

**THE PURSUIT
OF EXCELLENCE**

a lecture by

Mr. SOLI PAVRI

under the auspices of the

**INDIAN CENTRE FOR ENCOURAGING
EXCELLENCE**

SAHAKAR BHAVAN

KURLA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

BOMBAY-77

Catch them young to pursue excellence, advises Soli Pavri

Mr. Soli Pavri began by saying that it was rather unfortunate that he was introduced as the Governor of the Rotary Club. Governors these days were not very much in favour and sometimes they had to stand on chairs to enforce order in the Assemblies over which they presided.

He said he was essentially a school-master and it was with children and young boys that his life had been associated. He was very happy that an organisation like this had been started and he congratulated the organisers.

Speaking for himself, Mr. Pavri said that he has immense faith in the future. At the same time one had to face facts. He was a believer in taking a practical view of things.

Mr. Pavri warned that the pursuit of excellence demanded that we hold a clear idea of our responsibility. It was unfortunate that we had accepted very low standards. Sometimes even those in authority did not seem to have value for time and sometimes Ministers too made audiences wait for quite a while. Mr. Pavri said that in the Rotary meetings with which he was concerned, he had made it a point of starting meetings at the appointed hour, even if those who had been invited to preside or speak had not arrived. He wished that those who were associated with the centre would also pursue the same policy. That would certainly create an excellent precedent. If an organisation is to carry conviction, it must stick to standards.

Mr. Pavri posed the question, "What is this "excellence" we are trying to pursue?" A certain speaker had said that excellence cannot have a standard. It would vary with each individual.

Mr. Pavri thought that excellence was that stage when an individual did better than what he thought he could

achieve. In short, it was better than the best. Excellence, in fact, was an attitude of mind.

In creating that attitude of mind, one had to begin young. Few people realised this. In fact, it took the Rotary sixty years to understand that a beginning had to be made with childhood.

Mr. Pavri said that we must bear the responsibility for the low standards we see around us. It is because we are not tackling the problem at the right end and at the right stage.

Even in international affairs, we are not proceeding in the right manner. For instance, look at the United Nations. The men who go there, go with a national mind, with no sense of internationalism. Each one is prepared to die for his national flag, but who is there to die for the international flag? That feeling will come only when we begin the training at the right time. The U.N. has now begun to understand that the young should be approached, that the common man anywhere in the world is the same. Excellence, in fact, has to be taught from childhood.

At this stage, Mr. Pavri analysed the ills of the present educational system — particularly the method of examination and the allotment of marks. Neither the parents nor the teachers seemed to understand the child. The first impression always remained and no attempt was made to study or understand the reactions of the child, or the student. Because of this lack of understanding the best in the student never came out. In this connection, Mr. Pavri gave the example of his own boy who had a disappointing academic record. But when the same boy went to the States and came under a different environment, he showed signs of distinct ability. This showed that the system here was wrong.

Since the children coming to schools are from different backgrounds and are therefore at different levels of preparedness, Mr. Pavri, as a life time teacher, felt that every educational institution should go in for "Catch-up Clinics" whereby the individual student is helped to bridge the gap.

* * *

Stressing the fact that conscientiousness in a craftsman was an important factor in encouraging excellence, Mr. Pavri referred to a tailor in the United States who refused to make a suit for Henry Ford even when the latter insisted because he thought that the material was unfit to be used. In ancient Damascus too, craftsmen had the same high standard. The quality of the blade of a Damascus sword was considered sacrosanct. If the blade fell from its standard, they would kill the man who made it.

* * *

To what extent was the fall in standards due to the system of Government under which we lived? We seem to have a wrong concept of democracy, believing in the rule of the majority however ill-informed and untrained it was for the job. When we want our hair to be cut we go to a trained barber but we give our Government to M.L.A.'s and Corporators without asking any questions about their ability to do the job.

To show how ill-informed those in responsible positions of Government could be, Mr. Pavri cited the illustration of two Senators who were discussing what the term "7.1 per cent death rate" meant. "It means", said one to the other, "seven persons have died and one is on the point of death."

* * *

In conclusion, Mr. Pavri suggested that the centre should approach societies that run schools and work for a new understanding and awareness — an awareness that believed that the "35 per cent approach" was not enough.

And speaking about meetings, Mr. Pavri gave a tip from his own method of conducting Rotary meetings. Formal meetings with lectures or addresses were not enough. They should break up into working groups of people with similarities in approach with common problems.

* * *

Mr. Shukla who presided over the function said in his concluding address that the role of the teacher was an intangible one. They were the makers of society and they should behave as such.