

Dilipkumar V Lakhi

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We are living in times where self-gratification and selfishness are the dominating factors.

Man's world seems to begin and end with his own self.

Fortunately, there are still a few, who, while discharging their responsibilities and duties towards their family and society have a much wider vision for humanity at large. One such man from our Sindhi community is Dilip V. Lakhi who, shunning all limelight and credit is magnanimous with his selfless service and devotion for all worthy causes, and whose integrity and honesty is reflected by the fact that he is the highest tax payer in India. We have the privilege of his presence with us today.

Jawhrani: Dilipji, we welcome you. Can you tell us which part of Sindh you hail from, and what was the occupation of your elders?

Dilip Laksi: We hail from the world famous city of Shikarpur. We were engaged in agriculture and jewellery business which also had some activity in Sukkur. Some of our relatives were involved in the Hundi business, which is akin to the present day banking system.

Jawhrani: Many Sindhis ventured abroad for greener pastures. Did you also venture out from Sindh for business?

Dilip Laksi: At that time, some of our relatives also resided and conducted business in the city of Bukhara (in present-day Uzbekistan).

Jawhrani: Partition created havoc and shook the very foundation of Sindhi affluence. What effect did it have on your family?

Dilip Laksi: We lost all our properties, land-holdings, houses, shops, business in Sindh. But we had shifted to Jaipur much earlier in 1944, and established our jewellery business there.

Jawhrani: What was the reason for leaving Sindh in 1944?

Dilip Laksi: When my grandfather died and my father went to collect his share of the agricultural produce, the farmers simply refused to hand it over, citing the exhortations of the Muslim League "he who sowed has the sole right on the harvest." We knocked at the doors of the government and ultimately succeeded in obtaining our share. But the environment had been vitiated and we thought it prudent to leave Sindh.

Jawhrani: When was the 'Laksi Group' established?

Dilip Laksi: My father established it in Jaipur in 1944.

Jawhrani: What were the initial activities?

Dilip Laksi: We began trading and manufacturing coloured stones on a small scale in Jaipur. My father believed that if anything sold by us, did not satisfy the customer, for whatever reason, he/she had the right to the full refund of money. We are the pioneers in selling polished coloured stones since 1944, which was unusual at that time. In fact, people had so much faith in our dealings that they would purchase precious stones through VPP and pay the price of the goods before actually looking at the material.

Jawhrani: The business of diamonds is highly sophisticated. Did you stick to the Sindhi principle of 'Small Margins, High Turnover'?

Dilip Lakhi: Very much so. My father even added, 'Bigger Margins, Bigger Tensions' to this adage. He always insisted on increasing sales, than increasing profit margins. He felt increasing volumes will automatically result in the increase of profits, whereas increasing margins will only go to depress the business.

Jawhrani: Do you feel content with your present achievements, or you still have some ambitions?

Dilip Lakhi: I am always content with my present state of business. I consider myself as an accountant of God. Whenever my accountant fails to satisfy me I fire him. Likewise, if I fail to satisfy God, he would punish me. I emphasize on "customer trust" and ensure that I strive to satisfy him. And with the grace of God, I have been highly successful in my business.

Jawhrani: It is said, that wealth is like ashes, which bears fruit only if dispersed. Do you participate in charitable activities?

Dilip Lakhi: My father had established Lakhi Trust. He always held the view of helping those who cannot work and equipping those who can, but are jobless, with means by which they can gainfully earn their livelihood. Equipment that can help them earn with dignity. Lakhi Trust also provides scholarships to the needy students for the furtherance of their educational goals. It helps with medicines etc. to ailing needy people. We also help at times of calamities, like the Orissa cyclone, Gujarat earthquake or Kargil war. We are always there to help the needy and poor. I don't subscribe to the idea of charity, rather I would call it 'Sahyog', i.e. co-operation. Whatever we contribute should be construed as our co-operation. We are also always there to cooperate, whenever our language, literature and culture needs us.

Jawhrani: What do you think while doing such deeds?

Dilip Lakhi: We believe in oneness of God. People may give him different names. Some may subscribe to Jesus, some to Mohammad and some of us to Ram, Shanker or Jhulelal. But we see one God in all human beings and therefore we cooperate with everyone who needs it. We just believe in humanity.

Jawhrani: Sindhis are scattered throughout India and have adopted various customs and traits from every state. Applying Henna, from Punjab; Durga Puja from Bengal; Ganpati Puja from Maharashtra; but how can we educate our younger generation about our community deity Lord Jhulelal?

Dilip Lakhi: We should regularly hold 'Jhulelal Festivals' at different places. We should involve the entire Sindhi community actively in such endeavours to create awareness about our old traditions among the youth.

Jawhrani: Can't we bring 'Jhulelal' idols during Chaleeha festivals into our homes and then immerse them like we do in the case of Ganpati festivals?

Dilip Lakhi: I completely agree with you. We should put these suggestions before the community for implementation, at the earliest.

Jawhrani: It is a known fact that you are the highest taxpayer in India. How did you become an Amitabh or Shahrukh of the diamond business?

Dilip Lakhi: People think that jewellery business is the exclusive prerogative of Gujarati people and that too from Palanpur. Many of them ask us how we chose this business, whereas I feel we should ask them the same question. We have been in it for generations, whereas the Gujaratis, have been active in this business for just two-three generations. People used to project a doomsday scenario, saying Gujaratis won't allow us to prosper in this business. But our hard work, honesty and co-operative attitude have ensured the cooperation of Gujaratis and we have prospered despite stiff competition. That is how we have reached this position today and are the highest tax payers in the country.

Jawhrani: Every Indian should pay his taxes honestly. Is your honesty the secret behind your success?

Dilip Lakhi: Whenever a man thinks about tax-evasion, he loses the focus on his business. He wastes more time on tax- evasion, than doing actual business. Even otherwise, whatever we pay as taxes is used in the development of our own country. Besides tax compliance also ensures sound sleep.

Jawhrani: Today, preservation of the Sindhi identity is a cause of great concern. How can we ensure its survival?

Dilip Lakhi: Concerted and united efforts are needed for that. We should hold Jhulelal festivals, wherever five-ten thousand Sindhis live. We should take our literature there and establish Jhulelal temples. Also, we must celebrate Sindhi festivals so that the participation of our youth in these festivals will rekindle their interest in 'Sindhyat'.

Jawhrani: Can this objective be achieved through Sindhi music and theatre?

Dilip Lakhi: We should encourage all such activities to achieve our objective. But, I think Sindhi festivals will be more effective towards preserving our culture, language and tradition.

Jawhrani: Do your children speak Sindhi at home?

Dilip Lakhi: They make efforts to speak Sindhi to a great extent but yes Hindi words are also included in their conversations.

Jawhrani: What do you foresee for the Sindhi community in times to come?

Dilip Lakhi: The future of Sindhi community is bright, because a Sindhi always thinks about the welfare of others. We not only consider Sindh, but also Hind our own. Water takes the shape of the vessel in which it is stored. Likewise, we should become one with the people where we reside. Our ancestors always believed in cooperation and doing good to others. So we should continue with the same policy. We can help ourselves by helping others, and this way preserve our identity and culture.

Jawhrani: Thank you Mr. Dilip, I'm sure, we would certainly benefit from your experiences and noble thoughts.

Dilip Lakhi: Thank you.