

A man with rare Insight

R.K. Mishra

India has several renowned historians and eminent scholars. There is no dearth of people who admire Mahatma Gandhi and derive inspiration from his life and works, though their numbers are dwindling. We also have a growing number of men and women who are working in the villages, with sincerity and dedication for changing the life at the grassroots of Indian society.

Dharampalji was all this, no doubt. But he was something more. He was a man endowed with a rare insight. He was an inspiring example of simple living and high thinking, and had an extraordinary gift of cutting through the plethora of disparate information and identifying the core. He would extract the essence shrouded in distracting details. Suddenly, a new window will open up, refreshing rays of new light would pour in and illuminate and transform the way we look at events and their meanings.

He was a scholar with a difference. Generally, scholars learn from other scholars and pass on that knowledge to their students and their peers. Dharampalji was different in the sense that he had internalized the process of learning from the people, assimilating their wisdom, and then to make it available to those who would care to benefit from it.

Dharampalji was passionate that Indians should know themselves. He believed they could do so only by regenerating the vastly emphasized capacity to look at Indian society with unblinkered sights, without allowing their perspectives to be clouded by the haze of western description, definition and interpretation of India. This was a daunting task. To pursue achieve this objective required swimming against a strong current that has consolidated its hold on the “educated Indian mind during the last several centuries. But Dharampalji pursued this goal with remarkable persistence, defying all odds. The fact that Dharampalji could influence a large number of people – ranging from men and women in the world of science to constructive workers in the villages, from academicians and political leaders to eminent religious personalities, speaks volumes of the sweep of

his vision and the depth of his understanding. In fact, he made tremendous impact on a whole generation of young people that came in contact with him. In that sense, Dharampalji was an eloquent example of the enormous power of ideas.

A chance encounter with people in the villages of Rajasthan triggered in him the quest for knowing the fundamental difference between what people really think and what they say. His life, thereafter, began a relentless search to discern real India, an India that was submerged in the dust of colonial construction of our history and society. In that process, he developed amazing incisiveness to shifting the grain from the chaff. His enquiring mind ignited in him the fire to discover how the Indian society was managed before its encounter with the British.

Dharampalji enabled us to reflect on the true meaning of modernity. He discovered and articulated the running thread that connects self-governance, self-reliance and self-respect. He transformed our way of looking at Indian history. He made us proud of India not by taking recourse to meaningless jingoism; but by discovering concrete examples of the outstanding achievements of Indian mind in wide range of areas, from science to education, from statecraft to organizing a vibrant decentralized society. He outlined an alternative vision of Indian renaissance. He was not an isolationist. On the contrary, he was keen that Indian mind should rediscover its links with the rest of the world, specially the Asian nations.

Unfortunately, his life was a constant reminder of the difficulties of the Indian intellectuals in engaging in team work over a sustained period. But this is not surprising. Kabir's followers fought over his ashes. They could have done a lot to preserve and further his message if they could avoid frittering their energies in unnecessary divisiveness. Also, Dharampalji's experience with political leaders of all hues is an unflattering comment on Indian elite's treatment of genius.

Fortunately, he has bequeathed to us an invaluable legacy, specially his research on Indo-British encounter. He has indicated numerous lines of fresh enquiry which need to be

pursued with commitment and vigour. There is enough work for numerous scholars for several years. The brilliance of his insights provides an illuminating ambience. Dedicated effort can enable us to discover priceless gems of knowledge which could trigger a movement of genuine self awareness among our young people and help in building a powerful and modern India on the foundation of its culture and civilization. This is not a plea to be trapped in the past; it is an invitation to build a strong and confident future. To engage in this quest and to take Dharmpalji's work forward is one of the most important and intellectual tasks before us.