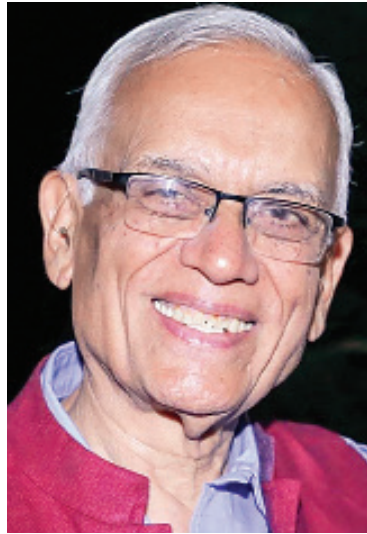By *Krishan Kalra*

An Agent of Change

AN ENGINEER turned IT specialist, Shugan Jain had a successful professional career. At 60, with children settled overseas, he had an inner calling to become self-reliant and also empower others. He gave up all economic activities; started learning about the true meaning of self-reliance; went back to school for MA and PHD degrees to study the Thought Process of Indians – particularly Jains – and started using 'education' as a vehicle to achieve his mission.

In 2005, he started the International School for Jain Studies –ISJS, (www.isjs.in) to promote values of equality, equanimity, non-violence, pluralism and giving/sharing – pillars to be self-reliant and helping others minimise their conflicts and sufferings. The idea behind ISJS was to train researchers and faculty from American universities so that they could promote these further. He invited them to India for residential and experiential summer schools and trained over 1,000 scholars till 2022. Jain philosophy is now being taught by ISJS alumni in over 50 universities of America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Current enrollment to these programmes is about 1,000 annually with growing movements like plant-based food and waste minimisation for environment protection with emphasis on education for an attitudinal change to study and work rather than seek charity, co-existence for sustainable peace and development.

In 2012, he developed a programme 'Teachers for Peace' (TFP) for K-12 schools in the USA with the objective to prepare a cadre of teachers who could learn these values – equanimity, non-violence, pluralism, giving/sharing – and use them to enhance learning, discipline and conflict resolution amongst schools in the USA. Altogether 220 teachers have been trained under this programme. Simultaneously, he adopted four heritage schools in Old Delhi, catering to over 2,000 students, including his own *alma mater*. Over time these schools started decaying and by 2000, almost 100 per cent of the students (boys and girls) were coming from families at the bottom of the social pyramid.

As a 'change agent' Shugan took several steps like:

- (**a**) scientific assessment of the schools through a professional consultancy
- (**b**) intensive teachers' training based on TFP
- (**c**) effective O&M
- (**d**) attitudinal changes of the management towards EWS students by inducting educationists on the school boards
- (**e**) based on the impact of 'Unto the Last' by Ruskin and Antyodaya concept in Jainism, he initiated activities to develop a feeling of pride and self confidence amongst students and teachers to inculcate thinking for 'making a difference in the life of the weakest students'
- (**f**) enhanced interaction with the government to resolve outstanding issues of teachers and
- (**g**) aroused a 'sense of belonging' amongst the rich alumni to contribute financially.

As a result of his painstaking efforts, there was significant upgradation of the classrooms, computer labs, library and laboratories as well as extracurricular activities, health check-ups and career-oriented sessions. Staff rooms were made pleasant and friendly places. He also developed a Value Education Programme, which is now being taught in many other schools all over India.

The results are amazing as seen in better attendance, academic and cultural attainments of students, willingness of teachers to give more at the two main schools with 1,600 students. Being Aided Schools, both are running under strict government rules. Today these schools have become perhaps the finest in their areas and students are winning national and international awards and many are pursuing higher education in colleges in Delhi. **BW**

> **Education is a major contributor leading to lack of inclusivity. Thankfully there are many unsung heroes doing valuable work for narrowing the gap – Shugan Jain (83) is an eminent example**

The author is member, Managing Committee, Indian Cancer Society Delhi and former member Governing Council, Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute & Research Centre. He is past president of the All India Management Association