

## Article – 4

### Has Y'sdom regressed?

A Y'Men's convention is a gathering of people, who have committed themselves to a humanitarian ethos, not only to reaffirm their pledge to uphold what they have espoused but also to give the new members the formative exposure they need for their initiation into community service. Fine words those, but can we in the same breath claim that there has always been a convergence between our professed precepts and their practice?

I write this against the backdrop of our SWI Regional Convention held at the Travancore Club over the first weekend of June 2008. As a delegate who had attended the convention, I felt in retrospect that I ought to have stayed away from it. Hindsight they say is a perfect science but, unfortunately, I could not have enjoyed its benefit before I had committed myself in good faith to the jamboree at Thiruvalla, could I? And the sequel to it tells a tale, and not a happy one at that.

Let me hasten to add that the Thiruvalla Y's men's Club deserves our congratulations for the way they managed the event with professional efficiency. The host committees carried out their assigned duties with great aplomb. It was clear that they had given attention to every little detail that goes towards making a meet such as this a success, assuming of course that the delegates present would all observe the decorum as befitting the members of the movement. But, it takes only a few determined malcontents to disrupt even the most meticulously laid plans; and that is precisely what happened on this occasion. Why did they, all of a sudden, have to crawl out of the woodwork? These odd men out put the rest of the community to shame by their unacceptable conduct.

An example was the yobbish behaviour, more than once, of a few of them at the marquee where food was being served during the convention. In the one that I saw, these characters barged in noisily and demanded to be served food without having to surrender their meal coupons. When the members of the food committee demurred, our 'heroes' threw a tantrum like a bunch of spoiled brats. And when they failed with this bit of drama to browbeat the officers on duty, they proceeded to hurl the food and crockery that they could lay their hands on in all directions to the dumbstruck surprise of the guests present. For a moment, I had thought that they must have been disgruntled gatecrashers who were denied a free meal. But, no, I was soon to learn that they were indeed '*bona fide*' delegates who expected preferential treatment as though it was their birthright. Some birthright! I dare say, this argues the case for naming and shaming them in public.

Then there was the curious spectacle of noisy delegates making their way to the makeshift bar at the back of the marquee to indulge themselves. It is one thing to go there discreetly without drawing attention to yourself and partake of the libation on offer with quiet dignity, but it is quite another to weave your jaunty way there with your child in tow, and your dhoti hitched up well above your knees and its hem tucked in chest high, in the manner of your local tipplers on their way to your familiar neighbourhood haunts. Alas, how drastically our membership profile has changed! It is high time such people,

who leave a blot on our movement, are shown the door. And, what is more, there should be very stringent screening before new members are inducted in future.

Our elections for new office bearers and the canvassing for votes that go before them have of late been revealing an unhealthy tendency towards some clubs putting up candidates who are not exactly role models of selfless leaders. If the criterion for running for office is the large amounts of money at your disposal to run a campaign and influence voters, it would make a mockery of the concept of 'the office seeking the candidate'. Not all candidates were above board this time, either. And to make matters worse, the polling was conducted in a slipshod fashion only to cause raised eyebrows. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we want for instance the likes of publicans to run for office or whether we would rather have public spirited individuals instead to be our leaders. It would be dishonest on our part to project as a prospective candidate anyone other than a person who has been seen to have offered sustained service to the community selflessly. I believe a screening committee would not be a bad idea to vet the credentials of the candidates before they are allowed to run for office.

A detached observer of the goings-on at the convention is unlikely not to be dismayed by the manner in which the movement, in this part of the world at any rate, has succumbed to such unhealthy tendencies that have lowered the esteem in which it was once held. And it is not as if this has happened overnight. For some time now, there have been disturbing signs of how we have more and more strayed from our ideals to reach our present predicament. As implied above, there has been a growing trend among our wannabe leaders at every level in our movement "to reap where they have not sowed". We have of late been seeing how such leadership aspirants have been falling over each other to model their actions on the shenanigans of our self-serving politicians who would rather seek the limelight than selflessly serve the community they represent without seeking recognition.

In his address to the delegates, one of our very own leaders in the movement was sadly so full of his own importance that even our local politicians would have felt completely outclassed in trumpeting their achievements had they been present at the meeting. Our leader's speech was peppered with 'I', 'I' and more of it in a similar style as he waxed eloquent on how he had done this and how he had done that and, as if that was not enough, how he had garnered more support for himself from our community across the board than any of his predecessors. Why did he have to make invidious comparisons? This was in sharp contrast to the self-deprecating, humorously anecdotal, and yet thought-provoking keynote address that the Chief Guest, the Hon. Minister Mathew Thomas, had only a day earlier delivered to elicit an ecstatic ovation. The audience would have been more indulgent towards our leader if he had instead confined himself to mouthing the well-worn platitudes that one normally hears at a valedictory function. In the event, by this act of needless self-promotion, he only managed to diminish himself in the eyes of the more discerning in the audience. And yet this is of a piece with the notion of leadership which the less discerning amongst us mistakenly hold! We get only the kind of leadership we deserve. Can we claim, hand on heart, that we deserve any better?

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