

On 6th July 2011

Dhirubhai Ambani: In Retrospect

- **Parimal Nathwani**

Dhirubhai Ambani, though known for his vision, business acumen and skills, is also referred to as a philanthropist in closed circles. Those who knew him from nearer knew that Dhirubhai simultaneously lived a parallel life of a real time philanthropist. The amount of charity he did would never be known; as one thing is certain that he (and for that matter the each member of Ambani family) believed in an adage in Kabir' s words: '*Neki kar aur kue mein daal*' (means do the deeds of charity and forget). It is an Indian ethos that 'left hand must not know what the right hand gave.'

At the same time, his interests and intentions to do something for the society on a sustainable way are evident from the institutions he permitted to set up during his lifetime. The activities of Dhirubhai Ambani Foundation for brilliant students at grass-root level, Reliance Rural Development Trust, Observer Foundation, etc are examples of an intangible societal contribution he made.

While charity refers to the relief of suffering, the philanthropy is the seeking out the root causes of the social problem and solving them. Philanthropy, no doubt, was close to Dhirubhai' s heart; as I am witness of it since 1995 till he breathed last on this day in 2002. The concern he' d shown for the sufferers during 1998 cyclone in Jamnagar and 2001 earthquake in Kutch need hardly any emphasis. The generosity, with which he ordered his men to exhibit austerity and supply water for people of Jamnagar 30 kilometers away, lay exclusive pipeline and chlorination etc during water scarce years of 1999, 2000, 2001 etc will go a long way in history of philanthropy by Indian industrialists.

1/2

One can imagine an innovation in granting a scheme to maintain cows of 14 villages since 1995, the day he determined to set up the refinery complex. He

knew well that the villagers of semi-arid region of Jamnagar district would certainly have the welfare of their cows closer to their hearts while parting their land for the industry. The village development activities around Jamnagar refinery, development of Dwarka for pilgrims, etc owe its legacy to Dhirubhai Ambani which is being furthered under kind stewardship of Mukeshbhai Ambani in right earnest.

We don' t know what must have transpired Albert Einstein when he said: *“the most powerful force in the universe is compound interest.”* To a businessman compound interest is dearer than the simple interest or even the principal. But for a philanthropist of Dhirubhai' s kind, a Foundation in his name involved in number of innovative initiatives aimed at effecting social change itself is compound interest.

Though Dhirubhai steered and guided the course of charitable and philanthropic deeds, he himself never said he did this and he did that. We can only say about him in George Elliot' s words that: *“blessed was the man who having nothing to say, abstained from giving wordy evidence of the fact.”*

(Mr. Parimal Nathwani is group president, Reliance Industries Limited and member of rajya sabha.)