

The Price Of Excellence

Talk Given by

Dr. Hazari

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Under the auspices

The Indian Centre For Encouraging Excellence

** Information about the "Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence" may be obtained from Mr. N. H. Attreyya, Sahakar Bhavan, Bombay-77.*

In the series of lectures under the title "Pursuit of Excellence" arranged by the 'Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence' the one by Dr. Hazari, Editor of the Economic and Political Weekly proved different. In fact as Prof. Shukla observed in his concluding remarks, it appeared as though one had been transported to the Athenian scene with a Socrates or a Plato debating and discussing the very fundamentals of thought and action.

In spite of the fact that at one stage, Dr. Hazari referred to the vague claims made for spiritualism as so much "bunkum", his approach was essentially that of an intellectual — and a very sensitive intellectual at that. Perhaps to the more mundane-minded in the audience, the ideas that flew off like a succession of Diwali crackers — brilliant, but somewhat disturbing — were far removed from their own experience of realities of today's India.

Perhaps Dr. Hazari let off the first bombshell when he said he was going to keep completely away from the subjects covered in his Report — which made his name a by-word to every newspaper reader in India. He said, he was speaking as a member of the younger generation.

In the olden days, Dr. Hazari said, life was simple and easy. Once one passed a certain age, one attained wisdom, one talked about the virtues of abstinence, of denial and of renunciation. Early to bed, early to rise — Be healthy, wealthy and wise — about summed up the situation. But conditions of life today were completely different. For instance, it won't do to go back to bed early. The ideas of excellence that have come up or have been accepted, have, perhaps due to the development of technology, changed enormously. In the old days, all that you had to do — or you were told to do — was to perform your duties, repeat your prayers more frequently and you would attain, perhaps if not in this world at least in the next world, a

state of excellence. In these days, the religious and moral overtones of these ideas of excellence are becoming extremely difficult to reconcile. This was perhaps due to the fact that the standards of our inherited behaviour did not take us outside the family and the caste. There is a certain dichotomy between what is in our mind and what we do. People who speak of salvation have very little to contribute to salvation on this side of the earth. Our scriptures may have an answer to all spiritual problems, but as an answer to an individual problem, we have nothing.

So far as the material part of individual excellence went, there were standards of craftsmanship. The progress of technology has elevated this to the level of quality control and research and development. Individual excellence has melted into a broader, social excellence. Very little, it seems, can be done by an individual in the social organisation.

When individual excellence becomes a part of the social organism, Dr. Hazari asked, what happens to the sense of fulfilment? If achievement is becoming institutionalised, a philosophical change is required. We cannot go back on the technology we have got.

Dr. Hazari felt that we cannot altogether avoid classes. Even if you have a Government of the proletariat by the proletariat, you cannot alter fundamental factors. Social philosophies have to be evolved in terms of the conditions around. When the population was small, one could talk about individual excellence. Now the individual has become inseparable from the total population. Carlyle had said that universal history was the history of what great men had achieved. It was the history of great men. But, if great men were being replaced by institutions, we cannot say that history is being made by individuals.

Dr. Hazari however conceded that thinking does remain individual. Achievement is being impersonalised, but

inspiration is individual. Leadership still has an individual element in it. But there are solutions which emphasise the individual and there are solutions which emphasise society. Dr. Hazari asked, "How does one think of resolving these conflicts?"

Those who strive for excellence do so by reference to something much lower down. Because these people are separated from the rest of the society, simple things do not mean the same thing. Those who strive for excellence are not an integral part of society — you may call this a class division, but the differentiation is fundamental.

The more you strive for excellence, the more conflict you must be pre-

pared for, for you are raising yourself far above the rest of the society. Excellence breeds conflict and conflicts breed unhappiness. Unhappiness was the necessary price one had to pay for excellence. In the process of the struggle, even within one's self, tensions are created. Again, a person pursuing excellence may be considered unusual. But unless one was prepared to pay the cost, one cannot think meaningfully.

In conclusion, Dr. Hazari pointed out that in terms of having achieved something, one still gets, as an individual, a sense of fulfilment. Again, individual development will never be completely devalued.

Six Things We May Do

The Indian centre for Encouraging Excellence has some ideas about how people can pursue excellence. For instance:

(1) We must widely and intensively canvass the idea "nothing but the best is good enough for me." Wherever we be, we should seek for and insist on excellence. For instance at home or outside let us go all out for the utmost cleanliness.

(2) A corollary to this is that we must raise hell wherever we find anything below standard. 'Sing out' the slogan for a bad product or poor service or a poor show or a poor publication. Do not acquiesce; speak out.

(3) We can arrange a hoarding campaign. If some one who uses hoardings can spare one of them, we may put up a campaign for ex-

cellence. There could be a message "Six things you can do (as a doctor, or a teacher, or a student, or a postman, or a housewife etc. etc.)."

(4) Some, who may like to associate their names with a good cause, may donate a rotating trophy for achievement in a particular area of excellence with token recognition in cash or kind.

(5) Some may like to sponsor scholarships to encourage pursuit of excellence in certain areas.

(6) In the school or college where your child is or was studying, some of us may institute, with the consent of the principal, some recognition or reward for some outstanding achievement, other than purely academic, say for example, boys scout or girl guides or civil defence.

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