

Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad Convocation Address by His Excellency
Dr. Sarup Singh the Governor of Gujarat on Saturday, March 23, 1991

Chairman, IIMA Board of Governors, Members of the IIMA Board and
Society, Director and Members of the Faculty & Staff of the Institute,
the Graduating students and distinguished guests,

I feel greatly honoured for having been asked to preside over the graduation ceremony of this august institution and to share a few of my thoughts with you. I am, of course, conscious that as a student and teacher of English literature I am singularly ill-equipped to address such a distinguished gathering of specialists in management. But I decided to accept your Director's invitation under the impression that it is perhaps goods for specialists to now and then hear persons who are not directly connected with their discipline. Moreover, I felt that perhaps the distance between my professional background and yours is more apparent than real. After all, literature deals with life and life in a very essential sense is itself a continuing process of management. In saying this I am of course referring to management not in the narrow technical sense but in the larger and more universal sense of managing our affairs as members of an organised society. It may, therefore, not be wrong to say that, with or without professional training, we are all managers when it comes to organising our lives both as individuals and as members of social groups. If this is accepted, it would follow that corporate management, while of great importance, is nevertheless only a part of the larger exercise of effectively organising ourselves to deal with the pressing problems of today and the daunting challenges of the future.

One problem that has been troubling my mind in recent months is the failure of our social system to contain the divisive forces which often lead to confrontation and violence. It is not that these forces are new but their systematic exploitation for political purposes is something that our democratic system cannot bear. We could have perhaps found some equitable solution if there were not at the same time an alarming erosion of both public and private morality in our society. All of us notice every day a new culture taking birth which permits and indeed encourages a cynical manipulation of everything within reach for the attainment of short-sighted and private ends leading to life styles which can only cause further alienation.

You may well ask why I am lamenting over things which I cannot correct. But can these young people not do something about it? They can surely see that we are increasingly losing our ability to manage our institutions

- whether these are political institutions, academic institutions or economic institutions. Is it not time that our specialists in management address themselves seriously to these larger areas of management ? After all, the issues of institutional management constitute the sinews of an organised and civilized society.

You will kindly forgive me if I look back to earlier times. Many of you may not perhaps know that when our educational foundation came to be laid under alien auspices - and even as late as the period between the World Wars - mention of management as an academic discipline might have raised eye-brows and the query: "Why do you need such a special field of study ? Any well-educated man whose mental faculties have been developed and refined by exposure to the existing fund of human knowledge - the best that has been thought in the world - ought to be able to handle a management situation as it arises. He will discover for himself the necessary means, having that resourcefulness within himself." You know, that is how in Victorian England, Henry Newman in his *IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY* defined the aim of higher education, namely, to produce a well-grounded mind, a self-sufficient entity called "a gentleman." And the intellectual elite of the time, Matthew Arnold, J. S. Mill, Disraeli, all concurred. The faith behind that notion was that a man of a rounded education, knowledgeable in how to obtain necessary expertise, would make the right decisions on public and private issues... and provide leadership in a crisis.

The important point was that the University was a place where knowledge was pursued for its own sake and not for any narrow utilitarian purpose. It was the idea of "liberal" education which had come to mean an education that liberates, releases man's inner potentialities as well as liberalizes the mind. It was both an intellectual and a moral discipline. The emphasis in such an education was squarely on literature, fine arts, history, philosophy - the humanities as a whole. What was aimed at was broadening of the mind and building up of the character of the whole man. The emphasis indeed was on wholeness, the culture and refinement of the human individual, the nourishing of the inner resources of a man's Self.

Now, glancing at the kind of issues that exercise your mind in the discipline of management, all this might strike you as something out of a fairy-tale ! And yet, would it be unfair to ask whether this kind of liberal education has become altogether irrelevant today ? In other words, is a rounded and a harmoniously developed personality no more needed in today's world ? Have the two words, character and conscience, simply disappeared from the modern dictionary ? Your greater concern obviously is with how to "modernize" - how to utilise strategies and practices of "high-tech" firms effectively, how to link up information technology to strategic management, and get rid of bureaucratic structures now rendered obsolete in an information society. Your prime problem may be how computer-based manufacture and marketing alter administrative practices and men's behavioural patterns. The older idea is now supplanted by "specialism", efficiency, professional expertise in an intensely utilitarian context - that is to say, "technological power," which is the watchword of the age.

This shift, I recognise, is inherent in the situation - a symptom of the times, something you can't wish away even if you want to. World events like the Industrial Revolution and the two World Wars, have made technological advance a means of survival. In India, our destiny almost entirely hinges on how quickly we make good the time-lag in economic and technological terms. All over the world the cleavage between technological pre-occupation and the knowledge that "liberates" and humanizes, has widened. The imbalance has become almost unredeemable. Indeed, we live in the world of C. P. Snow's "two cultures", the one of mathematical sciences and the other of the humanities and, to use Kipling's words, "the twain shall never meet."

I ask whether it is a healthy development that men of science, men of management, the technocrats, should have no place in their lives for humanities, for fine arts and literature, for religion and philosophy. In 1880 Matthew Arnold said: "Without poetry our science will remain incomplete" and that "we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us..." He was, perhaps, exaggerating, but was he altogether wrong in suggesting that we need to be consoled and sustained by the wisdom that is found in poetry ? It is interesting to watch that even while the common

imagination is stunned and captivated by the magnificent edifice science has created, the scientists themselves recognize science's incapacity to focus on mankind's moral purposes - wise or foolish - or on the values for which men and women have lived, striven and died.

"Important parts of human experience", says a distinguished scientist (Weisskopf of the M.I.T.) "cannot be reasonably evaluated within the scientific system. There cannot be an all-embracing scientific definition of good and evil, of compassion, of rapture or tragedy or humour or hate, love or faith, of dignity and humiliation, or of concepts like the quality of life and happiness." The scientists themselves are aware that a total reliance on the hard objective sciences can only produce a hard dehumanized world. Arguably, the old values may have lost their relevance, and so may have the humanities since business management must inevitably be swayed by the calculus of efficiency geared to maximum profit. But I am hoping that your frame of reference may be somewhat wider. Even if all you care for is "to deliver the goods" as the phrase goes, you are concerned with human beings, with individuals, and with social health of the community. Hence, even in your limited field, you would be a much more successful manager of men if you are able to combine the efficiency of technical knowledge with the human warmth that humanities alone can provide. Ultimately what matters is that your knowledge and your capacity to feel, your total intellectual and moral endeavour should flow harmoniously into sensibility and into character.

Today's world is, of course, a world of science, technology, big organizations, and primarily of business culture. That culture has won over man to a science-oriented reality principle. A secular humanism is its dominant religion. And science itself is becoming a closed, exclusive priesthood. Experience of the transcendent is exiled from our lives, rendering our lives indescribably vacuous in the process.

Even an ordinary man in our country recognises that a man has two sets of needs - one from without, one from within. If there is, all the time, enormous emphasis only on the outer needs, on collecting the goods of the

earth, there is a real danger that we would not know where to turn when we need to be consoled and sustained. In every man's or woman's life, however successful he or she may be, such moments do arise. That is why the primitive man invented his gods and goddesses, his philosophy of life and death and his own myths and literature. He did all this to face a hostile world. The world of today is even more hostile though in our moments of self-complacency we do not realise it. Like the primitive men and women, our need for shelter from hostile elements is even greater. Hence I am sometimes troubled by the aggressive managerial skill of the successful man. You have all been taught that efficiency is the soul of modern organisation. Perhaps so. But please see to it that this efficiency does not prove to be a rootless kind of efficiency. That, while it keeps you fully abreast of every innovative move - whether it is the Information Revolution, Computerizing, Artificial Intelligence or what-have-you - you remain rooted in the soil that is nourished as much by the humanities as by racial memory and the ever new search for the meaning of life.

In this respect we Indians are perhaps luckier than most other people. The Indian mind's ability to imbibe outside influences without abdicating its essential individuality is well known. This^{is} precisely what Gandhiji had in mind when he mentioned that he wanted the windows of his house to remain wide open for all the intellectual winds of the world to blow through them freely. He was confident that we would not be swept off our feet by these winds. I hope his confidence was well based.

In conclusion, I will like to say that those of us who belong to the privileged minority should remember that we can learn quite a lot from the common man in India. However poor and deprived he may be, he has adhered to his position of being at home in both the worlds - the outer as well as the inner. He never loses sight of the transcendent because of his preoccupation with the manifest world in which he has to function. You too, for all your knowledge and your material wealth, are heir to that great bequest. Honour it and it will honour you.

THANKS.