

Our National Problem and The Remedy

In our poverty-stricken Republic, as many as 47 Union Ministers own declared assets of over a crore. A report states that the average asset of ministers in this Lok Sabha is Rs 7.63 crore while that of the MP's is Rs. 5.12 crore. India Inc. now has so much wealth that high-profit investment avenues have become a bottleneck. They need land – it may be fertile and multi-crop, the farmers may be up in arms against land grabbing, there may be no proper rehabilitation scheme in place – so what? Shopping malls and educational institutes vie with each other to be lucrative. The secret bank accounts of Switzerland and various tax havens are said to be flush with funds stashed away from India by politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen. Corruption trickles down much better than economic benefits. According to a leading English daily, some corrupt constables of Kolkata Traffic Police raise Rs. 40 lac daily through bribes. For the whole country the corresponding estimate is a whopping Rs. 22,119 crore!

Since Independence corruption has engulfed our public life. The corrupt mostly get away with impunity. More so at the corridors of power. Just think of the apathy and callousness of the powerful. Two Union Ministers are reported to have stayed in five-star hotel suits for over three months in New Delhi, though at their own expense. And in relation to the austerity drive of the Union Government, one of them agreed to opt for the 'cattle class' with 'all our holy cows' while travelling by air! The memorial mania of a State Government costs billions from the exchequer. The cost is several times higher than what has been sanctioned for the State's 47 drought-affected districts. The statues erected include those of the incumbent Chief Minister, who is a self-styled champion of the most downtrodden! There is no end to such stories. What is going on in the name of public welfare? What is the remedy?

There are two approaches to our national problem. One is political, the other is cultural.

The political here stands for everything connected with the State and its governance. Obviously this is important for equitable development, economic and social uplift of the masses, spread of education and health care, and so on. Now, right from policy making to implementation on the grassroots level, everything depends on the character of the people at work. How do we get exalted characters at all levels? Certainly through the cultural method alone.

The cultural here means the 'refinement of mind' through right education. This is a continuous social input for every new generation, to ensure that all youths grow into mentally and morally healthy persons with desirable thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. This is the positive input that builds character at the young age. Good character is not formed automatically, it requires a strong input. And this is exactly the input that we have shunned altogether from our education system. Moreover, we are catering the new generations with all sorts of weakening inputs through education and media so as to distort their mental and moral growth. Therefore, as a logical consequence, we have landed ourselves where we are.

The political process is more external and curative in scope and approach, whereas the cultural process is more internal and preventive. These two processes should be mutually independent and separate, because the political process has a natural tendency to be vitiated

by the greed of power and lucre and then infect anything in its vicinity. This is what has happened to our national life.

These two processes can also be helpful to each other, when the cultural process can inject a good number of men and women of high moral character into the political arena. Then, of course, the political process assumes an altogether new dimension of selfless service to the nation. And then only will the question of character have its right place in our formal education.

Swami Vivekananda called this cultural process 'man-making'. When the process of 'man-making' is absent in a society, it cannot produce the right type of men in large numbers. Political and all other fields then suffer from unmanliness, selfishness, dishonesty, and so on and so forth. This is the core crisis today. It has to be clearly identified. No ambiguity here. The want of character has created this vacuum which is being filled up by the destructive elements. The remedy then is surely 'man-making'.

There are so few to understand this, feel this, and dedicate their life-energy for the purpose of 'man-making', that they must not divert their energy in any other vein thing. If we feel for the children labouring hard to make a living, for the millions going to bed without a morsel of food, we must unite and march on to reintroduce this process as a strong, positive force in the national life. We have to forget our petty ambitions, our egocentric considerations. Organization is the watchword. We must be like a disciplined army. Our love, our feelings for the suffering humanity will have no bounds. No distinction among us – no Hindus, no Christians, no Muslims, no high or low castes. We are soldiers of Mother India. We are determined to bring about a change. We may not live to see the effects of our work taking shape, but as surely as we live, the effect must come. History is full of evidence to prove the futility of all other methods. Let us, therefore, take up the mantle Swami Vivekananda left for us.

Young men, the Mahamandal is just for this work. It will not divert your mind with momentary excitements. It will not ask you to give up your social life and normal avocations. But it will lead you into a serious and strenuous life of work and dedication. For the people, for the Motherland – and for your own life too. But is it not the hero's way? Is it not the greatest joy? What will you choose? On your choice depends the whole future.

The welfare projects of the Union Government, including NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) and SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) are not producing the desired results due to corruption, inefficiency, and dearth of funds. The pay packs of the *babus* are, however, swelling merrily.