

# KESHUB MAHINDRA LIVES ON ...

Photograph courtesy: Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd.



**Chairman Emeritus of the Mahindra Group**

**(9 October 1923 – 12 April 2023)**

**Keshub Mahindra believed that business must be involved in “development”. And, this, of course, continues to hold true. He was deeply concerned that past failed policies had left many villages without water, food and housing. Mahindra believed that industry must, therefore, supplement the efforts of government, writes Tarun Das**

**T** HIS PIECE IS ABOUT the ‘Legacies’ of Keshub Mahindra. What he believed in, what he said, what he practiced – and how all of this continues to be very relevant, now and in the future. Some of the points are based on personal conversations over the years and some on his speeches and interviews. Keshub Mahindra is a permanent fixture in our lives because his ideas and principles are eternal.

At a personal level, he was soft-spoken. Made his views known without raising his voice. And, what was very special was his modesty. He was always, ready to apologise. To say sorry. This reflected his deep humility. A true learning for all of us.

What gave him “Joy”? In his own words, to “create”. Create products, create jobs, create new ways of making progress. But, always “Create”. This quality of Keshub Mahindra is the story of his life and work, which brought Mahindra and Mahindra to the size and stature it achieved and is an example for all.

One aspect of his character was reflected in an answer he once gave to a questioner who complimented him on building a great Brand, Mahindra and Mahindra. His response was vintage Keshub Mahindra, “I did not create the Brand. The Brand was



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built by our people in the Company. They are the Brand Builders." Credit for others, not for himself.

He spoke of every company being "People Centric". They are the engines of growth in the company. Not the person who is the face of the Company. And, this growth moves in different ways and different directions. Quality of the products. Quality of the service. Quality of the Reputation of the Company.

Corporate Governance, which included ethics and values, was an especially important issue on which he spoke and seriously practiced. It was a core principle of his and it showed in the way he ran and led his company or participated in the boards of other companies. For many, Corporate Governance is just a slogan. For Keshub Mahindra, it was a core principle which gave Mahindra and Mahindra the reputation and respect from all. Ethical Governance were the words he used. A continuing agenda. Another inspirational characteristic of this amazing man were the words he used with younger people and colleagues, "Please Dream. Impossible Dreams can come true". This motivated many to think beyond themselves, to have higher and higher aspirations, and to achieve. Dreams could and would be converted into reality given the vision and the application. This was his belief. This is his legacy.

He was questioned about "retirement", an issue that everyone faces at some time or the other, in their lives. Keshub Mahindra used to emphasise the importance of an outside interest, beyond work, so that post-retirement, life would be rewarding.

In his own case, his interests were multiple – photography, reading, writing, gardening and, yes, cooking. Again, a lesson for all.

He believed in "Long Term Relationships". For him, friendship, partnership, were not short-term issues. Lifelong relationships were the order of the day and, often, since he was older, he became both a friend and a Mentor. Friends turned to him for the huge value Keshub Mahindra brought to them, listening, interacting, guiding, and always doing so gently.


Going beyond the personal issue, to industry matters, he believed that business must be involved in "Devel-

opment". And, this, of course, continues to hold true. He was deeply concerned that past failed policies had left many villages without water, food and housing. Industry must, therefore, supplement the efforts of government.

He said that "making money" was not the be-all and end-all of business aims and objectives. He looked beyond to the contribution industry could make to society as a whole, especially the poor and particularly the rural poor. He believed that money must be a means to contributing toward a better life for all. His commitment to "Openness" and the "Open Economy" was strong and firm. But, he was also conscious that there was no such thing as "free competition". Even the most powerful economies imposed "anti-dumping duties", etc. he said. This was the reality.

Competition is good but national interest is paramount. He spoke of the misunderstanding in the media about the 'Bombay Club' which had tried to point out how issues such as labour laws, interest rates, inflation, corporate regulation, etc. need review to make Indian industry competitive. He once said, "we should have spoken and explained to the media" and that the issues presented to government had been well-received.

He was of the view that there was no need to be afraid of MNCs but that the policies of the previous 50 years needed to be recognised and corrected. Industry needed the right to change practices, using the best technology, so as to be globally competitive. He was a great believer in the automotive sector as a multiplier for development and growth, but not as a luxury industry as past policies had seen this sector to be. He appreciated the changed policies reflecting this understanding.

When he spoke of India, he spoke of its great strengths, its huge promise and potential and a very positive future. So, Keshub Mahindra definitely "lives on" because whether we speak of his personal attributes or his views on industry, responsibility or competition, or the future of India, his messages are strong and true even after he has passed away, and will be so, for long after. This man was a legend in his lifetime and his thoughts, words, life will remain with us forever. Keshub Mahindra lives on. 

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