

MADHAN MOHAN MALAVIYA -1861-1946 A.D FOUNDER OF BENARES HINDU UNIVERSITY AND PROMOTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Dr. M.Ramagopal
Lecturer in History
S.A.R.M Degree College
Allagadda, Kurnool District, ANDHRA PRADESH

Madhan Mohan Malviya was a renowned educationist, a popular freedom fighter as well as a supporter of Hindu nationalism. His role in the struggle for freedom was so unprecedented that he came to be called 'Mahamana' during the latter half of his life.

Madan Mohan was born on December 25, 1861, in prayag to Brajnath and Moona Devi, an orthodox Brahmin couple.

Malaviya's contribution to the cause of education is invaluable, immortalizing him in the annals of our country's history.

The most prominent example of the importance of education in India during the early decades of the twentieth century was the consistent and widespread effort championed by Malaviya to establish the Banaras Hindu University. Malaviya wanted to set up the university because the five universities then existing in India-Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Lahore, and Allahabad—were mainly examining universities, and he felt that the Hindu community needed a residential and teaching institution. He thought that Muslim, Christian, and Sikh efforts to found their own respective universities made the need of a Hindu university even more necessary.¹ During that period, the Arya Samaj, the Servants of India Society, and the Theosophical Society were also engaged, in their own ways, in uplifting the Hindus, and Malaviya's tireless promotion of the Hindu university was a significant effort in the same direction. All these efforts were oriented towards strengthening and improving the Hindu community materially, physically, and intellectually so that it could reverse a perceived sense of decline and ultimately assume its rightful place in the hierarchy of races and nations. It was, in fact, a type of constructive nationalism based on many ostensibly non-political activities that were imbued with the spirit of self-help, and it had education at its core.

EARLY EFFORTS

Malaviya proposed the establishment of a residential Hindu University at a meeting arranged at the Mint House at Banaras, which was presided over by the maharaja of Banaras. At this meeting Malaviya proposed, for the first time, the idea of a Hindu University. Thereafter, Malaviya reduced to writing the greater portion of the

prospectus of the proposed university with a view to garner support of the Indian National Congress, which was holding the annual session at Banaras. The Congress gave its formal support to the establishment of a Hindu University.

A separate meeting was held later on 31 December 1905 at the Town Hall in Banaras, at which, besides selected Congress delegates, many eminent educationists were present. They considered and approved the prospectus of the proposed Hindu university. Soon after this, the scheme was laid before the Sanatan Dharm Sabha which met at Allahabad during the Kumbh Mela from 20 to 29 January 1906. It was here that Malaviya took a resolve to devote his life to the realization of his project.²

THE PROSPECTUS OF 1905

The prospectus of the proposed Hindu university, published in 1905, is an important document. Malaviya explained that the proposed university aimed at the 'promotion of Scientific, Technical and Artistic Education' combined with 'Religious Instruction and Classical Culture', and, quoting a phrase from a Sanskrit scripture, laid down 'that it is religion which ensures temporal prosperity and eternal bliss'.

The prospectus stressed that the proposed university was not intended to be an ivory tower isolated from society. From the very outset, it was intended to be an institution that would be strongly tied into the community to maximize its usefulness. Clearly, the university was to be a functional and practical vehicle to help improve and uplift the Hindu community. But it was also important as a powerful symbol of what Hindus could do together—a prominent and visible example of public work and public service.

The prospectus of 1905 began with an analysis of India's situation. It compared India's present situation with her past and with the contemporary situation in Europe. It pointed out that the per capita income of an average Indian was one-twentieth of that of an Englishman and was still sinking. Regarding education, the prospectus enumerated that 94 per cent of the people in India were illiterate; in UP the figure was 97 per cent, compared to 5 per cent in Great Britain and 1 per cent in Germany. Millions of people died every decade in India due to famines and diseases. It emphasized the need to study the causes of this misery. Several Indian and foreign critics blamed India's social system for her misery. They said the cause was too much religion, and according to the missionaries, 'the wrong religion'. Malaviya gave an altogether different answer: not too much religion but too little of it was the cause of India's downfall. He refuted the view that Hinduism hampered modern development by favouring mysticism. Malaviya took it for granted that values laid down in the Hindu scriptures would be useful for laying the foundation of a modern technical civilization in India.³

Notions such as Hindus 'lagging far behind' and 'not keeping pace with the times' were an important part of the ideology and discourse of the prospectus. It supported the widespread feeling of that time that Hindus had slid close to the bottom of the supposed 'scale of nations', and that if they did not begin to revitalize their community, the march of progress would forever pass them by. Newspapers in north India

were filled with comments which documented this mentality. The Allahabad daily *Leader*, chastized Indians for lacking in character and asked, 'Who prevents us from infusing into the masses the spirit of manliness, self-reliance, and self-respect?' Other periodicals referred to Hindus as 'a lifeless community' belonging to a 'lethargic race', 'cowards', and 'lacking in courage'.⁴

Pre-existing Hindu anxieties about the community's decline were clearly reflected in the 1905 prospectus of the proposed university. There was widespread concern about the miserable position of the Hindus. The establishment of the Banaras Hindu University and the expansion of education in general were seen by Malaviya as remedies for the situation.

There was a broad consensus that Indians had to take the control of management of educational institutions into their own hands. Highlighting the importance of Hindu history and promoting Hindi as a national language were some of the ways in which educational institutions could create an awareness of a strong and unifying Hindu culture. Malaviya showed that Hindus had a great historical tradition of educational enterprise at the university level and claimed that universities existed in India 'ages before the idea of a university dawned on the minds of men in Europe and so far as history records prove, in any part of the world. Several years later, in 1919, this theme was still in Malaviya's mind when he spoke of Banaras as an ancient seat of learning and of the university as a national institution to record and preserve history and culture.⁵

Malaviya took the earliest opportunity to despatch the prospectus for the consideration of the UP government. He pointed out that 'the promoters of the scheme have taken it up as a purely educational scheme and are sincerely anxious that it should be judged as such and not suffer by reason of any misapprehension that it has anything to do with any political movement.' He was referring to the demand of 'national education' made by the Extremists in the post-Bengal partition era and was keen to convince the provincial government that his proposals for a Hindu university were in no way inspired by their ideology. There was no response from the provincial government as the UP governor, John Hewett, was opposed to Malaviya's proposal. In a letter to the Government of India, the official communication stated: 'In so far as the university would be a teaching university Sir John Hewett's opinion is that there is no room for a teaching university in India. In so far as it would be Hindu denominational university his opinion was, and still is, that the creation of such a university is most undesirable.'⁶ In view of such a stand of the provincial government, no progress towards the establishment of the university could be made before 1910.

Malaviya's agreement with Mrs Besant' to amalgamate their plans on the lines indicated above soon came under pressure from his own orthodox supporters. They resisted such a joint venture out of resentment against recent developments within the Theosophical Society of India and the new ideas propogated by Mrs Besant. Giving his own version of the new situation emerging after Mrs Besant's departure, Malaviya

informed her: 'During the last three months there has been quite a flood of criticism of your views regarding the coming of a great World-Teacher and of the predominance of Theosophy in the affairs of the Central Hindu School'⁷ Malaviya was referring to the discovery of the 'future Messia' the 'coming of Christ' in an eleven-year-old boy named J. Krishnamurthy. This was the beginning of the J. Krishnamurthy cult within the Theosophical Society. Annie Besant began to propagate J. Krishnamurthy as a coming World-teacher, being an incarnation of the Buddha and Christ.

In 1910-11, a small group was formed, mainly consisting of Central Hindu School teachers and students, who pledged loyalty to Mrs Besant. The main opponents of these developments within the Theosophical Society and the Central Hindu College were Bhagwan Das and his brother Govind Das. Bhagwan Das resigned as secretary of Theosophical Society. Bhagwan Das's break with Annie Besant over the J. Krishnamurthy cult was to have a decisive influence over the developments of the Central Hindu College and its future incorporation into the Banaras Hindu University. Attacks against Mrs Besant began in March 1911 by the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal as well. The Mahamandal was working under the patronage of the maharaja of Darbhanga who put forward his own plans of a Hindu university and expressed concern at Mrs Besant's plans of projecting theosophy in the minds of the students of a new university at Banaras. Similar fears arose in the minds of Malaviya's orthodox supporters. This put Malaviya in an awkward position as he had, on the one hand, to honour the support extended to Mrs Besant and, on the other hand, to satisfy the orthodox section of the Hindus. Malaviya explained the new situation to Mrs Besant in the following words: 'Since the proposal to amalgamate the scheme of the University of India with the Hindu University was published it has met with warm support from one party and with uncompromising opposition from the other. When you left for England the opposition had not become half so loud and strong as it has become since.'⁸

Malaviya had detailed discussions with leading members of the Central Hindu College Committee on 10 July and informed Mrs Besant that the majority desire or expect that the University will be a distinctively Hindu University. The most judicially minded among these consider that the proposals which have been put forward in your letter of the 11th April last, do not ensure that it will be so and that if an amalgamation is brought about on the basis of the proposals contained in that letter, the University will fail in a large measure to enlist the sympathy and support of the Hindu Community.

Malaviya issued a statement in the *Leader* on 15 July 1911 stating that Annie Besant's petition and rules of management, even with the changes proposed on 1 'April, do not meet the requirements of a teaching university and asserted that 'on close examination it becomes evident that what both parties really want is that the Hindu University should be, both in name and in reality a distinctively and genuinely Hindu institution, the governing body of which should be Hindu.'⁹

MALAVIYA'S SPEECHES ON THE DRAFT BILL

As a member of the Imperial Legislative Council, Malaviya spoke on 22 March 1915 at the time of the introduction of the Banaras Hindu University Bill and on 1 October when the bill was finally passed by the central legislature. During the first speech, his major task was to respond to the criticism voiced in the Imperial Legislative Council that the proposed university would be a sectarian university and would foster or strengthen separatist tendencies. Malaviya's contention was that the 'University will be a denominational institution but not a sectarian one. It will not promote narrow sectarianism but a broad liberation of mind and a religious spirit which will promote brotherly feeling between man and man: He went on to say: 'I believe instruction in the truths of religion, whether it would be Hindus or Muslims, whether it is imparted to the students of the Banaras Hindu University or of the Aligarh Muslim University, will tend to produce men who, if they are true to their religion, will be true to their God, their King and their country.'

Referring to the objections against the provision for compulsory religious education in the proposed university, Malaviya said that 'to remove this provision would be like cutting the heart out of the scheme'. He further added, 'It is regretted that some people are afraid of the influence of religion. I regret I cannot share their views. That influence is ever ennobling. I believe that where the true religious spirit is inculcated there must be elevating feeling of humility. And where there is love of God there will be greater love and less hatred of man.'¹⁰

During the second speech delivered in the Imperial Legislative Council on 1 October 1915 Malaviya minced no words in expressing the need for gaining full favour and confidence of the government: 'The movement has from the start been worked in the conviction, the deliberate conviction, that it is essential for the success of the University that it should secure the goodwill and sympathy of the Government and that it should always retain that sympathy.' This was a candid admission of the larger effort of the university movement so far and his plan of action in carrying forward the development of the university in the years to come. The bill was passed on the same day and received the governor general's assent on the 18th of the same month.

By this time Malaviya had learnt his lessons well. He had come to realize that sympathy and support of the government was vital as much for the establishment of the university as for its proper functioning, particularly during its early years. The government's blessings were similarly needed for winning over the ruling princes in support of the university. Malaviya, therefore, went around several Indian states to personally invite the ruling chiefs to attend the foundation-stone laying ceremony. He issued instructions that all those ruling chiefs who were entitled to a salute were to be invited. With regard to his motives, Malaviya wrote, 'But if we invite them all even those who do not come will be

pleased with the compliment and will probably be led by circumstances to take an interest in the University and will possibly be more inclined to listen to an appeal for subscription when we approach them.¹¹ Malaviya's policy of reaching out to the ruling chiefs paid rich dividends in the years to come.

THE FOUNDATION-STONE-LAYING CEREMONY

The foundation-stone-laying ceremony of the university, held on 4 February 1916, turned out to be an official show where 'loyalty was the keynote of the function.' Apart from the viceroy and several provincial governors and senior government officials, about fourteen ruling chiefs were also present on this occasion. Giving an account of the function, the viceroy remarked:

The ceremony at Benaras was a wonderful success and I have seldom seen a more enthusiastic gathering. After the big Durbar of 1911 it was the finest Durbar that I have seen in India. The arrangements were perfect and the whole scene most picturesque. My speech was received with great enthusiasm and altogether the whole function was a great success.

The viceroy gave the following assessment of the future of the university to Butler:

It is very satisfactory to feel that this new venture in Indian education for whose birth you and I are chiefly responsible, has been successfully launched and it now remains for the Hindus themselves to make it a complete success. Should it prove to be a failure, as some carping critics seem to think it will, we cannot help it but in my opinion the Ruling Chiefs will take very good care that the whole institution is properly conducted and does not become a home for sedition and mere examining University.

It was a great tribute to Malaviya's patience and integrity of purpose that he could finally win over the viceroy who had used the most derogatory words against him in 1911 and was, for several years, sceptical of his moves to establish the university.

No one was surprised at the absence of the nationalist leaders at the foundation-stone-laying ceremony. Malaviya had purposely kept his university movement away from the political currents of the time and did not seek Congress support for his university campaign. As such, only Mrs Annie Besant was present at the opening ceremony and Gandhi appeared on the scene two days later. Mrs Besant was studiously kept in the background and not offered a seat on the dais as the organizers knew that official opinion was against her. The lieutenant governor noted that 'she was a particularly bad influence in Benaras'.¹²

In the following days, several lectures were delivered, and one of the speakers was Gandhi. He had returned from South Africa in the previous year and on Gokhale's advice had abstained from public utterances. He used the Banaras celebrations to break his public silence. Gandhi's lecture turned out to be highly controversial particularly because he chose to hit out directly at the ruling chiefs and indirectly at

the viceroy and also because the tenor and tone of his speech was unusual. He criticized the ruling princes for their exhibition of pomp and show: 'There is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of this jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen in India.' Speaking about the security measures for the viceroy, Gandhi asked, 'Why is this distrust? Is it not better that Lord Hardinge should die than live a living death?' Other subjects of his speech referred to tint life in the university, the use of Hindi, anarchism, and the behaviour of British civil servants. Gandhi could not finish his speech as the princes left the hall 'in a body'. He was interrupted earlier by Mrs Besant but had continued with the permission of the chairman who happened to be the maharaja of Darbhanga. Malaviya tried to explain Gandhi's speech in an apologizing manner but could not prevent the complete break-up of the meeting. The maharaja of Alwar, who was present at the occasion, observed, 'Gandhi exceeded the limits of prudence and good judgement' and expressed his 'unhesitating repugnance and disapproval' of Gandhi's lecture. When Malaviya heard that the Commissioner, Banaras Division, was about to issue orders for Gandhi to leave the town the next day, he found himself in a difficult situation. It was embarrassing for Malaviya to appear on the side of the authorities against Gandhi and it was expected that Gandhi would not obey the order. Malaviya found a solution. He persuaded Gandhi to leave the city voluntarily, which he did, The UP lieutenant governor's remark on Gandhi that 'there does not seem to be malice in his speech but it was all so unnecessary'¹³ was a correct assessment of the situation.

From the very beginning, Malaviya was careful to shape the newly established university as an all-India institution. He was very keen to combat the notion that the 'proposed University was a more or less local affair of our provinces. He thought of offering the post of the first vice chancellor of the university to Gurudas Bannerji. But the suggestion did not find favour with Harcourt Butler who threw his entire weight in favour of Sundar Lal and asked him to shoulder the responsibility:

I have already recorded my opinion which cannot be altered that you are unquestionably the right man to be the first Vice-Chancellor of the University. The University Bill has been passed and I think some years will elapse before the buildings are ready and the University housed and set going. At any rate, in the preliminary stage it seems quite necessary that you should be Vice-Chancellor.

Sundar Lal quietly bowed to Butler's suggestion and wrote to the latter: 'I am willing to lean to your decision. I only wrote to you what I considered my duty in the interests of the University.'¹⁴ Sundar Lal was referring to Malaviya's desire to offer the post to Gurudas Bannerji and his willingness to act upon Malaviya's advice. Butler's firm opinion turned the table and Sundar Lal and Malaviya thought it best to act according to his advice. The appointment of Sundar Lal as the first vice chancellor of the university was a clear instance of the manner in which the university authorities sought to work with the cooperation of the government.

There was no difficulty in organizing the governing bodies of the university—the court, the council, and the senate.

There were no further difficulties in initiating measures for organizing the administrative set up of the university. While making suggestions to the government for the appointment of the chancellor, the pro-chancellor, and vice patron of the university, the two major considerations in Malaviya's mind were obtaining funds for the university and the strengthening of the Hindu sentiment. With these ends in view, he canvassed for the appointment of the maharaja of Mysore as the chancellor, the maharaja of Gwalior as the pro-chancellor, and the maharaja of Darbhanga as the vice patron. The government accepted these suggestions as it always desired that the ruling princes be assigned prominent roles in the proper functioning of the university.

GIVING AN EARLY START TO THE UNIVERSITY

In March 1916, Malaviya proceeded to Delhi to settle preliminaries and obtain the Government of India's permission for an early start for the university. He considered this necessary in order to keep alive popular enthusiasm without which the huge funds needed could not be raised. Giving an account of the his visit, Malaviya conveyed the following details to Sundar Lal:

I have informed to them all why we want to have the Act put into force at once and they are quite willing to do so.... I have fully explained to Sir Edward Maclegan and W. Sharp—as also to Sir Shankaran Niar—the necessity and advantages of starting the University in the present premises. I believe I have impressed them.

The main objection of the Government of India to allow the university to start functioning was the want of accommodation in the Central Hindu College. Malaviya, therefore, decided to remove the school department in the Central Hindu College premises to another building in an effort to convince the government that 'we shall have accommodation for up to one thousand students of the University in our present premises: Thus Malaviya had his plans ready in as early as March 1916 for an early start to the teaching work of the university at the Central Hindu College premises.

As a visitor of the university, the lieutenant governor of UP was reluctant to recommend this proposal for quite some time as he had his own doubts of the wisdom of allowing the university to start functioning from the Central Hindu College. However, he agreed to accept the proposal after one year, giving the following explanation to the viceroy:

The determination of the Brahman clique who now control the University to secure their ascendancy without delay, has beaten us. They have laid themselves out at all costs to consolidate their position before the inevitable enquiry into our university system imperils it. We have no statutory powers to check them and persuasion is useless.¹⁵

The lieutenant governor assured the viceroy that the promoters of the University were getting ready to make full use of the Nagwa site as early as possible:

To do them justice Malaviya and his followers ... are desperately anxious to push forward but are equally full of the idea of imposing buildings and a worthy employment of the site on which the foundation was laid.

In this way BHU was finally established in 1916, the first university in India that was the result of a private individual's efforts. The foundation for the main campus of the university was laid by Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy of India, on Vasant Panchami 4 February 1916. Sir Sunder Lal was appointed the first Vice-Chancellor, and the university began its academic session the same month with classes initially held at the Central Hindu School in the Kamachha area, while the campus was being built on over 1,300 acres (5.3 km²) of land donated by the Kashi Naresh on the outskirts of the city.

It was with considerable diffidence that the government of India at last agreed to declare the Central Hindu College as a college maintained by the university with effect from 1917.

At the time, it had certain other considerations in mind of according permission to the university to start work at Central Hindu College in October 1917. H. Sharp, Educational Advisor to the Government of India, noted: 'Meantime Sir Sundar Lars three years' term of office is half way through. Plots are afoot to prevent his reappointment as Vice-Chancellor and it would be deplorable if Sir Sundar Lars reputation were to be injured in the public eye by apparent failure to do anything and if the university is to commence under auspices other than his.'¹⁶ Writing further on 'the present unsatisfactory state of affairs in the University', H. Sharp observed:

There are two factions in the University. One is represented by Sir Sundar Lal and the other by the brothers Babus Bhagwan Das and Govinda Das and Sheo Prasad Gupta. This party is allied to Mrs. Besant.... I understand that Sir Sundar Lal is backed by Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru and to some extent by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who, however, inclines, I imagine first to the one side, then to the other, clings to his idea of an enormous University springing up in a day with thousands of students but at the same time is always apt to be antagonised by any scheme likely to play into the hands of Mrs. Besant.¹⁷

The official assesement of the emergence of the two factions in the newly established university conceded that Malaviya did not openly support one or the other group. In fact, his effort was to bridge the gulf between them and bring about an amicable settlement acceptable to all the well-wishers of the university.

It was unfortunate that Bhagwan Das and Shiva Prasad Gupta did not choose to raise their criticisms within the university bodies of which they had been members since the very beginning, but rather

voiced their opinions in open letters to Sundar Lal. Between 19 August and 20 October 1917, three letters by Bhagwan Das were published in the *Leader* leading to considerable debate with regard to the contents and quality of education and the curricula.¹⁸ Sundar Lal's attempts to offer satisfactory answers failed to satisfy Bhagwan Das.

While Malaviya favoured immediate construction of university buildings on the new site, Bhagwan Das was of the opinion that the old buildings of the Central Hindu College could be used for the time being. Bhagwan Das and Shiva Prasad Gupta's criticism developed into a real struggle for the leadership of the university. Since the issues raised by Bhagwan Das could not be resolved to his satisfaction, he decided to leave the University for Good in December 1920.

He was a role model, and wished to transform students and youths into ideal youths, so that they are equipped with the skills of acquiring education and earning livelihood, and be infused with the qualities of enterprise, morality, renunciation, self-control and religion. His personality, biography and simplicity are sources of inspiration for all of us. He was not only founder of Benaras Hindu University but also promoter of meaningful education. He left indelible impressions in the minds of Indians forever.

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