

The Mission of a Handful of Men

The Mahamandal has been working among the youth over the last forty two years with the ‘man-making, character-building’ ideas of Swami Vivekananda. It has spread to many States, having started in Calcutta, and now there are nearly 250 units of the organization. Several thousand young men from cities, towns, and especially villages, including very remote ones, are coming forward. They get training at the hundred-odd youth training camps of the Mahamandal round the year. They understand that the condition of the poorer sections of the country is extremely bad, that the nation as a whole needs to be built anew. And that it is the duty of the youths to accomplish this task, which begins with the building of their own life and character. On the strong foundation of character alone a nation can be built.

The Mahamandal is steadily working for a youth movement. It is in the freshness of youth that life can be given a desired shape. The vitality of youth may be channelized to alter the course of history. Vivekananda, therefore, bequeathed upon the young men of India the great task of raising the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden and rebuild the nation. He was chosen by his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, for this task. He struggled all his life for that, and, what he gave us in course of that struggle, India is yet to recognize and assimilate. But, even after he left his mortal coil, his spirit works, as he assured, through *the soldiers of his army* : the spirit of burning love and sacrifice for others, the spirit of universal embrace and of indomitable strength. The Mahamandal thinks he is the true leader and ideal of the youths.

The Mahamandal intends to reach every young man of the country – to bring the heart of Vivekananda to him. It aims at the balanced development of their head and heart. The effort is producing encouraging results. So, the efficacy of the scheme has become a matter of conviction for us. This success is, of course, very small, compared to the vastness of our population. To make a palpable impact on society, we must grow in number and strength, and that is happening – away from media glare. Yet, Vivekananda was emphatic on the need to create solidarity of purpose and a well-knit organization. He never considered sheer number as a key to success. He was ahead of his time in every matter, and, like modern historians and sociologists, he knew that, in an age of decadence, a *creative minority* (a coinage used by Toynbee) alone brings change. He said, ‘Numbers do not count, nor does wealth or poverty; a handful of men can throw the world off its hinges, provided they are united in thought, word, and deed – never forget this conviction.’ The mission of the Mahamandal is to make this ‘handful of men’ for India.

This is an enormous task, no doubt. In an interview given to the *Madras Times*, he said, ‘My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions. I have formulated the idea and have given my life to it.... They will spread from centre to centre, until we have covered the whole of India.’ And he said to Priya Nath Singha, his friend, ‘What we want are some young men who will renounce everything and sacrifice their lives for the country's sake. *We should first form their lives and then some real work can be expected.*’ The focus of the Mahamandal is the first task of *forming their lives*.

The press, the electronic media, and the intelligentsia of the country have not yet deemed the work of the Mahamandal important. The basic idea of the Mahamandal is perhaps too simple to draw anybody's attention. To express it in the words of Vivekananda, ‘No nation is great or good, because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are

great and good.’ ‘So, make men first.’ ‘When there will be such men (real men), how long will it take to drive away famines etc. from the land?’

Yet, such apathy does not deter or demoralize us in the least. Vivekananda put it in the right perspective when he said, ‘It matters little whether rich men and scholars listen to you, understand you, and praise or blame you – they are merely the ornaments, the decorations of the country! – it is the millions of poor lower class people who are its life.’

It was his firm conviction that ‘the nation lives in the cottage’. ‘But, alas! nobody ever did anything for them’, he lamented. He had an immense faith in their bright future: ‘Believe, believe, the decree has gone forth, the fiat of the Lord has gone forth – India must rise, the masses and the poor are to be made happy.’ ‘Up, up, the long night is passing, the day is approaching, the wave has risen, nothing will be able to resist its tidal fury. The spirit, my boys, the spirit; the love, my children, the love; the faith, the belief; and fear not!’

He defined the mission of the movement in no uncertain terms: ‘But our mission is for the destitute, the poor, and the illiterate peasantry and labouring classes, and if, after everything has been done for the first, there is spare time, then only for the gentry.’ In the same vein he wrote from the United States to his young followers of India, ‘Feel for the miserable and look up for help – it shall come. I have travelled twelve years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. I have gone from door to door of the so-called rich and great. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this strange land, seeking for help.... I may perish of cold or hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed.’

In answer we say, ‘We have taken up the Cross, Thou hast laid it upon us, and grant us strength that we bear it unto death. Amen.’