

SLIDING DOWN THE SLIPPERY SLOPE!

In the official publication of Y's Men's International, **Y's Men's World**, in its issue No.3 2010/11 the IP Fujii's message on Page 2 states *inter alia* that **'In Y'sdom, to be appointed to a post is not for honour but to serve in the forefront'**. What this short message connotes is that our movement is not about getting ahead personally, but about being true to the lofty ideal of **"Service before self"**. In other words, the appointee serves the work for its own sake and not to get a reward. To a Y's Man his duty to the movement is paramount. If he fails to acknowledge that, then he will have no claims to a Y's Man's rights. In the same issue of the magazine, we can also see IPAP Chou Byung-goo of Korea stating the *raison d'etre* of Y'sdom in these words: **"Community service is the be-all and end-all of the club's existing value. It is the duty, noblesse oblige, we Y's men should forever cherish in our hearts.**

Contrast these statements with what Y'sm K.C. Samuel, the ABE, said in the Editor's Corner on Page 2 of the Area Bulletin **Y's Times** Vol.1 No.3 about what is obtaining in Indian Y'sdom: **"...what ails our movement is the unethical race for points, as opposed to service to humankind"**. He might have added equally truthfully, **"and the unethical race for positions"**. Read this along with Y'sm APE Isaac Palathinkal's statement at the Chennai meet echoing what the rest of Y'sdom thinks about us: **"Indians are killing each other for positions"**. Since our leaders have over the last three or four years observed but have chosen not to act on the warning signs of the unseemly struggle in our movement for getting ahead in Indian Y'sdom, one may be pardoned for assuming that the top leaders too have been drawn into taking sides. Some may argue that this is an exaggeration, considering how a number of our leaders are upright in performing their roles with integrity. Maybe, they have a point. Yet, it is undeniable that at least some of the aspirants for top leadership in India have been tempted to pursue power with indecent haste, by hook or by crook, and have as a result slid down the scale of esteem that leaders do otherwise enjoy. I have therefore chosen the above title for these reflections that come 'straight from the shoulder'.

Let me now go off at a tangent and hark back to an article that appeared on 28th September last year on the editorial page of 'The Hindu' titled, **'Power, privilege, corruption, hypocrisy'** by Dr. K.S. Jacob of CMC, Vellore. He says that the people who believe that they deserve their power and position are morally pliable and are more prone to abuse their privileges. Their actions are therefore apt to be corrupt. He goes on to say that corrupt practices in a broad sense are the abuse of office and resources for self-aggrandizement. This is not necessarily restricted to financial fiddles alone. The abuse of privilege and position for bestowing undue favours on one's hangers-on or *chamchas* also comes under this rubric. Such misuse is no less a form of moral fraud than dipping the hand in the till.

The culture of sycophancy and flattery that has infected our movement has often emboldened our leaders in the higher echelons to short-circuit standard procedures and

resort to clandestine deals, to say nothing of vote-rigging, to promote their faithful henchmen or 'handmaids' to positions of prominence. They believe that their exalted position entitles them to flout generally accepted practices. The backroom deals they make are diametrically opposed to the principle that the leaders' actions should be seen to be transparent and beyond reproach. This culture of entitlement results in double standards, one for themselves and their toadies pushing and shoving for positions in the movement and the other for those who prefer to work in anonymity without any thought of personal gain. There are leaders, and then there are leaders.

Why are some leaders better than others in achieving their objectives? In the next breath, we might ask why things tend to go wrong with the others. If the protocol prescribes that the leader must be the most senior, having been elevated to take his appointed place, one might be tempted to ask the question, "Does long service have anything to do with the ability to lead?"

An interesting sidelight is thrown in answering this question by Dr. Lawrence J. Peter in his rather amusing book, '**The Peter Principle**' (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 tend to go wrong. When occasionally things do go right, it is because they have been done by 'people who have not reached the level of their incompetence'; that is, by people in the lower ranks.

In contrast to this hierarchical model of leadership, there is the egalitarian model. This suggests that a large group or organisation can function effectively together only if they have shared objectives and a leadership to give them cohesion. A readiness to accept new ideas and to delegate work effectively is the hallmark of such leadership. In addition to this, such leaders have the ability to identify talent, form teams, and sustain a high degree of morale. This can be achieved not by the top brass in a chain of command, but by a team leader who is at the same time a team member. You may be sure that he did not seek the office of his own volition, but that his office had sought him to be a leader. He is chosen to become the first among equals or *Primus inter pares*. He leads from the front, moves with the 'foot soldiers' and imbues them with a common goal. Our constitution says that there shall be but one class of members. It was for this reason that our American founding fathers indeed had envisaged a leadership that leads by consensus.

In hindsight, one wonders if they had reckoned without realising that what was only logical in their informal brotherly milieu would not be quite practicable in parochial cultures. For instance, ours is a status-ridden culture in which ostentation is sustained by genuflection. Lack of self-respect engenders subservience. It is a common sight to see our political and cultural leaders being feted on official occasions with pomp and panoply. The caparisoned elephants, the welcoming rows of nubile maidens carrying floral platters, the drummers and their accompanists and the incremental mounds of garlands that weigh the special guests down and, last but not least, their hangers-on, who in the meanwhile fetch and carry for their masters, are all of a piece. We saw this drama enacted, no doubt –thank God– without any bowing and scraping, at the Kochi International Y's Men's Convention too some years ago. Perhaps not as spectacular, but in our own meets, we too have our own version of obeisance in the form of adorning our

top echelon with brocaded shawls and ornamental headgear and what not, one after the other, as they sit ensconced in their gilded chairs on the dais as protocol and formality prescribe. It is almost as if we have regressed to the hierarchical model of leadership. The rank and file on the floor may be forgiven if they are dazzled by this spectacle and long for the day when they too can climb the dais to such 'glory'. So too can a consensus leader in India be sometimes led astray in spite of his good intentions, which may be seen eventually to have been strewn along the highway to his failure..

The kind of leadership we are heir to is only a reflection of the values and standards we cherish. In other words, a community gets the kind of leadership it deserves. It is high time we did some introspection about our outlook on life. In our pursuit of 'the good things of life', we are often unmindful of the means we use to come by these. If means are of little consequence to us and if we have as a result compromised on principles of conduct, can we expect our leaders to be as pure as driven snow in their thought and deed? For instance, if a community is willing to be led sheep-like, this way and that, unquestioningly, then it serves that community right for being fobbed off with an unworthy leader. And, so is the case with a community of time-servers and backscratchers. On the other hand, a community which sets great store by and jealously upholds the honesty and the integrity of the individual would choose from their ranks only a like-minded person to lead them. His commitment to the cause is beyond doubt because he is one of them. In contrast, a community of self-seekers and sycophants would be hard put to find from their ranks an unselfish person to lead them. If anyone claims otherwise, he speaks with a forked tongue!

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