

**To Them I Bow Down**  
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**Secretary, Odisha State Branch**  
**Akhil Bharat Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal**

*'Life is nothing, death is nothing, hunger nothing, cold nothing. Glory unto the Lord – march on, the Lord is our General. Do not look back to see who falls – forward – onward ! Thus and thus we shall go on, brethren. One falls, and another takes up the work' – said Swami Vivekananda, whom the Akhil Bharat Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal has placed before it as the ideal and source of all inspiration and as the true guide for the youth for moulding their lives to bring personal fulfillment as also to serve their motherland. Responding to his call for nation-building through man-making, the Mahamandal has been continuing its onward march for the last 45 years, since 1967. We shall be celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the 'Creator of Modern India', as Netaji Subhas has said, on 12 January 2013.*

I am now reminded of one conversation which we had with the senior most founder of the Mahamandal, its first Secretary and the present President, our most revered Nabani-da (Sri Nabaniharan Mukhopadhyay), at one State Level Youth Training Camp at Guamal in the district of Bhadrak in Odisha. He said – *'When we started the Mahamandal and were contemplating on the noblest of the objectives it has taken up and the spontaneous response it was getting from the elites and the youth, we thought, perhaps during our life time we would be able to see a noticeable change for the better in India. But alas! Now we feel, after about thirty years of struggle, that it is not going to happen. Many more should join the movement and many lives are to be dedicated for the work continually, and then only we may hope to see some change.'* What he said was truth and nothing but truth. But those of us who are associated with the Mahamandal for long years do sincerely feel that the Mahamandal has served as a beacon light for our own lives and provided us with a true understanding of Swami Vivekananda and has given us a chance to become an instrument in the work for which he laid down his life. Many venerable, sincere workers of the Mahamandal have left their mortal frame after decades of dedicated service in the organization, but, true to the spirit of Swamiji, we have not looked back. Under the stewardship of persons of most sterling and exalted character, who are with us, aging but never becoming old, we have continued our march, and the movement is gaining momentum day by day and is spreading from centre to centre in many parts of India. Nevertheless, the exemplary lives of those soldiers of Swamiji, who have passed away, need to be recounted time and again as our source of inspiration and to strengthen our resolution. I had not got much opportunity to mix with many of them very frequently, but the few souls with whom I had the privilege to be in touch occasionally – I bow down to them with utmost reverence, and to them I dedicate the following few paragraphs.

I met the first President of the Mahamandal, Prof. Amiya Kumar Mazumdar, who is now no more with us, during the Annual All India Camp of the Mahamandal in 1971. Thereafter in such annual camps only I used to meet him. Even though he happened to be a very learned and distinguished philosopher and educationist of all India fame, he was

extremely simple and humble. Not only his lectures made us spellbound, but also his cordial personal dealings with us were joyous and illuminating. He had an astonishing power of delivering thought provoking, flawless, powerful lectures with abundant clarity, wonderful vocabulary, absolute serenity, and wave-less pitch. Later on I learnt the significant role assigned to him by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur, in organizing the birth centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda in 1963.

I remember one interesting incident that happened at one of the annual camps. In the evening lecture session one respected speaker became overwhelmed while speaking and said that ‘we Indians have nothing to learn from other countries...’ Prof. Amiya Kumar Mazumdar was present on the dais. Immediately after the lecture he stood up and corrected the misgivings, quoting Swami Vivekananda’s message elaborately, where he had advised the Indians to learn science and technology, organization, etc. from the Western countries. He was not concerned as to how the invited speaker would take it. Rather his concern was that neither the speaker nor the campers should carry wrong notions about their ideal, Swami Vivekananda.

We in Odisha had the privilege of having him with us at Belpahar in a two-day function organized by the Odisha State Branch in collaboration with the Belpahar Unit of the Mahamandal to commemorate the Parliament of Religions, Chicago. There were ten distinguished speakers from different religious faiths, and Prof. Mazumdar presided over the meetings on both the days. His unique style of presiding, summing up the talks of each of the speakers in a most versatile manner, was expressive of the great dimension of his knowledge and understanding. We may take it as obvious, as he was a person of great learning and erudition. But I would like to open another aspect of his character, which is not less significant. On the last day of the function he received a message from Kolkata that he should immediately return home. So, we planned to put him in an earlier train. We had to wake him up at night at around 2.30 a.m. in order to take him by car to Jharsuguda, which is 22 km from Belpahar. It was winter and the fog was so dense that we could not see an object even at a distance of ten feet. Dr. Nakul Charan Samal was driving the car, and I was also accompanying them. With great difficulty somehow we could reach the station, and we found that the train was about to leave. With no time to purchase a ticket or to take the foot over-bridge to reach the platform, we had to help Prof. Mazumdar get down from the platform and cross the rails, and then climb on the other platform to reach the last coach of the train. Somehow making him seat on a second class wooden seat of the general compartment, Dr. Samal put in his pocket some money, without knowing how much it was, requesting him to get a proper ticket from the TTE and then take a taxi from Howrah station to his residence. And we got down from the train which had by then started to move. We were extremely sorry for the inconvenience caused to him at that old age and were very much anxious about his safe arrival at home. After a few days we received a Money Order refunding the balance amount, with the details of the expenses incurred by him. He travelled in that second class unreserved coach and from Howrah station to his residence by bus, keeping the expenses to the minimum. Such a man of learning, at the same time so simple, humble, loving, clean, and pure a personality, devoid of any ego whatsoever, was surely befitting the position of the President of the Mahamandal.

The Iron Man, Nilmoni Das, had been a symbol of Swamiji's message of strength, both physically and mentally. I had the opportunity of being in his company at the Annual Camps of the Mahamandal. Every step he took and every word uttered manifested tremendous strength, and his company used to drive away weakness. Even in his eighties he was never late to start the early morning physical training classes of the Annual Camps year after year. When for some reason the mike did not function, he used to carry on with his instructions to campers without mike, telling them jocularly that "*ami amaik*" (an expression with double meanings: 'I am without mike' and also, 'I am very simple and affectionate'). He published many useful books, charts etc. on physical exercises, free-hand and *Yogasana*, through his Iron Man Publishing House and greatly contributed to making youths in the country strong, following the ideals of Swami Vivekananda. He distributed pictorial calendars amongst campers, which was an object of attraction for us. Odisha State Branch of the Mahamandal was privileged to have him in one of the State Level Camps held at Belpahar.

From the day of my association with the Mahamandal I was fortunate to have the company of our most respected Bireshwar-da – Sangit Visharad Bireshwar Chakraborty. From the initial periods he was leading the Mahamandal movement in the area of music, of which he was an authority. I heard he was called the '*Sadaja-Yogi*', meaning thereby a sage who has perfectly mastered the musical notes. The Mahamandal Anthem, morning prayers, evening Aratrikam, and the various songs led by him at the Camp bore his unique touch of perfection and synchronization of the tunes and the idea behind the lyrics (*Bhava*). He was so simple and so humble! During the year 1979-80, on one occasion, I stayed at the City Office of the Mahamandal for about three weeks. He invited me to visit his home at Dankuni. I considered it a privilege and instantly agreed. One morning I reached Dankuni. I was received by him at the railway station. On the way to his home he took me to a group of small children of a school named after Swami Abhedananda, where he imparted moral education through music, also making them practise music to master the notes and tunes. It was to me a new and wonderful experience. Then we reached his home. Bireshwar-da was of my father's age. But I was simply moved when, on reaching home, he came forward to wash my feet with water in the most traditional way of treating *Atithi Narayana*. Thereafter with great love and affection he entertained me, fed me sumptuously with utmost care. When I left his home I was feeling divine joy. I found in him a burning example of true *Vaishnavic* devotion:

*“TriNādapi sunīchena taroriva sahisNunā /  
Amāninā mānadena kīrtaniyah sadā Harih.”*

- Be humbler than a blade of grass and be patient and forbearing like a tree, take no honour to thyself, give honour to all, and chant unceasingly the name of the Lord.

I could realize the truth: 'A tree laden with fruit bends low.' An ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva, he had the name of the Lord on his lips when he left his mortal frame.

During that period of my stay at City Office, I also came in close contact with Sri Chandi Charan Das, who was also an associate of the Mahamandal almost from the days of its inception. A most sincere, dedicated worker, who used to attend the Mahamandal Office almost every day after his office, he took care of the Mahamandal publications, *Vivek-Jivan*,

and other official work. His simplicity, humbleness, commitment to the cause and dedication impressed me immensely.

Now I would like to touch the life of one with whom I had the opportunity to mix very intimately, work together for the Mahamandal in Odisha. He is Sri Digambara Patra, who passed away on 23 March 2011 at 4.15 a.m. at Bhubaneswar at the age of 69, when he was the President of the Odisha State Branch of Akhil Bharat Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal. He served the State Branch of the Mahamandal as its 3<sup>rd</sup> Secretary for a long period of 38 years, from 1973 to 21 August 2010, when he was elevated to the position of its President.

Born on 2 October 1942 at village, Gadatorion, Nimapada of Puri District in Odisha, he had his early education in a village school and finally did postgraduate study in the discipline of Applied Economics from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. He joined the Odisha State Secretariat in its Education Department and held important posts. He retired from Government Services in October 2000.

From the very childhood he had an inborn passion for true leadership and in the youth he was attracted to the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. During his study at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, he used to visit Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar, and used to have discussions with monks of the Order to clarify his doubts. He had initiation (*Mantra Diksha*) from His Holiness Swami Nirvananandaji Maharaj, the then Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order. A critical study of Vivekananda literature and his association with the Mahamandal prompted him to take up the work of Swami Vivekananda in right earnest and to dedicate his whole life for working amongst the youth for nation building though man-making. He remained a bachelor and dedicated his life for service to the organization and the cause of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. He was a talented orator, proficient musician, and tireless worker with bull dog tenacity and lion's courage. He had deep understanding of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and the Vedanta literature. It was for the dedicated service he rendered for a long period that the message of the Holy Trinity reached even remote areas of almost all the districts of Odisha. Under his leadership a number of centres and study circles were started for the Mahamandal's work in different parts of Odisha, through which numerous public meetings were organized. Five meetings commemorating the Parliament of Religions (at Bhubaneswar, Belpahar, Jeypur, Chilika, and Chandanpur), thirty four Orissa State Level Youth Training Camps, and a number of Organizer's Training Camps and Regional Youth Training Camps were held over the years. Many veteran monks of the Ramakrishna Order, eminent personalities like the Governors of Odisha, Mr. Harcharan Singh Brar, Dr. Satyanarayana Reddy, Chief Justice of Supreme Court, S.J. Ranganath Mishra, Vice Chancellor of Utkal University, Prof. Manmath Nath Dash, Vice Chancellor of Sambalpur University, Dr. Nabin Kumar Sahu, the All India President of the Mahamandal, Prof. Amiya Mazumdar, All India Secretary, Sri NabaniharanMukhopadhyay, Assistant Secretary (now Secretary), Sri Birendra Kumar Chakraborty, noted educationists of Odisha and many other distinguished personalities took part in these meetings and camps.

He was deeply impressed by the call of the Practical Vedanta and dynamic spirituality as propounded by Swami Vivekananda and brought home to us through the forceful utterances of Revered Swami Ranganathananda, the 13<sup>th</sup> President of the Ramakrishna Math

and Ramakrishna Mission. He was a great admirer of the Swami and organized lecture tours of the Revered Swami when he was the Vice President of the Order, consecutively for four years in various districts of Odisha. Each time the Swami was the State Guest of the Government of Odisha. Under the banner of the Odisha State Branch of the Mahamandal, the Swami addressed 86 meetings in Odisha during the years from 1975 to 1996. It was a significant coincidence that despite serious illness, the last lecture Sri Patra delivered was at the meeting organized by Sarada Vihar Trust of Bhadrak to celebrate the birthday of Rev. Swami Ranganathananda on 15 December 2010. After that meeting, he was almost confined to bed. He suffered from cancer for the last five years of his life.

‘Confidence and faith in own self first and then in God’ was the watchword of his character. He dreamt of great functions and jumped into action, as if he had a sanction from the Lord, without caring the least for the unbelievably meager financial position of the organization, for he had the firm conviction that Swamiji’s work would not suffer for want of funds. Once he took up a work, his entire body and mind would be occupied with the thought of that work alone, and neither he would rest nor would he allow his co-workers in the Mahamandal to rest until the work was completed. He was honest to the pie. His involvement, sacrifice, dedication, and indomitable spirit for spearheading the movement in Odisha State will remain a Lighthouse for all of us for years to come.

To them I again bow down. Let these souls resting in the *Sri Ramakrishna-loka* shower their blessings on us and inspire us to emulate their examples to carry on the Mahamandal Movement in a more vibrant way by reaching the hearts of as many youths of our country as possible, to fulfill Swami Vivekananda’s dream of making them powerful instruments in his man-making mission for a resurgent India and for the good of entire humanity.