



THE OLIPHANT

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WELHAM BOYS' SCHOOL

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FOUNDER'S DAY SUPPLEMENT

SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. KANDHARI ON ^(A) FOUNDER'S DAY.

Mr. Mani S. Aiyar, Members of the Board of Trustees, Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome to our 60th Founder's day. We have, unfortunately a notable absentee: the Chairman Mr. Dharma Vira regrets his inability to attend due to his illness and conveys his best wishes. A special welcome to Mani Shankar who is an old student of the school.

As you know, we are gathered to pay homage to our Founders, Hersilia Susy Oliphant and her mother Mrs. Gertrude Oliphant. Fortunately our chief guest knew Miss Oliphant well and I leave it to him to tell you something about her. While I, as I often do in my Founders Day speech, address myself to parents on a serious note.

At Welham we have always stressed that we strive to turn out 'The Whole Man'- an aim that we share with all good schools. But I have a suspicion that in the pursuit of this 'all rounder', we, in education, are tending to lose sight of some important elements of human growth.

Three dimensions in particular seem to me to be missing from many of our schools today.

1. As I stressed in my speech last year, the need for all of us to value the striving for excellence in any one sphere be it in art, music, social upliftment, debates etc. and not necessarily in academics. This, of course, means that we should not be bemused by the concept of turning out all rounders to such an extent that the focus on the development of any special skill is lost. Here I would like to read to you a somewhat lengthy allegory which makes this point.

Once upon a time, the animals had a school. The curriculum consisted of running, climbing, flying and swimming, and all the animals took part in all the subjects,

The Duck was good in swimming, better, in fact than his instructor and he made passing grades in flying, but he was practically hopeless in running. Because he was low in this subject, he was made to stay in after school and drop his swimming classes in order to practise running. He kept this up until he was only average in swimming. But the average is acceptable, so nobody worried about that except the Duck.

The Eagle was considered a problem pupil and disciplined severely. He beat all the others to the top of the tree in climbing class, but he used his own way of getting there. He was indeed a problem pupil!

The Rabbit started out at the top of the class in running but he had a nervous breakdown and had to drop out of school on account of stress caused by overwork for swimming.

The Squirrel led the climbing class, but his flying teacher made him start flying lessons from the ground instead of the top of the tree down, and he developed muscle pull from over exertion at the take off and began getting 'C' s 'in climbing and 'D' s ' in running.

The Mongoose apprenticed their offspring to the Mouse when the school authorities refused to add digging to the curriculum.

At the end of the year, the abnormal Eel that could swim well, run a little, climb a little, and fly a little was awarded the 'Best Pupil Prize' in the school! I hope this does not strike

a familiar note!

Yet another notable dimension which I often speak about is aesthetics: the appreciation of art, of nature and style and beauty. This seems to me to be losing ground because of the race for marks or for jobs.

The third dimension, perhaps most important to the human soul, is that of 'service', a sense of duty, a sense of obligation to our fellowmen. It is sad that this ideal of self-denial to help the needs of the less fortunate is now mostly present in the homilies mouthed by us teachers. I stress this point because we are on the threshold of becoming members of the Round Square Conference, an international network of schools which share the philosophy of Kurt Hahn, a philosopher, the great educationist, 'service is the acquisition and philanthropic use of skills. It arises from our own innate decency and compassion. But it can also be inculcated both in home and school.' I am glad therefore to tell you that this December a service camp is being held in the village areas of the Siwaliks and four boys have volunteered to join this international camp. Three of our boys are going to Nairobi where they will interact with children from all over the world who have worked tremendously to uplift the under privileged.

Most parents who send their sons to Welham Boys accept this philosophy to a lesser or greater extent. But when the board exams loom in sight, all is forgotten except the single minded pursuit of the best possible marks at the expense if necessary, of all other activities. All this may seem abstract educational concerns but they are not - they are of great importance. I implore all of you therefore to think about them and do not hesitate to write to me giving your views.

To turn from this topic to something more tangible, we completed the construction of the Pavilion, staff housing, metalling of the road. The many improvements that have taken place in the last decade are evident, to all of you, but greater importance is to the future: Our plans for the next millinium. Next year we celebrate our diamond jubilee. We launched the celebrations this year by sending an expedition to Stok Kangri in Ladakh. this coming jubilee has been of great help in making us

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focus on our needs to prepare for the 21st century and also to some extent prepare for an environment that we cannot even foresee.

In any journey, to look back is not as important as it is to look forward. Keeping that in mind, we teachers who will have much to do to help educate the young people for the 21st century have to be well prepared : hence the urgent need to attend many developmental programmes both for professional and self improvement.

For students today mental growth and physical growth require not merely educational stimuli BUT a sense of physical well-being and space. So in our Jubilee projects we have given first priority to upgrading of our hostels, providing excellent facilities and reducing numbers. I am circulating, within a week, a brochure giving you an idea of what we plan for the future and what are our fund raising plans. I have, as you know, been attending meetings of parents and OBs in various cities to exchange views, to discuss plans for the future and also ways and means of raising funds.

Talking of fund raising is to hit a sensitive spot of many, but I do have some cheerful news: many parents have made donations to our Jubilee fund, for which we very grateful. And one excellent bit of news: we are signing an agreement with the owners to purchase the office block, white house, kitchen field and the adjoining land. The flip side of course, is that at the end of this purchase we will not even have one rupee of the corpus we have built slowly in the last 10 years.

Breaches in discipline: the infliction of any kind of cruelty, physical or mental deserves the severest action. This year I have had to expel two boys, one for bullying and one for the most ungentlemanly behaviour with a girl. I have also had to punish some seniors, one in connection with an act of bullying. At founders we normally tend to dwell only on the pleasant and on our achievements. But it is imperative that I share with you our failures also.

My special thanks to thanks to the Chairman and Trustees of the Board who have been a pillar of strength and a source of great advice; to our parents and to those of our old boys who have started making positive contributions to the school and specially to those members of the

staff who go quietly about their work and for the many who work for hours beyond their normal duties.

I would like to end with a school prayer: 'Creator and Ruler of mankind, we pray Thee this day for ourselves, that Thou wilt forge us into tools fit for the service of country; burn from us all selfishness and pride; purify us from all

baseness; fill us with Thy divine passion to uplift the weak, to sweep away oppression and wrong; to give to every man the opportunity of a full life that may be lived to Thy glory and to the service of mankind.'

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE CHIEF GUEST MR. MANI S. AIYAR ON FOUNDER'S DAY

Respected Principal, Trustees, Parents and Young Men.

The last time I was at Welhams School Founder's Day was in 1951. Some things never change. The most boring part of the Founders Day 1951 was the speeches. I find that in 1996 the same is likely to hold true. Our entertainment in 1951 was putting up the scene from Alice in Wonderland where Alice stumbles upon the Mad Hatters tea party. I was the March Hare and I think I have fulfilled in later life the role of a slightly madcap character allotted to the March Hare.

The other great difference between 1951 and 1996 is that the Chief Guest in 1951 was allowed to see his audience when he spoke. Of course I appreciate that the reasons for which the audience has been plunged in darkness is that several of you can go to sleep while I speak. But I do have a plea to make to those in charge of the lighting arrangements here. If while I'm speaking you could gently bring on the lights then I might be able to decide when exactly the time has come to cut my speech short.

I came here to Welham School just a few days short of my 8th birthday. I came in here with my brother.

The only answer I can give the editor of the Oliphant who asked me today how I could possibly be both, a Welhamite and a Doonite. The answer simply is : first my mother mixed it up when I was only 8 years old, that's one excuse. The other is that it was just a preparatory school and we went to Doon School for our secondary education. Things are now changed and you can continue to remain in Welham from the age of 5 or 6 right upto the time you are 17

or 18 and for those of you who have succeeded in maintaining the course, my heartiest congratulations. I for one have been extremely impressed with the 12th class boys with whom I have spent most of today and I have had the opportunity of meeting some of the youngsters extending from the room in the main building which I particularly recall. I have also had the pleasure of walking into the room where my other friend Prem Patnaik led me into one of the great secrets of life. We used to have tea at 4 'o' clock in the afternoon and it always consisted of uneatable brown bread. It was uneatable because Moni Ghai had failed to supply it to us from Kquality so we had to make do with whatever the bakery gave us and Prem Patnaik said to me (it's one of the clearest memories I have - he was all of 8 and a quarter and I was all of 8) he said that there was a better tea to be had than eating this brown bread here. I asked where? He said in the classroom. I went along with him to the classroom slipping out from under the vigilant teachers eye, and I found that he had taken a blob of paint and he had made a little mountain of paint on his desk and he started licking it and he said that I should try to do the same.

My most distinguished classmate here at Welham was Tiger Pataudi, who went on in later life of the undistinguished position of being captain of the Indian cricket team. He began life with the very high distinction of being captain of the Ganges company. And the best thing about having him as our cricket captain was that his father, the old and real Nawab of Pataudi. I call him old and real because he was never divested of his title. The old Nawab of

Pataudi used to come to see his son and it was the greatest entertainment of all, because we would all gather at the grassy knoll that flows down from Bethany to the playing ground and sitting there we would shout in one voice give us another sixer and the Nawab of Pataudi would smash yet another six of his own son's bowling and those were memories.

I was a completely useless, thumbs all creature on the playing field, my one great moment in sporting life. I was the best cricket commentator that Welham School had. So it was my duty when everyone was shivering in their beds waiting for Hamlet's father's ghost to appear, to invent a cricket commentary, in which not surprisingly Tiger Pataudi would score a century and everybody would go happily to sleep thereafter.

It was a wonderful place to be in. There was above all Miss Oliphant. I always thought that Miss Oliphant was as old as the hills, but that was because I was very, very young when I saw her. It is only very recently that reading the Welham book I discovered some biographical details about Miss Oliphant such as the fact that she was born, we in school always thought she was eternal, in the early 1880's and so would have been approximately 55 to 60 years old when she undertook this venture of setting up the Welham Preparatory School. And it was very significant that the name of the school when it started and continued to be that when I was a boy here, was the Welham Preparatory School for Indian boys. The accent was on a school which would prepare young Indians for future responsibilities. The accent on it's being for Indian boys was in anticipation of what was then a widely accepted fact that the British empire in India was going to come to an end.

It was to prepare the first generation of midnight's children that Miss Oliphant came to India and started this school. Miss Oliphant was among those enlightened human beings. The school opened when there were only 10 years to go to independence. The school also opened when there were only 10 years to go for partition. And you only have to look at the list of the first

generation of students and to see that they came as much from south of the Vindhyas as from Calcutta or Peshawar or Lahore or Krarchi, to realise that if the exact date of independence were not known on the day Welham School was founded, nobody, just nobody, thought that the price we would have to pay for independence was the partitioning of the country. To this India, on the other side of the clock tower, John Martyn had arrived a little earlier and started the Doon School and on this side, near the Rispana river which used to be a river and not merely a set of pebbles as it now is, came Welham School. And as she taught these children, independence was accelerated and so tragically was partition. It would have been natural and normal for Miss Oliphant to decide that as the sun had set on the British Empire, in 1947 and at least a quarter of the children here at Welham School would not be coming the next term because they had suddenly become citizens of another country, to have packed her bags to the village of Welham in the county of Nottinghamshire, in England, United Kingdom. But she had not come here as an agent of the empire. She had come here because she was a great human being. And she saw that human beings in this country, even after independence, would continue to have need of whatever it was she had to contribute. And in a very similar way, A.E. Foote at Chandbagh with his colleagues R.L.H. Holdsworth, J.T.M. Gibson and several other whom it would take too long to name, decided that they would remain here and continue to be the part of New India. And so long with Miss Oliphant over here when I was a school boy was Miss Meisenheimer. And Miss Oliphant while being an extraordinarily stern martinet also has a heart of gold. My mother once asked her whether she had made the logo of Welham School an elephant because many Indian parents wouldn't know how to pronounce Oliphant and might call her Miss Elephant. But she said no, she had picked on the elephant because it seemed to her to be a symbol of the essential Indians, it was an Indian animal. It had this memory which enabled it to remember everything which I think Miss Oliphant thought was important, and above all, it seemed to her to symbolize what she wanted Welham School to be. And above all that what she wanted the new India to be. A country growing from 'Strength to Strength.'

I also remember Mr. Gaur. I can never

forget him. I think my memory is right because when it was our company Ganges that year which won the shield and when Miss Oliphant called out Ravi Bajaj's name to come and collect the shield, I don't know what Ravi Bajaj was doing, perhaps smoking behind the bushes or something, but he didn't turn up so it fell to me to go and collect that shield. I was however delighted to be able to spot not only myself and my brother in a photograph taken in 1949 but to recognize at least 3-4 of the other people in the photograph. I think it just shows that once a Welham boy, always a Welham boy.

Now that your school has reached the stage where you have young graduates of the school who as Principal Kandhari just reminded us, have begun to earn a living, I think the main question which I would like to ask in my capacity as a Welhamite, is what can the Welham school of this generation, not the old Welham Preparatory School for Indian boys but the Welham Boys' School as it is today, what can it contribute over the next 40 years to the life of India which the Doon School boys of my generation has failed to provide. There is so much disillusionment. It came through even in the interview I did with the Editor of the Oliphant magazine in Mr. Kandhari's garden. A sense that the most demeaning activity which an Indian can undertake is to be in the public life of this country. Instead of regarding democracy as our single biggest achievement I think the mood in India is that democracy equals politics, politics equal politicians and politicians equal filth. There is a widespread national consensus that those who take to the vocation of politics are the dregs of the society. That they are an exploitative segment of our society. They are illiterate, criminals, self-serving, corrupt and nepotistic. Phoolandevi is held up as the paradigm of what an Indian politician is. I could give you other names which are perhaps well known- Taslimuddin who has a string of cases named against him and is today a distinguished member of the Parliament for Kishanganj, Shahabuddin, MP for Gopalganj on the western fringes of Bihar, who celebrated his election victory by firing several shots at the superintendent of police in his own district. There is Pappu Yadav with a series of cases behind him- several others. Anand Mohan Singh who has

lead many a march which has ended in bloodshed. And then the people of India look at such representatives in Parliament; when on television they see the kind of pandemonium that often overtakes parliament, when they read in the papers of not only former and greeted the storm troopers marching down the Unter der Linden having won the greatest electoral victory that democratic Germany had ever seen. And after that, it was the blackest night of all. I think the danger we in India face just now is that the very imperfect democracy which my generation has built is held in contempt not only by my brothers and sisters of my generation, but I fear held in contempt also by the 12th class of Welham School. And if the 12th class of Welham School is not as yet overtaken by this disillusionment which characterises that national mood, I fear that by the time they have finished college in three years from now they are also going to share in large measure that sentiment.

What is our greatest achievement is not the source of national pride. And that is why this country celebrating the Golden Jubilee of its independence is not celebrating it at all. Even Principal Kandhari did not mention this now, I have not seen it written in the current issue of the Oliphant. Why? Why is it that as a nation we are so unconcerned with celebrating not only the greatest event that took place in the lifetimes of your principal and myself, the independence of India but that our government today has only now appointed a Joint Secretary in the department of culture to consider, three months of the commencement of the Golden Jubilee year of our freedom, what we should do to celebrate it. It is because we have come to the conclusion that the political system we have built to consolidate our independence has failed us. But when we look at ourselves, there is no pride in our great achievement, which is unprecedented, unparalleled freedom for our people. We are almost the only emerging nation in the world to have translated independence for India into freedom for India. It was self evident that therefore we were proud of being Indians. That element of its being self-evident; that democracy, freedom, human rights, civic rights is an achievement for 90 crore Indians which countries of not even 9 lakh population have been able to achieve for them-

selves, has suddenly become an irrelevant or even a joke. Why? I think the answer to that why is the mistake, that I would broad call the Doon School boy of my generation has been. How many Doon School boys are in public life today. There was a brief moment when Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister when it seemed as if a few more Doon School boys may come into public life. But that little flash in the sky passed, and when I looked around me in the Lok Sabha and see that there are not perhaps more than one or two who were there with me in school and when I looked across the spectrum of the public life of this country, and see that not only are Doon School boys not to be found in our nations public life but the equivalent of the Doon School anywhere in the society. But you pick up your favourite hate figure in Indian politics and you ask yourself why is he or she sitting in the parliament the basic answer is because you are not. The guilt ultimately comes down to you.

There was a great political scientist in 19th century Britain. His name was Walter Bagehot, he who wrote a book called the English Constitution. It is regarded even a century later as a seminal description of how a democratic political system works and he had in that book one line which I think every 12th class boy in Welham School should inscribe into his heart in letters of gold : he said that a democracy needs, and I quote 'sensible men of substantial means.' Every boy who has been through Welham School whether he has done well in his class or not, has by virtue of the education he has received here became a sensible man. So if Walter Bagehot was an Indian and was writing today and writing in Dehra Dun, perhaps instead of saying every democracy needs sensible men of substantial means, he would simply say every democracy needs Welham School boys. But how many of the 12th class or the 11th class boys had any intention whatsoever of going into public life of this country. Your ambitions have been circumscribed by getting an M.B.A, by becoming good lawyers but who wants to become a politician. Now if all the best and the brightest in this country: the Welham School boys of today, the Doon School boys of my generations the equivalents across this country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari have all de-

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ecided that they are going to opt out of the civic life of this country, then inevitably, the dregs of society will move in. You cannot run a democracy without political parties. People choose to become politicians and the best and the brightest in post independence India have deliberately decided not to become politicians. No wonder then the quality of our democracy is what it is.

If Miss Oliphant had started Welham in 1907 rather than 1937 I am sure Jawaharlal Nehru would have come here as one of the earliest Welham School boys. This class of people, the middle class of India, the educated, the wealthy, decided that public life was a noble calling. That it was noble to lie on prison floors, to fight for freedom of India. To believe that it was worth the fight even if the goal was not going to be attained in their life time. And so many died including Motilal Nehru without ever having seen a free India. And certainly even as late as 1945 when they were still incarcerated in the Ahmednagar Fort Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues did not know that when we come out we are going to become the leaders of a free India. That generation of what I call 'the Welham School boy' decided that the noblest calling of them all is public life. And my generation of Welham School boy decided, that the dirtiest calling of them all is public life. So when the best and the brightest went into politics it was the noblest profession. Now, when the filthiest go into politics it has become the filthiest avocation. If we're going to change this, if we're going to preserve that freedom which was won with such immense effort for us by the pre-Doon School Doon School boy, then it is essential that the mind-set of my generation be changed in the next generation. I invite not all of you for even in politics there is not space for everybody. I hope some of you or five of you will say, that I want to serve this country.

Vote of Thanks:-

Col. D.P. Puri, member of the Board of Trustees gave a vote of thnaks to the Chair and focussed on the need for the improve school facilities and requested parents to assist in the on going endeavours to raise financial resources required for development works planned for the Diamond Jubilee.