

## Vivekananda and the Youth Movement

Modern India has witnessed more movements after Independence than before – students’ movements, workers’ movements, movements of the government employees for hiking their salaries and wages, movements of people of different occupations for fulfilling the demands of their respective groups, movements for protection of environment and tribal habitats, long term political movements for creation of new states and even for overthrow of the State, and so on. Normally movements spring from some demands. Governments or other employers are sometimes forced to accept some of the demands in the face of these organized movements. Yet, the basic problem of subsistence remains unresolved for the vast majority. If the people of a free and democratic country are denied of their legitimate rights decade after decade, they will naturally rebel. But the questions that perturb us are: Why are they deprived of their rights even sixty three years after Independence? Why do they remain downtrodden and oppressed? And who are responsible for that? We are a free nation now. We have our own Constitution. The Planning Commission has been taking up many development projects. But, it seems as if water is leaking out through a very big hole somewhere! There is a hell and heaven gap between our precepts and policy papers on one hand and actual implementation on the other. Pessimism prevails everywhere in society, especially in the educated class. The lower classes and the half-educated are normally more positive, self-reliant, and practical.

In order to plug the hole, to bring about a fundamental reform or, for that matter, to organize a real movement in order to solve the basic problem, we have to fulfill three preconditions. The foremost is sympathy: Do we truly feel from bottom of our heart for our people? There is so much suffering in the world, so much ignorance, so much superstition. Do we feel it intensely? Is such a ‘demon of feeling’ flowing through our veins and nerves? If it is so, we have taken the first step towards the desired change. The next step is to find a way out, a real and lasting solution of the fundamental problems. Many of the old ideas may appear to be superstitious, but, in and around them are hidden nuggets of gold – the eternal truths. Have we found some means to clean the trash and preserve those nuggets? Finally, we have to ensure that our purpose is really great. Are we sure that we are not in a movement for the sake of personal gains, like name and fame, power and pelf? Only a genuine youth movement can fulfill these preconditions, for it is in the nature of the youth to love freedom and feel for all, to knock down the inertia of the established system in search for the new, and to push forward with the power of suffering and sacrifice.

A true youth movement is different from all other movements, for it has its own identity and special characteristics. Any club or association formed by some youths may not necessarily have such a distinction. For quite some time youth clubs and youth associations have come up in every locality in our country. In most cases these are controlled by political leaders. Now and then they arrange what they call cultural programmes to prove their

existence. Needless to say, light entertainment is not conducive to character building of the youth. A true youth movement must have its own ideal, objective, and working policy, which are wholly positive. The objective of a youth movement is to search for something new – to establish a new society, a new State, a new economy; to awaken a new and high idealism in the hearts of men and women and to raise them to a high level of manhood. One who longs for such an achievement, who is mad for the new, for a life of greater significance, cannot but rebel against the present and the so-called practical. The rebellious mind that has such impatience understands the true import of a youth movement; for he had a glimpse of how great life can be, peeping through the curtain of what it appears to be. Such alone have the right to form youth associations.

If other movements could quench the thirst of our heart, no youth movement would have ever been born. But it has to be born again and again through ages – to save man and the civilization from aging and decay, to keep the fire of immortal youth burning. Through ages, therefore, young minds have to fight against all wrong and injustice, against imbecility and cowardice, and against all ignorance and bondage. Some think that Karl Fischer of Germany was the first man to begin a youth movement at the end of the nineteenth century. The fact is not so. Whenever society is struck with inertia, aging, and decay, a youth movement sets in. In the hoary past the dream of a *dharmarājya* captured the Indian mind. And the Greek wanted to materialize the Utopia with an ideal Republic. Since the very beginning of human civilization and culture, man had the quest to know the purpose of life. What for does he live? What can fulfill his life and make it meaningful? Unless he gets a satisfactory answer to these questions, he cannot move forward. To him life seems meaningless. He cannot bring out his inner potentials.

It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that all the great thinkers of the world adored the youth as the dreamer and the prime mover of progress. Professor Friedrich Paulsen of Berlin University wrote in his *Introduction to Philosophy*: ‘... the youth, always eager for novelty, were gathered together to experience the moment of the awakening of the absolute spirit into complete self-consciousness.’ ‘... it believes in thoughts and their power of transfiguring reality: all revolutions have been inaugurated by young men.’ According to the famous Anthropologist, Dr Bhupendranath Dutta, the task for boys and youths is to dream, and those who spend their whole life struggling to actualize their boyhood dreams are known as reformers or revolutionaries in history. History adores those successful workers as epoch-makers. Professor Binoy Kumar Sarkar observed that the key to progress in any country in any age rests in the hands of its young men and women. Dr Motoda of Japan said that the mission of the youth is for the present, while its aim lies in the future.

In the modern era we have seen in Sri Ramakrishna a wonderful leader of the youth. Standing on the roof of a building at Dakshineswar, he called young men at the top of his voice, ‘Where are you that would come unto me? Come, please come. I cannot wait any more!’ Responding to his call, a few young men, full of life and energy, assembled around him. Under his guidance they fought against bigotry and falsehood and established the

*Ramakrishna Empire.* No rational mind with a scientific orientation can deny the significance of this phenomenon for the era that is dawning.

Sri Ramakrishna groomed Narendra, one of those boys, who would be famous as Swami Vivekananda later, to be the leader of the youth. The Mahamandal is organizing a nation-wide youth movement in India in the way shown by Swami Vivekananda. It is not a movement for fulfilling some demands. It is a movement for accomplishing the most fundamental task: man-making, character-building.

Many have now come to understand that the movements of some groups, organized in a scattered way, will never solve the problems faced by the country. We need a movement on a universal basis – for universal welfare. And the material for such a movement is abundantly available in the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji said, ‘India wants the sacrifice of at least a thousand of her young men – men, mind, and not brutes.’ For they alone create history, who are men of character – courageous, self-confident, intelligent, and selfless. It is a firm conviction with the Mahamandal that universal welfare wholly depends upon the making of such men and women.

Netaji Subhas, who could catch the spirit of Vivekananda very well, explained the purpose and programme of the youth movement, that is destined to usher in a new India, thus: ‘Many of us believe that propagation of social or political theories and ideas is essential for the rousing of the wider mass and the youth of a country. As regards the ideas of a State or a society there are innumerable “isms” in vogue these days .... The fanatic believers of each “ism” have the illusion that once they establish their own faith amongst the people, all the suffering and misery of the world would be eradicated.... But with me it is a firm faith that unless at the beginning we have acquired strength of character, rare in its human quality, there is hardly any hope of redeeming mankind by means of any of these “isms”. This was why Swami Vivekananda would say, “Man-making is my mission.” Men, true in spirit, were indeed the basic need, for without men hopes of national reconstruction or the founding of “isms” on any firm ground would be idle dreams. Hence every youth movement should primarily aim at producing men of the truest type.’