



EXPERT
VIEW
TARUN DAS

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KM: A LEGACY OF ETHICS, WARMTH, PHILANTHROPY

I am privileged to write this tribute to an outstanding man whom I have known since the 70s, about 12 years after he became chairman of Mahindra & Mahindra. This was an extraordinary man of many facets. I shall focus only on nine, which for me, are pre-eminent. In doing so, one is trying to be specific, prioritizing the really key issues.

First and foremost, he was a man to trust. He meant what he said. He followed a straight course. His word was his commitment. And, he trusted others though sometimes they let him down. Trust was a big part of KM—with it came respect for him. With it came admiration. With it came loyalty. A rare quality—Trust. This is unique in the world of business and beyond. Trust is not just rare. It is largely invisible. But, in KM, you could Trust.

Second, he was a man of vision, clarity and farsightedness about the nation, Indian industry, Indian economy and huge potential. In his time, the economy and industry were micro-managed by complex laws and regulations, but KM saw through the cobwebs. The clouds. The chains. His vision for India and Industry was clear and firm. He had faith in India's future even when policies and processes did not go the way they should have. He believed in the promise of India.

Third, he was a Manufacturing Pioneer for India. Taking over as chairman, Mahindra and Mahindra, within 16 years of Independence, he built a manufacturing empire against all odds. Today, India is working to emulate his example by reinvigorating manufacturing and taking the sector to a new level. KM did just that 50-plus years ago. A pioneer of building manufacturing from scratch. Manufacturing has always been complex and continues to be so. Hence, many do not understand all that is involved in manufacturing. Against this backdrop, within this difficult environment, KM made manufacturing happen.

Fourth, KM was a driver for liberalization, deregulation and opening the economy. He was not afraid of competition. He was not afraid of the world of industry coming into India. He had self-confidence, and he had faith in his team

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of professionals to “deliver”. This was not a business leader seeking protection! And he built a great group of engineers and executives who carried Mahindra & Mahindra forward. He was a constant believer in his colleagues, his executives, his engineers and his workforce. The name of the company gave the impression that it was a family business. But, truly, this has always been the case, and Anand Mahindra continues this policy to give space and opportunity to professionals.

Fifth, he was a nation builder, an industry builder, and an institution builder. He thought of nation first. He thought of industry, and he also thought of Institutions, of industry or otherwise, to be strong, effective, and competitive. And he worked to make all this happen in whatever he could and wherever he could. This was a leader with a very wide vision, touching on many aspects of development and growth. KM understood that there was a process involved in building anything long before others did. And he strengthened processes wherever he was involved so that the outcome was always sustainable.

Sixth, He was a strong man with firm views, not afraid to express these. But he was also a listener and a learner. He gave time to people (like me) to connect, converse, and seek greater clarity. The outcome was eventually his own view, clear and concise, firm and fair. This was an outspoken man coming from a community of industry which is not known to be outspoken.

Seventh, this man was a “giver”, not a “taker”. He was sought after for his generosity of spirit and thought. He was sought after to serve on the boards of some of the finest Indian companies. There was a universal appreciation for what he brought to the table and the contribution he made. Keshub Mahindra practised social development and philanthropy long before the 3-letter word “CSR” was invented! This was an added dimension to quite an incredible business leader whose work spanned several decades.

Eighth, he was a man of values and ethics. The gap between industry and society is huge. But, here was an exception to the general rule. A long way away from the beaten track of the private sector. KM stood out, as J.R.D. Tata had done.

Ninth, he was a man of charm, caring and warmth. Where does one find all these qualities in one person? But KM had these in abundance. His smile was worth a million rupees. His concern and caring for others were always constant. His warmth was infectious and all-embracing.

Keshub Mahindra, a very special man, business leader, Indian, whose quality spread all around him.

Tarun Das is former director general, Confederation of Indian Industry.

<https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/remembering-keshub-mahindra-a-visionary-nation-builder-manufacturing-pioneer-11681323975581.html>

Keshub Mahindra: A Legacy of Ethics, Warmth, Philanthropy

4 min read . Updated: 13 Apr 2023, 12:15 AM IST **Tarun Das**



Veteran industrialist Keshub

Mahindra (Photo: Mint)

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