

OF LEADERSHIP AND “Y’S MANSHIP

In reflecting the views of the Bangaloreans who had attended the IC 2004 at Kochi , one of them avers that the running of the convention was, “**a national disgrace and showcased the typical Indian crab-syndrome behaviour and one-upmanship**” and, proceeds to pick on a few relatively minor lapses to justify such a sweeping generalization. He was targeting the conveners for their lack of attention mainly with regard to the trimmings of the convention rather than its substance. If he had paid more attention to its deliberations and not so much to its lack of razzle-dazzle, he would have thought twice before attempting to nitpick. But, apparently he had not. His litany of complaints sounded needlessly harsh. Notice how he goes for the performance of the Master of Ceremonies to insinuate that even Y’s lings would have done a better job of it. Surely, emceeing is not about some pretty young thing gushing over the ‘dignitaries’ by reeling off florid clichés straight out of a prepared text, is it? And then he proceeds to brand him an ‘idiot’ while savaging his diction, which he chooses to call ‘Minglish’. Would he have preferred his own brand of ‘Banglish’ to it? That’s rich! Also, comparing regions *vis a vis* organizational efficiency was nothing if not invidious. And when he so patronizingly tossed a crumb or two of approval towards the organizers, one suspects he was only damning them with faint praise.

He, however, did make two points that are certainly relevant to us. The more obvious one is that the running of the convention could have been **a joint venture** with every region drawn in to play a significant role. Perhaps, the budget projections must have persuaded the conveners to decide against it. But, by excluding the other regions, the conveners had lost a rare opportunity to draw on their varied experience in organizing conventions. If they had co-opted them, regardless of expenses, they could have forestalled this specious charge of **one-upmanship**. Instead, they would have pulled off a diplomatic coup and been praised for what we may decide to call their “**Y’smanship**”, for want of a better term.

The second point was about the marshals. It hinged on a value judgement. He was lamenting the lack of initiative on the part of –and the lukewarm welcome extended to the delegates by- the marshals who were ostensibly being groomed to lead Y’sdom in the future. He admits that there were a few among them who worked diligently, but implies that it only served to show up the others as merely going through the motions. Is it possible that they were overwhelmed by the sense of the occasion and did not have a clue on how to handle their responsibilities? That would be the most charitable explanation for their apparent remissness in their duties. Or, perhaps, they did not have it in them to assume the role of marshals, did they? No one who has seen, year after year, the shenanigans surrounding the elections of our office-bearers would expect the ‘counterfeit coins’ among them to pass muster on either count! This is a sad reflection not only on **the calibre** of such office bearers but also on **our failure** to see that appearances can be deceptive. It seems that the most unwelcome aspect of our political culture -that of unworthy leaders being foisted on us- has rubbed off on Y’sdom as well. Not long after

having chosen them, we learn to our dismay, that in having done so, we have deceived ourselves and become our worst enemy. We pick them in haste and then repent at leisure.

Seeing the increasing numbers of smooth-tongued triflers in the movement jostling for leadership positions at various levels of Y'sdom in India, and no less using questionable means to get there, the ones who believe in 'service before self' are put off by the lack of scruples that these people reveal in their scramble for official positions. Those who acknowledge the duty that accompanies every right, therefore, will have no stomach for joining this rush for office. They fear that they might thereby be compromising on their principles. But, if they risked it in the hope of changing things, their good intentions are soon seen strewn along the primrose path to privilege. Here, I would like to share with you a few interpolated excerpts from an article on Y's leadership that I wrote years ago.

"Why are some of the leaders better than others in achieving their objectives? In the next breath, we might ask why things tend to go wrong with the others. Before we attempt an answer, we need to look at two different models of leadership as also at the factors which are likely to create the differences between them. In one model, the leader sits at the top of the heap and issues orders. In the other model, which is intrinsically progressive, the leader sees himself as just a member of a team that is only committed to group objectives.

*In the first model, there is a hierarchy and, therefore, there is a chain of command. The supporters of this model believe that excellence can be achieved only if a single person with clear authority takes charge... This system prescribes that the leader must be the most senior, having been elevated to take his appointed place when it was his turn to do so. The question is, 'Does long service have anything to do with the ability to lead?' An interesting sidelight is thrown on this question by **Dr. Lawrence J. Peter** in his rather amusing, but at the same time thought-provoking, book, '**The Peter Principle**' (Pub. Pan Books). He argues that individuals in hierarchies tend to be promoted to the level of their incompetence, but by the time their ineptitude becomes apparent it is too late to dislodge them. That is why things always go wrong. On the rare occasions when things do go right, it is because they have been done by 'people who have not reached the level of their incompetence' i.e. people in the lower ranks.*

The second model suggests that a large organization can function effectively together only if they have shared objectives and a selfless leadership to give their joint efforts cohesion. A readiness to accept new ideas and to delegate work is indispensable to such leadership. It calls for a willingness not only to identify and employ the talent in others - without feeling uneasy at the likelihood of being upstaged - but also to form teams from among them and sustain a high degree of morale. This can be achieved only by a team leader who is also a team member. He is merely the first among equals. He leads by consensus, not by control.

However, such a leader can often be led astray after he has acquired a taste for the colourful rituals of protocol and privilege that go with his predictable elevation. And, what is more, by and by, he is conveniently persuaded by 'rules' to draw his team from among a few whose main claim to being inducted is their presumed experience as past office holders. This is in effect an 'old boy network' in the making, in which the privileged tenaciously continue their hold on the movement as 'advisers' or 'resource

persons'. While these seniors had earlier held office at various levels, they had managed to make new 'rules' so as to ensure their continued influence by shrewdly amending from time to time eligibility criteria not only to induct **Yes-men (toadies)** who would kowtow to them but also to exclude **Y's men** who might prove a threat to their secure positions. **This is in fact a deviant form of the second model.** In other words, it is the egalitarian model that has regressed down the 'evolutionary chain' to the old hierarchical one.

In this model, what happens is, 'the downward pressure of the Seniority Factor nullifies the upwards force of Push' ('The Peter Principle' p. 52), to pre-empt potential leaders with fresh ideas from assuming leadership (Crab syndrome?) In so doing, the seniors renege on the principle that **the office should seek the candidate and not, the candidate the office.** And, in the meanwhile, the consensus leader, who began with the best of intentions, takes the line of least resistance and goes with the stream. Remember how in '**Animal Farm**', the revolutionary motto of '**Four legs good, two legs bad**' relapses into the reactionary '**Two legs good, four legs bad**'? It is time we asked ourselves, 'Do we want to remain a society of **selfless Y's Men** or become a society of **servile Yes Men**'?...

In conclusion ...a community of self-seekers and sycophants would be hard put to find from their ranks unselfish persons to lead them. If anyone claims otherwise, he speaks with a forked tongue."

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