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Are we truly Y's Men?

There are disturbing signs that our movement is slowly but surely losing its sense of direction, especially in the South West India Region. I cannot speak for the other regions in India, but I dare say that they may also have worries about the growing departure of the movement from the precepts that we profess to practise as a service organization. Like other service organizations, we profess to uphold 'service before self' as our principal motto, and yet we see the spectacle of an ever-increasing number of our members getting more and more worried about their appointed places in the pecking order and less and less concerned about their duty to help the needy in the larger community. Also, the principle that the office should seek the right candidate for leadership -the most deserving candidate- is conveniently forgotten, as many with questionable credentials are pushing and shoving to gain positions. Again, we Malayalees are so relentlessly opposed to discipline and good order that we turn anarchic whenever we meet. One might, with a bit of levity, be tempted to name these signs of the times 'Muralidharan Syndrome'. This lack of selfless dedication combined with indiscipline has been the bane of our movement. Where there is no commitment to the cause espoused, there is no discipline and where there is no discipline, there is chaos.

Y's Men's movement enjoins its members to "acknowledge the duty that accompanies every right". Fine words, those. To put them into practice, however, has not always been easy. For some time now, the movement has been infiltrated by a bunch of free-loaders and self-seekers whose only aim in joining the movement is, "What is in it for me?" It would seem our self-promoting political culture has rubbed off on us.

You go to any Y's-man get-together in this part of the world, be it a sports and cultural meet or a council meeting, you are more than likely to witness unsavoury attempts at seeking attention. It could be the unwarranted protest of a club for not having been adjudged the winner in a competition. As bad losers, they would even stoop to '*gheraoing*' the top officials, in order to gain undeserved recognition. Or, like a bunch of hooligans or *kavale Chattambees* they would threaten to use strong arm tactics to get their demands met. Or it could be the spectacle of members in a drunken stupor taking leave of their senses and behaving like spoiled brats. We have not forgotten, have we, the incident at the Travancore Club, not long ago, when a couple of idiots threw crockery and food around for not having been allowed to jump the queue without a meal coupon at a buffet. This is but a short step away from a regular bar-room brawl.

Behind the scenes too we see this jostling for recognition. The dubious means that are used to canvass for votes in an election are a case in point. Against strictures laid down for the choice of candidates, the house-to-house crawl as a candidate seeks support from all and sundry, the glossy pamphlets distributed extolling the virtues of the candidate, the garish flexi boards and banners put up as inducements are but some of them. There have also been instances of complimentary presents being handed out to voters by the candidates' henchmen at the polling booth. And some who are already high up in the

hierarchy, resort to unethical means to leapfrog over others, using blandishments of all kinds including wining and dining their target group in houseboats or even at exclusive resorts. Worst of all, there have also been cases of phantom clubs having been chartered, at considerable expense to such aspirants jockeying for higher positions, to serve their selfish ends and win vote banks.

As a result, many who have joined the movement hoping to serve the community, with their time, effort and, not least of all, money, are soon disappointed by the goings on, starting from the club level all the way up to the highest level. Consequently, many well-intentioned members take a backseat, disillusioned. Some even leave. Addressing the delegates at the Aarhus International Convention as early as in July 1986, Y'sm Dr. Patrick Sukumaran, past International President, is on record as having expressed this concern in these words: "We are losing members as fast as we are getting them. I feel the main reason is poor selection of members, poor orientation and poor utilization of members in the Club activities". Doesn't this argue a case for not only properly screening and vetting new applicants for membership, but also enforcing already existing mechanisms for throwing the existing bad apples out?

Y'sm T. K. Easo, India Area President 1992-'93, while laying down his office, did remark: "Leadership is another problem area. Whereas many of our leaders have justified the faith and confidence reposed in them, we have many who have craved for positions, but failed to rise to the occasion and live up to the expectations of those who made them leaders –virtually doing nothing for the movement....." Except, one may add, forming cliques at every level with an eye to the main chance.

Sadly, in our unseemly haste to increase and maintain membership levels in the name of extension, we have not only allowed interlopers in the movement but have refused to recognize and deal with such infiltrators who can only bring the movement into disrepute. We happily continue to induct new members without properly examining their antecedents. Are our top-rung leaders bold enough to tell the clubs where to draw the line? More importantly, can they themselves set an example by strictly staying on the right side of the constitutional and procedural '*Lakshman rekha*' drawn up by the movement? It is time for the movement, from top to bottom, to do some serious soul searching and take correctional measures lest our professed objectives become a lost cause. Perilous times are ahead for us, for I fear that even a Hercules might not succeed in destroying the Hydra-headed monster that the SWIR is fostering.

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