

Challenge to Sisterhood:

College Day, 1966

College Day records the achievements of the academic year, and offers a new challenge for the future: the challenge of universal sisterhood.

College Day, 1966, will be memorable in Stella Maris for its gay but gracious atmosphere, and for the three great moments of the function: the speech of the Chief Guest, the Honourable Mrs. Jothi Vencatachellum, presenting to the students the ideal of universal sisterhood, the play, in lighter vein, which proved that G.B. Shaw's lucid and lively prose in "Pygmalion" is as entertaining, and more witty, than the most lyrical of the songs which it has inspired: and the concluding dance-recital in Bharata Natyam on the theme of the Gitanjali.

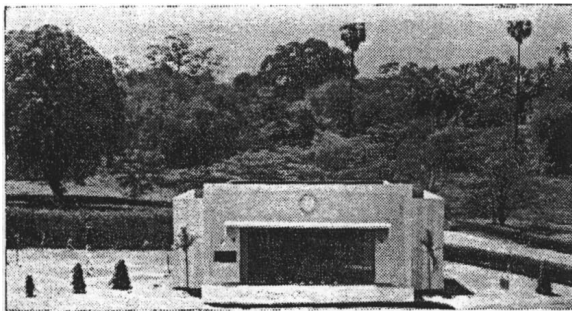
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The first of these highlights of the evening was the address of the day's guest of honour, whose appeal for universal sisterhood struck a responsive chord in the hearts of her audience, for, as she herself observed, the gathering was a symbol of unity in diversity, and the sisterhood, which the students had attained among themselves in spite of differences of origin and family background, could be the beginning of a true integration among all the people of our richly diverse land.

"At a time like this," observed the speaker, "I believe that a great sisterhood among women is the only means of bringing peace and harmony to this strife-ridden world, regardless of colour, creed, nationality or rank.....Even in this great institution, I am quite confident that the have-nots are no less in number than the haves, and it is in this context that I am requesting you to form a solid unity, and have consideration for your less fortunate sisters....."

"If you can give relief to just one sister, in her acute and agonizing want, if you can render some kind of aid to make her life a little more pleasant and happy, then the very ideal of sisterhood will blossom into a fragrant flower, and that fragrance will permeate the whole world....."

"You will observe that there is a clear absence of marked prejudices among children. The divisive influences among men are acquired from the surrounding culture as children grow to adolescence and adulthood. It is there-



fore imperative that this sisterhood concept should be instilled in you, to create a sense of unity and to enable you to develop it, as you pass from childhood to adolescence and beyond.....

“It seems to me that women’s most distinguishing characteristic is the capacity to create a society based on justice, because justice, love and affection are natural to women. When I say justice, I do not merely refer to legal justice, because equality before the law, thanks to our splendid Constitution and its makers, is to a large measure achieved..... I refer to what is known as natural justice, equity and good neighbourliness.....

“The demand for equality has become an essential and emphatic claim of women. It cannot be gainsaid that inequalities between men and women do exist, and retard the progress of the human race. Yet when we demand equality, it is our bounden duty to develop ourselves, mentally, morally and physically, so as to bring all human beings onto the same footing, and foster goodwill and peace among them. From the practical point of view, an attempt should be made to convert the minds of women to form an effective sisterhood... It is a colossal task, as mighty as the Himalayas, but with friendship and understanding.....I have no doubt that we shall achieve our aim.”



In the international sphere, too, the Honourable Minister observed, the ideal of sisterhood has a vital role to play. “International amity can be engendered only through national solidarity, and to achieve this you should get together, share your ideas, pocket your vanity, shake off your apathy, and set aside your pride. Incidentally I may say that the emotion of pride in its finer manifestations gives rise to dignity, self-respect and moral courage ;.....there is nothing wrong with holding your heads high... ..When sisters are united, world brotherhood also becomes an accomplished fact. Each lady in the world should treat every other as she would treat herself. How ennobling is the verse :

“ She whose wakeful tenderness removes
The thorn that wounds the friend she loves

Smooths not another's rugged path alone,
But scatters roses to adorn her own."

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After the distribution of the prizes for the year, the entertainment followed, beginning with lively extracts from "Pygmalion" spiritedly performed by our most talented actresses. The comedy of speech, well brought out by "Eliza", had attractions, as the audience discovered, quite other than those of the musical comedy based on the play, and the concluding triumph in which Eliza is mistaken for a Hungarian princess "because no Englishwoman speaks English properly", was greeted with thunderous applause.

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The appeal of the second part of the entertainment was to a deeper and a higher level of appreciation : higher aesthetically, deeper emotionally. A fine Bharata Natyam performance was given by six students, interpreting, in classical dance, themes from the "Gitanjali" expressive of the soul's search for God in contemplation, and the obtrusive distractions which deflect it from the path of meditation. Truly,

"Ever in my life have I sought Thee, O Lord."

"O God, the picture of perfection, the joy unalloyed."

Yes, I know this is nothing but Thy love, O God!
this golden light that dances upon the leaves,
these idle clouds sailing across the sky.

"O God, Thou hast made me endless, such is Thy pleasure."

This little flute of a reed
Thou hast carried over hills and dales
and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.
At the immortal touch of Thy hands,
my little heart loses its tumult in joy
and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

"My days pass in the crowded market of this world."

And thus it is that time goes by
while I give it to every querulous man who claims it.
I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn uselessly roaming in the sky.
I keep gazing on the faraway gloom of the sky
and my heart wanders wailing in the restless wind.

"All desires that distract me are false and empty to the core."

By all means they try to hold me who love me in this world.
But it is otherwise with Thy love, which is greater than theirs.
I want Thee, only Thee, O God. Come with a burst of song.

“Who is this that follows me?”

I move aside to avoid His presence, but I escape Him not.
He came when the night was still,
He had his harp in his hands,
and my dreams became resonant with his melodies.
Lord, if I keep not Thee in my heart,
Thy love for me still waits for my love.

“My life is all astir and a feeling of tremulous joy is passing through my heart.”

Thus it is that Thy joy in me is so full.
Thou hast come down to me, O Thou Lord of all heavens.
In my heart is the endless play of Thy delight.
In my life Thy will is ever taking shape.
The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad.

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Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day,
back to their mountain nests,
let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to Thee.
Ever in my life have I sought Thee with my songs.
I shall take this harp of my life, tuning it to the notes of forever.

A STELLA MARIAN

