

An Ordinary Man with Extraordinary Vision: Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya

Abstract

"Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who spent his energies and life for the cause of education. In his message on the eve of starting of Banaras Hindu University wished ".....It is my earnest hope and prayer that this centre of life and light which is coming into existence, will produce students who will not only be intellectually equal produce students who will not only be intellectually equal to the best of their fellow students in other parts of the world,.....".

Keywords: Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Banaras Hindu University, Extraordinary Vision, Education System etc.

Introduction

Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (*December 25, 1861– November 12, 1946*) born at Allahabad, Madan Mohan was the son of Pandit Brij Nath, a highly respected scholar of Sanskrit of his time. Even during his college days, as a student of the Muir Central College, Allahabad, he took keen interest in public activities. Religion and education were, however, of special interest and he dedicated himself to these till the end of his life. While being a man of action Pandit Malaviya placed the greatest reliance on the spread of learning and scholarship.

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Mahamana Malaviyaji at this moment is highly desirable when country needs greater emphasis on honesty, sincerity in nation-building activities. His concept of creating B.H.U. as "Sarva Vidya Ki Rajdhani" was remarkable.

Extraordinary Vision

An ordinary man with extraordinary vision, Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was a nation builder, who rendered manifold services to the nation. Malaviyaji was distinct from many other leaders of his time, mainly because of the gift of his visionary outlook, his ability to see and think far ahead of his times.

Mahatma considered him as an elder brother and would refer to him as "Maker of India". Jawaharlal Nehru called him "A Great Soul, one of those who laid the foundation of "Modern Indian Nationalism". His most ambitious projects and one whose realization was described by Mahatma Gandhi as his chief contribution, was the founding of the Banaras Hindu University.

In Mahatma Gandhi's words he was also the King among Beggars, for by his intense efforts, he collected as much as 14 million rupees in 1910 (worth 25000 million rupees in 2011 based on the price of gold) for establishing the Benares Hindu University. Today it is the largest residential university in Asia.

Extraordinary Personality

Malaviyaji's extraordinary personality was due to a number of his exemplary qualities like-- his clear objectives in life, many bold ventures in early life (that forecast the coming of greater events), his visionary gift of looking far ahead of times, his practical efficiency of a karmayogi (considering 'work as worship') in many fields, and the importance he gave to values in life.

Malaviyaji had many dynamic qualities to his advantage, like—a strong leaning towards the spiritual/ dharmic way of life, a clear background of the cultural, spiritual, social and political history of the country, conscientious hard work to get complete detail and acquire mastery over any situation, marvelous memory, surgical analysis, sound reasoning, incisive logic, powerful arguments, persuasive convincing, educational pioneer, a silver-tongued orator, a national leader, a four-time congress president, a social reformer, a religious leader of secular order,

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a fiery journalist/editor, command of languages, pleasing personality and above all a great patriot with a set of basic values. These strong assets (mental, intellectual, spiritual) helped him to develop a super sense, which made him a Visionary!!

Malaviyaji's oft-quoted aim in life clearly indicates his extraordinary personality, very different from most of the persons. Two of his many famous quotations spell out his objectives in life – "I have no desire for Kingdom, no desire for Heaven, no desire for Moksha. The only desire I have is to mitigate the sorrow of the living beings who are ridden with sorrow" (from a Sanskrit shloka) and his own utterance during a speech – "I want to shine light into the darkness before people's eyes". In the first saying, there is his genuine concern for the sufferings of the humanity and the utmost sacrifice that one could imagine. In the second, there is his solution to the problem of suffering, by 'shining the light' where darkness pervades. This solution for a way out of the mundane sufferings of the ordinary men appears to be as simple as lighting a lamp in the path of darkness. But intrinsically, it has the undertones of the highest philosophy, which says that 'knowledge of the self' is the only way for liberation from all sorrow and sufferings.

He also declared "I am the priest of humanity, I do not believe in caste and creed in front of humanity" and boldly stated: "At home ours is Brahmana Dharma, in our group it is Sanatana Dharma, in the society it is Hindu Dharma, in the country it is the Dharma of freedom, and in the universe it is the Manav Dharma".

In this spirit of love for humanity, he was instrumental in passing resolutions like- "Dalits have the right for education, drawing water from public wells, mixing with others and to enter the temples" and declaring "Women also should work for the country and its welfare... Till the time they cannot take a lead, the country cannot progress" etc. The great Visionary had clearly foreseen the problems and had also prescribed a wonderful formula for harmonious living.

Are we really prepared to emulate him in all such aspects of his basic personality? His methodology may not be replicable but these of his qualities are certainly replicable at all times. We could also respond to the present challenges successfully, may it be in the field of education or in any other field of social/national interest, provided we emulate the above mentioned qualities. With such qualities many in their own field of activity are responding to the present-day challenges quite successfully.

Spiritual Face of Malaviyaji

Malaviyaji was such a noble 'sage', who vibed with the sufferings of the common man and used high philosophy as if it was a simple soothing balm to mitigate the pain. Dr S.Radhakrishnan expressed while referring to Banaras Hindu University: "He has lighted a lamp here, whose light will penetrate far into space and time and will not be put out, by God's grace, as long as civilization lasts".

The real worship is in thinking, visualizing and behaving the way the hero did. In our traditions it is said 'Shivo bhutva shivam yajet'; meaning thereby

that you can worship and become hero-like only by becoming like him and not by merely his remembrance or puja or following mechanically his methodology of work.

Malaviyaji's extraordinary greatness lies in the successful achievement of a rare objective in life.

Making of BHU

If you wake up any Indian in the middle of the night and say 'Madan Mohan Malaviya' he is sure to exclaim 'Banaras Hindu University' (BHU). His efforts to develop multi-disciplinary institution at that early stage of development with limited resources and enormous constraints are still praiseworthy arranging finances by donation and planning the minacity campus. Today, the importance of multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies is well recognized worldwide, in view of greater possibility of emergence of new ideas capable for development of new technology in various directions useful for the society. That is why even today B.H.U. is rated amongst the top-ranking universities in the country.

Let us therefore first understand the fundamental and eternal principles based on which Malaviyaji responded the educational challenges of his times. Why, how and in what way he could start, develop and sustain BHU to provide the required man-power for the development of our nation? The methodology of his times may not be replicable now. What is that we need to emulate from his life?

Primarily his sterling character was responsible for the success he achieved. Secondly, his total commitment to the cause of setting up BHU was responsible for his success. Thirdly, he could inspire and get hold of highly intelligent and qualified people to come and join its faculty on whatever remuneration was offered to realize Malaviyaji's dreams. Fourthly, he was aware of the poverty and lack of resources in certain section of the society that was posing hurdles for them in pursuing education then at BHU.

The idea of a Hindu University was mooted in a meeting held in 1904 at Benares and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya gave up his practice at the Bar and launched his mission to build the BHU in January, 1911. Almost at the same time, there was another proposal of Dr Annie Besant for establishing a university at Benares under the name of "The University of India". In 1907, she had submitted a memorandum for the grant of Royal Charter for the establishment of the University.

In April 1911, Annie Besant and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya met and decided to unite their forces and work for a common Hindu University at Benares. A society under the name, "The Hindu University Society", was formed with Maharaja Sir Rameshwar Singh Bahadur of Darbhanga as its president and Sir Sundar Lal, a Judge of the Allahabad High Court, as its Secretary. Its office was opened at Allahabad on January 1, 1912. The then British Government of India had required, that a sum of rupees fifty lakhs must be collected before the scheme could be put into effect. By the beginning of the year 1915, this target was achieved with the great dedication and efforts of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya.

There are many interesting anecdotes as to how he collected the funds. He went from town to town, met many rich people and traders to collect donations. Initially the Maharaja of Benares was reluctant to donate the 2760 acres of his valuable estate in Benares for the BHU. But Malaviyaji pleaded with him and succeeded.

Malaviyaji then went to the rich Maharaja of Dharbanga. As he listened to Malaviyaji's appeal the Maharaja was spellbound. He not only donated fifty lakhs of rupees to Benares Hindu University but also pledged to work for the noble cause during the rest of his life. Malaviya was deeply moved and shed tears of joy. The Maharaja of Dharbanga kept his word. With Malaviya he visited many states and collected huge funds for the University.

Malaviyaji went to the Nizam of Hyderabad (then reputedly the richest man in the world) to request him for funds. There are many versions of his appeal to the Nizam. One version says that the Nizam was furious, "How dare you come to me for funds and that too for a Hindu University?" He roared with anger, took off his footwear and flung it at Malaviyaji. Malaviyaji picked up the footwear and left silently. He went directly to the market place and began to auction the footwear. As it was Nizam's footwear, many came forward to buy it. When Nizam heard of this, he became uneasy. He thought it would be an insult if his footwear were to be bought by someone for a pittance. So he sent one of his attendants with the instruction, 'Buy that footwear no matter whatever the price be!'

Thus, Malaviya managed to sell the Nizam's own footwear back to him, for a huge amount. He used that money to build the Banaras Hindu University.

The whole University grew as one family under its head Malaviyaji. But due to infirmities of age finally in 1936 he decided to retire from the Vice Chancellorship and succeeded in securing the services of Sir S Radhakrishnan to take up the task of Vice Chancellorship. The silver jubilee of the University was celebrated in January 1942. A special Silver Jubilee Convocation was held on January 21, 1942 and Mahatma Gandhi delivered the address in Hindi. It was the last occasion when India saw the two great leaders Mahamana Malaviyaji and Mahatma Gandhi seated together surrounded by a distinguished galaxy of nation leaders.

"Great as are Malviyaji's services to the Country, I have no doubt that the Hindu University constitutes his greatest service and achievement and he has worn himself out for the work that is dear to him as life itself..... Everyone knows that there is no greater.

The natural boldness in taking up new ventures and the sheer dominance of vision, thought, determination and organizing capability were the reasons for his 'unbridled enthusiasm' during 1905-06, when he was planning for a new university. The university conceived by Malaviyaji was not only grand but unique in many respects.

It was the first university to plan for holistic education combining the western science and technology with the eastern knowledge, giving

importance to formation of character teaching university' was new (the five universities existing then were merely examining universities).

It was planned as a denominational institution, but open to all castes and creeds and not a sectarian one. Malaviyaji's great qualities (of 'self-confidence, power of conviction and determination') once again came to the fore in this 'brave new venture'—of starting a big university not with the help of the government finance or of a few select rich donors but with the support of the people from the length and breadth of the entire country .

Lokamanya Tilak was utterly surprised to hear of Malaviyaji's grand scheme, which appeared as utopian! Noting that Malaviyaji was then in the thick of freedom movement and his own profession in law, Tilak asked whether he would be prepared to devote his entire life time for the mammoth project. Malaviya ji had no hesitation in declaring on 1st January 1906 of his intention to leave his legal practice to devote his entire life for realizing his dream university.

For him 'Free India' was almost certain, but he wanted to create a strong 'base' for building Modern India (in the form of a big university) much before India became free. Bubbling with his enthusiasm, Malaviyaji used to explain the plan of the university to friends, guests and even to strangers travelling in the train. Once his friend got upset with his 'mad obsession or stubborn perseverance' over what looked an utopian project and commented caustically "You have not built a small school and you are talking about a big university!"

Great men are those who contributed something unusual in the upliftment of their society in their own times. In the land of Vedic and Upanishadic wisdom India was rated as backward in education in the 18th and 19th century under the British slavery and domination.

Mahamana quite rightly understood this lacuna in terms of modern scientific and technological understanding of the world. But at the same time he was also aware and quite rightly proud of the Indian cultural ethos that was necessary for the overall development of a human being, both materially as well as spiritually. He therefore amalgamated both these to create modern educated Indians to make India ultimately a great nation in the modern world.

The Challenges in Education System

The challenges in the field of education then were quite different from the present day challenges in the field of education. Now educational approaches are becoming fairly universal and there is not much left as characteristic of any society or nation. This is because the human race as a whole is not only coming closer-to-gather but getting interconnected on an unprecedented level to know each other more intimately and to know as to how human kind as a whole should progress.

"India was once a super power"- this was a statement given by a high level government bureaucrat of one of our neighboring countries. It was in fact. An apprehensive statement in terms of geo-political and strategic considerations, addressing world nations. "mind you, India was once a super power", meaning thereby that given a peaceful and

favourable climate. India will once again become a super power, when, we (they) all will have to live at its mercy. That is a pointer towards the potential of our country to become a super power! We were a super power not because of our might of arms and army but because of being a super knowledge society.

But, we are no more now near to even a knowledge society. The change had come because we forgot our 'sastras/science'. Leave alone the great teaching and learning traditions, especially of Vedic and Upanishadic period (during sixth century BC?) when civilization was just dawning on the rest of the world, we started Takshashila, a grand edifice of education.

Thereafter, during fourth and fifth centuries AD, two more universities, Nalanda and Vikramsila respectively were established in our country. Great Masters taught in these universities and they attracted students and teachers from far and wide. Great Master of knowledge turned out of these universities and turned the country into a super knowledge society commanding a great deal of respect and attraction for our country from around the world. For centuries 'the world looked to us with an intense sense of respect, awe and wonder especially because of being a super knowledge society.'

The word about an "educationally superior, philosophically perfect, culturally and materially rich status of India spread around and aroused the interest of many leading them on voyages of discovery to reach our land. It was this quest to reach India on sea that led them to discover a whole new world- Americas, Australia and other unknown parts of the world. People arrived in legions by caravans and ships especially in the medieval and post medieval times and the traditional educational system started feeling the pinch with such a rush of men and women of different languages and cultures.

Muslim rule got established and thereafter came many others from the European shores leading ultimately came many others from the European shores leading ultimately to the establishment of British colonial rule.

It was under the British colonial rule the traditional Indian education system based on a time tested concept of learning and teaching- 'sraavanam, mananam and nidhiadhyasanam' (which approximately translates into 'listening the shruti, repetitive reciting and singing the shruti, and contemplating on it to know the ultimate') and the mother tongue (Sanskrit) of our motherland were left to the winds.

Our country lost its voice and vogue of learning and teaching, and, we were forced to learning and teaching, and, we were forced to learn under a new system in a new language. This is the singular reason why we lost our supremacy in education and are now lagging behind the rest. The main accent of education during British rule was on producing servants out of us conversant in English to serve 'the masters'.

There is view point, that to bring many more of our people under the umbrella of education we require at least few thousands more of colleges and a

few hundreds more of universities!! Driven by an imperative of giving a least the three R's- reading, writing and arithmetic- to the illiterate masses of our country, the successive government of Independent India embarked upon setting up schools in every nook sans a thought to the quality of teaching and learning at that (school) level which ultimately feeds the higher education. Still, unfortunately our school education is not up to the mark.

Quality was given a go-by and quantity became the target. With no clear policy on quality, quantity targets are being achieved; but, to what end? With the roots weaker, our tree of knowledge couldn't fully bloom, flower and fruit. With the result, now, out higher education especially in the universities is so weak and poor less said the better about it.

Faculty are the most visible faces of the higher education structure, as they constitute a single major group which is responsible for both research and teaching and performance of the teachers alone (Biyani, Current Science' v84, March 25, 2003). The same fact is projected in Prof. Yashpal Committee Report (2009) that emphasizes; quality of teaching is the best indicator and a key determinant of the overall quality of institutional life." This is exactly the reason why, more than the quality of students introduced as inputs in to the university machine, the quality of teachers running the machine is the basic prerequisite to bring quality in education. Because, it is expected to be well within the capacity of a teacher to mend, mould and make even a poor pupil into an able person. It is for this reason utmost care has to be taken in the matter of recruitment of teacher into the higher education system.

It is here as our universities falter in the process of recruitment, drastic change in the policy of recruitment is needed to be introduced if possible countrywide or at least in the case of all central institutions. It can be through an all India level examination and interview similar to civil services and other examinations conducted by Union Public Service Commission, at least, in the central universities if not in all-India universities. Anything less than this, there is ample opportunity to misuse and misrecruit. Or else, the best way to call the bluff of the interviews in the process of selections of teachers in the higher educational institutions is to beam the interview proceedings out for public view and scrutiny.

Now, with this background, let us have a look into some important aspects of teacher, teaching and administration. If these three elements in a university system work in order, it is possible to produce students who are intellectually the best. But if the two key components-teaching content and the human component- are deficient in their content and functioning respectively or are not overhauled with changing needs and priorities, either the system would reach a high degree of entropy with very little left within the system to work to produce the intended product. After all, quality of the student depends on quality of teaching.

If in our country, higher education is in a pathetic condition. It is solely because of teacher first. So, something drastic must be done in this respect to

reinvent and reinvigorate higher education. At this juncture, it would be in the fitness of things to reproduce two quotes for Prof. Yashpal Committee Report (2009), " (i) in the composition of the faculty, the representation of regions other than the one in which a university is located can serve as a valuable means of accessing we commonly notice, (ii) Any reform of higher education must give the highest priority to attracting good teachers. It is important that the universities attract talent from diverse background, and take care not to encourage inbreeding."

Let us go back to the beginning on the question of 'forgetting our sastras'. Here the word 'sastras' does not refer merely to the large body of knowledge it refers to the science of generating knowledge.

Whatever were the challenges, he faced them successfully. But the same approach may not bear the same results. We now need to understand the challenges of our times and get inspired from him to evolve creatively the necessary responses to meet these new challenges in education at the present.

"Out of the past is built the future. Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that, look forward, march forward and make India brighter, greater much higher than she ever was." Swami Vivekananda.

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