

## About Our Founder

### Lala Shri Ram

*"If charity was his passion, humanity was his religion"- The Hindustan Times (Jan, 12, 1963)*

Nothing can better sum up the homage paid to great son and philanthropist of Delhi, Barey Lalaji, Sir Shri Ram who began as a humble worker and went on to set up one of India's largest business houses - the DCM Group. Not only did Lalaji achieve great height in business enterprise; he also participated in full measure in the crucial early stages of nation building. Everyone is familiar with the name of multiple facets of the industries and institutions on which he left his imprint - be it the DCM Limited, Bengal Potteries, Jay Engineering Works, many sugar mills, Sindri Fertilizers, the Lady Shri Ram College, Shriram College of Commerce, Delhi School of Economics and umpteen others. But who is this Barey Lalaji?

Born into a family of Agarwal banias of modest means, Shri Ram, in the 79 years of his life, built an industrial empire manufacturing a vast variety of goods like - textiles, sugar, alcohol, heavy, chemicals, vanaspati, pottery, fans, sewing machines, electric motors and capacitors. The industrial legacy that he left behind was valued at Rs 600 million at the time of his death.

Reared in milieu which graft nepotism, black marketing and tax evasion were considered a must for success in business, Shri Ram set for himself rigid standards of morality in his dealings with the public and government and made no compromises in order to earn more money or gain a favour. While himself deprived of opportunities for higher education, he nevertheless understood how important such education was in building the future of a nation. As a result he helped to finance a network of schools, colleges, industrial institutes and research laboratories. He was also the founder chairman of the Industrial Finance Corporation and Chairman of Sindri Fertilizers, the first national venture in the public sector in free India.

Little is known of Shri Ram's ancestors. Khuswant Singh writes in his "Shri Ram: A Biography" of the oldest family name on records, is the one of Kanji Mal. Nothing more is known about him. One of Kanji Mal's descendants was Rattanchand who was a confectioner. He was the grandfather of Shri Ram's grandfather. Rattanchand was a man of influential means. He was able to secure for his son Badri Das, the post of treasurer in the Karnal Commissariat of the British Army.

Badri Das was very mature for his age and he fared well by saving and investing in buying real estate in Firozpur and Delhi. He died in 1874 leaving behind four sons of whom the youngest, Bishambar Das was somewhat more distinguished. Bishambar Das had three sons - Gopal Rai, Girdhari Lal and Madan Mohan Lal. Shri Ram was born to Madan Mohan Lal and his wife Chando Devi on April 27, 1884.

While Shri Ram lacked formal education he read extensively. His reading included religious scriptures, Sanskrit classics, Urdu and Persian poetry and some English biographies. He assiduously cultivated men of learning and culture. But most of all he admired scientists on whom he pinned his hopes for the salvation of his country. One of his lovable eccentricities was that he carried out experiments to produce new varieties of food in his own room and then subjected his none too robust digestive system to his new recipes.

The secret of Shri Ram's enlightened approach to people of different faiths lay in his basic patriotism, making money was of little consequence to him; not once did he succumb to the temptation of netting an extra buck or two in the black market or by evading tax. He was an idealist who believed in raising India into an industrial nation. His love of India did not make him dislike or distrust Pakistan. Many of his friends were the members of the Muslim League. At the behest of his friend in Lyallpur Cotton Mills in Pakistan, Khan Sahib Ahmed Islam Khan, he laid the foundation of a mushaira what in the later years came to be known as the Shanker-Shad Mushaira.

Shri Ram had this uncanny ability to spot the right man for the right job a rare quality that contributed to his success. He made many mistakes in the choice of friends but seldom did he err in the selection of a business executive. Shri Ram's choice was not based on the scrutiny of a "Curriculum Vitae" but on an inborn gift, a sort of built-in Geiger-counter which ticked when he came across the man he was looking for. This helped him to pick up a humble mistry and make him a work manager, to convert an engineer into an administrator, to mould a perfume-seller into the overall head of a vast enterprises producing precision instruments and so on. So sure was Shri Ram with this instinct that once he made up his mind about the man, he gave that man every latitude,

there after his sole concern was with the results.

Shri Ram, described by his umpteen friends, was indeed a true friend. He refused to believe that any of his friends exploited him. And many did quite blatantly. He made friendship into an article of faith. "His house was like a dharamshala" remarks 90 years old freedom fighter Aruna Asaf Ali. He was unable to eat food unless every seat at the table was occupied. This indiscriminate hospitality at times caused great strain to the members of his family. But his principle was, "the more, the merrier."

While just in his thirties, Shri Ram got himself known in the industrial as well as the educational circles. He was nominated to the Delhi Municipal Committee. Through his business connections with Ram Bahadur Lala Sultan Singh and more to with that of his son, Raghubir Singh, who had started the Modern School in Delhi, Shri Ram began to think of problems of education in India. He ensured that his sons Murli Dhar, Bharat Ram and Charat Ram went to the Modern School where children of more advanced Indian families were studying. He also was instrumental in setting up several prestigious institutions of higher learning and arts such as the Lady Shri Ram College and Delhi School of Economics, Shriram Center for Performing Arts etc.

The initials DCM went on to become known, not only in India, but also in Africa and Europe as well. Lalaji was knighted by the British Government 'for his distinguished career as an industrialist and philanthropist'. To the very end Lalaji however retained his simple demeanor and humbleness, his love for his country and his undyingly loyalty to his friends.