

DR. K.L. SHRIMALI (1909-2000)



Dr. Kalu Lal Shrimali was a distinguished parliamentarian and an educationist. He also served as Union Education Minister for Government of India. He was born in December 1909 at Udaipur and had his education at Banaras Hindu University, Calcutta University and Columbia University, New York. He served as Minister of Education in the Union Council of Ministers from May, 1955 to August, 1963. Dr. Shrimali represented the State of Rajasthan in Rajya Sabha from April 1952 to April, 1956 and from April, 1956 to April, 1962. He was associated with several educational and various social welfare organizations. Dr. Shrimali was editor of "Jan Shikshan" a monthly educational magazine and had a number of publications to his credit. He was awarded Padma Vibhushan in 1976 for his contribution to education. Dr. K.L. Shrimali also served as the Vice-chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University from 1969 to 1977.

BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY
CONVOCATION ADDRESS
BY
DR. K.L. SHRIMALI
IN 1963

I am deeply indebted to you for having invited me to address the Convocation of your University. Being an old Boy of this University, I consider it a special honour to have received this invitation and take special pride in the degree you have conferred on me. It is difficult for me to communicate my feelings to you on this occasion when I return to my alma mater to receive a degree after a lapse of thirty-two years. My mind goes back to those days when the founder of the University Mahamana Malaviyaji was attempting to give a concrete shape to his vision of a temple of learning to revivify the spirit of Indian culture. What a magnificent dream it was and with what ability and devotion the founder had executed his plans? The Hindu University was meant to epitomize in itself all that is sublime in Hindu religion and culture. It was the founder's wish to make this University an instrument to revitalise those ideals and values which give a distinctive character to our way of life.

India has made great contributions in art, architecture, literature, religion and philosophy in the past and we have every reason to take legitimate pride in our achievements. When other societies were in a barbaric or semi-barbaric stage, the Indian civilisation blossomed forth and its fragrance spread far and wide. In its earlier stages, it showed tremendous vitality. Whenever it came into contact with other civilisations, and there were many such occasions, it assimilated all that was worthy of assimilation and rejected those things which did not suit its genius and culture. India had to face invasions from the Greeks, Parthians, Huns and Scythians and it is remarkable that in spite of these inroads the edifice of the Indian civilisation remained secure and stable. It was only at a later stage when the Indian civilisation had exhausted itself through incessant creative activity lasting over two thousand years, that it began to resist all influence from outside and withdrew itself in its own shell. At the time of the Muslim conquest the Indian civilisation was already showing signs of exhaustion and decadence. It had lost its earlier flexibility to adjust itself to new situations. When the British came, the Indian civilisation lay completely prostrate and helpless and was ready to imitate with a servile fidelity the ideals and forms of the western civilisation. This great

civilisation which had stood the onslaught of time was now enveloped in complete darkness. But the dawn came and India regained her consciousness. The period of renaissance, which began with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, witnessed the awakening of the spirit of India which culminated in the personality of Mahatma Gandhi who brought about not only political freedom but also moral and spiritual regeneration.

India has entered a new phase of development after independence. She has accepted the democratic form of Government and through its five year plans has undertaken a gigantic programme of industrialisation and economic reconstruction. In order to give equality of opportunity and social justice to her people she has accepted the socialistic pattern of society as its goal. She is also now building up her military strength to defend her borders. In view of these developments one may ask: What will happen to India's spiritual heritage? Will she preserve it or turn her back altogether to it? Will she also follow the cycles of success and failure, conflicts and war, characteristic of western societies? It is necessary to face these questions boldly, so that we may be able to mould our future more purposefully.

The modern world has become so complex and interdependent that it is not possible for any society to isolate itself from the rest of the world. New discoveries in science and technology are bringing about revolutionary changes in the minds of men, their habits, beliefs and attitudes and in their social and political institutions. It is not possible for any society to remain unaffected by these changes. The barriers of distance between the distant parts of the world have broken down and ideas are transmitted through the newspaper, the radio and the film with great speed. Events which take place even in the remotest corner of the world are bound to have repercussions on our part of the world.

There are different ways in which an old civilisation may react when it is confronted by the impact of a powerful and dynamic, civilisation. Being conscious of its own superiority it may reject external influence altogether. The society then becomes rigid and closed and develops institutional forms of resistance to check outside influences. This tendency was found in our society in medieval times when it began to resist influences from outside. Its caste structure which, at one time may have performed some useful function became a rigid instrument of resistance. When a society develops this kind of negative attitude it loses its vitality and decadence begins. The civilisation, may also take an altogether opposite attitude and may begin to imitate slavishly the ideals and

forms of a foreign civilisation. Indian society when it came into contact with the European civilisation began to imitate it not only in external forms, dress, food, manners and customs but also in ideas and thoughts, and people began to look down upon their own culture. When there is blind imitation, people lose their initiative and creative power and allow themselves to be dominated completely by a foreign culture. But between total rejection and blind imitation there is another posture which a civilisation may adopt. It may reject what is undesirable and unsuitable and may accept and assimilate forms and ideas which are compatible with its spirit. This seems to be the most desirable course for us to follow if we want to retain the vitality and creativity of our civilisation. We must not shut our doors and windows to the outside world. We must continue to receive fresh ideas from outside but instead of accepting them blindly we must assimilate them and give expression to them in a creative form so that they may no longer remain foreign elements but become true expression of our spirit. Similarly we may reject all such ideas which may have deleterious effect on our growth. There should be a creative response to every new situation and idea. In this way our civilisation will continue to grow and in all matters dealing with human life, art, religion, literature, social and political institutions, it will give expression to its own characteristic forms of life, making full use of ideas and knowledge received from outside. We are bound to be influenced by the governing ideas and problems of the western world, by its ideologies and its conflicts. Instead of running away from them we must face them squarely and find solutions which would be in consonance with our own ideals and values. Freedom, social justice and economic equality are some of the ideas which have shaken the world during the first half of this century and continue to exercise a powerful influence over the minds of people and their social and political institutions. We have also been influenced by these ideas but under the leadership of Gandhiji we gave them a distinctive turn and our struggle for independence which was carried on a high moral plane was without any hatred or ill-will against the foreign rulers. The efficacy of the method of non-violence was due to the fact that it re-echoed and revived the spirit of ancient India. If we continue to meet the new challenges in the same spirit, we shall repossess ourselves and make our own contribution to the solution of the problems which confront the world today. The most important thing for us then is to rediscover the spirit and ideals which have moulded our civilisation during the course of centuries.

The edifice of Indian culture has been built on the foundation of a few fundamental concepts. It recognises the spirit as the supreme principle which governs the whole universe. The aim of human existence is the progressive growth of the finite consciousness towards the Infinite, the Eternal or the Universal Being. There is no fixed path for the realisation of this goal. The Supreme being manifests and fulfils itself through hundred fold ways and each individual soul is one with the Supreme Being and therefore each individual person can realise the divine nature of the self by removing the veil of ignorance which hides the real nature of the self from us.

To the sophisticated modern mind these ideas may appear to be fantastic. But if we give up these concepts, how are we to determine the goal of human life? Life loses all its significance when man begins to think that there is nothing higher or nobler to aspire for and mere physical existence is the be-all and end-all of life. If we give up the spiritual conception of life, human effort and sacrifice for the attainment of high ideal become futile. Man will continue to remain engrossed in the needs and desires of his physical being and there will be nothing to lift him out of his egotism, ugliness and ignorance. Indian culture provides a motive for the continuous development of man towards perfection. What greater aim can there be for the life of man than to grow through an inner and outer experience till he can live in God, realise his spirit, become divine in knowledge, in will and in the joy of sublime existence ?

The spiritual ideal of our culture holds good not merely in the realm of metaphysics but will also help us in curing the maladies which afflict our society today. The one feature of our national life about which we all seem to be greatly worried is national disintegration. Society is torn by narrow loyalties of caste, religion, language and region. This weakness can be overcome only by holding to a high spiritual ideal which would transcend our narrow interests. In the past also it was this ideal which provided the unifying factor in the diverse elements of Indian culture.

Some people think that the spiritual ideal of Indian culture stands in the way of material progress. This is altogether a mistaken notion. The spiritual ideal in our culture does not ignore the physical needs of man. Man can attain spiritual liberation (*Moksha*) only after he has fulfilled three other purposes of life-Kama, Artha and Dharma-relating to his physical and economic needs and his duties and responsibilities to society. In Buddhism there was a sharp opposition between the

impermanence of life and the permanence of the eternal and exaggerated importance was given to asceticism but the synthetic spirit of Indian culture soon recoiled from it. In the *Vedas*, the *Upanishada* and the *Gita* there is no negation of life. Man is expected to perform his duties in this world and then grow out of physical and mental ignorance into spiritual self - knowledge. There have been many failures in the long history of our civilisation but they were due not to any defects in our spiritual ideal but to the wrong application of the ideal to the facts of life.

The present and future needs of our society may necessitate a revision, modification and reconstruction of our ideals, but it will be disastrous to turn our back to our past heritage. There are many ideas and forms which will have to be recast in a new mould; many practices and institutions which have dishonoured and degraded our civilisation will have to be discarded; many superstitions and dogmas which have grown round our religion will have to be rejected. But there is no need for us to reject the values which have given stability to our society. At a time when western societies, threatened with total annihilation by the demoniac forces of their own creation are groping for higher and nobler ideals to uplift them out of the present chaos, should India give up the ideals which have stood the test of centuries and which still have the strength and vitality to meet the challenge of modern times? The valuable gems of knowledge and wisdom which she had acquired during the course of centuries can still illumine our path and we need not look for light elsewhere.

This University has a special responsibility to equip her students with a knowledge and understanding of our culture and a deep and abiding faith in its values and ideals. The graduates going out of this University will be required not only to protect and preserve this treasure but also to add to its wealth by their own creative work. It is in this way that they can enjoy immortality—

विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते

May I thank you once again for your kindness in inviting me to this function. Let me assure you that nothing has given me greater pleasure than to share my ideas and thoughts with the young brothers and sisters of my *alma mater*. May they succeed in life and bring glory to the motherland.

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