

REPUBLIC DAY ADDRESS

Mr. Paul Machado, Principal of Campion School, Members of the Council of Management, fellow parents, respected teachers and my dear young friends.

I stand before you enveloped by a great sense of nostalgia as I vividly recall the years when I participated in all Independence Day and Republic Day parades, initially as a member of the Cub Pack and later as a Scout. Some of our parades were even held on the road outside. This sounds incredible today but in those days our school had sufficient clout to cordon off the not so heavy traffic on Cooperage Road for the duration of the parade. Besides, the Cooperage Stadium wall that runs parallel to the far side of the road was much further behind allowing enough space to accommodate all participants. The parades then were choreographed and orchestrated by Mr. J.S. Hodiwala, a legendary teacher of our school who served the school with distinction for over three decades. He was a strict disciplinarian and his quest for perfection was endless. He had a special dress code for every trapping of our attire and it had to be adhered to rigorously. For example, he used to say that your black leather shoes had to be so thoroughly polished that you should be able look into them and comb your hair. Under his tutelage, **our school won the interschool march-past trophy for 25 successive years.** This is a record which is unparalleled in the annals of inter-school competitions in our city in any activity. If any of our present day teachers were to resort to his strong arm tactics today, some parent like me would certainly haul him up to the police station and charge him with child abuse. Yet, we ex-students remember him fondly. Unfortunately, he passed away a few days ago and I thought today would be an appropriate day to pay a tribute to his memory. May his soul rest in everlasting peace.

Coming to the Republic Day, it was this day in 1950 when we adopted our own constitution after two years of intense debate and also appointed our first President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. With this, the process of gaining freedom that started on 15th August, 1947 was complete. It is incumbent upon us today to reflect upon the huge sacrifices made by our forefathers who fought hard for our independence. It is due to their untiring efforts under extremely oppressive conditions that all of us have had the good fortune of being born in free India and the luxury to chase our own dreams. Whereas we all take our right to freedom for granted, it is equally important to be conscious of our obligations that accompany our rights. We have just heard a well researched and eloquent speech from a young lad who highlighted the immense progress that our country has made in the last few decades. It is extremely important that we do not lose sight of these many great achievements of our country that we ought to be proud of. Undoubtedly there are many evils that plague our society too. As we are free, it is our duty to see that we carry the momentum of our progress forward and simultaneously work hard to eradicate some of the problems and divisive forces that our country suffers from. It is only by single-mindedly channelising our energies in this direction that we shall be utilising our freedom fruitfully.

We have just hoisted our national flag and it would be interesting to know a little bit about the history of how our tricolour came into being. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, the Indian National Congress was at the forefront of our independence struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. At his behest, a gentleman named Mr. Venkayya designed a simple flag consisting of a saffron and a green horizontal stripe with a spinning wheel or “charkha” on it. These colours were so chosen because they were dear to the Hindu and Muslim communities which formed bulk of India’s population. The charkha symbolised our desire for self reliance. Shortly thereafter, a white stripe was inserted between the two in order to represent all other communities which formed part of undivided India. Thus our tricolour was born and it sought to represent every citizen of our country. It also sent out a strong message to our British rulers that the entire country was united in its fight for freedom and opposed to

their policy of divide and rule. When India finally gained independence in 1947, this flag was adopted as our national flag with the dark blue "Ashok chakra" replacing the charkha. The Ashok chakra sits right at the centre of the flag and it lends itself to symmetry as opposed to the charkha which appeared different when viewed from either side of the flag. More importantly, the original religious symbolism of the flag was replaced by a much deeper and more profound meaning. Now the saffron stripe exhorts us to be courageous and make sacrifices just as Campion calls "To Courage and high chivalry." The white stripe reminds us to be honest and pure in thought, words and action just as Campion calls "To honour, truth and loyalty." The lower most green stripe stands for Mother Earth and Her abundant riches that sustain life on our planet. Gandhiji famously said that Mother Earth has enough bounties to fulfil every man's needs but not his greed. Finally, we have the Ashok chakra with 24 spokes standing for each hour of the day and inspiring us to make continuous and relentless progress all our life.

Thus, you can see that our national flag teaches us many sterling values which are concurrent with the values that our school ingrains in us. Campion school has a rich history of taking in young boys of five with impressionable minds and arming them with a wide range of skills and knowledge that enables them to make a difference. By the time they graduate they are young, confident men of sixteen ready to take on the world. It is no small wonder that you will find a star Campionite in every nook and corner of the globe excelling in all conceivable spheres of human activity. Campion has always been committed to imparting value based education while fostering all round development of every student.

Today is a day to express our gratitude to all those who have shaped our destinies and lives so far. It is also a time to renew our pledge to do our best for our families, society and country. So go out and reach for the skies. While you stretch yourself fully in this endeavour, please remember to ensure that your feet remained firmly planted on the ground.

I shall conclude where I started from. As the bell rang to bring the curtain down on our last P.T. period with Mr. Hodiwala, he said, "Boys, do your best and leave unto Lord the rest."

Thank you and Jai Hind!