Madan Mohan Malaviya and Banaras Hindu University

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A brief account of Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya with regard to his manifold services to the nation and his creation of the Banaras Hindu University is presented to mark his 150th birth anniversary celebrations concluding on 25 December 2012.

If you wake up an Indian in the middle of the night and say ‘Madan Mohan Malaviya’ (Figure 1), he is sure to say ‘Banaras Hindu University’ (BHU). An ordinary man with extraordinary vision, Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (25 December 1861–12 November 1946) was a celestial light who rendered manifold services to the nation in his pure, serene, simple and selfless life. He was an educational pioneer, a silver-tongued orator, a national leader, a four-time Congress president, a social reformer, a religious leader of secular order (without greed, passion and hatred), a model of lofty-minded integrity, a fiery journalist/editor, and above all a great patriot. Some continue to grow in stature as the subcontinent’s greatest creative geniuses like M. Visvesvaraya, Rabindranath Tagore and Madan Mohan Malaviya. Their 150th birth anniversary celebrations have been taking place during 2011–2012. Visvesvaraya and Tagore among others were closely associated with Malaviya and had taken keen interest in the formative years of BHU at Kashi (now Varanasi). The university had conferred upon them the Honorary degree of ‘Doctor of Letters’. Malaviya’s immortal monument is his creation of a temple of learning at Varanasi. His vision is embedded in its unique architectural layout and its content: a magnificent silhouette against the Gangetic sky at dawn with gothic pillars: Banaras Hindu University.

An eminent maker of modern India

Malaviya was a great visionary. His passion was to dispel any ignorance from our motherland, his ambition was to rekindle the ancient fire of knowledge and virtue that had illuminated this land of the Aryans in the distant past. He firmly believed that the fusion of the country’s ageless sublimity with modern science and technology could make India happy and contented.

On 4 February 1916, Lord Hardinge laid the foundation stone of BHU. Speaking on this occasion, he remarked, ‘It has seldom fallen to my lot to address a more distinguished gathering than that which I see before me today, … and so much of the flower of India’s intellect.’ During 5–8 February 1916, after the BHU foundation day ceremony, a series of lectures by a galaxy of eminent people were delivered, which included Mahatma Gandhi (who gave his first public address in India), Annie Besant, J. C. Bose, P. C. Ray, C. V. Raman, Sam Higginbottom, Harold Mann, Kaviraj G. Sen and P. Geddes among others. Raman spoke on ‘Mathematics’ and ‘Some new paths in physics’. Tracing the history of mathematics to the days of Aryabhata, he remarked, ‘… We need not look to foreign countries for inspiration. It is enough if we look to the glorious past of our own country. For, it was in India that numerical figures were invented, and that the decimal system of notation originated.’ C. M. Sogani was the third recipient of D Sc from BHU in 1928 under the supervision of Raman, who was an Honorary Professor of the university.

Honorary D Sc was conferred upon Raman in the 1932 convocation of the university. While conferring the degree upon Raman on 11 February 1932, Malaviya exhorted, ‘By your achievement in the field of science, you have already won the worldwide distinction and have raised the glory of the motherland. I pray to God that you may continue to do your work for long long number of years, and with higher and higher distinction in the world of science for the benefit of the mankind and for the glory of the motherland.’ Honorary D Sc was also conferred upon J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray at the BHU convocation held on 11 December 1933.

In his life-long work of a patriot–politician with an eminent career of an educationist, Malaviya proclaimed, ‘I am establishing a University, which will combine ancient wisdom with the knowledge of the physical sciences and technology.’ Since ancient time, we had the legacy of the ashrams of rishis, the forest universities, the Gurukulas, the universities of Takshashila (in the 7th century BC, it was a centre of excellence in vedas and arts, medicine, law and military science) and Nalanda (4th century AD; Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang studied there in the 7th century AD). Malaviya conceived of a university with a blend of ancient traditions with modern universities in the West giving courses in arts, science and technology. He wished to achieve all this in a residential university to which Lord Hardinge observed, ‘But, whether the idea of a residential teaching university be new or old, there is no doubt that it is a departure from the existing model, nor is this the only departure that characterizes this enterprise.’

Malaviya was at the forefront of the freedom struggle, with an ultimate goal of achieving freedom (Figure 2). The path to achieving this goal lay through toil and tears, sacrifice and sustained fight. In his
firm belief of a sound education as a pre-
requisite to freedom, Malaviya put in
dedicated efforts in his divine spirit. And
he made it, not substantially but in full
measure: the Banaras Hindu University.

In order to revitalize India as a nation,
Malaviya viewed the importance of feed-
ing its youth with the ancient culture and
moral food. The proposal to establish a
Hindu University in Kashi was first put
forward at a meeting held at the ‘Mint
House’ in 1904 under the presidency of
Kashi Naresh (King of Kashi). When
the Congress session was held in Varan-
sasi during 27–30 December 1905 in
Rajghat plateau at the presidency of Gopal
Krishna Gokhale, Malaviya took this unique opportunity to
discuss his proposal in such a distin-
guished gathering in the Town Hall of
Banaras on 31 December 1905.

Malaviya discussed the prospectus of
the proposed Hindu University in detail.
He had already circulated his proposal
for the ‘Promotion of scientific, technical
and artistic education combined with re-
ligious instruction and classical culture’,
to a number of leading people and emi-
ente educationists in different parts of
the country. Most of them were there to
attend the Congress session in Banaras.
One of the justifications put forward to
establishing BHU was: ‘In the present
economic condition of India, there is no
branch of education for which there is
greater need than scientific and technical
instruction.’

In order to invite distinguished schol-
ars working abroad, thereby enriching an
academic environment of the university,
Malaviya used to have frequent corres-
pondence with eminent scientists like
Ernest Rutherford, Arthur Eddington and
others. With his wide personal contacts,
Malaviya would frequently have eminent
visitors to his university: Arnold Som-
merfeld (German theoretical physicist),
Raman, Tagore, Ashutosh Mukherji,
Vivesvaraya and others.

While conferring the Honorary degree
of ‘Doctor of Letters’ upon Tagore on 8
February 1935, Malaviya exhorted,
‘Never in the discharge of my duties as
the Vice-Chancellor of this university, I
had greater pleasure than in performing
divine role in shaping modern India.

During the BHU silver jubilee on 21
January 1942 (Vasant Panchami), Malavi-
ya and Gandhi sat side by side on the
dais (Figure 3). ‘Blessed is India that has
given birth to Gandhiji and Malaviyaji.
Lucky are we to hail the two men today,’
exhorted Servapalli Radhakrishnan, Vice-
Chancellor and President of the jubilee
convocation. And as Jawaharlal Nehru
said, ‘Malaviyaji was a giant among men,
one of those who laid the foundation of
modern Indian nationalism and year by
year, built up brick by brick and stone by
stone, the noble edifice of Indian free-
dom.’ Malaviya was an eminent maker of
modern India.

Teacher of the nation:
‘Satyameva jayate’

Banaras has been housing divine men,
women and teachers of humanity since
time immemorial. Continuity of life mir-
rors here: a dip in the holy Ganges sancti-
tifies both life and death. The blend of
Veda Vyasa, Gautama Buddha (he gave
his first sermon at Sarnath) and set in
motion the wheel of Dharma,

Figure 2. British Judge Lord Sankey chairing the second meeting of the India Round
Table Conference in September 1931 with Indian leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Madan
Mohan Malaviya on his left and William Robert Wellesley Peel and Samuel Hoare on his
right.
charya, Kabir and Tulsidas reverberates everywhere in this holy city of Lord Shiva. Malaviya was a natural descendant of the great teachers and sages of India. He followed the teachings of Lord Krishna as narrated by Veda Vyasa, ‘Awake, arise and engage yourselves unceasingly and dauntlessly in works leading to prosperity, with the firm faith that success shall crown your efforts.’

Malaviya started his career in July 1884 as a school teacher in Allahabad, after graduating from Calcutta University. He rendered manifold glorious services to the nation. Education is one of his most prominent services, and he is aptly known as the ‘teacher of the nation’. He viewed education as the prime means of national awakening, achieving independence and regaining our ancient glory and dignity.

While still working as a teacher, Malaviya delivered his maiden, but historic speech in December 1886 (at the age of 25) at the second Indian National Congress in the Kolkata Town Hall under the chairmanship of Dadabhai Naoroji. His electrified address magnetized the audience. This marked the rising of a new brilliant star on the political horizon and among those present was Mahatma Gandhi. His address inspired and ignited men and women to fight for our freedom. The majesty of the Congress in the Kolkata Town Hall under the chairmanship of Dadabhai Naoroji.

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Malaviya's best memorial is BHU, which epitomizes his selfless service in the cause of the nation regardless of caste, creed and religion. His 100th birth anniversary was organized in 1961, forming an All-India Malaviya Centenary.
Like pioneers of education at the time, such as Maharshi Karve in Pune, Ashutosh Mukherji in Varanasi, Malaviya envisioned a broad-minded, tolerant and universal religion as the foundation of education. He built and nourished a unique crescendo-view university to the Ganges as a centre of excellence in every branch of human knowledge. It is not just bricks and stones that an institution make. It is, indeed, a blend of excellence and dedication by exceptional and capable individuals that glorifies it.

Malaviya always maintained, ‘rules are made for man and not man for the rules’. Spirit of tolerance and accommodation with a blend of idealism and realism (gyan-vigyan) reflected both in his action and in his speech. For the maintenance and progress of the university, Malaviya counted on his countrymen rather than on the ‘halting aids doled out reluctantly by an alien administration’. His success lay in the purity of his motive and selfless devotion. His 20-year long term as Vice-Chancellor (November 1919 to September 1939) was synchronized with turbulent days of the freedom movement. Accordingly, he had twofold conflicting duties to perform: the first to take care of India’s future citizens and the second to fight for ‘Apne Desh me Apna Ray’ (our government in our country). He performed both the duties admirably well, as he was an embodiment of love, peace and friendship. As a result, the work in the classroom as well as outside went on uninterrupted. Its doors were always open for all to come in, or to students to go out, but the university was hardly closed.

Preserving the imperishable treasures of ancient values, Malaviya moved forward with time. For the first time in India, he established departments of mechanical and electrical engineering, glass technology, pharmaceutical chemistry, mining and metallurgy. Side by side, he introduced subjects like ayurveda, indology, ancient Indian culture and higher Sanskrit learning to bring about the synthesis of the best of the East with the advancement of science of the West. He always had his eye on the brilliant scholars working in India and elsewhere. Accordingly, he had the services of Jadunath Sircar, Radha Das Banerji, U. C. Nag, Charles A. King, A. B. Dhrupa, Ganesh Prasad, Birbal Sahni, R. S. Inamdar, S. S. Bhatnagar, V. V. Narlikar, R. K. Asundi and others, to guide the students and inculcate in them the spirit of research.

Malaviya always held the view, ‘Caesar’s wife must be above suspicion’ in letter and spirit. His personality radiated the sweetness and simplicity of a child, but his words carried the strength and conviction of a man with a settled philosophy of life. He could achieve all this because of his two great qualities of having contemplative energy of Lord Krishna and practical efficiency of Arjuna.

Malaviya firmly believed that the country could gain strength and develop itself only when the people of the different communities in India live in mutual goodwill and harmony. It was his earnest hope and prayer that the centre (BHU) of light and life, will produce students who will not only be intellectually equal to the best of their fellow students in other parts of the world, but will also live a noble life, love their country and be loyal to the Supreme ruler. The emotional national integration was an act of his living faith. In the history of Indian education, Malaviya and his spirit would serve as a beacon light to succeeding generations down the ages.

At the time when Aurobindo Ghosh dreamt of Swaraj through Swadeshi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale dreamt of spiritualizing the political life through public service, Malaviya dreamt of liberating India through learning and education. The BHU is an immortal monument of which he was both an architect and a builder. And it will continue to play a prominent role in shaping modern India. Like divine king Rantideva (as narrated in Shrimad Bhagwat), Malaviya too did not pray to God to give him salvation or freedom from re-birth. His spirit reverberates in his garden of light and life.

Malaviya’s vision on science and technology

The Vice-Chancellor/Rector of his own university, a spotless and flawless religious leader of highest secular order,
Malaviya was aptly called ‘Devata Purush’ (a man of God) by Mahatma Gandhi. With purity in his expression and divinity in his look, he would always summon, ‘Practise truth and do your duty’. Malaviya’s vision was to generate national spirit through the power of education and righteousness, achieving the economic development of the country by combining the teaching of science and technology with that of religion. BHU was built and nourished by him out of contributions from beggars to kings. So it is truly a people’s university. This ‘temple of learning’ glorifies a unique blend of academic excellence and dedication. Malaviya viewed the excellence in science and technology with the presence of Bhatnagar and Narlikar in his dream campus. The BHU Kulgeet (alma mater song) was composed by Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, one of the most renowned scientists, who was a Chemistry Professor at BHU for three years during 1921–1924. Malaviya, said Radhakrishnan, ‘has lighted a lamp here whose light will penetrate far into space and will not put out, by God’s grace, as long as civilization lasts’. In the words of T. V. Ramakrishnan, ‘The “promotion of learning and research in arts and sciences in all branches” in one place was unusual in the then prevalent atmosphere of institutional degree-granting and individual research..., the impact of the university, with its integrated activities of undergraduate and postgraduate education as well as research, on India’s national growth in science was great.’

Malaviya’s love for nature and humanity

Malaviya loved nature and prayed its Creator. He was fond of cow, birds, trees and flowers (Figure 5). He addressed a cow conference in Varanasi, which was probably the last that he attended. He used to feed the birds to welcome the messengers of the dawn. No one was untouchable to him: he gave Mantra Diksha to the downtrodden to bring them into the mainstream of the society. Women’s College at BHU speaks of his contribution to women’s upliftment. He always maintained proximity with poor and downtrodden. His service to humanity was unparallel. ‘Malaviyaji is immortal’, said Mahatma Gandhi.

In conclusion, Malaviya’s manifold services to the nation were great, but he himself was greater than what he could achieve. Maintaining his vision in modern perspective, advancing forward following his footprint, and keeping BHU ‘madhur manohar ateev sundar’ (so sweet, serene, infinitely beautiful) will be a befitting tribute to Malaviya on his 150th birth anniversary.

I acknowledge the following references and suggest them for further reading

2. Mahamana Malaviyaji Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume. Published by the Secretary, All-India Malaviyaji Centenary Celebration Committee, BHU, Varanasi, 1961.
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