

43rd Graduation Day

Convocation Speech delivered by Dr. R.Kannan, B.Com, M.B.A., C.A.I.I.B., B.L., M.A. (History), M.Soc.Sci. (UK), Ph.D., I.A.S. (Retd), Former Additional Chief Secretary, Tourism, Culture and Religious Endowment, Government of Tamil Nadu, Former Principal Secretary, Higher Education and Syndicate Member of the Tiruvalluvar University at the Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur on 09-03-2019.

Dear Rev Fr [Dr. D. Maria Antony Raj](#), the Principal of Sacred Heart College, Rev. Dr. C. Antony Raj, the Rector, learned faculty, beloved parents and my dear students,

Pax Vobiscum – if the Rev Fr Rector, Rev Fr Principal and other Rev Fathers would permit me the use of the Liturgy greeting. ‘Peace be unto you’ - which is most needed in today’s world. I am departing from my prepared speech since we were treated to a wonderful multimedia presentation which presented the Annual Report of the College in a crisp and attention riveting presentation not the usual boring reading. The presentation by Rev Fr [Dr. D. Maria Antony Raj](#), the Principal shows that the college has a 360 Degree view and activities. It is not a run of the mill institution of Rote Learning which passes for a college these days. The main thrust on Research and the finale emphasising the papers presented and seminars in which the faculty participated shows that the vision is one of a world class institution, with a thrust on Knowledge Creation so rare in India. I recall the two convocations attended by me at McGill University, Montreal in June 2018 where a parent with a T Shirt McGill Dad talked to the audience from the space shuttle since his child was graduating in that convocation. This multimedia presentation by the Principal I would rate better than that though no one from space spoke. The service rendered during the cyclone shows that the spirit of social service is embedded in the staff and students. Rev Fr [Dr. D. Maria Antony Raj](#) has been chosen for the Fulbright Fellowship by the USA-Indian Governments jointly. This is a personal acknowledgment of his efforts to serve in a remote rural community and bring them world class education. He has won it in competition with the seniormost IAS and other

civil service officers, scientists etc. He has been appreciated as the Crème de la Crème as the IAS used to be described when we joined the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie way back in 1981. My compliments to him and the academic milieu which gave rise to this great achievement.

“Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime”—Old Chinese Proverb.

I consider it an honour to have been invited by your principal to deliver the convocation address at this illustrious college. The Silesian Order has founded and administers high quality educational institutions. I had the honour to address the National Educational Conference of Don Bosco School Principals of the Silesian Order of which the Sacred Heart College is a part. I presented a well received seminar paper ‘*Overcoming the Challenges Faced by Schools*’ for this conference at SRM University, Kattankulathur on 30.09.2018.

I myself am a student of a brother institution, Loyola College, Madras of the Order of the Society of Jesus of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The Sacred Heart College is a pioneer. It introduced quality collegiate education to the rural area of Tirupattur which in times past was considered remote. Even today, it is quite distant from the metropolises of Bangalore and Chennai. Institutions like Sacred Heart are world renowned for their strict adherence to quality both in admission of students and recruitment of staff. What is more they never rest on their considerable laurels, but continuously strive to succeed to better their own excellent and world class past record. They are in the language of the Bible, the Gita and modern management gurus like Maslow ‘Self Realised or Self Actualised’ institutions. It is indeed a privilege that you are graduating out of such an institution. Yet each and everyone of you is an ambassador who reinforces the brand image. If you are as ethical and striving for excellence as your college in whatever field of activity it shall please Providence to place you in and you decide to embark on, the credit shall redound to your college. I have consciously dwelt on the intricate interplay between Free- Will and

Predestination because effort and reward are many a time in a disconnect. This is true especially in Oriental societies rather than in the Occident as Prof. Hostede, the Management Guru postulates. May be this is more true of India and therefore historically we believe more in Fate than Free Will. But we should not be lulled into inaction like the Lotus Eaters of Lord Tennyson.

‘Mens Sana In Corpore Sano’ – a sound mind in a sound body;

‘Character is built on the playfields of Eton’.

These are famous sayings from my younger days. Education these days has become equated with flooding the young minds with a lot of information related to the subject that the young student decides to specialise in. The subject itself is chosen not because the youngster has a natural aptitude for it but because the parent or the youngster desire it for the market value. The market value is judged based on earning capacity by ethical and in many cases by other means. This is like what Clausewitz stated: "War is a mere continuation of diplomacy or politics by other means". This leads to mental depression and many a student and parent have come to me for counselling for salvaging many a young life from mental instability. Therefore, education is not mere accumulation of bookish knowledge. It is along with memorisation of facts analysis for real enlightenment. This alone leads to creation of fresh knowledge. In modern parlance, this is called Research. The presentation by the Principal dwelt on Research as the first and most important activity in the college.

Mahatma Gandhi formulated a series of diagnoses of the modern world's seemingly perpetual state of crisis, which he called "the seven social sins" – a la Seven Deadly Sins of the Bible. We can think of them as seven social diseases, since the problems they address are not crimes calling for punishment, but ailments that are a punishment to the people themselves. The foremost one is **Knowledge without Character**. It traces all our difficulties to a simple lack of connection between what we know is good for us and our

ability to act on that knowledge (Knowledge Without Character in *Daily Good* by Eknath Easwaran, Feb 17, 2012).

Knowledge Without Character

The central paradox of our time is that despite our powerful intellectual skills and our ingenious engineering and medical achievements, we still lack the ability to live wisely. We send sophisticated satellites into space that beam us startling information about the destruction of the environment, yet we do little, if anything, to stop that destruction.

We know about the evils of corruption, nepotism, barriers to universalism like regionalism, religion, caste etc but we encourage them though they are dysfunctional and drag us down. When they enter the field of education, generations of future citizens, young minds are led astray with disastrous consequences for society and the country and its future.

As Martin Luther King, Jr., put it, we live in a world of “guided missiles and misguided men,” where few technical problems are too complex to solve but we find it impossible to cope with the most basic of life’s challenges: how to live together in peace and health. In our lucid moments, we see that we are doing great harm to ourselves and to our planet, but somehow, for all our intellectual understanding, we cannot seem to change the way we think and live. This has been the central crisis of India for the past fifty years.

This makes the current Occidentalists in the West, the carriers of the White Man’s Burden in a sophisticated way in the current post colonial era to erect institutions and multi lateral agreements that make the governments of the Orient and Africa to conform to the values that have broad agreement throughout the world. Ready examples that spring to mind are Free Trade (World Trade Organisation), Transparency Agreements, Money Laundering Regulations to prevent international terror and Climate Change. And yet the West change the rules of the game when it does not suit them. England started with Mercantilism and Charter Trade for the East India Company but went on to Laissez-

Faire and again rationing during the World Wars which they imposed on colonies like India to their detriment. The USA is now following suit. Unless we learn to govern with a strong value system imbibed in each of our citizens, we are destined to be camp followers of the West and not the Leaders which our intellects though capable of are not delivering.

Another neglected aspect of the present day Rote Learning is the neglect of the body. Junk food and lack of physical exercise are two aspects of the phenomena.

Physical exercise is neglected in this mindless pursuit of accumulation of facts and their recall in an examination setting. Therefore, the maxim above that a sound mind has to exist in a sound body. A nation of book worms in poor health would drag down the Human Development Index that is the hallmark of a nation's well being very low.

Character is another neglected aspect of education. There is a relentless pursuit of marks or grades without regard as to how they are secured. This takes many forms of innovative plagiarism low tech and hi-tech, chasing the answer paper or having a sneak preview of the questions that are likely to appear in an exam. Success without ethics is useless tinsel à la Rajaji who spoke in a different context about Gnana and Bhakti in his introduction to Bhaja Govindam. Education is therefore accumulation of knowledge for ethical use and to make the educated person a better human being. In Macro, it makes society, the country and the world a better place to live in.

Women's Education is an old tradition in India. The oldest civilisation in the world with unbroken continuity is the Sindhu-Saraswati civilisation (earlier called the Indus Valley civilisation). Saraswati is not only the river but also the Indian Goddess of learning. Minerva of the Roman and Pallas Athena of the Greek pantheon are also Goddesses of Wisdom and Learning in the West, a rough though not exact equivalent. This shows that women were once the fountainhead of learning. In the Imperial Chola Era, it was the queens like Sembian Ma Devi, who constructed temples, made endowments for learning etc. During the middle ages, this commitment to female literacy was replaced by

indifference if not hostility. In the 19th Century, due to our erstwhile colonial rulers and the native elite that they fostered like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindra Nath Tagore etc., female education was revived. It is this tradition that is reflected in this college that was fittingly founded on August 15, 1947, the date that this country became independent. It has lived up to the expectations of the founders of modern India whatever may have happened to the rest of the polity. Successive generations of girls who have gone on to become ladies of scholastic excellence in every field which they have chosen to enter attest to this.

We have seen what real education is. Let us now examine some of the modern trends in university education.

Some institutions of higher education like the IITs, IIMs and AIMS have emerged as centres of innovation, excellence and development in India as in the developed West. The major focus is on Quality. The emphasis is to provide world class quality education, while opening the portals of higher education to students from rural and backward areas and marginalized families. To develop, recognize and enhance talent and skills in our youth, to equip and enable them to meet the emerging challenges and demands of the century is the need of the hour. In India, we need to combine fairness, transparency, justice and integrity with learning in order to achieve excellence in our higher education institutions. Sacred Heart College has a past reputation for all this. I am sure hope that it will maintain it and pass on the torch for the future.

We need to replicate colleges like Sacred Heart that have excellent infrastructure facilities for the development of higher education. We need to impart education by World Class pedagogy, the Socrates method or Gurukula method as it is called in India. We need to implement E-Governance in the Administration, so that reward and effort are strictly correlated in the academic world. The presentation of the Principal shows that this is being done. Otherwise, this will make the next generation have a lackadaisical attitude. This will not enable India to become a developed nation. We need to facilitate institution-industry linkage for inculcating entrepreneurial culture. We need to encourage Research

and Development. Emphasis on nano-technology, molecular biology etc which are the latest fields should be given more resources.

The culture of the Kow-Tow (origin Chinese) but now so common in India should be replaced by polite but robust self confidence based on hard work and achievement. Student and Peer group appraisal should be weighted more than the superior's appraisal as in USA etc. Courses to keep abreast of the latest world trends in pedagogy, research, infrastructure including IT infrastructure, proper, efficient and transparent administration and management based on e-governance and merit based appointments and promotions alone will ensure that we become a knowledge based economy.

Based on their rating by the accrediting bodies, private institutions can charge their fees. Just as in the USA, there is need for private universities with a reputation for excellence like the George Washington University. I am happy that the Private Universities Act has been passed. I drafted it in 2011 but it has been passed now albeit in a different form. This opportunity for creating a private university can be explored by this college for vocational and professional education. Of course, students from economically weaker sections will have to be charged at lower rates.

Joint ventures and Memoranda of Understanding with world class universities and premier institutions across the world is being done. Research scholars and the best performing students across the nation should be encouraged to take up research partnering with premier World Institutions and their study should be sponsored by the Government. This was included in the Policy Note on Higher Education which I drafted in 2011. I am happy to find that this is being done here.

We should attract world class faculty as they are the foundation for excellence in education. Persons of Indian Origin [PIOs] from foreign universities and research labs at various levels right from senior research associates to chair professors on the model of

CSIR, IITs and IIMs should be attracted. Foreign faculty can be appointed on contract basis for self-financing courses with syllabus on par with leading international universities like MIT, Princeton, Oxford, Cambridge, London School of Economics, etc. This was also included in the Policy Note on Higher Education which I drafted in 2011 and was accepted.

Applied Research, product development and productionisation are areas in which India is perceived to lag behind advanced economies. Industry-University Collaboration, close interaction, visiting faculty from industry constituting about fifty percent of the faculty of courses with a reverse traffic of academics serving industry on sabbatical are important for a frog in the well mentality to be replaced by a robust outward looking attitude. The ancient Tamils said, “All Places are our own; all people are our relatives”. Let the winds blow from all directions. The autarchic attitude to competition should be replaced by a self confident - can face competition attitude. This has worked for the economy which has started growing from 1991 due to the market friendly and export oriented policies replacing the Import Substitution Model of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, what Rajaji called the Permit Licence Raj. There is no reason why it cannot work in education. A number of the best professors in USA etc are Indians.

We have seen the initiatives adumbrated in the 2011 Higher Education Policy Note being followed up with orders of the Tamil Nadu Government creating smart classrooms with Video Conference facilities in 10 Universities; establishing Language Laboratories to enable the students to become proficient in Foreign Languages, viz., English, French, German and Chinese in 10 Universities; establishing Entrepreneurship cum Skill Development centres in 10 Universities to train students for profitable self employment / gainful employment; to invite renowned Professors from Foreign Universities to train the Faculty / Students / Research scholars; to establish a Curriculum Development Cell in 10 Universities to enrich our existing curriculum to International standards through cross pollination of ideas from distinguished Professors and Experts of International repute from other countries. The Universities have also been instructed to improve the process of evaluation of Ph.D. Thesis of research scholars by appointing examiners with

impeccable academic credentials. The Laptop scheme will bring computer skills and the knowledge available in cyber space to the student in the remotest area. Knowledge will not be metropolis based any longer but spread far and wide. It will not be the privilege of birth but the property of those who have a thirst for it.

Conclusion

The ancient Indians were in the forefront of global trade and knowledge. They were world leaders in science and technology. Roman artefacts have been found at Arikamedu, Roman coins have been recovered from the river bed of the Noyyal and Cauvery at Perur and Karur. Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (Greek for Red Sea) attests to this great trans continental trade. The naval power of the Pallavas and Imperial Cholas which conquered Sri Vijaya (Indonesia) is attested by inscriptions in Bori Budur etc. Knowledge of air power is reflected in the descriptions of Vimanas using mercury driven engines in Mayamata, Manasara, Samarangana Sutradhara etc.

Charaka was the ancient physician while Sushruta was the surgeon. The surgical instruments that Sushruta describes requires laser level tolerances in metal forming. The Tamil Siddhas probably used teleportation as described in Tamil literature. There are unsubstantiated claims that Karur Thevar, the Siddha Guru of Raja Raja travelled as far away as present Kandahar (Gandhara). Similarly, Siddha Roma Rishi is claimed to have travelled to Rome; Siddha Poonaikannar to Egypt etc. The medicine practised like the use of mercury by Pulippani Siddhar is now being researched in USA and Europe. It was dismissed in the last century as superstition. Mercury after iterative processing had to be inserted by the finest tolerance needle tip. Mercury in Siddha medicine is claimed to cure HIV/AIDS etc. Research is on-going. Similarly, the purification process of metals as in Thanga Bhasma (fine iterations of gold in the form of ash) used traditionally in Siddha medicine has been replicated in a university in Thanjavur. It now reappears in the field of nano- medicine.

We were once creators of knowledge. Taksha Shila and Nalanda were world famous centres of learning. They taught by dialectics contemporaneous to the Greeks and Romans. Later, we ceased to analyse but became mere storehouses of knowledge. Of late, we are not in many cases even that.

My vision for Sacred Heart is that it must become a centre of excellence offering several dual degree international programmes. It must attract foreign students and professors. I am sure that this will become reality in the near future. I also envisage it as a Private University of Excellence.

To conclude, Indians became users of knowledge by way of foreign collaboration agreements to produce various products invented or at least designed abroad in the recent past. The time has arrived for us to become generators of knowledge once again. This knowledge revolution in an inclusive manner underpins the modern global superpower. We shall endeavour to recapture our past glory instead of merely talking about it. We shall strive to succeed and never give up.

With the Value System that you, the students and staff, have been imparted of honesty, hard work and consideration for the less fortunate you will surely succeed. Success is not a narrow momentary achievement by using all kinds of means but ethics based achievement in the long run, even if the moment brings discomfiture. This alone will bring a lasting name and fame. The rest will be judged by history as infamy. History is replete with instances galore.

I wish the Principal, the staff (teaching and non-teaching) all the best in their endeavour to impart holistic education of character building while imbibing knowledge. I wish the students all the best as they go out into life from the cocooned world of the warmth and love of their parents and teachers. There is a glorious future panning out in the sands of time, waiting to unfold. Before we proceed to award the degree and medal certificate individually to about 1300 students, a daunting task, I recall the purpose of education:

Tamasoma Jotir Gamaya – Let us go from darkness let us go to light – enlightenment.

Luceat Lux Vestra – Let your light shine is the motto of Loyola College where I studied.

I slightly modify it as Lux et Veritas ex Tenebris – From darkness to Light and Truth let us journey.