

Editorial

Why Think Independently?

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'



"I would never die for my beliefs because I might be wrong"
Bertrand Russell

"Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it?"

Asked Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher in one of his essays.

This is a puzzling question after experiencing all the vagueness and confusion that underlie our ordinary ideas.

After a closer scrutiny of the current political turmoil, it seems difficult to understand what to believe and who to believe. A lot depends on the influence of our acquaintances who tend to shape our belief. While growing up in India, my acquaintances (which also included educational materials) instilled in me that everything was invented in ancient India and the west simply stole those ideas from us.

Similarly, the liberals in this country think that anything said by the conservatives is wrong and it must be opposed and proven wrong at all the cost. The same applies to the conservatives when it comes to dealing with the liberals. Can it be true that we may be drawing wrong inference from our acquaintances? We know that on very many subjects different people hold different

incompatible ideas, hence some beliefs must be erroneous. Since erroneous beliefs are often held just as strongly as true beliefs, it becomes a difficult question how they are to be distinguished from true beliefs.

One way to look impartially in this matter may be the possibility that our ideas don't have to conform to our acquaintances' because the later may not have taken any opposite in account. "Minds do not create truth or falsehood. They only create beliefs." If there were no beliefs, there could be no falsehood and no truth either. Truth and falsehood are correlated. Russell stated, "In fact, truth and falsehood are properties of beliefs and statements."

Thus, we should know that there is no reason to suppose that only one coherent body of beliefs is possible. That's the benefit of independent thinking. An independent thinker can look at any action critically and can take the bad with the good. Every purposeful action has unintended consequences. We can always reduce the severity of unintended consequences by tweaking our action. In management, we call it control. All I know is that there are no perfect measures and no guarantees in life.