

NAPARIMA COLLEGE

Our Alma Mater dear,
The school we all revere,
Make us worthy.
Help us ever to be
All that we ought to be,
And always proud of thee:
Naparima.

To thee the best we owe
With which we may endow
Our island home.
No matter where we roam,
If near or far from home,
Let us be always one
Naparima.

A POSSE AD ESSE

GRADUATION CEREMONY

**On this day of our Lord,
Thursday 19th October 2023**

Mr Chairman...Principal, Mr Roger Ali...for the records, no relative of mine...venerate brothers and sisters of the teaching fraternity...committed clerical and custodial staff...elated graduates of Naparima College...justifiably proud parents...other distinguished guests...a very pleasant morning to all...

I thank you for that kind and laudatory introduction. For a moment I thought the Master of Ceremonies was introducing someone else and then I heard him call my name. Being too old to blush...I almost burst like the frog in the equally old Aesop fable.

To the administration of my Alma Mater...I am blandished by the revered honour conferred upon me this morning...to speak and to join with you on this propitious and extolling occasion.

Mr Pardasie, one of my forty-eight thousand former students, discreetly told me that initially four persons were considered to deliver this feature address:- Joe Biden, Rihanna, Judge Judy, and me.

“The final decision was unanimous,” he smiled...and so here I am feeling rather prideful and most exultant.

Graduates who sit here this morning...to seek knowledge is your sacred duty...it is obligatory for every person on this Earth...

It is so whether they be male or female...regardless of age or colour...impervious to race or creed ...oblivious to class or culture...and it is so written in the Holy scribes of all the major religions of our God-fearing world...

Throughout our lives, all of us have sought and continue to absorb knowledge...this subpoena of nature is neverending...and it has been so since the moment of our birth...

We have learned to touch and feel and taste ...to speak and hear and listen...to read and write and to think...and because of these we became responsible and accountable and answerable...and we thank Sir and Miss and Ma and Pa and Nani and Uncle Doshi...

As Naps men...in the vocational years that shall arrive in the proverbial blink...you will find yourselves more responsible...more accountable...more answerable...and you shall thank the various institutions that further saturated your brains and filled your minds.

And when you capture a mate...or one unearths you...then from that day onwards...you will be deemed totally responsible...totally accountable and without fail or exception...totally answerable...and may God then grant you courage...and may He have mercy on your soul.

Ladies and gentlemen...each child who is sitting here today is different...each has their own special ability and unique talent...each has their own hopes; each one has their own dreams...

And though at times we may question the veracity of this claim...it remains immutable and indisputable...that just like us...each one of them was created equal in the eyes of the Lord...

Young men of Naparima College...on your scholastic achievements today, we celebrate the human spirit...you have triumphed...and you have mostly kept on the straight and righteous path...and in this gallant pursuit of knowledge...you seek a preferable and a more comfortable way of living...

But...whenever and wherever there be success...there are many unto whom thanks, praise and gratitude must be rendered.

To your families, we confirm that their support throughout this journey made an enormous impact and ‘their sweetness was not wasted in the desert air’. Parents and guardians came together with your teachers and you...all three blended, alloyed, and compounded to extract the purest and the finest...

That merger forged the great triangle essential for success...and where there is pleasure in the fruits...there is an even greater treasure in the roots...

To parents and guardians, as for your devotion, there is no compare...

From us humans to the lowest denizens of the animal kingdom...parental care of our young...in fairness at times rather strikingly diverse in nature...is as evolutionary as it is strategic. It enhances the growth and survival of our offspring...and parents seek zero...and expect nothing in reciprocation.

It is much like when we plant a tree and nurture it...prune it...allow it to catch the sunlight...watch it grow...all the while knowing that we may never get the opportunity to taste its fruits...

Aware that we may never sit in its shade...or scratch our backs against its trunk...so too, parents often never see the full blossoming of their children.

**To each parent sitting here this morning...to those in absentia...to the ones who could only have attended in the spirit form...we say-
*Semper gratiam habebō-***

We shall forever be grateful.

Parents...from that single human cell, smaller than the head of a pin...blended and punctuated and blessed with Divine intervention...was created footsteps and laughter and boundless potential...they became your sons who sit here this morning and who make you smile...and that's all you ever asked for.

The great poet of old said-

“...Your children...come through you...but NOT from you...and though they are with you...yet they belong NOT to you. You may give them your love...but NOT your thoughts...for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies...but NOT their souls...for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow...which you CANNOT visit...NOT even in your dreams...”

Today, graduates, you are mature enough to see and understand the logic that motivates your parents...

We thank God for giving them the courage to do the things that they did...which they still do...and which they will never stop doing...and we thank God for giving them the capacity to love you...

There are many virtues by which we are taught to adopt...GRATITUDE is the greatest among all...and among the dharmas of a child is to obey parents and to study.

Thanks to all the teachers...the Sages...the Gurus...the Maharishis...and their guiding hands that clothed you...thanks especially to your fifth and sixth form teachers who adorned you with the final cosmetics for you to take the stage this morning.

Thanks to them for sharing and giving their very all...unselfishly throughout the years... as they invaded the temples of your minds...and made you the natural enemies of ignorance...each day they sacrificed themselves upon the altar of duty...in this temple of care...Naparima College.

Your teachers toil for almost the same salary today as they did ten (10) years ago. Yet they persist...

The love of teaching and desire to mould young minds remain their undeniable quest...to make this world become a better place...that you shall not have to bite from the bitter bread of dependency...they gave each of you a sense of pride...and made you strive for more...

That alone is priceless...for, when a teacher fails you...then as said in Hamlet-*Thus bad begins, but worse remains behind...*

The teachers at Naparima College understood that teaching, especially at this level, involves wearing multiple hats...and each accoutrement was aimed at developing the fullest potential of their wards.

Sadly...it is a role that goes mostly unheralded by our society...the gritted teeth and the scathing, scornful glares of blame are often cast upon the teacher when there is a failure.

In success, though...Miss and Sir are about tenth on the 'List for Gratitude'...

Sadly, especially in these times, it is considered 'taboo' and socially and politically volatile to even suggest that a parent is failing in their duty.

Statistically, in our country, the schools that produce the highest percentage of academic scholars...both at primary and secondary...continue to be the 'Board schools.'

Due commendation, adulation, plaudits and approbation...must be rendered to the administration of this school and to the Presbyterian Board...together they continue to furnish the ethos which is a manifestation of their moral and spiritual philosophies.

Graduates...the fact that you are here... all of you looking as fresh and important as the morning headlines...and being recognised by this noble institution...indicate that you have already shown the definitive steps that will mark you as a moral, ethical and responsible human being.

Through the years at Naparima College...you have been offered many rich and enviable opportunities in a safe, happy and inviolable environment.

The frenzy that accompanies our cricket and football...the exhortative morning assembly...sharing our breakfast and lunch ...disseminating our acquired knowledge thereby benefitting from socio-cognitive learning...forging life-long friends...the amiable rivalry on Sports Day...the ebullience of our Elocution and Oration Contests...the solemnity of Founder's Day...the cheerfulness and buoyancy of together celebrating Eid, Divali, Easter, Christmas side by side with each other...the exuberance in celebrating Scholarships...the Clubs...the soulful College Hymn embedded in our marrows...one hundred and thirty years of history...and so many more...

And...all them interposed by the majesty of the adjacent emerald sea...

Cumulatively they provided the initial training for you to overcome any obstacle.

Naparima graduates...only Oliver Twist...if resurrected...could ever ask for more.

Exactly half a century ago I sat like you...an A'level Naparima graduate...and I listened to the speakers bemoan that it was a preferential, rough, unfair and unbalanced world that faced me and my fellow graduates.

Their lamentations flowed like the Nile in the Akhet season.

Likely...those before me heard wailings that were equally disconcerting...I though, never subscribed to them...because I didn't believe them.

What I believed then...and what I have proven through the decades...is that the world offers to every one of us...exhilarating music for those who choose to listen.

Graduates...bend your ears to the euphony of Orpheus' lyre...choose your journey and go forth boldly as Naps men have been taught to do...but as you travel this journey, each one of you must be cautioned.

The emphasis in the twenty-first century has shifted across the Cartesian plane...it is different from the positiveness of Quadrant One.

Those coordinates have been translated to highlight self-popularity, promiscuity, scandal, rebellion, the worship of money, revenge and other offscourings that are pretzeled into desirables.

There is far less focus on morals...respect... individuality...ethics...manners...values... empathy...the importance and sanctity of marriage...our purpose in this World...our Maker.

Still, it seems difficult to fathom that such things could happen in a world governed by a merciful Providence...and maybe the 'end' really is near.

Graduates, each one of you sitting here this morning can singly make a difference in this World of ours...

My Naparima brethren...

One vote can change a nation...One sunbeam lights a room...

One candle wipes out darkness...One smile conquers gloom...

Though none of us can look into the seeds of time...and none of us can say which grain will grow and which will not...all the flowers of all the morrows are planted in the seeds of today.

Graduates...if I were to condense my decades of experience and be presumptuous enough to offer advice in a few precipitous words...I would say to you...use your God-given senses and nourish your soul every day.

Remember, insecurity makes liars of us all... don't confuse success with excellence, so, educate all of your parts...seek out and have mentors and listen to them...bite off more than you can chew...

Look at the foot of the highest mountain and slowly concave your gaze to the summit. Its sheer majesty will remind you of your human vulnerability...it will make you aware of your atomic insignificance...

...but more so...in the inscrutable ways of nature, you will feel taller...and you will stir the spirits that lie latent, idle and asleep inside of you...

Graduates...insist on seeing...believing in...and admiring heroes....and then you...become one.

The Divine Creator has given each one of us the freedom of choice. We are free to have the mind of a genius and live the life of a King...or have the mind of an idiot...and live the life of a fool...to drift aimlessly with an outstretched begging hand...to exist like an indolent mass of protoplasm, floating in vacuous space...the choice is always ours...and ours alone...

Graduates...of 2023...like you...the good people who passed through our hallowed hallways left with us a part of their goodness...I call it the **'Brotherhood of the Hill'...and in that gift which they gave to us...our noble institution grew stronger and each giver lives on Paradise Hill evermore.**

Look around...feel the dynamism...the brawniness...the majesty...the resplendence that is Naparima College...and my brethren...you too must continue to have and cherish this memory...to keep the carvoting blue flames of our College burning bright...

To the graduating class...success at the secondary level is a small but important and wonderful tool in your life. It unlocks other doors of opportunity in your development. Let this graduation be your launching point to project you to further ones.

Whether your career choice belongs to the Culinary Arts or Sports or the Visual and Performing Arts...whether they be Technical or Vocational...or some other academic field...this graduation must NOT be your last one.

But, all along, you need to find what you love. And this is as true for your work as it is for your lovers.

Your work is going to fill a large part of your life and the only way to be content is to do what you believe is great work...and the only way to do great work is to love what you do.

And...if you have not found it, then keep looking. As it is with all God's creatures, none of us will ever be forsaken by Him...at the right time you will be led to it...just as it is with all matters of the heart...you will know when you find it.

The roads that lie ahead, were the same for my father as they are for me...they will be the same for you ...they shall be the same for your children...

There will forever be obstacles, hurdles roadblocks, potholes, speed bumps, speed limits, speedsters and drunken drivers...

These are mere challenges that we must learn to overcome...learn from everyone so they are not repeated...boldly persevere...a Naps man never says die until ‘rigor mortis**’ steps in...transfer your actions to move from the state of dream-like possibility to that of living actuality...**

A posse ad esse...is to remain your life’s motto...for it is on the bumpier roads where you will make your biggest and best contributions.****

Graduation is a step that defines a coming of age...the ending of one kind of life for another. It is moving to a new stage in which you become a leader, a doer and an achiever in yet a wider world...and this process never ends...

And though today is a happy and joyous time as you move with open arms to a new beginning...to another phase of your life...it is, however, a sad, perhaps even tearful day for others...especially the teachers at Naparima College...

You see...it marks the end of an era for them...it signifies the denouement of their phase with you...

So, as you greet your new beginning...glance back and assuage the heaviness in their hearts as they gather at the harbour and wave to you as you set sail...

‘Ave atque vale’...hail and farewell to the smooth-faced squeaky little boy who metamorphosed into the husky-voiced young man who now sprouts a strand or two of facial hair.

I wish each one of us a blessed and wonderful morning...a welcoming tomorrow...and eventually a fruitful...successful and accomplished life...

Naparima graduates of 2023...you are an instrumental part of tomorrow's future...go out there and do it...carve your path...

Travel to Mars and back...get rich...get famous...win...lose...innovate...lead...fall in love...fall out of love...and then fall in love again...make and lose fortunes...swim naked in the wild jungle rivers-upstream of course where the fat hippopotamuses and other river creatures don't deposit their droppings...roam the desert...climb the mountain...live, love and laugh often...and do it all your way.

But as you do...always glance in the direction of kindness. Do those things that incline you toward the big questions and avoid the things that would reduce you and make you trivial.

That luminous part of you that exists beyond your active personality—your passive soul...if it be...keep it as bright and shining as any that has ever been.

Go out into the beckoning World and make yourself, your family, and your country proud. Make Naparima College even prouder to boast that they have played a role in this intermediary stage of your education...

To the 2023 graduating class of Naparima College...the school that has produced thousands of scholars through the years...a school now captained by a stalwart principal...and who...for the records is not a relative of mine...and sailed by a crew of enviable professionals...

To our Alma Mater...we pray that our students continue to receive God's richest blessings...for which we are grateful.

May this blue-blooded institution always prosper...continue to stand tall...strong and proud.

This morning, we pray that the graduates of 2023 will continue to fly the flags of our College and our Country with honour and glory. May God always help all of us to be more compassionate...so that we may know the pain of the hungry and the agony of the violated...so that we may sympathise with the cold of the homeless and be wary of the task of the burdened...

To the entire staff and students of our Naparima College...I thank you so very much for having me here this morning.

by

Fayad W. Ali, MSc, PhD (Prof)

