

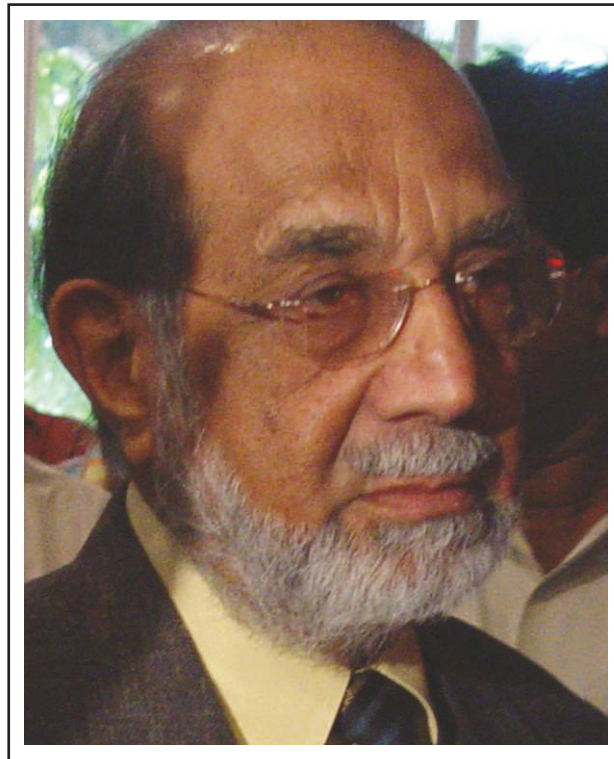
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By Shubhashish

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Niraj Bajaj reminisces about his days with Viren Shah



Our families go back over 90 years. Viren Shah's father, Jeevanlal Shah, was closely associated with my grandfather, Jamnalal Bajaj.

Gandhiji was the common link between the two.

In 1931, Jamnalalji had invited Gandhiji to stay in our house in Wardha, now known as the Sewagram Ashram. Since then, Virenbhai has been family for us. He was very close to my uncle, Kamalnayan Bajaj, and my father Ramkrishna Bajaj - they were like brothers. They grew up in the environment of the freedom struggle and were inspired by the spirit of simple living and high thinking.

He was a young 86 – fit, disciplined and full of life. For me, Virenbhai has been a father figure---always giving me love, guidance and blessings. He was close to every individual of all generations of the Bajaj family. His favourite was Rahul Bajaj. Though there was such an age difference between the two, they were very close.

Virenbhai had the unique quality of having a close association with four generations of a single family. Both our children looked forward to having breakfast with their dada.

He lived more than a full life. Ten days ago, he was in Pune for the cremation of my sister-in-law (Rahul Bajaj's wife). He seemed to be in good health and told us about his coming trip to Jordan.

Mukand Ltd was not started by the Bajaj and the Shah family. Someone called Mukandlal Agarwal came to Gandhiji and said he was in need of financial support. He added he wanted to sell his small operations called Mukand Iron and Steel Works.

There was no due-diligence, etc, in those times. Gandhiji asked them to buy; his was the final word. That is how they got the company. Virenbhai had a very long association with Mukund and, for a long time, he was chairman of the company. In 1999, when he became governor of West Bengal, he resigned as chairman.

He was always smiling and joking, even in tough situations.

He was one of the rare people to have been successful as an industrialist, a politician and a statesman. He was president of IMC (Indian Merchants' Chamber) and Assocham (Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India), a member of Parliament and governor of West Bengal.

I would call him a true patriot. We will really miss him.

(Niraj Bajaj is CMD of Mukand Ltd and director of Bajaj Group)