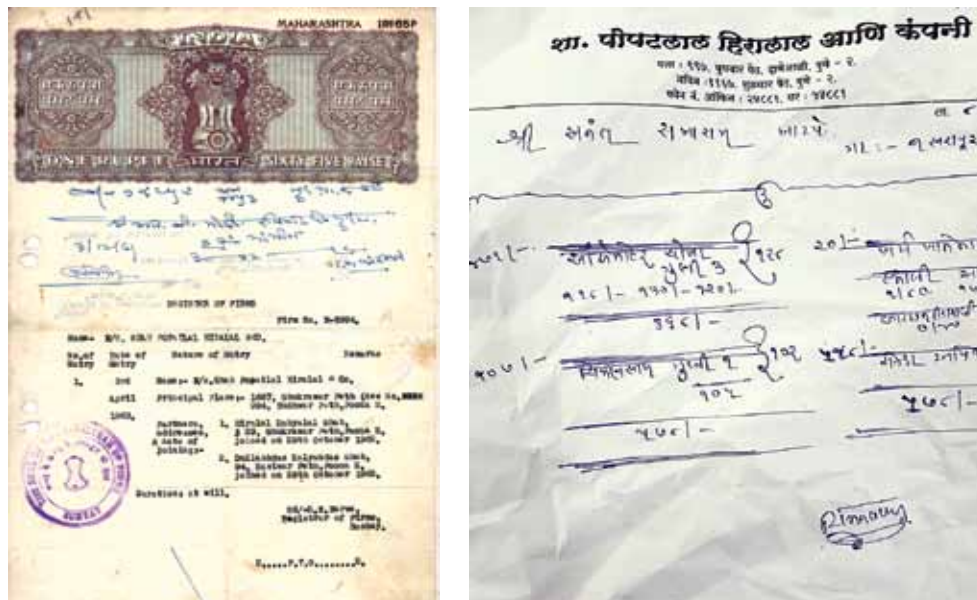
he started looking for a job in the paper, utensil and other such business circles in Mumbai's Tamba Kata area. He would be out the entire day, only returning to his cousin's house to sleep. Finally, with Popatlal's help, Bhai was able to secure a job at Kantilal Chimanlal Shah's shop, a place dealing in the raw material required for making cotton clothes. The shop was located in the Tamba Kata area. Kantilal Shah had a good eye for people. Bhai's duties included opening the shop early in the morning, cleaning up, filling water, etc. He did his work with the utmost sincerity, often staying back late at night to attend to his duties. His efforts did not go unnoticed by Kantilalji, who was pleased with his dedication and honesty. He started paying him a monthly salary of Rs. 30. Bhai had so won over his employer's trust that he was entrusted with depositing large sums of money running into lakhs secured by nothing but an ordinary cloth bag! Not just Kantilalji, but also his wife started depending on Bhai for running some personal errands. Sometimes, when she sent Bhai to the market to buy fruits and vegetables, he would add some of his own money to that leftover from what she had given him, much to her pleasure. By and by, both Kantilalji and his wife began to look upon Bhai as their own son. He was assigned complete responsibility of running the shop.

Bhai worked with Kantilalji for three years, in which time he got the opportunity to learn quite a few things about running a business. His business ethics were honed here. Kantilalji taught him a lot, the most important of which was money management. In the three years that Bhai was with him, his salary went up from Rs. 30 to Rs. 300—quite a princely sum in the fifties.

Things were finally looking up for Bhai. He had some money saved and was on excellent personal and professional terms with Kantilalji. But just then, his uncle turned up at Kantilalji's place and said, 'My son Poonamchand is ill and there is no one to look after my shop. I have come to take Hiralal back with me to Pune so he can help out'. Kantilalji, being unwilling to send Bhai with him, replied in plain terms, 'I intend to make Hiralal a partner in my business. I have come to look upon him as my own son. You should have thought this over before you sent him to me'. However, he gave in to Bhai's uncle's cajoling and promise to send him back to Mumbai after his son recovered in about a month, and thus Bhai found himself back in Pune, much against his wishes.

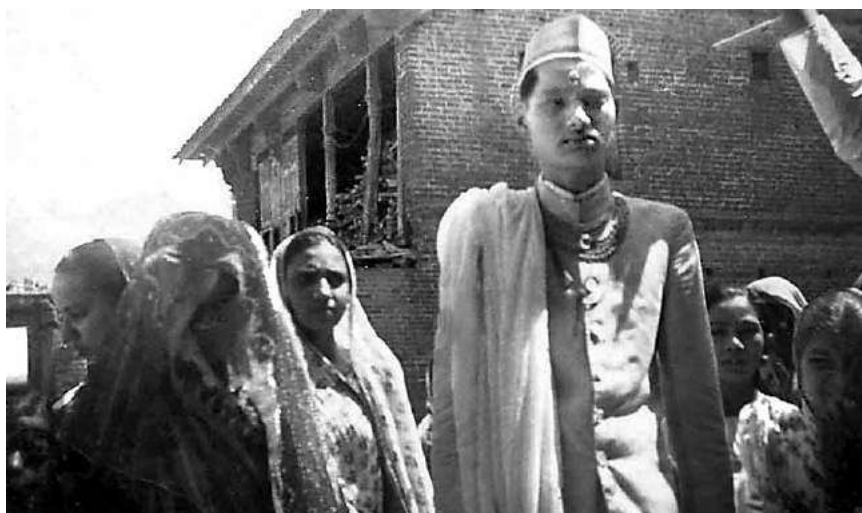
Due to Bhai's efforts, business picked up once again at his uncle's shop. However, Bhai's heart was not in it this time. After the stipulated month was over, Kantilalji and his wife personally came to take Bhai back with them to Mumbai. They had truly begun thinking of him as their own son and keenly wanted him back in their lives. However, Bhai's uncle reneged on his promise and flatly refused to send him back with them. Thus Bhai's association with Kantilalji and his wife came to an unceremonious end. Upset by this unpleasant turn of events, Bhai started considering striking

out on his own. He even had the requisite capital to start his own business. The only impediment was his uncle's permission. After much persuasion, his uncle finally agreed, but laid a condition: he would be a partner in the new business. Thus was born "Sha. Popatlal Hiralal and Company," a rice wholesale shop in Shukrawar Peth. Bhai, his uncle and a Pune-based trader named Popatlal were the three partners of this company. They appointed a person named Karve as the shop's supervisor.



*The partnership deed of "Sha. Popatlal Hiralal and Company", Bhai's first ever business venture (on the right) Bhai conducted his business with high degree of transparency; this patti, a document of transaction made in the Nasrapur market with small farmers, stands proof to that approach*

At the time, the Ambemohur variety of rice was in great demand, and used to come into Pune from Bhor-Nasrapur and Kamshet. Karve and Popatlal were on really good terms with the farmers in Bhor-Nasrapur and Kamshet, respectively, and so the business was off to a flying start. Bhai was all of 20 years old at the time.



*May 12, 1954... Bhai and Bhabhi on their wedding day*



This was a time of major transition in Bhai's life. Along with the new business, another new chapter was starting in his life: the chapter of matrimony. Bhai's uncle fixed his marriage with Kanchan, the daughter of Dahyalal Nagardas Fadia hailing from Sardarpur, Gujarat, and on 12th May, 1954, they tied the knot. As early marriage was the norm of those times, Bhai found himself simultaneously straddling two new responsibilities at just 21 years of age: business and married life. The newly married couple settled into his uncle's house. My mother, i. e. Kanchanben attended to her housewifely duties conscientiously; however, as is the norm in almost every joint family, she and Bhai's aunt started having minor tiffs over the running of the household. Bhai decided to act before their altercations escalated and the couple moved out of his uncle's house. They took up residence at Sharma Building, an old wada in the Mandai area owned by the then Deputy Mayor Durgadas Sharma. One of Bhai's friends, Vasantlal Vadilal Shah, had taken a room on rent in this wada and had offered to let Bhai and my mother stay there for a while. Those days that my parents spent in that tiny room were some of the happiest of their life. Here, they were free to live as they pleased; there was nobody to instruct or find fault! Two of our relatives lived in the same wada; however, my parents developed closer ties with their neighbours, the Sadres and the Desais. Being young and saddled with the joint new responsibilities of business and family life, this was a testing time for Bhai, and so the timely help extended by Vasant kaka proved invaluable. Vasant kaka went so far as to pay the rent to Mr Sharma himself; he refused to take even a paisa from Bhai!



*The "Sharma Building" near Mandai, Pune's largest vegetable market, has been a silent witness to the different phases in Hirabhai's life - domestic as well as professional. Bhai participates in a procession, riding a horse; the Sharma Building is seen in the background.*



*The family lived in a small room in this "Sharma Building". The room was taken on rent by Vasantlal Shah, a friend of Bhai.*



*Friends forever: Vasantkaka and Bhai*

Bhai was making good money in his business: Rs. 2400 a year, which was definitely more than he would have been paid had he taken up any job. It worked out to Rs. 200 a month, which was more than enough to run his house comfortably. Thus his mind was at ease on the domestic front, which meant that he was free to devote all his attention to his business. While that was going well at first, soon unsavoury incidents began to crop up. Things that didn't fit into his moral framework started occurring. Money began to get pilfered. Bhai tried to reason with his partners, hoping they would see sense, but when they didn't, he broke off the partnership and decided to strike out on his own.



*Chandulal and Popatlal Jeevraj Shah, Bhai's maternal father-in-law who backed him in his business*

Now it was Bhai on one side and the combined forces of Popatlal and Karve on the other. They had become competitors. This did not particularly worry Bhai, however. The experience he had gained in the field made him confident that he could run his business on his own steam. The only obstacle now was capital. As luck would have it, my mother's maternal uncle

Chandulal Jivraj Shah came to his rescue and loaned him Rs. 5000, a huge sum in those days. The money and the confidence reposed in him by Chandulal Shah worked like a shot in the arm for Bhai, and he geared himself up for business. He was aware that no business could run on money alone; it needed the support of a honeyed tongue, honesty and courteous behaviour. He inculcated all these qualities into his manner of conducting business, and it picked up in no time.

While his business formed a major chunk of his life, it was by no means his only interest. He gave equal importance to attending religious functions and listening to the discourses of sadhus or learned holy men. What was more, he did his best to practically follow all that he learned from these exalted souls in his business. Now that he was the sole proprietor, he found this easy to implement. He also started expanding his social circle and helping people in need. In addition to his strict value system and social ties, he also had the advantage of an attractive, well-developed physique that he had earned through strenuous exercise. All these factors worked in his favour and helped him gain an enviable reputation in the community. Nobody was better at forging cordial relationships with clients than him. This was maybe because Bhai's aim had never been just to make money; he was just as keen on forming close ties with people. His



*Bhai was a people person ... he took as much interest in social events as he took in his own business*

independent business was helping him fulfil this objective as well. He was prospering on all fronts: financial, social and cultural...

Just when things were going so well, Bhai suddenly took ill. I remember him telling us of this difficult time numerous times:

*'I was so ill that I had to be admitted to the Joshi Hospital in Erandwane for four whole months. No line of treatment was working. I was then taken to a Mumbai hospital. The doctor there said that my case was doomed. I started losing hope. I would lay awake at night, tossing and turning. I refused to give up though. I was still running my business from my hospital bed! I got loads of visitors. Concerned friends would suggest alternate therapies, new physicians. I gave all their suggestions a try, to no avail. Then, someone happened to mention that a South Indian countryside herbal medicine practitioner had newly started practicing in Somwar Peth, near Shahu*

*Udyan. He specialised in herbal therapies. Although my heart wasn't in it, I gave him a try as a last resort. He felt my pulse and gave me some medicine and lo and behold! In no time I was completely cured!'*

For Bhai, this physician had proved to be nothing less than divine. Throughout his illness, two friends never left his side: Dr Chinubhai Shah and Mohanlal Porwal. Chinubhai even stayed with him in Mumbai for 15 days. The close ties formed with these friends during this dark time were to last a lifetime. Bhai never forgot those who had stood by him in difficult times. He was always ready to do anything for such friends. He was by their side in both happy times and sad...

These trying times had imparted Bhai with immense mental strength at a very young age. He had seen first-hand how there was always a silver lining to every dark cloud; how with a positive mind frame, one could overcome the most taxing of circumstances. This important realisation was to guide him throughout his life...

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# Good deeds

Bhai had always been a people's person, and so from the very beginning of his professional life, he had forged a lot of cordial relationships that were not restricted to plain business. He had a loving nature, and his disposition and speech were always sweet. He had to face numerous challenges, but the resultant tension never showed on his face. Nobody ever had to bear the brunt of it; on the contrary, he always dealt with everyone in his characteristic genial manner. His unfailingly considerate treatment of people came to his aid during his long illness of 1953, which was to last three whole years. All the people who had come to be his extended family of sorts came to visit him, to give him encouragement and strength and pray for his recovery. One of these regular visitors was the Jain holy man Bhanuchandra Maharaj. He would constantly reassure Bhai that he would make a full recovery, and thankfully, his words came true and Bhai did indeed recover totally.

This harrowing time made Bhai keenly realise the value of loving people in one's life. He felt that it was the love and prayers of his extended family that had brought him back from the brink of death. He had always valued people and treated them with kindness and consideration, but his illness made him extra conscious about his interactions with his close ones. He took extreme care never to hurt anyone.

Given his above board professional etiquette and personal touch, it wasn't difficult for Bhai to win over customers. He always maintained fair and transparent trade practices with the farmers who were rice grain suppliers. Some of his contemporaries followed the questionable practice of maintaining two receipt books. For example, if they sold a bag of rice for Rs. 500, they would enter the transaction as only Rs. 450 in one of their books, taking advantage of the fact that the farmer in question was not physically present to witness the said transaction. The other book, which was for their personal reference, would show the correct amount. Bhai never resorted to such cheating. They simply did not agree with his personal ethics. His strict adherence to fair business practices earned him the reputation of an honest trader over time. Bhai always had the well-being of the farmer at heart, because having seen the hard work that went into producing the grain at close quarters, he respected it and wanted the farmer to receive his due. Even if a farmer sometimes brought in a bad lot of rice, Bhai tried his best to give him a good price for it nevertheless. This attitude he harboured towards his business helped him firmly establish his business as well as gave him an edge over his contemporaries following

underhand business practices.

As Bhai's business picked up, he was able to return the capital that his wife's uncle had loaned him. He was also able to devote time to forging new friendships, something he had always enjoyed and given importance to. Having seen extreme highs and lows in his life, he had developed a very balanced personality. He kept his composure even after this newly found success. On the contrary, he started getting involved in social causes, and started investing his time and money in various social organisations. He also found time to attend religious discourses.

The cordial ties Bhai had formed with so many people came in handy in his business. When he started his business under the registered name of 'Sha. Popatlal Hiralal and Company', the adjoining shop was run by 'Messrs. Nainsukh Bhavarlal and Karve', who were very well established and renowned traders. At the time, material used to be supplied to shops on a commission basis. You needed to be reputed grain traders for farmers to approach you. However, although Bhai was a new entrant in the field, he had gained the respect of a farmer named Anant Khatpe, who not only supplied him with his own rice grain but also influenced a number of other farmers into supplying him with theirs. The system followed then was such: the small-scale farmers used to take their rice to the bigger-scale farmers. If their grains matched, the small-scale farmers would sell theirs to the bigger-scale ones at the spot, after which the latter would supply these mixed grains to the shops.

### ***For a farmer who was ill***

*Bhai knew that even though the farmers are the actual food providers, they are always in a very tight spot. Bhai toured all the areas which have rice plantations and fields by any means possible. He used to visit the farmers at their houses, talk to them, understand their problems and then he used to buy rice from them.*

*Once in the raging monsoon, he travelled to Kalewadi. The heavy rains and slush made it difficult to walk in that area. He was scheduled to meet a farmer but there was no road for vehicles leading up to his house. So Bhai got out of his vehicle, rolled up his pants and walked up to his house. He was concerned because the farmer had not showed up at the store for a while. Upon reaching there, Bhai came to know that the farmer was ill. Bhai brought him along to Pune and made sure he got the best of medical attention. He allowed the farmer to return home only after he was cured and rejuvenated.*



My mother bears witness to Bhai's efforts in establishing his business. We fondly addressed her as Bhabhi. She has always been the backbone of the family and her demure nature was supported by a strong inner resilience. A couple of months after their wedding, Bhai fell ill and the next three years were full of turmoil for Bhabhi. She took care of her ailing husband and managed the household affairs seamlessly. But as Bhai regained his health, his social circle widened. Their 10 x 10 feet apartment in Sharma Building was always full of guests. The couple was not affluent but Bhabhi left no stone unturned in extending warm hospitality. The Desai and Sadre families, who were their neighbours, always helped Bhabhi. Mr Uttamsheth Vohra, the owner of Poona Motors Goods Transport was an eminent personality in our community. The networking with such eminent personalities helped Bhai in turning the tide in his favour. Soon, on the personal front, the family grew to welcome four kids into its fold. I was born in 1958 and two years later, Jayant was born in 1960. Veena was born in 1962 and in 1965 the family was complete with the birth of Kalpana.



*The author, Jayant, Veena and Kalpana during their childhood days*

Following the Indo China war of 1962, traders started hoarding rice and sometimes it was adulterated. But Bhai stuck to his principles of honesty and integrity and refused to join the bandwagon. Despite the tough situation on the business front, he always showered his love and affection on all of his children. But the advent of the India Pakistan war in 1965 ushered in changes in Government policies for the trading of rice. Rice could not be sold freely over the counter and our household used to run on this business. Other traders of rice resorted to the means of dabbling in the black market or selling adulterated rice. But Bhai never compromised on his beliefs and values and refused to be drawn into this circle. The Government, as part of its policy, sealed our warehouse. This led to heavy losses as the stored grain went bad. To add to our woes, Popatlal dissolved the partnership and Bhai was left alone to fend for the business, but thankfully Dullabhdas Kalyandas who was a big trader of rice joined Bhai in his business. For a while they also dabbled in the trade of jowar and bajra.

Bhai believed that opportunity knocks even in the face of adversity. Ever

since he started the trading of rice, he was keen to understand how this business and market works across the entire country. So taking advantage of the ban, he travelled all over the country to understand the market and the trading setup of not only rice but multiple grains and commodities. He travelled to Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. Despite the financial crunch, he knew that these trips were necessary to give shape to the idea that had formed in his mind.

Upon his return to Pune, he established himself as a big name in the trading of grains. Eventually he focused on giving back to society and on philanthropy. Not only was he actively involved in the day to day affairs of the business, but he also formed a strong network of friends and associates. Soon, he was associated with multiple NGOs and institutions. He served in the capacity of the head or treasurer of these institutions. Eventually Dullabhdas Kalyandas opted out of the partnership in the store at Shukrawar Peth and Bhai had to suffer losses.

But this was not all. Close on the heels of the India- Pakistan war, was the India- Bangladesh war in 1971. Once again, there were restrictions on the trading of food grains and it added to the woes. To seek guidance in the face of this adversity, Bhai consulted some astrologers and they declared "You will not be successful in this business at all".

Bhai also dabbled in other business opportunities such as transport and he invested in two trucks to transport sand and bricks. However, he did not succeed in this and eventually moved back to trading in food grains.

This was an era when banks did not finance the food grain trade and Bhai had a huge financial burden to tackle. He was frank and vocal about this with Uttamsheth Vohra. Bhai attached a lot of importance to his counsel.



*Uttamsheth Vohra: A well-wisher  
whose advice Bhai always sought in all  
business matters*

Uttamsheth Vohra always admired Bhai's tenacious nature, observing that Bhai always made his way out of any crisis with his own efforts and it made him a staunch supporter. Our family is forever indebted to him. Mr Vohra was closely associated with Shri Balasaheb Gokhale, the renowned astrologer and Bhai consulted him at Mr Vohra's insistence. Upon studying Bhai's horoscope, Balasaheb Gokhale insisted "You will touch the pinnacles of success in the business of trading in food grains." In fact he did not simply stop at verbal reassurances. He offered to invest Rs 20000 in Bhai's

## **Childhood with Bhai and Bhabhi**

*In the initial stages, Bhai was very busy with expanding his business so Bhabhi used to look after us day in and out, but Bhai always ensured that we did not lack anything. We lived in the Sharma Building in Pune. The Sadre and the Desai families were our neighbours. We were four siblings and our dear childhood friends were Ulhasdada, Sarojtai, Prakash and Raju from the Sadre family and Satish, Suhas, Kishor and Shobha from the Desai family.*

*Jayant, Veena, Kalpana and I used to play carom, business monopoly and cricket with our friends. We celebrated Ganeshotsav and other festivals with fervour in the "wada". We went out to see the various Ganapati idols and tableaus with these friends. That's why the days spent in Sharma building was a golden period of our childhood. Veena, Kalpana and I were students of RCM Gujrathi school, whereas Jayant studied at NMV school. There were a lot of vendors selling foodstuffs that attracted kids around the school premises. Bhai used to give us siblings a sum of 10 paise everyday so that we could relish these goodies. It used to be our pocket-money!!*

*Bhai and Bhabhi made sure that all of us kids were exposed to hard work in the form of doing chores or running errands every day. We happily helped out in cleaning, sweeping, mopping, washing clothes and putting them up on a clothesline, cleaning utensils, fetching the flour from the mill or making trips to the green grocer. We also helped Bhabhi in the kitchen and in cooking.*

*Each year, during the summer vacations, she used to take the four of us to her maternal place in Sardarpur, Gujarat. For this, we used to travel to Mumbai from Pune. Our maternal aunt lived in Mumbai. Then with her kids, all of us used to travel to Sardarpur by rail and then by road. Like every other child all of us loved the journey by train and enjoyed squatting on the floor of the carriage to play cards or to count the trees swooshing by.*

*Bhai used to be working hard in Pune. I cannot recall a day when he took some time off for himself. Though he was besotted with difficulties and financial troubles in the early stages of the business, he never let it affect his family or the quality of family life. Though he never discussed the problems openly with Bhabhi, she was in tune with his problems and successes. However Bhai did not ever ask her to compromise on our meals and he was the reason we never ever went to bed hungry.*

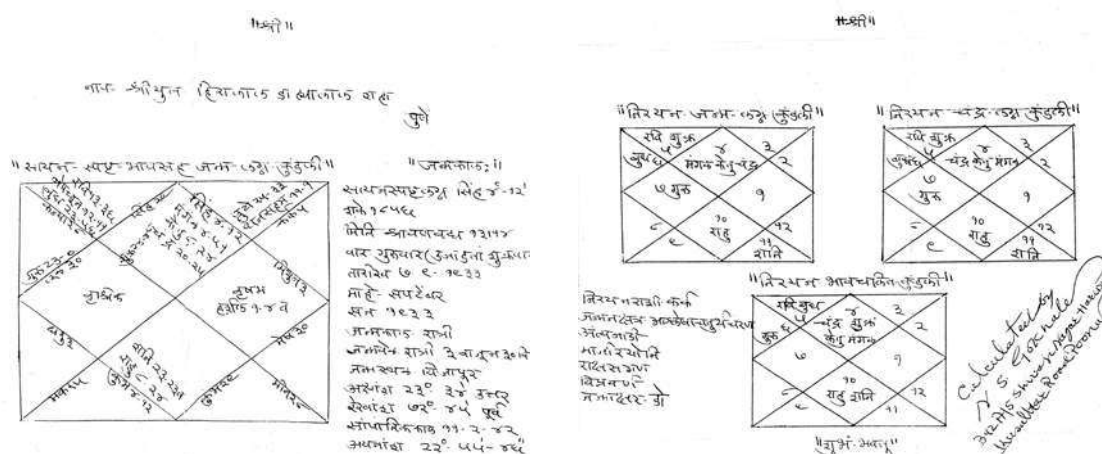
business. Bhai seemed unconvinced and finally Mr Vohra explained "If he did not have faith in your success in the future, why would he offer to invest his own funds in your business?" This statement appealed to Bhai.



*Vidyadhar Bhide, a friend who always stood by Bhai*

In the interim, Bhai made good friends with Mr Vidyadhar Bhide who introduced him to various avenues in the business and trading world. He proposed the setting up a new business of plastic sacks. Mr Nagpurkar, who was the then Vice President at Kirloskar Cummins, offered assistance on the technical front and there were about 8 other people willing to be partners in this endeavour. They were successful in setting up a prototype but this venture did not taste success.

After a few weeks, Mr Gokhale suggested that Bhai would taste success if he started a new shop at a new location. Using a combination of the names Jayant and Rajesh, Mr Gokhale suggested that the new venture be named Jairaj and Company. In those days, the foodgrain market operated from Bhavani Peth in Pune whereas we used to operate from Shukrawar Peth. Acting upon Mr Gokhale's advice, Bhai chose to rent a store in Bhavani Peth and started the operations of Jairaj and company from there on January 26, 1972. The premier store at Shukrawar Peth was kept operational under the name of Sha. Popatlal Hiralal and company.



*Balasaheb Gokhale, a reputed astrologer, was very impressed with Bhai's horoscope*

The new store rung in good opportunities for us and things were looking up for us on the business as well as the domestic front. I secured an aggregate of 72% in the matriculation examination and enrolled myself into the Science stream in the prestigious Fergusson College. Within a month's tie of this development one evening, we heard a golden announcement on the radio "The restrictions on trading of rice have been lifted in all parts of Maharashtra except Mumbai".





*The registration document of Jairaj and Company...  
This identity not only helped Bhai to overcome difficult  
times in business, but also to establish a niche in the  
rice market*



*This small shop in Bhavani Peth was the first business  
establishment of Jairaj and Company*

This was an opportunity which would ease us out of our financial woes, but by then Bhai had already started dealing in other food grains. So the challenge was to set up a new business in the trading of rice. Bhai consulted Uttamsheth Vohra and he gave Bhai the sum of Rs 200000/- as the capital for the new venture. The next morning, Bhai was astonished to see a truckload of rice being unloaded by labourers, to be delivered to our shop. This was the result of the goodwill that Bhai had generated in so many hearts and of his business network. Till date, we have no idea who extended this helping hand, the source of this stroke of good luck remains anonymous. What I can say for sure, though, is that this gesture paved the way for Bhai's successful run in this business.

Jayant and Bhai hoped that I would choose medicine as a career path. It was my father's fervent desire that I should obtain higher

education in America. This was an era when one could appear for Medical entrance exam after completion of the pre-degree. I scored a total of 70% at the pre degree level but it was not sufficient to gain admission

into the reputed B J Medical College. The subsequent choice would be Karad medical college but the lack of funds prompted me to cancel the plans of securing admission at Karad. I joined the B.Sc. course at Garware College and I also started helping out at the store. In 1977, I secured first class in the B.Sc. exams and got selected for the M.Sc. course. Bhai wanted me to obtain the M.Sc. degree from the US and was trying to raise funds for my education abroad. So I accompanied him to Mumbai where we had a discussion with my maternal aunt's husband, Sumatimaasa. In the course of the discussion, I became aware of the loans and financial burdens which Bhai had on his shoulders. I spent a sleepless, restless night thinking about how he was willing to spend money to send me abroad despite the burden of loans. In the morning, I woke up with a resolve to join the business and abandoned any plans of studying abroad.

Jayant had already started helping Bhai in the business. He had made a pact with Bhai that he would join the business immediately upon completion of his matriculation exams. True to his word, Jayant started going to work, immediately after attempting the last paper of his exams, in his school uniform!! Bhai always exposed us to the nitty-gritty of the business and made it a point to share and explain the pros and cons of any decision. Since free sale of rice was still banned in Mumbai. Rice was sold only in Badlapur and Thane. So people travelled all the way to these places to procure rice. Bhai and Jayant focused their energy on this fact. Bhai was well versed with the nuances of this business and had developed a strong network across various states. Bhai used to obtain the samples of rice from various states and Jayant used to commute to Badlapur Mumbai everyday via Sinhagad Express with the samples. He used to sell the rice in the Badlapur market after which he commuted to Vasai Virar via Dadar and returned to Pune at night. Bhai and Jayant were hardworking and dedicated and they managed to square off the loan amounts with these earnings within 18 months. Secretly, Bhai was pleased that his son had joined him in the business.

Good times were in store for our family in 1972, when with the able backing of Uttamsheth Vohra, we shifted into new residential premises. The 10x10 feet room in Sharma building was definitely our home but it was inadequate as a house for a family of 6. Besides, after the demise of Bhai's friend Vasantlal, his widow wanted to occupy that room. It was this room which bore witness to Bhai's struggles, his success and failure, and to the childhood of all his four children. Besides Bhai and Bhabhi were very attached to the neighbours who were like an extension of our family. So though they were reluctant to leave the premises, the lure of a self owned property was a strong force which made the transition easier. Bhai booked a flat in the upcoming Adinath Society, off Satara road. Uttamsheth lent us the sum of Rs 34000 for the downpayment. Followers of blind faith had cautioned Bhai "Do not buy the flat adjacent to the temple in the premises".



*Our first owned house in the Adinath Society. (Below) View of the Jain temple from our window was always soothing.*



gains. Our family was basking in the sweet delight of having our owned premises and in the success of the business.

Bhai continued to develop his business network and he also devoted his spare time to various institutions. Vidyadhar Bhide, a well wisher, once gave an outspoken counsel to Bhai cautioning him about the pitfalls of not devoting sufficient time to the running of his business and to his family. The counsel had the desired effect and Bhai immediately resigned from almost all of the social organisations that he was working with. However he continued working as a trustee in "Shrimati Kantaben Mahila Udyog" the organisation established in the memory of Mr Utaamsheth Vohra's

But Bhai never encouraged these superstitious beliefs. On the contrary he became an active participant in the construction of this temple. Today, this particular Jain mandir is considered to be an auspicious place.

The official inauguration of this society was at the hands of the erstwhile President of India Dr V V Giri. Bhai also got introduced to Mr Morarji Desai, Ex Prime Minister of India, Mr Yashwantrao Chavan, Ex Defence Minister of India and developed a close bond with them. The Ex Home Minister, Mr Shankkarao Chavan, ex Chief minister Mr Vasantdada Patil and the famous ophthalmologist Dr M C Modi were frequent visitors at our residence. However, Bhai never used any of these connections for his personal or business



deceased wife. He had been associated with many esteemed gentlemen through these institutions but this incident also shows that he was always willing to accept the advice of well wishers and once he agreed to it, he always implemented it with immediate effect. Despite resigning from the official posts, he was always connected with these institutions and moreover so with the people who worked for these institutions.

"No eating... no meeting... no seating... no cheating" was the motto followed by these institutions. As the rice trade grew, a raging fire destroyed the stock of flattened rice and puffed rice, in one of the godowns. It led to heavy losses. But Bhai with his resilient attitude, rebuilt the business. Shri Kantilal Gundecha joined Bhai from 1973 in this business of trade in flattened and puffed rice.



*Our godown in the Bhavani Peth was gutted in a fire, forcing us to start the business again from scratch*

Bhai's firm beliefs and principles were a firm foundation to the growth of the business. We used to procure rice from Gondia, Tumsar and other neighbouring villages. This rice typically had gravel in it.

The equation was simple, the more the gravel the lesser the price of rice. These gravel are formed naturally. However, if consumed they cause constipation and other digestive problems. The rice from these villages proved to be a lucrative opportunity but Bhai wasn't happy. "If this harms my consumers, I will be responsible for their ill-health". And thus we stopped selling the rice which had gravel in it.

It was a crucial decision, but Bhai stuck to it. It did slow down the sales initially, but these principles eventually helped us to gain momentum and expand the business. We were suppliers for Maharashtra. In due course of time, we bagged a tender from FCI. We could buy rice from them in bulk and then resell it. However, we realised that it was infested with insects. Bhai ensured that the rice was cleaned in the mills. This went on for 6 to 8 months. In fact we had a monopoly for this across the country. Then suddenly, one fine day, Bhai declared that we would not deal with FCI

### ***Why deal in puffed and flattened rice?***

*After the Government put a stay on the rice trade, Bhai took up the trade of flattened rice. He did have various options to choose from to set up a new business. But the choice to trade in flattened rice was a product of Bhai's deep study and understanding of business.*

*The trade in puffed and flattened rice did not have many players. So Bhai decided to enter this domain. He gradually started dealing in roasted gram, popped flakes etc. The consumers in Pune were familiar with only one type of flattened rice. So Bhai introduced different varieties of beaten rice into the market. It was his idea to introduce the idea of "bhadas" i.e. the pohe which can last longer and are ideal for travel since they are light and easy to digest. He struck a rapport with the regular consumers of beaten rice. Today brands like "Laxminarayan Chivda", "Ramprasad Chivda" and "Chitale Bandhu" have grown into empires. The fact is that we were their preferred choice to buy pohe or flattened rice which is used to make chivda.*

anymore. Jayant and I were flabbergasted. The work was in accordance with Bhai's principles as was also lucrative. However he decided that he would not deal in the rice which has gravel, lumps or insects. For Bhai, the interest of the customer always stood first. He was of the firm opinion that the hard work and effort of the farmers who grew rice should be ably rewarded. The health of the customers who would consume the rice was a priority for Bhai. Besides, we used to clean the rice before selling it. All these factors contributed to our success. Our Mantra was to purchase rice without the said impurities.

Following this, Bhai pioneered a new trend in the market. He declared that the rice mill owners had to affix their stamps on the rice sacks. He insisted upon buying the rice which had these stamps. Soon mill-owners of brands such as Diva, Kandil started affixing their stamps. This helped us to procure rice easily too. Also we could reject the ones who did not adhere to these rules. It is said that experience is the result of bad judgement and good judgement is the result of experience. Bhai's judgement and decisions stemmed from his experiences.

One of the traders who sold goods worth 50 truckloads in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh dealt exclusively with Jairaj and Company. He was among the biggest players in this business. The fact that he was associated with us was a matter of prestige. We asked them to affix their brand on the sacks of grain. In due course of time, the quality of the rice that they

dealt in started deteriorating. Bhai dealt with cheaters with a firm hand. He ruled that Jairaj and Company would not deal with such traders.

Once Jayant and I learnt the ropes of the business, we started targeting new markets for expansion. Initially we did some prospecting in Pune and then moved on to tour the rest of Maharashtra and finally across the entire country, looking for business opportunities. In this period, we were introduced to Babubhai Dalal from Hyderabad who got us in touch with Ashok Corporation. It gave a huge boost to our business. We travelled frequently to meet new traders and to negotiate our terms with them. Jayant and I were always out of Pune. Bhai handled the operations of both stores in Pune. The networking helped us and in a couple of months we became a name to reckon with outside Maharashtra too. Our brand was established and the business flourished.



*Bhai in the Bhavani Peth godown surrounded by rice bags*

Now that the burden of loads was mitigated, Bhai decided that the family needed a car. He was keen on purchasing a white Ambassador car which was the rage in those days. He sought the opinion of all the family members and we got our first Ambassador car.

Jayant and I streamlined the business during 1977-80. The Government had ordered that the markets of Bhavani Peth, Nana Peth and Ganesh Peth be relocated to Market Yard Pune 37 to ease the traffic situation. So Jairaj and company started operations from a new shop measuring 3000 sq ft. The trading of puffed rice and flattened rice continued to operate from Bhavani Peth. Business flourished to such an extent that we had to acquire 10 to 15 new premises on a rental basis. The space in Market Yard now proved to be inadequate but thankfully, the location was easily accessible to the brokers and agents. Our godown was surrounded by



## ***Weddings of the siblings***

*Once the tide turned and our financial burdens were eased, Bhai and Bhabhi decided that it was time for Jayant and I to start the matrimonial chapter in our lives. My wedding was solemnised on 27 April 1979; it was the day I got engaged to Hansa, the daughter of Taraben and Chotalal Mehta. We got married in 1980.*

*Our son Dhaval was born in 1981. Bhai doted on his first grandchild. In 1982, Jayant got married to Heena, the daughter of Kantilal and Sushilaben Shah. Their son Malav was born in 1983. Bhai doted on him too and was happy in the company of his grandkids. In 1985, our daughter was born and Bhai decided to name her as Keyul. He firmly believed that she ushered in wealth and prosperity and believed that it was Goddess Laxmi who blessed us in the form of this delightful daughter.*

*Veena got married to Vipulkumar Nanavati in 1984 and in 1985, Kalpana got married to Bhadreshkumar Vohra. Bhai and Bhabhi were blessed with more grandkids to shower their affection upon, in the form of Veena's children Nikisha and Bhaven and Kaplana's son Mudit.*



*Bhai and Bhabhi celebrated our marriages with much fanfare. (clockwise) Both of them blessing the author and Hansa, Jayant-Heena, Veena-Vipulkumar, and Kalpana-Bhadreshkumar during the marriage ceremonies.*

*With Dhaval's birth in 1981, Bhai became a proud grandfather.*

### ***A bond beyond the business***

*One of the key factors contributing to the growth of our business was the fact that Bhai put the customer above all. He would always chat with the customers and knew their names, address, and profession. There is an interesting incident. Once a customer by the name of Mr Apte came to the store to purchase rice "I need rice for domestic use". Bhai explained "We stock various varieties of rice. Which one would you prefer?" The gentleman was not sure of which type of rice they consumed. Bhai advised "Instead of choosing something at random, please do come back tomorrow with your wife as she will know". Mr Apte did return with his wife the next day and she said that they usually bought Ambemohar rice. Bhai explained the difference between the Ambemohar of Kamshet, Kalewadi and Panshet to the couple. He explained which type of rice would be suitable for which preparation. Handing them a sample of the rice grown at Bhor-Bhatgar, Bhai advised them to try it out and then buy it if they liked it. The Aptes were so thrilled with the information and service that ever since, they have always been buying their annual stock of rice from Jairaj and Company. Bhai has established this kind of rapport of faith and trust with thousands of such customers in not only Pune but all over India!!*

godowns of jaggery. Bhai connected with Manilal Swarupchand who rented out his premises at 583 Market Yard, where we started a new shop.

In 1982 Sajjansingh Jaywantsingh from Amritsar, who owned the Santbhog brand of Basmati rice, visited us in Pune. He wished to promote and sell rice under his brand in the Maharashtrian market. We grabbed this golden opportunity and Jairaj and company started dealing in basmati rice too. Business gained momentum after 1986. We proudly take credit for promoting the Santbhog brand all over Maharashtra. After Mr



*Bhai with Jugalkishor and Sanjay Arora of the Kohinoor Basmati brand*

Sajjansingh's demise the company shut down the operations. After this we started selling Kohinoor Basmati and Dawat Basmati. The business attained new pinnacles of success and we booked ourselves a flat at Adinath Society and purchased a red Ford vehicle.

Haribhai Shah was a formidable name in this business. Jayant and I became well known in the field too. With Bhai's support and blessings, I contested the elections of Poona Merchant Chambers and won!! It was a crucial win and opportunity for us. The Chamber sells the Maharashtra snacks viz Chivda and laddoos at affordable rates. I have been spearheading this venture for the past 25 years. This achievement found a place in the Guinness Book of World Records.



*The Rice Festival of Grahak Peth has now become an annual event with popular support. "Jairaj" helped Grahak Peth to initiate this activity... The then president of Grahak Peth, Dr B.R. Sabde, inaugurating one such festival. Suryakant Pathak, the author, Bhai, Shrikrushna Chitale and Jayant alongside him.*

The "Tandul Mahotsav" in the Grahak Peth of Pune is very popular but the fact that Jairaj and Company has had a major role to play in its organisation, is not known to many. Bhai was well aware of the work by Mr Suryakant Pathak of Grahak Peth. He was renowned for his ethical business values and Grahak Peth was set up under his able leadership and guidance. In one of his meetings with Jayant, it

was decided that Jairaj and Company would supply the annual stock of rice to Grahak Peth. This trend started in 1992-93. The response by Pune-kars was so overwhelming and positive that to date, people look forward to the annual "Tandul Mahotsav".

New opportunities beckoned and in most cases we took them up and turned them into success stories. It is interesting to note that the core business was never neglected or compromised. In fact it was expanding at a very rapid pace. The topline of the business was running into crores by 1994. The Council for Fair Business Practices recognised our efforts and growth and conferred upon us the Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 1994, at the hands of Mr Narayan Murthy of Infosys. In 1999, we were again chosen as the recipients of the same award in a higher echelon of topline growth. This time, we were felicitated at the hands of Mr K L Chugh, the then director of the ITC Group. We hold the distinction of being the only company to be the recipients of this award, twice. As the list of awards





*Bhai, on behalf of Jairaj, receiving the Jamnalal Bajaj award for Fair Business Practices at the hands of Narayan Murthy of Infosys*



*It's the Jamnalal Bajaj award once again... this time in the next category. Bhai receiving the award from K.L. Chugh, the then director of ITC Group. (on the right) Bhai was always generous in recognizing Jayant's and the author's contributions in the growth of the business. Here, he is sharing the award with them.*

and accolades grew, so did our responsibilities.



*Bhoomipoojan at the new site in Market Yard, where Jairaj and Company's new shop was opened at Market Yard.*

We bought the spacious plot no 530/31 in Market yard. "Jairaj and Company" shifted at this new place on June 07, 1995. Later we purchased another establishment in Market Yard and started a new business under the name of "Hiraj". It was a combination of the syllables in the names of Hirabhai,





*Hiraj: Another shop at Market Yard. The name "Hiraj" was conceived from the first syllables in the names of Hirabhai, Rajesh and Jayant.*

Rajesh and Jayant . Under the new establishment, we also started dealing in pulses, other grains and dals. We were fortunate to receive a lot of help from Mr Ravi Nahar in this business. Today we run the business on the same principles and ethics be it in Pune, rest of Maharashtra or any other state of the country. We are the premier distributors for Kohinoor Basmati brand. We also hold the distinction of introducing the global market to puffed rice and flattened rice and of being the premier distributors of rice on an all India level. We are an ISO 9001 certified firm, with a distribution network of more than 10000 agents.



*"Jairaj" is one of the few companies in the food-grains business to receive ISO 9001 certificate. This achievement in 2006 was followed by another ISO certificate for food safety standards in 2015.*

Rice is known as "chokha" in Gujrathi colloquially. Bhai was hailed as an expert in the field of trading of rice and in our community he was known as "Chokhawala". This is a testament of our success. As this business grew, Jayant was also keen on exploring multiple business opportunities. Bhai always supported the ventures. He hit the jackpot in the Construction business . In 1988 his residential scheme "Padmavati Nagar" was a great

success and was sold out in no time. Another feather to in this cap was the Sujay garden project which was completed in 2005. We were fortunate to be helped by Bharatbhai and Rajubhai Keshavlal Shah. Lake Town and Amanora Park are two other commendable projects of us. We are expanding this business in Pune and Mumbai.



*Padmavati Nagar: The first completed housing project. Jayant is leading this real estate business of "Jairaj Group".*

Every business needs fresh ideas from young blood. My son Dhaval and Jayant's son Malav are the next generation of our family and are actively running the business today. Dhaval is in charge of Jairaj and company while Malav takes care of running the construction arm, Jairaj Developers.

But this entire journey originates from the word: Hirabhai Shah. Bhai was totally devoted to his work and ran the business successfully. It was part of his genetic makeup. His ability to stick to his principles and ethics were instrumental in his success.

Bhai was never good at a typical 9.00 am to 9.00 pm job. He did try it out once in Mumbai but that was the only time he ever took up a job. Once he started his business, he did face a lot of obstacles but the huge amounts of loans did not deter him. He believed that hard work always leads to success. Jayant joined the business and I followed suit. Though we were really young when we started off, Bhai was never worried about whether we would learn the ropes and manage it well. Instead once we were firmly ensconced into this fold, Bhai started passing on the baton to us. He did come to the store everyday but played the role of a silent observer. I believe he is the first father, especially in the trading community, to have

done this. If anything needed rectification, he always made it a point to talk to us about it at home and never in the presence of the staff. If he observed that our attitude in dealing with any trader needed adjustments or that we were quick to reprimand our team members or helping hands, he made it a point to explain our mistakes to us. He urged us never to commit the same mistakes twice.

Jayant has been an integral part of the business since he was 16 years of age. He commuted from Pune to Mumbai daily. Upon his return in the evening, he used to share the events of the day with Bhai and seek his counsel. Bhai never asked him or me to account for any penny that we spent. He passed on the authority of signing the cheques to us, placing utmost faith in his sons. We have taken a cue from his actions and today our respective sons are the authorised signatories in all matters of banking and finance.



*Jayant, the author, and Bhai with Jugal Kishor Arora of Kohinoor Foods Ltd*

Bhai knew the pulse of the business and had a keen, observant eye. He ensured that everything functioned smoothly in adherence to his principles and beliefs. He ensured that we left for work at around 7.30 each morning and returned home at 10 pm. It was his inherent belief that successful people do

need to devote that much of a time-span to their business daily. If we were delayed at night, he used to explain the importance and cause of delay to our young children. At the same time, he saw to it that we would get home cooked meals delivered at the store, if he knew that we would be late at work. We may not have memories of him being a stereotypical hands-on father, but he groomed us to be disciplined young men. I can't recall him saying, "Sleep well... You've had a long tiring day". But this was because he believed that one needs to spend the greater portion of the day working hard. We are fortunate that he never opposed or bogged down our ideas, efforts or endeavours. That is why he encouraged us on the days when business was slow or when business was booming, with equal gusto!!

Hard work is the key to a long and successful life was his motto in life. We are fortunate to have been groomed under this aegis. We have always upheld Bhai's thoughts and principles and pledge to continue to do so.

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# Virtuous path

During the course of completing a journey of eight decades in his life, Bhai also crossed the milestone of seven decades of business enterprise. Rarely does someone encounter experiences and face ups and downs of the nature which Bhai met along the way in this journey; he learnt extensively from these experiences. The life's "school" continued to guide him along a virtuous path. He associated himself with whatever was positive and good; he moulded his character in that spirit. It was not surprising therefore that people longed to be in his radiant and energetic presence with the intention of drawing if only a portion of that energy to shape their own lives. And Bhai, like a true giver who believes in perpetually giving away to society, sought more and more ways to reach out to people.

"Hirabhai", the superlative molecule, was not synthesized in a day! The molecule took a long time to synthesize through the catalytic action of everyday incidents and their deep impact on his mind. The first person who picked up the chisel to shape his character was his grandfather. Grandfather was very fond of him and showered his love unconditionally, but that affection was within the bounds of discipline. And, yet, that discipline too was endearing since it was enveloped with kindness. Next, his mother and surrounding situations took up the chisel. The fall from affluence to a state of want and the consequent stoicism in dealing with hardships sculpted him. Hardships bring in their wake a tinge of spiritualism; he got an opportunity to serve sages and saints during this period. That conditioned his mind further.



*Bhai was very much influenced by Gandhiji and his attire in early days was reminiscent of that influence. (on the right) Bhai near the wax statue of Gandhiji at a museum in Hong Kong.*

Bhai remained deprived of much school education; but circumstances taught him more than any school could. He abandoned education owing to Mahatma Gandhi's influence. Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on self-reliance and self-discipline inspired him. He was spurred by patriotism. Bhai had a strong body - a muscular body developed through long hours of exercising. But arrogance, which is the usual ally of a strong body, was absent in him. He could easily have countered any violence, but Mahatma Gandhi's advocacy of non-violence had taken so deep roots in him that he never used his physical strength to inflict injuries upon others. He launched his business, and his interaction with people increased. The people treated him with respect; they held him in awe not because of his physical strength but because of his respectful behaviour.

The initial years of his life were full of hardships. His zeal and perseverance to overcome the difficulties used to leave people amazed. Shantabai Tilak was one of them; she was Jayantrao Tilak's mother. Bhai used to deliver goods to Kesariwada where she lived. It is during these visits that Bhai developed a strong friendship with the Tilak family. There were so many other families with whom Bhai fostered a strong bond through his dedication and hard work. Kantilal Chimanlal Shah from Mumbai was the first to recognize the diamond in Bhai! He was left in no doubt about Bhai's abilities. Kantilalji trusted Bhai with all his heart and treated him like his son. Bhai proved that he was worthy of that trust; from an ordinary employee in Kantilalji's payroll he rose to higher and higher positions until the time arrived when Kantilalji began contemplating making Bhai a partner in his business. It would take reams and reams of paper if one were to list the names of people with whom Bhai developed such close friendship!

Along with business Bhai was attracted to social work. He became associated with a number of social organizations. But the meetings and other activities of these organizations began telling upon the business and family life; he, therefore, decided to withdraw from the day-to-day activities of these organizations but, nevertheless, continued to remain



*Bhai was impressed by Osho's discourses, and never missed any opportunity to meet him*

associated with them always. He had always been drawn towards saints and sages, and retained this devotion throughout his life.

Sometime during 1974-75 Bhai had an opportunity to listen to a discourse by Acharya Rajneesh. An organization had invited Osho to deliver a talk; Bhai

was present for the discourse. Osho spoke on adopting a practical and realistic mode of living. Bhai was motivated by the talk and, thereafter, he never missed any opportunity to listen to Osho, and regularly visited the Osho Ashram. Many influential people used to visit the Ashram in those days and Bhai struck up cordial relationships with them. "If you are good, the whole world is good ... if you are bad, the whole world is bad," Bhai used to say in context of this association.

....Always behave well with everybody; this has been Bhai's ceaseless endeavour.



*Uttamsheth  
Vohra*



*Dr Chinubhai  
Shah*



*Vasantlal  
Vadilal*



*Sumatilal B.  
Shah*



*Mohanlal  
Porwal*



*Chandulal  
Swaroopchand*



*Vidyadhar  
Bhide*



*Dr Vinod  
Shah*



*Ghevarsheth  
Bora*



*Maniksheth  
Bhandari*



*Omkarmalji  
Bhandari*



*Devichand  
Jain*

This endeavour has earned him many affectionate friends like Uttamsheth Vohra, Mohanlal Porwal, Dr Chinubhai Shah, Vidyadhar Bhide, Sumatilal Shah, Chandulal Jeevraj, Chandulal Swaroopchand, Ghevarsheth Bora, Maniksheth Bhandari, Bapji Bhandari, Dr Vinod Shah, and Vasantlal Vadilal Shah. These people became associated with Bhai during different phases in his life, and remained life-long friends.

Uttamsheth has been Bhai's well-wisher for a long time; at every fork in Bhai's life, Uttamsheth has been there to point out the right way like a true younger brother. Bhai struck up a friendship with Vasantbhai during his youth days, while his association with Mohanlal is of later date. Ghevarsheth and Kantabai treated him as a member of the family. His acquaintance with Vidyadhar Bhide blossomed into a life-long solidarity. Bhai met with Maniksheth during the usual course of business – a meeting which later transformed into a beautiful friendship. So was the case with Chandulal Swaroopchand who has been ever willing to lend a helping hand. Chinubhai's medical advice always stood Bhai in good stead, and the affectionate bond with Vinod Shah transcended doctor-patient relationship. Bhai's friends' circle kept widening with time and every new friend became an integral part of his life.

A true friend is one who is to be found near you at times of difficulties. All



of these friends have proved true to that definition, and Bhai reciprocated in equal measure. He tried to learn something good from each of them. For Bhai, everyone was a friend; even Jayant's and my friends were his buddies – he recognized no age barriers. He could, therefore, interact



*The generation gap never bothered Bhai. He mingled with every generation with equal ease. Here, he is in the company of his grandson Malav's friends.*

with everyone with ease. Although, as a youngster, he had cultivated a vast circle of friends he never fell prey to any kind of addiction; he had only one addiction – to bond with people. That, perhaps, is the reason why he could ignore not only age differences but even business barriers. When business partners met with him, they showed more interest in talking about Bhai's personal

matters, about his family, and whether he faced any problems which they could resolve. Business matters were relegated to the back burner!

After Jayant and I started looking into the business, Bhai gradually withdrew and devoted his time to social work. He was relieved of much of the business responsibilities. He had given us a free rein to run the business as we deemed fit. Before we took up the responsibilities, Bhai used to work from 6am till midnight. But even after Jayant and I took up the reins, Bhai was not very happy at the prospect of sitting idle while the boys worked; so, he decided to immerse himself in social work. That gave him great pleasure. He would be beside himself with joy if someone did well. There are people who lend with one hand in the hope of receiving back with the other hand; if they achieve to do this they feel happy. But, Bhai was different; he did not approve of this kind of philanthropy. He lent a helping hand but only to the really needy. And when he did so he did not enquire into the person's caste or religion; he would stand by the person through thick and thin, and without ever letting out that he was helping someone. It is owing to this aversion for fame and a propensity to help without letting others know that it is impossible to quantify the extent of his philanthropy or social work. But, even the little that we have heard has been inspiring to us and many others.

On the insistence of Bhabhi, my mother, he built a few temples. He strove to fulfill every wish of Bhabhi. They shared a different kind of relationship. When we were small, Bhabhi used to be a pillar of support for Bhai. She used to keep a strict watch on our education. Till 55 years of age, her life

was marked by uncertainties – bad days followed good days and good days followed bad days! That’s how it went on. Once when we went to attend the wedding ceremony of a relative, she fell down while climbing the stairs. She suffered severe injuries to the foot and a major surgery had to be performed. She was bed-ridden for almost a year. Bhai nursed her during that period. This one accident brought in its wake several other complications, but she bore her sufferings and went about cheerfully taking care of us. Bhai, during every bout of sickness, remained by her side like her shadow till the very last. Before departing she was sick for four to five years, and Bhai never left her side. I realized then how much they loved each other.



*Bhai always fulfilled Bhabhi’s every wish; he built temples as desired by her. Both, performing pooja at one such temple.*



*A bond forever: Bhai was always by Bhabhi’s side when she suffered from frequent bouts of sickness.*

Often Bhai, unable to bear her suffering, would break down sobbing. He desired only one thing: The world’s best doctors should treat her and make her better. But she did not get better. The umbrella of affection which she had spread over us was withdrawn on 28 December 2012. “Oh! If we could have saved her it would have been so good,” Bhai often repeated after her passing away. Bhabhi’s nature complemented his own. She never said, “I want this, I want that” or “Get me this, get me that”. No. I had never seen or heard her demanding anything. She understood only one thing: Life’s journey has to continue whatever be the circumstances. This simple wisdom helped Bhai to take his business forward.

Bhai had always been dedicated to social service. But, following Bhabhi’s departure, he increased the sphere of his social work. In Bhabhi’s memory, on her first death anniversary, he assisted the H V Desai Eye Hospital to set up a Low Vision Centre to provide free treatment to needy patients. He established a cultural hall for the Janaseva Foundation on Bhabhi’s second



*After Jayant and the author took charge of the business activities, Bhai started devoting his attention to social causes ... He constructed a cultural hall in memory of Bhabhi, on the occasion of her second death anniversary.*



*His native village, Pedhamali, was dear to Bhai; he built a school and a modern well-equipped hospital there*

death anniversary. He set up a school in Pedhamali, his native village. A cancer research centre, and a 150-bed ayurvedic hospital soon followed in the same village .... Bhai had always been fondly attached to Pedhamali. Bhai visited Mumbai in 1984 to pay obeisance to Acharya Premsuriji Maharaj; on the instructions of the Acharya, he organized a six-day pilgrimage to Palitana and Girnar for our relatives in Pedhamali and 600 members of the "Kantha Sattavis" community. These pilgrimage centres hold very revered positions in our religion. Bhai was honoured with the "Sanghvi" Kitab and felicitated



*Bhai bestowed with "Sanghvi", a highly esteemed honour in the Jain community. The author and Jayant were also conferred the honour.*





*Shortly after their marriage, Bhai took Bhabhi on a visit Pedhamali. Bhabhi and Bhai were married for over five decades, but the freshness of their marriage never diminished with time; rather, it blossomed. A function was organized to celebrate the golden jubilee of their marriage during which Bhai and Bhabhi underwent marriage rituals for the second time as a symbolic gesture. The happy memories of that event still lingers.*

at the Girnar Jain temple for organizing the pilgrimage. Incidentally, Jayant and I, too, were honoured with the "Sanghvi" Kitab.

Many people came to Bhai for his assistance, and he never disappointed them. Some came to him faced with financial difficulties; others sought aid for pursuing education; and, then, there were those who came to him seeking help for medical treatment. He rendered assistance to everyone without showing favouritism. But, he was vigilant that nobody should take advantage of his generosity. Once satisfied that a person indeed needed his help, he would not hold back but go all out to help that person; I have witnessed this on several occasions. He sent many of those who came to him for medical help to Poona Hospital managing trustee Devichand Jain; he, then, arranged for all medical expenses after obtaining necessary details from Mr Jain and after satisfying himself that the patient really deserved to be helped. Bhai was open-handed when it came to helping needy patients who required treatment at the H V Desai Eye Hospital. However, when extending assistance to any organization or institution he did not wish his name to be publicized. There were instances when Bhai was cheated; there were people who collected funds from him claiming that they were building schools, or for social work. When Bhai realized he had been cheated he became even more vigilant.

Whenever Bhai visited any institution or an ashram, he quietly observed their functioning, and noted down what they lacked – that was his way. He would then ask, as though he were making casual and general enquiries, "How many children are here? How old are they?" A few days later the institution would be surprised to find rain-coats and sweaters of various sizes, blankets, and other necessities delivered to them. It is Bhai who would have instructed his chauffeur to deliver the goods!

Bhai was associated with a number of institutions and organizations – Poona Blind Mens Association, Poona Hospital, Janaseva Foundation, H V Desai Eye Hospital, Kantaben Mahila Udyog, Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya, R C M High School and College, Punyabhushan Foundation, The Poona Merchants Chamber, Gujarati Kelvani Mandal, and others. He devoted his time, advised, guided, and even served as an activist.

Come December and the new crop season for rice begins. The moment the first truck arrived with jute bags containing rice, five of them would be removed and dispatched immediately to the old-age home. "Who has sent these?" the old-age home management would wish to know. "We have been asked to deliver the rice to you," would be the only reply to their enquiry. No name was ever mentioned. Bhai always extended this kind of help to the helpless, ignored, and less-privileged sections of the society. It is needless to reiterate that he never enquired into the religion, caste, or creed of the beneficiaries.



*Bhai felt it his duty to help the needy; he extended help to needy people and social organizations but without any craving for name or fame. (on the right) The "Sharma Building", where it all started. The building had a special place in his journey. Here he is seen releasing the Diwali issue of Punyabhushan, a publication of his neighbor, Dr Satish Desai.*

Bhai assisted 20-25 people in establishing their own businesses for trading in rice and other food-grains. Well, Bhai even coached them on how to maintain mental peace while doing business. Bhai had a piece of advice for anyone wishing to do business: "Don't just run after establishing businesses; there's a kind of peace which you can attain through business, try to achieve that."

On every Diwali, people came to seek his blessings. Along with the blessings, everyone received an envelope; whatever the envelopes might have contained, but one thing was certain: no one left without it. After distributing the envelopes Bhai would remark, "If you have money and give them away happily, your money will never get exhausted."

Bhai's attitude towards life was quite different; it was a giving attitude. The questions uppermost in his mind would be "What does this person need? What should he be given?" After resolving these questions, he would, accordingly, shower material benefits or shower his affection.

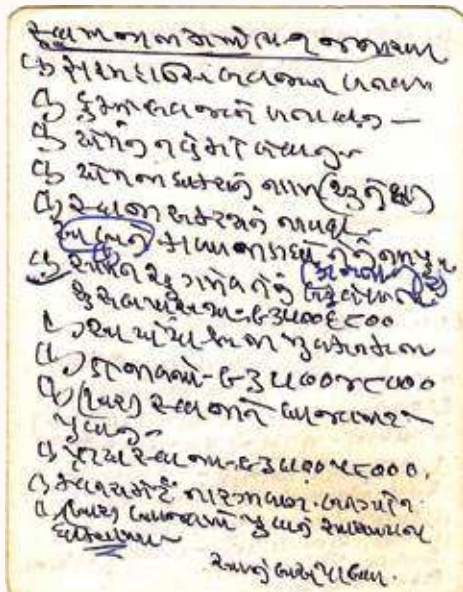
Nothing made Bhai happier than to gift a basket of fruit. Every day he sent fruit to someone or the other – in fact, he had made a list of people to whom he dispatched the fruits. "It isn't just fruit which I send in the basket, but I send love and affection," would be his reply to anyone who was curious to know about this novel practice. Bhai has juiced up the lives of numerous people through this loving act of his; and, of course, they have become healthier too! Once he learned that an acquaintance was suffering from a chronic illness. Bhai gathered information about a fruit which could provide relief; it was an exotic fruit. He obtained a picture of the fruit, circulated it in the office, and asked it to be fetched for him. It was a tough assignment – to find a fruit from just its picture! But our people did it; the fruit did not grow in India and had to be imported.



There were sellers in Mumbai who imported the fruit. A basket of fruit was ordered from Mumbai and speedily delivered to the ailing person. The person did experience relief upon eating the fruit.

.... That gives a glimpse of Bhai's "love for fruits"!

### **Note-taking and Bhai**



*Bhai's penchant for taking notes needs to be mentioned. This was his peculiar task management tool – a tool that allowed him to manage the conflicts between his daily chores and prioritized work. Bhai used to meet a large number of people daily, and make enquiries of them. The subjects discussed in these meetings would find their way into the notes. The subjects that needed to be pursued ultimately found their way into his to-do list. The next time the person who had raised that particular subject met him,*

*Bhai would draw out the notes and review the matter. Once the matter was resolved, it would be struck off the list. When a new matter cropped up there would be a fresh chit!*

*While Bhai recorded the work to be carried out personally by him in these notes, he also recorded work that needed to be executed by others .... This was to remind the person concerned who had been tasked to carry out the job. That way he could also enquire whether any help was required of him to complete the task. Every evening after returning home, Bhai engaged himself till around midnight in sorting out the notes and enquiring of others how they had fared in their tasks. And, of course, new chits had to be prepared before he retired to bed.*

People who called on Bhai never went away empty-handed. When Bhai visited someone he always carried some kind of present with him; he never deviated from this practice, especially so while visiting seniors, masters, and scholarly people. While dealing with people, Bhai exercised utmost caution not to hurt their feelings; his manner of speech was pleasant to hear, and bereft of any unkindness or harshness. He did not mind being humble if it were only not to show someone else down. Bhai never got



angry. Well, he might have got angry at times but never showed it – at least, his face never showed any trace of anger; but there would be a slight hint from his manner which indicated that he did not approve of something. But since everyone held him in awe, the slightest hint from him was like a deafening rebuke for the wrong-doer to improve!

Bhai took care to ensure that he made a positive influence in other people's lives. If an employee from the shop came and stood silently by him, Bhai would at once recognize that the person was in need of money; he would dive his hand into his pocket and draw out as much as possible and hand the money over to the employee. He never counted how much he gave. This has happened umpteen times. At times of difficulties, the employer-employee relationship dissolved, and every employee looked upon Bhai as an elder member of his own family. This kind of behavior endeared Bhai to everyone. If he visited somebody's house, he would win over every person there, and he would show equal affection towards all.

His social network was huge. He, particularly, shared good relations with spiritual gurus. This was really surprising because he never sought them out, rarely visited them, and hardly ever spoke with them. But on occasions when he did meet them, it was as though he was meeting someone whom he had known all his life! When sages and spiritual gurus visited Bhai's home, he would take the dust off their feet. However, he never insisted we do the same.

Curiosity would get the better of us, and we would ask Bhai, "What do you discuss with them?" He would reply, "Whatever image the society



*Bhai enjoyed the company of virtuous people. Luminaries from all walks of life frequently visited the home... Here, he is having lunch with Acharya Shri Chandanaji and Baba Ramdev.*

may conjure up about a person, he is but a human being, and ties of human relationships bind him. I, therefore, show affection towards all. These sadhus, gurus, and swamis are human beings after all. Just because they offer guidance to people does not imply they have no problems of their own. They have their problems and issues which they cannot reveal to others. They discuss such things with me; I think that is a great honour for me."

Since the last 20 years, Bhai had become much more involved in social and spiritual work; of course, he did not neglect his own work.



*Acharya Arun Vijayji, who instructed Bhai to follow the "Ambil Oli" ritual*

Bhai became acquainted with Acharya Premsuriji and Arunvijayji at the Adinath Society. Acharya Premsuriji's four-month stay was arranged at the Society temple on the occasion of its pranpratistha (energizing) ceremony. Bhai was impressed by the Acharya's discourses. Our house was situated close to the temple, and the Acharya visited us regularly as a matter of right. Gradually, a guru-disciple relationship developed between the Acharya and Bhai. In those days, our business was in a precarious state. Premsuriji Maharaj and his disciple Arunvijayji had arranged for a worship to be held in our new house to improve the standard of living. The Acharya advised Bhai to undertake the "Ayambil Oli vrat", a pious observance. Now, Bhai was aware that the observance had health benefits; so, for reasons of health rather than religious considerations, he undertook the observance and continued it for 50 years.

Sometime during 1981-82, Bhai was introduced to Sadhvi Vinita



*Sadhvi Vinitayashashreeji:  
The infinite source of guidance that helped Bhai to maintain a balance between work and personal life*



*Kaushalendra Prasad, head of the NarNarayan Dev Gadi of the Swaminarayan Sampraday, inaugurated our new shop in the Market Yard.*

Yashshriji. Bhabhi had listened to a discourse by the Sadhvi at the Society. She was impressed by the talk and she took Bhai along with her for the next discourse. Bhai, too, was greatly affected; the Sadhvi's guidance regarding a person's responsibilities towards his own self, his home, business, and society, provided a new insight to him. Sadhvi Vinita Yashshriji was candid enough when she advised Bhai against holding blind faith. A person's faith should not be such as to make him superstitious, the Sadhvi advised. And, neither should it be such as to make a person lose his direction while pursuing sadhus and sages. The Sadhvi's talks influenced a perceptible change in Bhai. "Earn riches through just means," the Sadhvi had advised. Of course, Bhai had been following this course for long years without needing a guru's advice! He had been practicing this advice assiduously – a reason why his business flourished and expanded over time.

It was the Adinath Society again which was responsible for bringing together Anand Rishiji Maharaj and Bhai. The Maharaj had arrived in Pune from Ahmednagar for a year-long visit, and the Society had arranged for his four-month stay. Anand Rishiji Maharaj was a Sthanakvasi, who don't believe in idol worship, while Bhai was a Mandir-margi (temple-goer), yet the two shared cordial relationships owing to the common thread of faith.

The sect of Acharya Kaushalendra Prasad, chief of the Ahmedabad-based Swaminarayan Temple, is different from ours; but he, too, showered his affection on Bhai. It was the Acharya who inaugurated Jairaj and Company. Whenever the Swamiji arrives in Pune along with his disciples, our entire house along with the kitchen is kept at his disposal.



*Impressed by the activities and social outlook of Veerayatan, Bhai offered his services to further that cause. He enjoyed a unique bond with Acharya Shree Chandanaji, the founder of this organization.*

Bhai shared warm relations with Acharya Chandanaji of Veerayatan. He was immensely impressed by the Acharya's passion to empower the younger generation through education, and to prevent the society from getting entangled in a web of traditions. Veerayatan has ambitious plans to construct 200 schools; the project aims at building a school at, or near, every holy site. The Acharya had organized a

conference in the United States in July 2014 with a view to impress upon her American disciples the importance of the project. Bhai was in the United States for 20 days to attend the conference. Everyone there had taken to addressing him as “Mama (uncle)” because of his affable nature.

Bhai, who always sought opportunities to serve the society, steadfastly supported such social organizations. The Matoshree Old Age Home at Nasik Road was one such organization. Run by Pravartani Dr Chandana and Sadhvi Dr Akshay Jyotiji, Bhai helped in getting allocation of this old age home to this organisation. The activity was always close to his heart and he was keen to serve the heads of this organization who were supporting a noble cause.



*Bhai receiving blessings from Janki Dadi, the spiritual head of Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya.*

A broad-minded person, Bhai respected religious and spiritual authorities from all faiths and not just his own. That's the reason why he bonded well with the Shankaracharya of Sringeri Peeth, Janki Dadi of Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, Swami Parthasarathy of Vedanta Academy, Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev, and

The Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Most of them visit our house. Whenever the Shankaracharya of Sringeri Peeth comes to Pune or anywhere around Pune, the news is conveyed to Bhai without fail, and he visits the Shankaracharya to pay his obeisance. Janki Dadi, on her visits to Pune, resides in our house during her stay. When Bhai moved to a new house he wanted it to be blessed by a spiritual authority; he had, therefore, invited Dadi, and she had accepted the invitation immediately. Hansa and I had accompanied Bhai on a visit to the Brahma Kumari Ashram; on Dadi's invitation we had the privilege of staying with Murali Dada at the palace in Oxfordshire, England. The hospitality extended to us was marvelous beyond words, and it showed the affection which Dadi had for Bhai.

I have always been curious about the relationship between Swami Parthasarathy and Bhai. The Swamiji's lectures on “Intellect and Intelligence” are very interesting. But the lectures are delivered in English. Moreover, the Swamiji holds conversations in English. Bhai's knowledge of English was scant. Yet, when the two met, it was like a meeting between the two brothers – Rama and Laxmana. They spent hours together in each other's company during these meetings. Everyone at Swamiji's ashram addressed





*Language is never a barrier in communication once affectionate bonds are established; the intimacy between Bhai and Swami Parthasarathy was ample proof.*



*Baba Ramdev greeting Bhai with an affectionate hug. The two conversed in Gujarati whenever they met.*

Bhai lovingly as "Kakaji" and treated him with respect. While language might have hindered communication with Swami Parthasarathy to a little extent, there was no such impediment when speaking with Baba Ramdev – Bhai and he conversed in Gujarati. We loved to hear them talk! Bhai had tremendous respect for Baba Ramdev for his devotion to yoga. The yoga guru's opinions and thoughts on yoga, ayurveda, corruption-free India, youth power, and education impressed Bhai; he had great faith in Baba Ramdev's efforts to make every person healthy.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's views on adopting a less-stressful lifestyle appealed to Bhai. Bengaluru was Bhai's favourite city, and he found every excuse to visit it whenever he could. And a visit to Bengaluru, for Bhai,

would have been incomplete if he did not stop over at Sri Sri's ashram. There he spent his days doing "Pranayama" and "Sudarshan Kriya". Bhai made special arrangements every Sunday to send fruits to Sri Sri from Pune; the spiritual leader relished the fruits. It made Bhai happy; happiness akin to the joy Sudama must have experienced upon feeding Krishna!

Bhai had cemented an unbreakable bond with people and organizations that endeavoured to provide a new direction to society and infuse fresh thoughts. He wished to contribute his mite to every good work that was being carried out. Bhai's efforts were directed at making the paths of these people smooth so that their work became easier to be accomplished.

While extending support to people who undertook these kinds of activities on a large scale, Bhai tried to reach out to the needy at his own level. He always had a daily schedule of tasks and engagements, and the list invariably included the community services he had resolved to

execute. He knew what someone wanted, and what they needed. The list used to be prepared accordingly, and two employees were especially commissioned to manage these activities and to ensure that the wants of the needy were satisfied. Since the last 15-20 years, Bhai devoted half his day on the administration of these activities. He had established a commendable community service program by personally immersing himself in the actual work.

He loved doing good work. Till the very last, Bhai strove to serve the society as much as he could. One of the principles that he maintained in his mind was: When you serve, your mind becomes righteous and you behave well with everybody. More importantly, you keep your feet firmly planted on the ground...

As these memories of Bhai come flooding to the mind today, the images of his last journey abroad with the family and his energetic efforts to do something for the society ignoring the illness that took hold of him thereafter, present themselves in vivid colours.

March 13, 2016. Bhai returned from a holiday in Hong Kong. The city had been hit by a cold wave, and this had led to Bhai drinking less water; that caused dehydration. Even after returning to Pune, he continued to feel slightly uneasy. Blood test and medical examination confirmed the diagnosis of multiple myeloma. We were shattered! The best doctors from India and abroad were consulted, but the diagnosis remained unchanged. It was as though all the roads ahead of us had closed; we could see no way out!



*Forever cheerful, Bhai however did not smile when this photograph was clicked despite the photographer's instruction to say "cheese" ... This vacation in Hong Kong with family proved to be his last vacation*



Right since our childhood, we can't recall having ever seen Bhai taking pills for fever or headache. A healthy man like him was now gripped by such a deadly disease! The treatment began. The doctors had given us enough indication that Bhai did not have very long to live. But we held on to the wild hope that Bhai would be his strong self once again.

We did not divulge the nature of his illness to Bhai on the advice of Dr Vinod Shah. Blissfully ignorant of the life-threatening disease, Bhai immersed himself whole-heartedly in social services. Over the next few months, we had a great many visitors to our house and they included Arunvijayji Maharaj, Swami Parthasarthy and his daughter Sunandaji, Baba Ramdev, Janki Dadi, Acharya Chandanaji of Veerayatan, Vinita Yashshriji, Acharya Kaushalendra Prasad, Pravartani Dr Chandanaji, Pandit Pramod Sharma, and many Jain sadhus and saints. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar was abroad at that time, so he sent his representative, A K Subramanyam, to enquire about Bhai's health. Swami Parthasarthyji was amazed to see Bhai continuing with his social work despite his ill-health. "You have a large heart," he said, and advised Bhai to slow down. When we saw these luminaries from political, social and spiritual fields showing so much concern for Bhai, we realized how wide his influence was!

Bhai's health continued to deteriorate; Dr Vinod Shah was, then, in the United States. So, we admitted Bhai to the Lilavati Hospital in Mumbai where he was examined by world-renowned doctors. For almost a month after returning to Pune, Bhai felt somewhat better; he even started attending office, and also resumed his social activities.

Dr Vinod Shah, following his return from the United States, and Dr Rahul were constantly by Bhai's side. He had to tolerate high doses of medicines and injections but never once complained. However, sometimes Bhai wished he would be granted few more years of life so that he could complete the unfinished social work. From the day he fell ill till the very last, Bhai used to send written messages every morning instructing us on whom to aid on that particular day, how much aid was to be rendered, and for what reasons! Till the very last, he ensured that his unfinished work was carried out at least through us.

July 19. It was "Guru Purnima", a day celebrated by people to pay respect to their teachers. Many had come to pay their obeisance to Bhai and receive his blessings. Dr Atul Bhavsar had come all the way from Pedhamali; he had come to seek Bhai's permission to inaugurate a hospital on December 4. Bhai granted the permission. Later in the evening Bhai told Jayant, "We must invite at least 200 distinguished people from Pune and Mumbai for the hospital's inauguration." His intention was clear; he hoped that at least two of the 200 people would take inspiration and build a similar hospital in their own villages. Kalpana, Heena, Dr Vinod Shah, and I were present

when Bhai spoke to Jayant. "Expend all your efforts towards helping in the establishment of hospitals and schools in the villages," he told all of us. "I am certain you will continue my work, but don't ever publicize," he further told us. Bhai, then, told of all the social work he wished to do, and made us pledge that we would complete the unfinished work.

On the same evening, around 7.30pm, his heart abruptly stopped beating. Devichand Jain, and all the trustees and doctors at Poona Hospital worked strenuously and got the heart pumping again around 10.30pm. But the doctors recognized that this was but a short respite. The next day, however, we felt that Bhai's health had taken a turn for the better. Around 5pm, Malav's wife Prachi prepared soup and served him; Bhai drank the soup on his own without needing anyone's help to hold the bowl to his lips. But that was the last meal he took. After 9pm, his condition deteriorated rapidly, and at 3.06am he left this world.

The whole family was by his bed. Before embarking on the final journey, he spoke to each of us separately ..... as though he wanted to explain something. His face radiated satisfaction at having accomplished this task.

The long continuous path traced by a positive life, thus, suddenly disappeared from sight. The pathway that had enriched our lives in every respect abruptly left us all behind and vanished. Till the very last every member of the family was with him; that was our only consolation.

Bhai's journey through life was full of struggles, but he never deviated from the straight and narrow path while discharging his familial, professional, and societal obligations. The principle of "Seva Parmo Dharmo (Service is the highest duty)" guided him along a virtuous path, and he spread joy and happiness along the way until he reached his destination.

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*Bhai left all of us behind for his heavenly abode on July 21, 2016... But his resolute principles, positive attitude, and enlightened outlook will be an ever-energizing source of inspiration for us all.*



## **Acknowledgements**

During his lifetime, Bhai made numerous friends who became intimate with him during different phases of his life. These friends showered their unconditional love and affection upon Bhai. Among them are:

Uttamsheth Vohra

Dr Chinubhai Shah, Vasantlal Vadilal Shah, Mohanlal Porwal, Chandulal Swaroopchand, Vidyadhar Bhide, Kantaben and Ghevarsheth Bora, Maniksheth Bhandari

Sumatilal B. Shah, Manulal D. Fadia, Lilaben and Popatlal Jeevraj, Chandulal Jeevraj, Anandlal Lakhichand Shah, Mahasukhlal P. Fadia

Dada Joshi, K. C. Shah, Babubhai Nanavati, Raichandji Malu, Sohanben and Maniksheth Bafna, Dwarkadas Boob, Chimanrao Kadam, Omkarmalji (Bapji) Bhandari, Devichand Jain

Sadre family, Choice family, Kothari family, LT Overseas family, Satnam Overseas family, Chordia family, Parakh family, Shroff family

Pandit Pramod Sharma (Ujjain), Dr. Gunwant Oswal, Prataprao Pawar, Rajendra Keshavlal Shah, Shriramsheth Kasat, Bankatlal Runwal, Dalal Babubhai Thakkar

Dr Vinod Shah

Chimanlal Amolikdas Shah, Mahendra Mehta, Jagdish Deshpande, Subhash Mehta

Dr. Sundar Jagannath (New York), Dr. Vijay Ramanan, Dr. Jagannath, Dr. Yogesh Bendale, Dr. Ashwin Porwal, Dr. Hemant Dhoka, Dr. Samir Bhandari, Dr. Atul Bhavsar, Dr. Rahul Shah, Dr. Neeraj Nahar

All colleagues from the Jairaj Group

We express our deepest gratitude to all those whose names have been mentioned here and to those whose names we have missed.





Hirabhai and Kanchanben Shah

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Rajesh and Hansa Shah

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Jayant and Heena Shah

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Dhaval-Dr. Sejal,  
Ilisha and Adiv



Keyul-Dr. Kavita  
and Krishav



Malav-Prachi,  
Stutie and  
Hridaan

# The Hirabhai Family



Veena and Vipulkumar nanavati

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Kalpana and Bhadreshkumar Vora

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Nikisha-Chetan Shah  
and Ved



Bhaven



Mudit

Bhai was always busy, but never too busy for his family. He was instrumental in creating a loving, healthy atmosphere at home for the family but it was based on the sturdy foundation of Bhai's principles and ideologies. He believed that the greatest investment was in family and business relations; he was a people's person. All of us learned to emulate him. Bhai was of the opinion that a firm family background and backing helps to pave the way to success on a business and social level. Bhai showered his affection upon his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren and these bonds of affection have always tied our family together. Celebrations held a lot of importance for Bhai and Bhabhi, and the wedding ceremonies of all four of us were moments of joy which they always treasured.

Hansa and I got married on April 27, 1980, and she soon became an integral part of our family, winning over the hearts of all the members with her kind nature. She always held Bhai and Bhabhi in high esteem, and just like Bhabhi, Hansa is very religious. She has lived up to the expectations of her in-laws. Jayant and Heena were married on February 26, 1982. Bhai loved Hansa and Heena just as much as they loved their own daughters Veena and Kalpana.

Veena and Vipulkumar Nanavati were tied in the bonds of matrimony on March 20, 1984. Vipulkumar runs a successful business of garment trade in Mumbai. Kalpana was married to Bhadreshkumar Vohra in December 1985. Bhai and Bhabhi celebrated both weddings with pomp. Like all parents, they did so with the strings of parental affection tugging at their hearts to see their daughters flying out of the nest.

Bhai and Bhabhi became proud and doting grandparents with the birth of my son Dhaval, on September 08, 1981. Bhai had a twinkle in his eye whenever he held Dhaval or played with him. Jayant became a proud father to Malav on October 31, 1983, and my daughter Keyul was born on November 13, 1984. The proud grandparents were very happy that they had more grandkids for whom their love simply multiplied by the minute. With the birth of Kalpana's son Mudit on 29 December 1988, and Veena's daughter Nikisha on March 31, 1986 and son Bhavesh on September 01, 1990, Bhai and Bhabhi's joys knew no bounds. All the grandchildren were always very attached to Bhai and Bhabhi.

Upon completion of his graduation in commerce, Dhaval joined the family business. He looks after the trade of rice and commodities. He can take right decisions even in the most difficult situations. He, of course, discusses matters with me, and regularly consulted Bhai. He has always upheld Bhai's tenets, and has inherited Bhai's business acumen. Dhaval is married to Dr Sejal, a dentist. Dr Sejal manages the day to day running of the household while successfully running her dental practice. Bhai was

very proud of the way she managed everything so well and effortlessly. Dhaval and Sejal were blessed with a girl, Ilisha, on March 29, 2007, and a boy, Adiv, on November 02, 2009. Their arrival into our family elevated Bhai and Bhabhi to the status of great grandparents.

Jayant's son Malav, armed with a management degree, started managing the affairs of Jairaj Developers. His wife Prachi is a textile designer. Bhai always enjoyed spending time with their children Stutie, born on August 23, 2009 and son Hridaan born on January 27, 2013.

I would love to share an incident which involves Keyul. Bhabhi always tied a rakhi to all the staff members each year on Rakhi Poornima. Today, following in her footsteps, Keyul too ties a rakhi to the staff members. Even if she is busy or tied up, she always makes it a point to carry out this tradition. It is heart warming to see the younger generations carrying on the legacy of Bhai and Bhabhi. Keyul completed her graduation in arts and was married to Dr Kavita Shah on November 29, 2008. Dr Kavita is a reputed dentist, based in Ahmedabad. Bhai's happiness was multiplied with the arrival of Keyul's son, Krishav, born on April 14, 2011.

Veena's daughter Nikisha was married to Chetan Shah on February 17, 2012. Soon another great grandchild was the recipient of Bhai's love and affection when Ved was born on April 21, 2015.

Kalpana and her husband Bhadrashkumar relocated from Ahmedabad to Pune. They took great care of Bhabhi and Bhai. Kalpana's son Mudit is a commerce graduate, and Veena's son Bhaven is a management graduate. Both of them are achieving new heights in their respective businesses.

Bhai loved to travel and once the younger generation took over the business responsibilities, he became an avid traveller. He always enjoyed taking the grandchildren on annual vacations each year. He was full of life and enjoyed dancing at the annual dandiya-garbas.

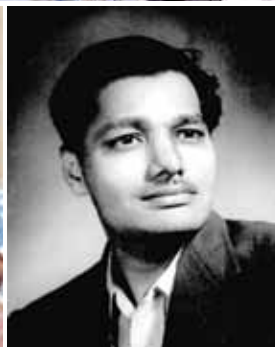
Bhai always moved with the times and was full of bright and new ideas for his children and grandchildren. He was always a beacon of light for all of us, embracing us in the warmth that he exuded. All family members respected him but loved him even more and the essence of his enviable persona always lingers on...

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# Snapshots

The person, his family, his business, friends and social circle, his presence on various social platforms and social work... Here are some vignettes of Hirabhai...





## **Bhai, All the Way...**

Ever smiling, ever content... That's how Bhai was. Whoever had the fortune to spend time with him, yearned for more! And here was Bhai, always encouraging, always supportive and positive. All of us know he is no longer amongst us today. But when one looks at any of these photographs, one finds that hard to believe!









Tranquil as a forest, but busy within... Never did Bhai excuse himself when people around him sought his company. He was a master at managing his priorities.

Be it at home, office or the shop; Bhai was always accessible. Almost omnipresent in the lives of everybody around him!







## Kanchan-Hira

This journey of togetherness commenced on May 12, 1954. The early days of struggle and business development fructified in a secure future for the Shah family. The sacrifices of both of them laid the foundation that helped the next generations build stronger storeys above it.







Be it family gatherings or festivities, their moments of togetherness provided strength to each other ... the bond was hard for any of us to emulate.



## The Family Bond

Bhai exuded warmth that kept the family and close relatives together ...  
that "togetherness" recognized no generation barriers.



(Sitting in the front row) Veenaben with Stutie- daughter of Malav in her lap, Hansa with Adiv- son of Dhaval and Krishav- the son of Keyul in her lap, Elisha- daughter of Dhaval in front of Bhai, Heena and Hridaan- son of Malav in her lap, Kalpana and Ved- son of Nikisha in her lap.

(Standing behind) Sejal, Dhaval, Vipulkumar, Rajesh, Bhaven, Keyul, Chetan, Nikisha, Jayant, Bhadreshkumar, Malav and Prachi.





Elder sister tying Rakhi, a sacred thread, on Bhai's wrists



Performing *Pooja* at the printing press of Sumatilal Shah



With the in-laws



Bhai and Bhabhi with Jayant, Rajesh, Veena, and Kalpana



With Jayant and his wife Heena, Rajesh and his wife Hansa





Bhadreshkumar, Kalpana, Heena, Jayant, Bhai, Rajesh, Hansa, Veenaben and Vipulkumar



Rajesh, Vipulkumar, Veena, Hansa, Heena, kalpana, Bhadreshkumar and Jayant with Bhai and Bhabhi. Dhaval and Malav beside them. Also present, Bhaven, Keyul, Nikisha and Mudit.



Bhadreshkumar, Vipulkumar, Jayant, Rajesh, Bhai, Dhaval, Sejal, Bhabhi, Hansa, Veena and Kalpana. (Sitting in front row) Mudit, Malav, Keyul, Nikisha and Bhaven



Bhai had the fortune to play with his great grandchildren... and, he would lose himself in their world. That was his favourite pastime.



Malav breaking a fast with Bhai and Bhabhi's blessings



Prachi breaking her vow with Bhai and Bhabhi's blessings





With their grandchildren: Dhaval and Keyul standing near Bhabhi, with Nikisha in the lap of Bhai and Malav in front of him.

Dhaval and Malav with Bhai and Bhabhi



With Hridaan, son of Malav

Bhai was liberal in his approach and the same liberty was extended to Jayant and the author in the business too, when they took charge... To follow in his footsteps, in the business, as well as in his religious followings to the best of our abilities, has been our constant endeavour.



Rajesh and Jayant in the shop with Bhai



When Rajesh and Jayant were also felicitated with the Sanghvi honour, along with Bhai





When the religiously important *Palna* arrived at home



In a family function

The relationship that Jayant and I enjoyed with Bhai was completely transparent and friendly... and Bhai was always keen to close the generation gap just to be with you...



Bhai's birthday was always an occasion to celebrate for the family...  
Here, Jayant sharing a lighter moment with Bhai.



...Such informal moments!





Rajesh was accompanying Bhai when he was airlifted to Mumbai after his health deteriorated



Jayant feeding Bhai, as he was bed ridden due to ill health during last few months



## Bhai in Business

Bhai felt at home when he was at his favourite place... our shop!  
One can easily get to know the facets of a businessman in him, when one met him as a customer. His customer orientation and his ability to think ahead of the times was a striking characteristic...



Bhai in the godown, with rice sacks everywhere



Bhai in his office cabin



Jayant and Rajesh performing Laxmipoojan along with Bhai



Bhai used to treat our staff as members of our extended family... and each member of this "family" treated Bhai as a fatherly figure.



Bhai with company staff, Rajesh and Jayant along with



07 September, Bhai's birthday, was celebrated in "Jairaj and Company" every year. This photograph is shot in 2015, when he was greeted in the shop. (from left) Dhaval, Madhukar Nagare, Ravindra Nahar, Jayant and Rajesh.



Bhai's maternal uncle and his senior associate in our business Chimanlal Shah greeting him on the occasion of his birthday



## Awards and Accolades

This was an acknowledgement of the meticulous way Bhai built this business... Although his achievements in the business sphere and his contribution to the society was never intended to showcase for anybody.



With the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj award, for fair business practices



Receiving an award for his social contribution, at the hands of the then Governor of Maharashtra, P.C. Alexander



Sharad Pawar felicitating Bhai with the Baba Pokarna award



The then Chief Minister of Maharashtra Shankarrao Chavan felicitating Bhai, in presence of Mrs. Kusumtai Chavan



Receiving Udyam Gaurav Award of the Sheth Chimanlal Govinddas Trust, at the hands of Raghunathrao Chitale, the founder of Chitale Group



Felicitated as the best trader, by the Poona Merchant Chambers, at the hands of the then President of the Chamber Madanlal Nahar and vice-President Rajesh Phulpagar





Pune Municipal Corporation honouring Bhai for his business and social contribution.  
The then Mayor Ali Somji felicitating him.



Felicitated by the Executive Editor of Sakal Nandkumar Sutar at a book release function. Also present were Has Mukh Vora, Gopalrao Kulkarni and Babasheth Vora.



## Spheres of Social Contacts

Bhai was equally at ease and conversant with people in all strata of society. Be it the social field or spiritual world, he was ready to embrace any positive thought, deed or development.



With Swami Parthasarathy and his wife at our home. Also present to receive blessings from Swamiji were Heena, Kalpana, Prachi, Jayant, Malav, Hridaan and Stutie



With Janki Dadi of the Brahma Kumaris



With Murali Dada of the Brahma Kumaris



With Sister Gemini and Sister Jayanti of the Brahma  
Kumaris



Acharya Kaushalendra Prasad of the Swaminarayan Temple giving blessings



President of the BAPS Swaminarayan organization Pramukh Swami Maharaj Narayanswaroopdas greeting Bhai at a function



Acharya Shri Chandanaji giving blessings to Bhai



Bhai was not averse to being in the company of political personalities. But, despite maintaining very cordial relations with many political personalities, he never took advantage of it. Such was his character and behaviour.



Receiving an honour from Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a function in Pune. Rajesh was also present on this occasion.



At a function organized by Janseva Foundation, along with Dr Vinod Shah, Aaba Bagul, Prakash Javadekar, Mohan Joshi and Ankush kakade





The then Chief Minister of Maharashtra Shankarrao Chavan and his wife Kusumtai at Bhai's residence. Also present, Bhabhi, Ghevarsheth Bora and family members.



Senior Congress leader Ashok Chavan at Bhai's residence to have a lunch. Also present along with Bhai and me were Dhaval and Heena.



Senior Congress leader Vilasrao Deshmukh along with his wife, arriving at Bhai's residence. Rajesh was also present along with Bhai to greet him.

Bhai was happy to be present at many social and cultural platforms, even though he always preferred to be in the background and continue to work for the society. Many of his acquaintances on such platforms later became friends forever.



At the Bhoomipoojan of the Lake Town Society, along with playback singer Asha Bhosale. Also present on the occasion was senior BJP leader Gopinath Munde.



With former Union Minister Sushilkumar Shinde and Baba Ramdev





At the Punyabhushan awards ceremony, along with Kishori Amonkar, the then Mayor of Pune Deepti Chaudhari, the then MP Suresh Kalmadi and Dr. Satish Desai.



With Vyapari Mitra Bhogibhai Shah and trustee of the Anand Kalyanji Trust Kasturbhai

Bhai always sought company of thought leaders of the society. Their words of wisdom, acts with balance and advisory that helped one to be on the right track was what he yearned for.



With *Shivshahir* Babasaheb Purandare



With veteran Gandhian Balasaheb Bharade, at our residence





With Justice Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari



Noted Economist Narendra Jadhav felicitating Bhai



At a function with Senior Scientist Dr Raghunath Mashelkar and author Savita Bhawe

Bhai was open to all religious and spiritual thoughts and interacted with such thought leaders on a regular basis. The way he imbibed the values of progression while maintaining the foundation of faith and beliefs was really commendable.



With Ayurvedacharya Dr Balaji Tambe



With Mohan Buva Ramdasi at a function organized by Janseva Foundation. Also present were Dr Vinod Shah, Meena Shah and Vivek Kulkarni.



At a function in the Amanora Township, along with the Rural Development Minister Pankaja Munde, Aniruddha Deshpande, Bhaiyyuji Maharaj, Social activist Prakash Amate and Mandakini Amate.



With Pandit Vasant Rao Gadgil



## A Friend in Need...

Bhai had various circles of acquaintances that ranged from business to social, political and spiritual fields. Making friends, taking care of them, extending a helping hand whenever they needed and enjoying their company was how he characterized friendship...



With Poonamchand and Vasantlal Vadilal Shah



Enjoying a holiday at Matheran  
with friends in the Adinath  
Society



Bhai taking a horse ride at Matheran.  
Accompanying him were Kantilal Chimanlal  
Shah, Baubhai Nanavati, Bavrambhai Turkhiya  
and other friends.





With Ramesh Shah and other business friends



The then Chief Minister of Maharashtra Shankarrao Chavan also enjoying chitchatting with Bhai's friends' circle. Present amongst others were Maniksheth Bhandari and Ghevarsheth Bora.



Bhai's friends gathering at the home of Uttamsheth Vora. Present amongst others were Hiralal Malu and Ghevarchand Bora.



With Dr Vinod and Meena Shah



With Vijaykant Kothari of Mahaveer Pratishthan



With Haribhai Shah



With Bharatbhai Shah and Nitin Desai of the Poona  
Gujarathi Bandhu Samaaj



With Rajubhai Shah





With architect Jagdish Deshpande



With CA Mahendra Mehta and his wife





With Abhay Bamb of Balaram Market and his family



With Nareshbhai Chheda, Aniruddha Deshpande, Lalit Adani and Ishwar Goyal

## Serving the Society

Bhai recognised the crucial role played by some people in his life that helped his growth as a business person. He wanted to give back, what the society had given to him... and like a true philanthropist, he would be the rock behind every good cause.



Actor Dilip Prabhavalkar accepting an award. Present along with Bhai were Mohan Dharía and Dajikaka Gadgil.



Felicitating Sakal Media Group Chairman Prataprao Pawar, along with the Mayor of Pune Prashant Jagtap





Felicitating Senior Scientist Dr Vijay Bhatkar



After inauguration of a hospital in quake hit Bhuj,  
along with Rasiksheth Dhariwal



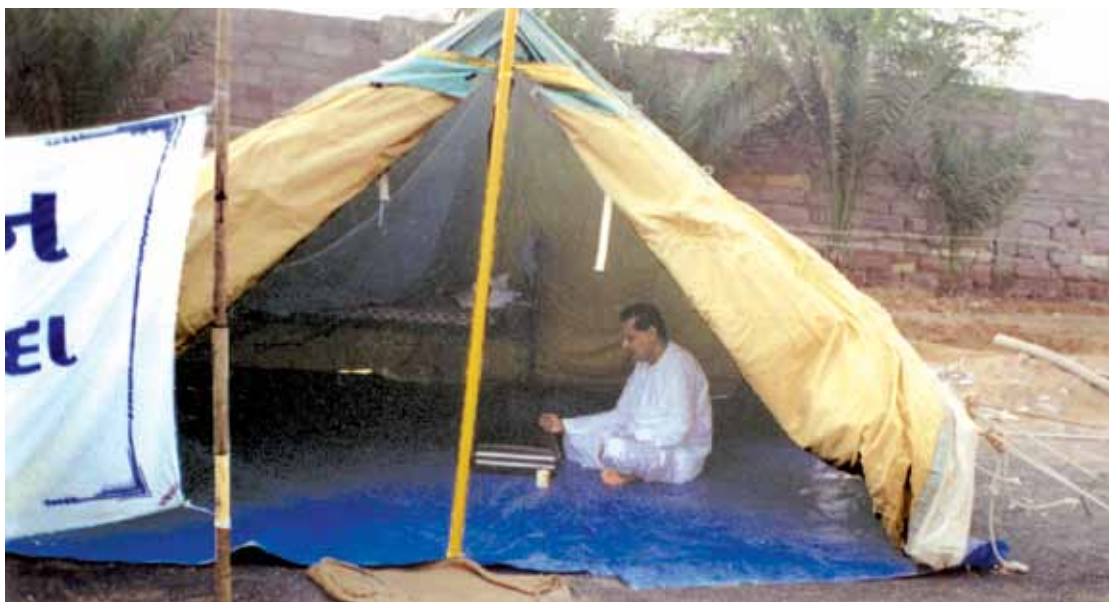
Along with Education Minister Vinod Tawade, at a function organized by Jansewa  
Foundation



Felicitating Deepchandbhai Gardi



Visiting the facilities during inauguration of the hospital at Pedhamali



At the quake hit Bhuj, in a camp overseeing relief work



# Memorabilia

Bhai was fortunate to have the virtuous company of many prominent personalities, especially from the social and spiritual fields. He had frequent interactions with them. Here, a few of these prominent personalities share their experiences about Bhai...

## A. PARTHASARATHY

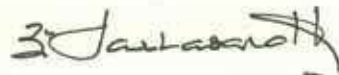
### Always exuded love and warmth

I may find it easy to talk about the Bhagwat Gita or the Upanishads but words fail me if I am asked to talk about Kakaji. He was always surrounded by people because they respected him and loved him. He was a unique personality; so warm and kind. It is difficult to measure the quantum of his love and concern for people. Only someone who is as affectionate as him can fathom this.

He was an active social worker and philanthropist. He had donated a sum of Rs 500,000 to my mother so that she could give it to the poor and needy. We always kept him posted before arriving in Pune, and he always kept boxes of vegetables and fruits ready, and always welcomed us with these gifts. He always asked us, "How can I be of any assistance to you?" I always replied, "Kakaji you are too generous". He always guffawed with laughter at this statement and whenever we came back to Pune, he repeated everything just the same way.

The entire Shah family is blessed to have stemmed from this great soul.

May Bhai rest in peace!!



- Swami Parthasarathy

## A Virtuous Person

Hirabhai was very close to the Brahma Kumari family. This is an interesting narrative about Janki Dadi.

The construction of Hirabhai's new home was completed in December 2004. It was designed to house a large joint family. However he was keen on organising a religious and spiritual event in the new premises before moving in. With this view in mind, he invited Janki Dadi and her family to live there for a few days. Her presence created ripples of spirituality and positivity in the new home.

But it didn't stop at that. Bhai had a tent erected on the pavement opposite his house. Janki Dadi used to pray and meditate each morning and there were a few spiritual classes organised in that tent at the same time. The brothers and sisters of the Brahma Kumari ashram used to come there and cook for us. Everyone shared and enjoyed their meals together and it gave us a peek into Hirabhai's magnanimous heart.

Bhai was always involved in helping people and in spiritual activities. This helped him to earn the well deserved good wishes of many people. Even though Bhai is not amongst us today, his legacy will be carried on.



- Sister Jayanti

## The loss of the aegis of love

The news of Hiramama's sad demise was a big blow for all of us. "No human is immortal," preached Bhagwan Mahavir. Yet it was difficult to come to terms with his passing away. He was instrumental in establishing many temples and institutions. He was the beacon of light for many families, and was a source of support for the needy and the destitute. "We can freely share a lot of things with him," were the praises sung by people. His spiritual advancement was seen in his selfless deeds. He was very well respected in the circles of business, family, friends, associates, and religious institutions.

He was an astute follower of the faith of Acharya Chandanashriji Maharaj and was an integral part of the Veerayatan family. He brought in a lot of positivity into this family. He hailed from an affluent business family, and his illustrious life made him a role model for many. He continued to be a guide and philosopher to many.

Just like the Shah family, Hirabhai's demise has also left us bereaved.



- Acharya Shri Chandanaji  
(Sadhavi Sangh and Veerayatan Parivar)





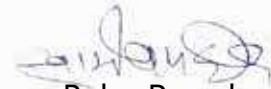
ओ३म

पतंजलि योगपीठ (ट्रस्ट)  
Patanjali Yogpeeth (Trust)

## An idol of inspiration

Hirabhai and I were as close as brothers. I was happy to know that his journey and success story would be immortalised in the form of this book. Hirabhai fulfilled all his duties and responsibilities successfully. His personality and his ideologies were a source of inspiration to not only his family, but also to the people who interacted with him. This book is bound to be a source of inspiration to his family members as well as the readers.



  
- Baba Ramdev

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"Shraman Sangh Ho Avichal Mangal"

**Pravartanee Dr. Chandana**

## A life worth emulating

Some memories leave a lasting impression on us. Hirabhai Chokhawala came to Poona Hospital with a view to extend help and to serve the needy or ill. Words fail me if I am asked to describe his selfless service. His name contains the word "hira" meaning diamond; but the sparkle of his personality was far greater than any diamond. I can confidently state that he was the "Kohinoor" of the Jain community.

Whenever we had any discussions or interactions, he was always keen to explore how else he could help the community. "You are treading on the right path of dharma, spirituality and social service; please continue with these good deeds," was his advice to us. He strongly believed that helping the ill, poor or destitute, is like serving the Almighty.

For the past 16 years, the Matoshree old age home on Nashik Road, run by the Jain Sadhavi Shri Kamla Shodh Trust has been receiving funds and assistance from Hirabhai and his family. We can cite numerous such examples, and it is this selfless service which has always helped this family to succeed.

This book will not only prove inspirational but will also be a guide for those aspiring to succeed.



ગાંધી સી. ચંદના

- Dr Chandana



ગાંધી સી. અક્ષયજ્યોતી

- Dr Akshayjyoti



SURYODAY

श्री सद्गुरु दत्त धार्मिक एवं पारमार्थिक ट्रस्ट, इंदौर

## An astonishing source of immortal inspiration

Hirabhai was a simple trustworthy man, who always set an example by his actions. Hirabhai's involvement in spiritual, religious and social causes always left me spellbound. I always wondered how a successful trader and merchant could have such a selfless and pure heart. His compassion towards the society as a whole was heart warming.

His involvement with so many religious and social institutions stands proof to the purity of his soul. A good book always proves to be a source of motivation and inspiration for us. I am sure that this book will help in shaping many lives.



- Bhaiyyu Maharaj



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- Late Mrs. Kanchanben Hirabhai Shah (Chokhawala) Sanskrutik Bhavan
- Shri. Haribhai V. Desai Old Age Home Wing I & II
- Shri. Rasiklal Manikchand Dhariwal Old Age Home
- Com. Late Govindrao Dhapare Rural Hospital • Driver's Training For Under-privileged Youth
- Rural Health Services • Mobile Medical Units - NRHM
- Shrimati Achala Sachdev Institute Of Education • Education for Street Children
- Mrs. Kumudben Madanbhai Sura Nursing School • Computer Training For St. Citizens
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**JANASEVA  
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## The healing touch

We met Hirabhai, father to the orphaned, at the inauguration of Deepchandji Parakh's store. One meeting with him was sufficient to convert us into his ardent admirers. We had lost our father at a young age, and we regarded him as our father - always guiding us on the path of life just like our father would have.

He took Meena under his wing and treated her like his daughter and me as his son-in-law. I was fortunate that he had full faith in me as his trusted medical practitioner. His family is also actively involved in the activities of Janaseva Foundation. Rajesh is a trustee with us and Jayant works in an advisory capacity.

Meena and I were scheduled to travel to the USA for our son's graduation ceremony. However, since Bhai was hospitalised, we decided to defer our plans to a later date. When Bhai heard of this, he was quite upset. When I entered the hospital room, he asked everyone else to leave us alone for a few minutes. He clasped my hand gently yet firmly and made me promise that I would not miss our son's graduation ceremony. His emotional plea still rings in my ears. I remember that both of us had tears in our eyes that day. What was special about the way Bhai held my hand was that it had a healing touch, almost divine!!



*Dr. Vinod Shah and Mrs. Meena Shah*

- Dr Vinod Shah and Mrs Meena Shah

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### Born to serve the needy

The school that Hiralalkaka built in the village Pedhamali is the cynosure of all eyes. It is fully equipped with a multimedia theatre and a computer lab along with various other facilities. The underprivileged kids are getting an opportunity to use laptops for their education. Initially, the school had 90 students, which has now increased to 200. What is commendable is that this school ranks first in the entire state. Bhai was also instrumental in setting up a hospital in this village. His sons, Rajesh and Jayant essayed an instrumental role in this venture.

The ayurvedic and cancer research hospital, which has also started in the village, has been named after Late Smt Kanchanben and Hirabhai Shah. It includes an OPD, a laboratory, operation theatres, a kitchen and pantry, dining hall, yoga hall, library, organic food, and a dairy. This is why it is a preferred hospital for patients from not only Gujarat but also from neighbouring states.

This has been possible only due to the efforts and blessings of Hirabhai Shah. I firmly believe that advanced souls like Hirabhai Kaka are incarnated on this earth to serve the homeless, poor and the needy. His guidance and blessings have turned around my life completely. I am sure that he was a saint born in these modern times.



- Dr Atul Bhavsar

## **Bhai**

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