

Part Four - Moulding Men

Chapter 35 - Be Men with Capital 'M'

Be foundation-stones - Ideal of service - Self-reliance; glowing examples - Curse of careerism - Choosing the right ideal - Avoid two extremes - Serve nation - Shake off inferiority complex, cheap imitations - Secret of world respect; our past heroes- Past tradition - What Mother wants.

ONCE, while I was conversing with a great Sadhu, the subject of frequent student strikes came up. The Sadhu remarked, "This is the bitter fruit of dinning into the ears of students by our leaders that they are the pillars of the nation, the leaders of tomorrow and so on. This, coupled with their natural immaturity, has made them swollen-headed. The right attitude to be inculcated in the young minds is of selfless service, where ego has no chance to raise its ugly head. Calling them 'pillars', 'future leaders' and all that has only roused their ego which makes them rise in revolt and indulge in strikes and violence at the slightest touch of injustice or insult, imaginary or otherwise."

Listening to those wise words of the Sadhu, I remembered an incident in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Once some of his disciples were talking about helping the poor, showing compassion to them and so on. Sri Ramakrishna came there in a God-intoxicated mood and admonished them saying, "Who are you to show compassion to them? Who are you to help them? They are the living manifestations of Narayana himself. So you can only serve them".

Be a Foundation - Stone

This attitude will generate in us the spirit of true selfless service and take us a long way in giving purity, humility and strength to our character and save us from swollen-headedness, which is the first step to degeneration. Let the stone in the foundation be our ideal. It lies there unseen, unadmired. It may not be beautiful, may not be polished; but all the same it is the base. If it moves or is shaken, the whole edifice crumbles down. More important than the central dome, more important than anything else, is that stone in the foundation. However, the stone remains there as a symbol of self-oblivious service and self-effacement. That should be the spirit with which we have to work among the people. The desire to strut about in the limelight of name and fame, to shine at the top only betrays one's lack of inner worth and weakness for self-adulation. After all, what is great about sitting at the top? Even a crow can sit at the top of a dome!

True Service

The great men of our land have always upheld the spirit of service as the highest expression of devotion to God. One such great soul has prayed to Almighty-

न त्वहं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम् ।
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ॥

(I desire neither kingdom nor heaven nor salvation. All that I desire is to remove the sorrows and miseries of living beings.)

This is the true spirit of service. The constant prayer of such a person is for greater strength and capacity to serve. His fulfillment in life is that he has offered in service all that God has bestowed upon him. He says, "Oh, God! I have emptied the *jholi* (bag) of my life at Thy feet, and therein lies the fullness of my life".

Swami Vivekananda used to say, "Be ready to bear everything for the sake of the people like the great Guru Govind Singh. After having shed his blood and the blood of his nearest and dearest, he retired from the field calmly to die in the South but not a word of curse escaped his lips against those who had ungratefully forsaken him!"

Such is the true servant of society who seeks not anything in return for himself but finds the joy of fulfillment in having suffered and sacrificed for the good of society.

Even while wiping the tears of sorrow of others, the feelings of elation or self-gratification does not enter such minds. Such perversions enter when there is no real identification with the sufferings of others.

There was an annual function of a 'Home for Destitute Widows' in Bombay. The secretary while reporting the progress of the institution expressed his gratification that every year larger number of widows were filling that 'home'. He ended with the hope that the institution would grow on like that for ever! If he had been really distressed at the woeful condition of those women, evidently he would not have prayed for there 'growing number"! The feeling of a worker with the true spirit of service will be like those of a son while serving his ailing mother. We are all children of our society and whatever service we do should be imbued with that pure and sublime spirit.

Symbols of Self-reliance

The spirit of humility and service need not make us loose our self-reliance and self-confidence. All our great men have been an embodiment of the blend of the two virtues. In fact, the two qualities are like the two faces of a coin.

Mahadev Govind Ranade, a scholar of great note in Maharashtra was a destitute in his early life. In his school days he would go to *Madhukari* (receiving food from a few homes) which was then considered honourable. He would sit in temples under an oil lamp and study. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, one of our greatest educationists from Bengal, was also very poor. It was monetarily hard enough for him even to complete Matriculation. Then he took up a job and out of his meagre earnings continued his college

studies. Self-reliance was the watchword that made these stalwarts rise to such heights of scholarship.

Then we have the inspiring example of Swami Ramatirtha. He was born in an extremely poor family. He was married early as was the custom in those days. After his completing Matriculation his father wanted him to take a job and maintain the family. But he had resolved to continue his studies. A conflict ensued and his father asked him to quit the house. Ramatirtha made obeisance to his father, asked his wife to follow and quit the house. He was aged about fifteen years and his wife about eight years at that time. She also braved the storm, having devoutly listened in her childhood to the stories of Sita and Draupadi and how they had followed their husbands to the forests. Ramatirtha rented a small room and lodged his wife there. He became a part-time tutor in a school and joined the college. Further, he was a student bound by all the injunctions enjoined on a *brahmachari*. He could not take food prepared by any woman other than his mother. So he cooked food for himself and his wife. He began teaching her also. In spite of all these privations, he was always coming out in flying colours in all his examinations. He took Sanskrit for B.A.. Till then he had not the slightest touch of Sanskrit. But he had steeled his will to pass and he came out in first class. Such are the towering personalities who rose to sublime heights of achievement on the strength of their will and determination, which carried them through all obstacles and adversities.

Truly has it been said, "Self-help is the best help". Once a villager was driving his bullock cart to a neighbouring village. On the way the wheels got stuck in the mud. The man sat cursing his fate and praying to God to get him out of the troubles. After some time, a person passing that way saw him sitting with folded hands bewailing his lot. He asked the villager to get up and put his shoulders to the wheel along with him. The cart came out of the mud in no time; then he went his way telling the villager, "God helps those who help themselves."

Curse of 'Careerism'

But what do we see all around us today? Do we find such self-effort and self-reliance in our youth? Take a student, for instance. He does not like to take the trouble of writing notes every day at home. The study of textbooks also has become out of date. He goes in for printed notes, questions and answers and tries to get them by rote. And if he can dispense with that also, so much the better. For that purpose, he moves about to see if he can get at the examination questions beforehand and sometimes does not hesitate even to copy from others in the examination hall. Or else, he takes some rounds of the Hanuman shrine! But he never pauses to think that he has to put in personal efforts to learn, to acquire knowledge. Naturally, he remains the same dunce that he was even after passing the examination.

Our educated young men hanker after easy jobs and easier money. They are after cheap careers, which are the very antithesis of self-respect and self-reliance. The same low mentality is the reason for hankering after Government jobs. Guaranteed regular monthly income, little exertion, very little responsibility, and pension after retirement - well, this

line of least resistance appeals to many. They hanker after this simplest of short-cuts to ease and comfort. How despicable is this idle 'career' for filling one's belly!

Sometimes even good and well-meaning persons get into that track and then bitterly complain of their helplessness to act up to their convictions in life on account of having become Government employees. It is like a person putting his neck into the noose and then crying out that he is losing his life! To sell one's soul by becoming 'your most obedient servant' as a short-cut to easy money is in fact a short-cut to animality. There is joy in living by the sweat of one's brow even as a 'hamal'. I know of an M.Com. who pulls a rickshaw. He prefers that life of hard work and independence to one of idleness and servility. He gets quite a handsome income too. One should bow down to such a life of self-respect and self-reliance.

Let us not become 'careerists' hankering after easy money, less effort and more comfort. Such unmanliness ill behoves the educated young men of a land, which has produced a Ramatirtha and a Vidyasagar. Let us build our life on those inspiring models blending the spirit of service with self-respect and humility with self-confidence. All our latent virtues and energies will then blossom into a beautiful and fragrant flower of heroic manhood.

Tall Talking, Low Living

Now, how are we to manifest this spirit of selfless service and other virtues in our actual life? What is that inspiring object to which we are to offer our worship and service? Is it 'humanity'? We often hear persons speaking of 'world brotherhood', 'service to humanity' and all that. But when such people come to grips with reality, all those dreams vanish into thin air. I know of a gentleman, who used to repeat the highest Advaitic saying *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma* (verily God pervades all creation) but who would draw back with revulsion at the sight of a Negro! Our educated young men cannot even bear the atmosphere of our own villages, what to speak of humanity! Now there is a cry, "Go back to villages". But who listens to that? When they see the stark naked humanity in the villages, all their tall talk gets frozen. Once a young man went to take 'up the work of village upliftment. He was accustomed to gingelly oil but the people there were habituated to linseed oil. He could not simply bear the smell of that oil. It appeared as if that horrible smell pervaded the whole atmosphere! He could not eat, he could not sleep. He could not stay there even for a day and he hastened back.

Unless we are properly trained so as to meet the challenges we cannot stand the test of harsh reality. Once I came across a young man who wanted to learn wrestling. But when he was asked to take off his clothes, he exclaimed, "Taking off the clothes and wrestling! No! No! If there is anything like wrestling with all my clothes on, then only I can". So I asked him to wrestle with mosquitoes! This is what happens to those who speak of high ideals like serving humanity. When they come face to face with its severe demands they turn back and invariably end in inactivity.

The Golden Mean

The other extreme swing of the pendulum to which people go is the mentality of "I and my family, that is all." Once a leading advocate of a place asked me, "If I cannot think of humanity why should I not think of only my family?" I replied, "Our national prosperity and happiness were razed to dust when we thought of *Brahma satyam jaganmithya* only on a superficial plane. Similar fate overtook us when we were immersed only in our narrow personal and family life. So, both these extremes - *ativyapti* and *avyapti* - must be avoided and a middle path adopted. We get that balance, that perfect poise of mind, when we take up the golden mean between the two extremes, in the form of 'nation'.

Reactionary 'Progressives'

Hence, the one idea, which can inspire us all to dedicate ourselves, is 'service to our nation'. That will satisfy both the aspects of a practical ideal - the sense of realism and the sense of idealism.

It is well known that the spirit of service will be generated only towards the object of our love, pride and adoration. The first and foremost training that we must impart to our minds is, therefore, the inculcation of feelings of intense love, pride and adoration for our national life in its manifold aspects - its religion, history, heritage, philosophy of life, aspirations, points of faith and honour.

But there are people calling themselves 'progressives' in our country today for whom all our ancient life-values appear as reactionary and harmful. Their chief argument against our values of life is its age. These neo-prophets have neo-mania. For them all that is old is bad. Since their nostrums are chronologically later arrivals, they assume them to be more efficacious. It is like a doctor advising the patient to die since chronologically death follows life! Must we substitute tube-light for the sun because the sun is old, indeed very old, and tube-light a recent device to dispel darkness?

To condemn things as useless and retrograde simply because they are old would amount to accepting the worst type of slavery - the slavery of the intellect. And yet these intellectual slaves are pleased to appoint themselves as the 'progressives' of this age. This is a sign of weakness of the mind, the absence of intellectual strength to think freely and positively, fully and fearlessly.

Mental Slavery

The second factor, which has added to this weakness of mind, is the sense of inferiority complex that we suffer in relation to the Westerners. This is an evil legacy of the days of English rule here. During the last one century or more many personalities have arisen in this land, who have striven to shake off the foreign yoke. But most of them had themselves become mental slaves to the English. A sense of defeatism, a sense of inferiority complex ruled their minds. How did this happen? The reason is simple and lies in the common human weakness of associating good qualities with wealth and power. A famous saying in Sanskrit -

यस्यास्ति वित्तं स नरः कुलीनः ।

स पण्डितः स श्रुतिमान् गुणज्ञः ॥

describes how the human mind naturally attributes all virtues, learning, wisdom and great lineage to the possessor of riches and power. When the tide of war turned in favour of the English and for a time it seemed as though we were finally overthrown, there came a period of lull and diffidence, resulting in the fostering of the idea that the victors, superior in their military prowess and scheming skill and possessed of a brave show of physical prosperity, must also needs be superior in all kinds of knowledge. That is why our people at the beginning of the British rule started aping the manners and customs of the English and voicing opinions borrowed from the West with an air of conviction. Every European ideal, however absurd, was gospel truth; everything ours, by contrast, was naturally false and foolish. Especially those learned in the Western lore, the 'educated' class, became in truth 'black-skinned Englishman'.

No wonder that such 'educated' men found no difficulty in gulping down the extraordinary absurdity cleverly propagated by the foreigner that at the root of our defeat and degeneration lay our way of life. So they began to rebuild our national life with contempt for our own culture and infatuation for the foreign ideals. The Britisher too cleverly managed to bring up such soft-peddling leadership in the country. Foreign rulers have always followed that policy of playing down the genuine elements of patriotism and bringing up a compromising group in order to tone down the fury of freedom struggle in enslaved countries.

Animality Supplants Divinity

This attitude of base imitation had a disastrous effect on our national life. It changed our very life attitudes. As we know, imitation implies a complete absence of one's inherent genius and originality in one's outlook of life. Firstly, it resulted in our forsaking the noble ideals of self-sacrifice and self-restraint in a mad rush to embrace the Western life-pattern of enjoyment and satiation of pleasures of the flesh. Western life is, after all, extrovert. Earthly enjoyment is its highest ideal. Their concept of individual freedom lies in allowing the senses full licence to have an unbridled sway over the mind, thereby making a slave of oneself to the brute instinct. We also, in our wild-goose chase of the white man's ideals, echoed his slogan of 'raising the standard of life', which simply means increasing our slavery to material things in life or, in other words, increasing slavery of man to the brute. It is this glorification of animality that has resulted in all-round selfishness and jealousy. The youth of today is getting infatuated with but one dream in life - of maximum pleasures and enjoyment.

Procrustean Bed of Politics

Secondly, having lost the cultural essence of our national existence, we fell a prey to the superficial view of looking upon politics, as the pivot of life. In line with this perverted view, our people were advised to become 'politically conscious'. This has gone

to the extent of even saying that all our life-values must be recast in the light of the requirements of politics! In fact, life was equated with politics and accordingly our *dharmā*, our language and even our history were altered to suit the fleeting shims of political exigencies. After all, politics is described as -

वाराडग्नेव नृपनीतिरनेकरुपा ।

-changing its hue and shade every now and then. It is only an arrangement, a means to serve social life. But external arrangement is not all, is not life. However, in our case the 'means' was mistaken for the 'end'. Man wears clothes according to the needs of the body. He does not cut up his body according to size of the clothes!

There is a story of a robber by name Procrustes who used to invite an unwary guest to his forest-house and ask him to rest on a cot. If the guest was longer than the cot, the robber used to chop off his extra length, and if shorter, he was elongated forcibly! That was the novel technique the robber employed to murder persons. Similarly are our leaders hammering and straining the body of our nation to adjust it to the bed of politics with the inevitable result that our age-old social life has fallen into a perilous plight.

It is well known that each family has its own deity. Some worship Rama, some Bhavani and some others Shankara as their Chosen Deity. If in the place some evil spirit or a fallen soul is installed nothing short of total perdition awaits such a family. This is what we are witnessing today in our country. Our Chosen Deity of ancient spiritual and cultural heritage is now dethroned from our hearts and in its place the Western spirit of materialism and politics installed.

'Swa' in Swatantrya

Today we find everywhere attempts to recast our life-pattern in the mould of an American, English or Russian way of life. How can we call it *swatantrata* (freedom) which has no *swa* (our genius) in it? Then it is only *para-tantrata*. If Lenin is kept as the ideal, it becomes 'Lenin-tantra' and not *swa-tantra*! In fact, protection and propagation of our national life-values, i.e., our *dharmā* and *sanskriti*, have always been held in our historical tradition as the *raison d'être* of *swatantrata*.

A wheel, in order to rotate, must have its pivot inside. If that pivot is outside the wheel, it cannot rotate. A circle with the centre outside cannot exist. Similarly if the life-centre of Bharatiya life is kept outside Bharat, it cannot survive. If anybody cherishes extra-territorial loyalties, we call him a traitor. Would it not then be a greater disloyalty to our country if a person derives inspiration from extra-territorial ideals?

Some people ask us, "What is your 'ism'? It is clear from the question that the questioners are slaves of the European way of thinking and that they have straitjacketed themselves in European 'isms'. They cannot even conceive that we too have a thought-pattern, a solid substratum of our own on which we can build an ideal national life.

We have to shake ourselves free from these shackles of inferiority complex and imitation. It does not mean that we should not take what is good in other countries. But we should assimilate those things and make them the flesh and blood of our own body. But now we are taking all those foreign things at the cost of our own vitality. Our fate will be like that of a person who is unable to digest the food thrust into his belly, and is sinking under its load.

This mental subservience to the foreigner will ruin all our natural virtues and make us a laughing-stock in the eyes of the world. There is that notorious incident of one of our ambassadors, who, while talking to the Pope, said that the world would no more be poorer even if all the copies of *Bhagvad-Gita* were consigned to the fire, so long as a single copy of the Sermon on the Mount remained with mankind! Another ambassador, another chip of the same 'progressive' block, selected a cheap cinema love song to be presented as one of our national songs to the country to which he was accredited! Fortunately for our country, the patriotic instinct of one of his subordinate staff averted the national humiliation.

Body without a Soul

A gentleman from the West once remarked, "When I came to Delhi I felt that I was not in India at all. It is just a cheap imitation of London or New York. If this continues, I feel your country has no future. It can only be a satellite, a slave of some other country." How strange, an Englishman comes to us, we talk in English; we go to London and there also we talk in English! And we pride ourselves on being 'internationalists'. This is nothing but utter lack of national self-respect, abject slavery of the mind. When Srimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit was sent as Ambassador to Russia she presented her credentials in English but it was rejected as it was not in our national language. Then the Hindi copy was presented. It was again sent back as there was mistake in the Hindi rendering. What a disgrace!

There are some eminent personalities in our country, who write and speak highly of our culture and philosophy and proclaim that we can lead the world on that basis. But ironically enough it is they who clamour for the retention of English and for the adoption of all foreign systems and customs.

In the days of our fighting against the British, foreign clothes were burnt and foreign goods boycotted. But today, after the British have left, we have not only retained their language, dress, etc., but we are using many times more of foreign goods than we did ten years ago! One can understand the sheer necessity of importing certain essential commodities not manufactured here, like certain military equipment for our armies, and medicines. But what is this nonsense of wasting crores of rupees on playing-cards, lipstick and such other worthless articles? The costly game of cricket, which has not only become a fashion with us but something over which we are spending crores of rupees, only proves that the English are still dominating our mind and intellect. The cricket match that Pandit Nehru and other M.P.s played some years back was the very depth of

this Anglicism. Why could they not play Kabaddi, our national game, which has been acclaimed by several countries as a great game?

How strange that we have picked up only the vulgar exterior of the Western civilization and ignored the spirit of national pride and patriotism that animates every one of their activities, whether in affluence or in adversity. A few decades back, in spite of all-round plenty and prosperity, England was faced with an economic crisis. The leaders of England put their heads together to face the challenge. For that purpose they decided to revive the spirit of *swadeshi*. They arranged exhibition and geared up their propaganda machinery. And the King himself was in the forefront of that movement. That King and other leaders of society set an example by themselves scrupulously taking to *Swadeshi* goods. And thus they were able to ward off the economic disaster that was looming large over their nation. We, in our infatuation for the show and pomp of Western life, have sacrificed the spirit of *swadeshi* and are inviting decay and disaster in every field of our national life.

This corrosion of our national soul has not spared even the most hallowed aspects of our life. For us marriage is a *dharmic* ceremony. But even there during the sacramental rituals, and not only at the time of reception, the bridegroom is often dressed as an Englishman from top to toe. One is shocked to see aping of a foreigner even in a religious ceremony! The same dismal humiliating picture stares us in the face wherever we go. There can be no future for a nation, which does violence to itself losing faith in its own way of life.

Our forefathers were great, commanding the respect of the world, because they were conscious of their great national ideals and their national self-respect. They would address the world in a tone of quiet confidence born out of the consciousness of their intrinsic greatness. The very term *Arya*, which they applied to themselves conveyed culture and character. They had proudly declared:

न त्वेवार्यस्य दासभावः ।

(*The Arya shall never be a slave.*) They announced:

एतद्देशप्रसूतस्य

सकाशादग्रजन्मनः ।

स्वं स्वं चरित्रं शिक्षेरन् पृथिव्यो सर्वमानवाः ॥

(*Let men all over the world, learn their lessons in life sitting at the feet of the first-born of this land.*)

Such an intense love and pride in our own national life and ideals alone can protect the true and glowing image of our country before the world today. This flame of pure patriotism needs to be lit in the heart of every son of this soil. And the warmth and

effulgence of such hearts shall dispel the darkness of intellectual imbecility enveloping our country.

Let us, with this firm realisation, press forward on the path of national rejuvenation. Let us not be carried away by the clever and often mischievous arguments that corrode the people's faith and devotion to nation. Once a leading figure of our country wrote in an article that the RSS people were 'fanatically patriotic!' We do not know what made him say like that. But so far as we are concerned, we feel that there are no gradations in *desha-bhakti*, i.e., patriotism. *Bhakti* is self-surrender, it is dedicating oneself completely and unreservedly without any thought of the self. Real devotion can never be half-way. But it seems some people cannot bear this full-blooded spirit of patriotism. It may be too hot for them. Probably they require gradations in patriotism - warm, lukewarm, and cold! Those who dare to drink to the full the cup of devotion need not be afraid or misled by such words as 'fanatical'. Let us challengingly say, "Yes, we are building that intense white heat of patriotism".

Springs of National Glory

In fact, such have been the qualities of the great builders of our society since hoary times. It is always the selfless, self-confident and devoted band of missionaries, intensely proud of their national ethos, who have roused the sleeping manliness in our nation in times of adversity and made our nation rise gloriously from a heap of shambles. Verily such men have been the true salt of this soil. In ancient times, the educated and intelligent young men came forward in an unbroken succession to serve and elevate society giving up all thought of personal comforts and enjoyments. They were the embodiment of the spirit of selfless service, sacrifice and character. They would live on roots or collect a morsel going from door to door and somehow carry on their physical existence. And all their energies were bent towards the single purpose of bringing about the welfare of the common people. They would mix with them, share their joys and sorrows, try to alleviate their physical wants and miseries and infuse in them the higher values of life. They - intelligent, the self-sacrificing hearts - were the pinnacles from which the streams of cultural and spiritual values flowed and permeated all levels of our society. They formed the perennial life-springs, that made, both these streams, i.e., of cultural sublimity and physical prosperity, flow to the brim in national life and made our nation a treasure-house of material and spiritual glory.

Mother Wants

Let us re-live those great ideals. Let us shake off the present-day emasculating notions and become real living men, bubbling with national pride, living and breathing the grand ideas of service, self-reliance and dedication in the cause of our dear and sacred motherland. Only such a band of young men fired with a missionary zeal can rouse our people to action and ward off the grave perils threatening our country from inside and outside.

Let us feel ourselves fortunate to have been born in the present trying situation. Some may deem it a stroke of rare good luck to come into the world in a nation of peace and plenty, of power and glory. There are so many in our country today, who feel in that manner and go away to America, England etc., lured by the luxuries there. But men with ring of real heroism think otherwise and thank God that during their sojourn here they are faced with hardships, scarcity, adversity and trouble, through which they have to struggle on to prosperity. In times of affluence, our life will probably mean nothing more than 'to be born, to live happily for some time and die one day'. But in adverse circumstances we get an opportunity to put forth the best in us, to test our manliness and to stand before the world as a colossal personality full of grandeur. We are offered the chance to rise to our full stature, to soar to heights beyond the highest flights of human imagination.

Today, more than anything else, Mother needs such men - young, intelligent, dedicated and more than all virile and masculine. When Narayana-eternal knowledge- and Nara-eternal manliness- combine, victory is ensured. And such are the men who make history - men with capital 'M'.