

National Defence Academy, Pune

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CONVOCATION ADDRESS

by

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Commandant, NDA, General A.K. Chopra, Principal, Professor S.C. Joshi, Members of the Academic Council, proud graduating out cadets of the 108th Course and their prouder parents, all other learning cadets, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to being asked to address you all on this very auspicious and happy occasion of the Graduation Ceremony of the 108th Course. I thank warmly the Commandant and the Principal for giving me this honour. Ever since I came to Pune long time back in 1966, NDA had always stood for me as a symbol of excellence and an important landmark in the landscape of Pune. I have had some contact with this great seat of training and learning through some of the academic faculty members, and was once asked to give a talk to the members of the Astronomy Club. You have an irresistibly beautiful and scenic campus with the Peacock Bay adding the grandeur of its own, and if one is lucky to run into a generous and obliging officer, one could as well have a joy ride in the lake. Needless to say that NDA has been one of my favourite spots to show to visiting friends and to boast about.

I must confess that it did take a good bit of serious deliberations in thought and principle before I could bring myself to accept the kind invitation. I wish to share my hesitation with you.

By nature, I am not comfortable and fully at ease in purely a ceremonial function. Secondly, I had no idea what I could meaningfully talk to you. I am a scientist who is concerned about some fundamental questions like why is the Universe, we live in, the way it is? But this is hardly an occasion for a serious scientific discourse and indulgence. More seriously, I am not only a peace loving person like everyone else but am a committed peace activist. It would therefore be against my grain to be associated with any event which could be construed as not being in conformity with the basic tenets of peace and harmony.

The question that I had to resolve for myself was: Was addressing the NDA cadets on their graduation in any way conflicting with commitment to peace? NDA's main aim is of course to train and prepare soldiers for fighting battles. Soldiers are indeed human tools for war. Do they cause war? Certainly not. War is thrust upon them as much as it is on other innocent people. I therefore thought of engaging you, who have taken armed forces as career, in a dialogue on a matter of much wider context and relevance. You are trained to fight war with the abiding purpose of

defending our motherland from external aggression. Never must we take to offence and aggression. Even in defence when you fight a war, it is an act of violence which does inflict grave human misery on either sides, yet its main purpose is peace. We must always respect and adhere to the principle of NON VIOLENCE as propounded and practiced by the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi. I would like to look upon the Indian Army as a well trained and prepared force with its abiding motto of NON VIOLENCE OF THE STRONG. Not many people know that Gandhiji had in fact established a physical training school in early 40s for young men to give effect to the non-violence of the strong.

In spite of the apparent divide in our viewpoint, we then share the profound concern for peace and are on the same line.

War has been as much a part of human history as peace. From the time immemorial we have been fighting big or small wars. Over the period, particularly with revolutionary and rapid advancement in science and technology, we have attained great heights in transforming human as well as physical landscape. On one hand we have built big skyscrapers, super fast highways of both physical and information transport, tunnels through mountains, dams on rivers, and nuclear power stations, and on the other hand the lethal weapons of mass destruction which can wipe us all out from the face of this planet, and turn it into a dead rock like other planets. The concern for peace and human survival with the accumulated knowledge and accomplished culture has never been greater in entire human history than today. We have to pool together all our wisdom and persuasiveness from all corners to steer past this very explosive and patently disastrous times.

Human beings distinguish themselves from other species that their concerns go beyond the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. They are blessed by nature the faculty of thinking which enables them to organize themselves into a civil society and as much as to create an alternate nature. They make knowledge and can propagate it from one generation to the other, and it keeps on building up. It is the process of carrying forward that gives us the sense of history and a kind of eternal continuity. Though human life span is quite finite yet it is a part of the eternal time. What one inherits at birth from the past, she or he transmits hopefully with 'value enhanced' at the death to the future. This is how the chain continues.

The most pertinent question is of value addition. We should all reflect most candidly and objectively upon this question individually in reference to one's life as well as profession and collectively as a community. In what state have we inherited the world from our parents and in what state are we leaving to our children? An honest answer and assessment of it will give the clear measure of value addition and our place in this eternal chain of evolution and development.

It is this human tendency of carrying forward and inheritance which if done without restraint gives rise to the unmitigated greed resulting in serious imbalance in distribution of wealth and resources among people, communities and countries. The wealthier and stronger want to control the sources of wealth generation so that they continue to accumulate more and

more. It is this unholy accumulation of wealth and power is the root cause of conflict and war. Wars are fought whenever the economic interests of the strong and mighty clash and are challenged.

One natural question arises that it is the monumental developments in science and technology that have brought us to such a critical juncture, what have they to offer for peace and containment of conflict? Science is a reliable and objective method of probing nature and its application gives rise to technology. Application of technology is in our hands which we can use for upliftment of life in all respects or for destruction of it all. Science and technology offer great opportunities for propagation and preservation of peace. It allows you to analyze and assess different aspects of a problem in a correct and quantitative reliable manner. It will offer practical solutions if proper questions are asked. A correct understanding of problems eliminates fear of uncertainty and will facilitate a cooperative and collective mode of interaction. It is this fear which is at the root of all conflicts that could fan out into wars.

The first step in this direction is adaptation of scientific temper in our social as well as physical living. It should become an integral part of our thought process and daily life as much as reading a newspaper in the morning. If we accept rational and objective analysis of all phenomena and events including social as well as emotional, it will make our life more true, harmony enhancing and conflict free.

It is only when we objectively analyze situations that we understand them better. Better understanding would promote confidence and empathy building. Right in the school, children should be exposed to scientific method in an exciting and demonstrative manner. There should be a global effort in devising proper curricula and some real life interactive exercises. Even the scientific facts about our Universe and our position in, if communicated with an enlightened peace perspective, could be quite effective as social harmony and fraternity promoting exercise. Just think of our status in the Universe. We are sitting on the third rock orbiting around an insignificant star which is one in  $10^{11}$  such stars in an equally ordinary galaxy, we call by the name Milky Way, and there are  $10^{11}$  galaxies, each having as many stars, in the Universe. Does it leave any breath behind for you to feel special and unique? This realization of one's insignificance in the larger scheme of things could be nothing but humbling. Taken in the right spirit and perspective, it would have an immense levelling influence promoting cooperation and camaraderie.

It then calls for a universal concern which should be taken as a global mission only then there is a hope for creating a conflict free enlightened world of truly rational beings. Then we would, in place of NDA, have NPA (National Peace Academy) which will specially train and prepare cadets for conflict resolution and problem solving. Wherever there will arise a conflict, corps of properly trained and equipped Peace Keepers will be rushed in to diffuse the situation. They will analyze and understand the cause of the conflict and mobilize the proper resources accordingly. Once the physical aspect of the disturbance is arrested by the sheer power of personification of the NON VIOLENCE OF THE STRONG, they will then try to engage the involved parties in a dialogue. There is no better effective and reliable method of conflict resolution than making the two sides talk and discuss. It is tempting to imagine that some time, hopefully in not

too distant future, there would come someone to address the graduating cadets of NPA, and I would feel highly gratified if he happens to take some cue from what I have been talking to you this morning.

Until that happens we have to live with realities of our times. You might wonder what type of a person you have invited who professes of withering away of this great institution. With due humility and all sincerity, I wish to say that I have attempted to present before you a picture of a highly enlightened and accomplished world and in that the transformed 'avatar' of your great institute. You might say that it is an idealistic dream. True, human history is built on dreams. The Chief of Army Staff, General J. J. Singh, an alumnus of this great institute, had soon after assuming the office asked his officers in the militancy torn Kashmir that tell me not of number of encounters but of number of hearts you have won. I salute and congratulate the General most warmly on his very first and clear pronouncement of his vision and concern for wider human issues. Wasn't he dreaming for a peace and harmony? It is very significant as well as heartening for it indicates a change in mindset. A very welcome change.

You are all used to being addressed as Ladies/Gentlemen Officers, I would rather like to address you as Citizen Officers. You are first and foremost a citizen, which echoes equality of all as enshrined in our constitution, and then an officer, which signifies your functional and professional role, of a democratic country.

Finally I wish to congratulate all the graduating out cadets on their brilliant performance and wish them all the best in their future career. To all other cadets also, I wish them well in their studies and training. I will close by a poem in Hindi which well resonates with the theme of this discourse.

## जरूरी नहीं है

तेरे सही होने के लिए  
मेरा गलत होना  
जरूरी नहीं है  
आसमान को नीला होने के लिए  
धरती का लाल होना  
जरूरी नहीं है  
एक साथ मिल-जुल कर जीने के लिए  
धर्म, जाति, रंग का  
एक होना  
जरूरी नहीं है  
अपनी पहचान  
जानने और बनाने के लिए  
एक-दूसरे से  
लड़ना-झगड़ना  
जरूरी नहीं है  
हम दोनों एक साथ  
सही और गलत

हो सकते हैं  
उसके लिए  
धरती का थम जाना  
जरूरी नहीं है  
न गलत अपने में गलत  
न सही अपने में सही  
जरूरी नहीं है  
गलत सही न हो  
और  
सही गलत न हो  
तेरे-मेरे एक साथ सुख-चैन से जीने के लिए  
जो कुछ भी लगे  
वह निखालिश  
सही और  
सही के सिवाय  
कुछ और  
नहीं है।

THANK YOU