

His Excellency for speech at the Centenary celebrations of the Birbhum Zilla School on 10th January, 1951

Kailash Nath Katju

Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal

Mr. Chairman and members of the Centenary Celebrations Committee, Mr. Headmaster, the members of the staff and young friends and students:

This is a memorable day not only in the history of your school but shall I consider it, a memorable day in my life too. To take part in the centenary celebrations of an educational institution in India is not a small event.

You have referred in your addresses to many eminent men who have played a great part in the national life of this ancient land. The past hundred years, I imagine, in the history of India will be found to be the most important. Two thousand years ago our history shows that India was united under Asoka. But in those days conditions were vastly different and while cultural unity was always there, the ties binding the different parts of the country must have been very loose indeed. During the British times—after 1850 when the East India Company established domination over the Punjab and thereafter owing to the policy which was pursued in regard to the Indian States—they acquired domination over every part of India and India was politically and administratively united. That unity began prac-

tically from the era of the foundation of your school and these hundred years have seen both the zenith of the British power and the decline and fall and disappearance of that power. So, as I have said, you have covered a momentous period in Indian history. The only thing that is now important is that the political unity that was brought about by the British rulers should remain firm. The cultural unity has always been there. Otherwise this nation would have been lost like the Assyrians, Babylonians and many others who are now completely forgotten. I was talking to a Greek friend the other day and enquired from him whether there was any trace of the Greeks of 2,500 years ago in Greece. He said, "No". The present Greeks are in no sense direct descendents of Pericles, Socrates and Aristotle.

There has been a tremendous mixture of races and those Greeks of antiquity have no lineal descendants among the modern Greeks. But here in India we can say with pride that the institutions of the time of Asoka—and even earlier than that of the times of Gautama Buddha and the Vedas—are still to be found and we can trace our descent directly from our forbears of 2,000

years ago. So, the cultural unity has always been there fostered by many traditions by the great language Sanskrit, by the great system which was introduced, of establishing sacred places of pilgrimages throughout the length and breadth and at the extremities of India. In the olden days in India when a man went on a pilgrimage, he not only accrued religious merit but also a clear and complete knowledge of the geography and topography of India, manners and customs and how the people lived. Speaking of our ancient institutions, I must not forget the Mathematics which were established by Shankaracharya and led to that cultural unity. But to our misfortune the administrative unity, the political unity was lacking and so was the case between those who were political figures then. This led to our downfall over and over again and that led also to our loss of independence. But times have now changed. Movement has become easy, air has been conquered, distances have been annihilated and I pray that these centenary celebrations will also mark the inauguration of a new era—the era of independence, the era of the establishment of the great Indian Republic, an event unprecedented in our history and also an era of the attainment of political and administrative unity. We must profit by the mistakes of the past, and we must see to it that this political and administrative unity is never lost and that it is always cherished and developed and kept alive even with our lifeblood. That is of paramount importance. Every child here, every schoolboy and schoolgirl reading in any school in India, must be taught that if anyone suffers in any part of India, the suffering is his or hers. We want unity of heart and unity of purpose and this will enable us to maintain our political unity. We must not forget on

this day the political unity that we have inherited from the British and we must cherish that.

I regard the students of this school, the students of today and the coming generations as exceptionally fortunate. It is not a small thing to read in a school which goes back to one hundred years. One of the reasons for the greatness of English schools has been the ancient tradition behind them. Anyone who goes to Eton and Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge goes to a place of learning where for 600 or 700 years the English race has continued to flourish. I was told that there is a room where the students live, very likely the students have been living for the last 500 years. In that particular room, one can find the names engraved of the people who have adorned the pages of English history. I do not know whether you have hostels here of that description. I wish we had hostels of that type in every school and then every single room in that hostel in course of time would become a monument of national pride and national endeavour and would become a living source of strength and inspiration to generations of young people. That is what is wanted. I consider the students of this school as exceptionally fortunate. I envy them myself. It is our misfortune that our old ancient ashrams have vanished with our independence. The old centres of learning are now in ruins. These seats of learning created a sense of oneness and political unity among the people, I suppose that the Birbhum Zilla School must have taught at least five generations here,—that itself is a great thing. The school does not merely convey or impart instruction. It is the tradition of the school which is also of importance. To every young boy or young man who is looking up to a legal career, it must be a

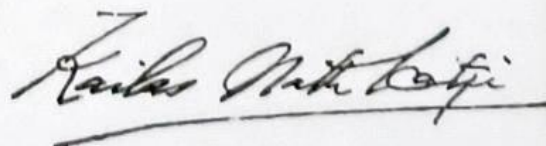
matter both for pride and emulation that from his school have gone forth lawyers, advocates of great eminence, such as Lord Sinha. I heard him arguing in only one case and what impressed me profoundly was his clarity of thought. If thoughts are confused, expressions are bound to be confused. Lord Sinha thought clearly, looked at affairs clearly and expressed his mind clearly. You have referred to many names, engineers, lawyers, administrators, governors, ministers and other noted public servants. The tradition of the institution will have the greatest formulating effect on your students and I tell you again that their example will keep the boys straight. The fact that in the legal profession they must not fall below the standard set up by Lord Sinha will keep them straight here. That is the great benefit of example and tradition. I can go in this strain for a great length of time.

I am very happy indeed that this short visit should have synchronized with your centenary celebrations. Now in this free India the people have got a glorious and bright future. I have no doubt, so has this school. I was thinking to myself while I was listening to your addresses, as to how could I, coming here as the Governor of West Bengal, associate myself permanently with your centenary celebrations, and it occurred to me that the best way would be to award a centenary medal every year to the student who has had the most distinguished career for best conduct

in this school. This medal may be awarded to the student when he leaves the school and I imagine when awarding that medal many factors will be taken into consideration—length of his association with the school, his conduct not only in any particular class but throughout his career in the school, his conduct on the playground, his academic career and his mode of life and thought. I hope the school committee will make rules governing the award of the medal and it may be a piece of presumption on my part to bind my successors, but I do hope that they will keep this up and continue awarding this medal for generations to come and, I believe that will be a living memory of the association of the Head of the State with your school and also of the fact that one Governor had the honour and privilege of taking part in your centenary celebrations till you celebrate your bi-centenary and that memory is effaced by more glorious ones.

I wish you all good luck and my parting message to my young friends is this:

Honour your parents and obey your teachers. That is of the essence of the Indian tradition of life, that is of the essence of our culture and of our Indian way of life. Take it from me that you will never suffer if you continue to honour your parents and obey your teachers. May this school continue to serve the people of this District and people of West Bengal and may the boys who go out of its portals be a source of pride to this school. ◀



JAI HIND