

**FELICITATIONS BY MR. R. SUNDER, MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF
GOVERNORS OF GOOD SHEPHERD INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**

Hon'ble Chief Guest, Justice Venkatachaliah, Dr. and Mrs.P.C.Thomas, Ladies and Gentlemen, and, most important of all, dear students – past and present, of Good Shepherd International School, who have been sculpted and perfected by this famous and venerable creation of Dr.Thomas:-

A famous American educationist defined one kind of education as “That mysterious process by which the notes of the teacher enter the notebooks of the student without entering the minds of either of them”. But Swami Vivekananda defined education as “The manifestation of the humility and divinity of man which is already in him”. Today, I have the good fortune to felicitate the person who is what Swami Vivekananda probably had in mind when he spoke of humility and divinity; and my good fortune has been enhanced many times over when I do so in the very special presence of another great man who is the personification of humility and erudition, and on whose shoulders his innumerable achievements sit lightly – Justice Venkatachaliah.

I am certainly not exaggerating when I say that it is my proud privilege to felicitate Dr.Thomas on this doubly important and happy occasion, the Founder's Day of this great school and his 65th birthday. As a good friend, as a complete man, as an educationist par-excellence, as a leader and innovator, as a bold and fearless individual who has never been afraid to create, engineer and experiment with pioneering ideas and ventures, and especially as a humanist who has constantly built bridges to the future without burning those of the past, Dr.Thomas is indeed one in a million. Such a person has completed 65 years of his eventful life today, and it is my fervent wish that this is but the 65th run of his century!

Thomas and I have been good friends and colleagues for over 35 years, and over these years, I have always admired his qualities. His penchant for punctuality, his suave manners and excellent sense of dressing, his attention to detail – here I must make a note of his habit of keeping small slips of paper in every pocket, where he makes written notes of every small point to be attended to, and which he does attend to within three days at the most – and above all, his consideration and regard for all his old acquaintances, be they staff, students, colleagues, friends or servants, have all made him stand out as an object of admiration and envy. Thomas

has an incredible capacity for work and burning the midnight oil, for he is always of thinking of newer ways to build and improve his institutions. My favourite poet Longfellow probably thought of a person like Thomas when he said:

“Heights that great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upwards through the night”

In the course of his long and illustrious career as a Teacher in the Sainik Schools, Headmaster of the Brecks Memorial School and then the Founder-Principal of the Good Shepherd Public School, which started with just 54 students and has now grown into one of the largest residential schools in this part of the world, the Good Shepherd International School with 1200 students from over 40 countries and matured into this monument of International fame, Thomas has crossed many rivers of fire. He has had more than a fair share of problems from many who have resented his progress – but then, all great achievers do. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt:-

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat”.

Dr.Thomas has been the living example of the fighter and man of action envisaged by Roosevelt. His achievements are legendary, and I simply cannot exhaust or detail them without taking the whole evening to do so. Apart from bringing the Good Shepherd International School to such excellent levels, Thomas has also started the Good Shepherd Finishing School and the Good Shepherd College of Hotel Management, both being excellent institutions with International ramifications. He is also on the councils and Boards of Management of a whole lot of educational institutions which benefit continually from his wide experience and expertise.

Not content with being an educationist alone, Thomas has excelled in other fields, which, though not apparently related to one another, he has blended together with his enterprising vision. He has ventured into farming and agriculture with the Shepherd's Farm, into construction with the Thomson Construction Company, and into Printing and Publishing with the Hi-Tech Universal Printers and Publishers (India) Limited. With his keen and sharp sense of giving the best service, he has managed to integrate all the ventures to run his educational institutions in a highly professional and self-sustaining manner.

Again, as if these achievements were not enough, Dr.Thomas has made a huge mark in Rotary International, and has held innumerable positions of high esteem, through which he has been able to render service to humanity. He has scrupulously followed and observed Rotary's famous four-way test in every walk of life. It is my earnest wish that he will soon scale the summit of Rotary International and become the President of that great organization. With his intelligence and industry, Dr.Thomas is destined to achieve this too, and when he does, he will bring honour and joy to all of us who know him. The social service that Dr.Thomas has been doing has brought him in touch with legends like Pope John Paul and Mother Teresa, and Dr.Thomas has naturally been fired into reaching out to the poor. He has started a vocational training institute to train under-privileged women in professional and life-skills, in keeping with the adage that "if you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day, but if you teach him to fish, he will eat for the rest of his life". He has adopted the School for the Hearing impaired in Ooty and the Tribal School at Thorapalli, where the Shepherd's Farm is located, and he has also made the children of Good Shepherd International School engage in charitable work and social service every time they go there on outward-bound camps.

Swami Vivekananda's clarion call "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached", has found its personification in Thomas. The awards and rewards that his ventures in all fields of life have brought him are myriad in number, and I am not here to list them, lest I be accused of blowing his trumpet!!

At the same time, Dr.Thomas has always been, and continues to be, a deeply devout and religious person. He has never, even for a moment forgotten that without the help of the Divine Architect of the Universe, the Good Shepherd, to guide and sustain us, all our efforts will be in vain. St.Theresa's beautiful prayer is apt for an occasion like this:-

"Let nothing upset you;
 Let nothing frighten you;
 Everything is changing,
 God alone is changeless;
 Patience attains the goal;
 Who has God, lacks nothing;
 God alone fills all his needs"

God is ever full – "Sampoorna", and no-one knows this better than Thomas. It is because of his abiding faith and God-fearing nature that such success has come to him and his institutions rapidly and in full measure. When we consider the great many students, staff, employees, Teachers and acquaintances of the institutions in the Good Shepherd stable who derive the benefits of learning and sustenance through life, I am sure Dr.Thomas can rest assured that his mission is fulfilled. "Tomorrow" is a beautiful word and the most beautiful thing in life. It comes to us at midnight, very clean. It is perfect when it arrives and puts itself in our hands. It hopes we have learnt something from "yesterday". Dr.Thomas realizes this truth more than anyone else, for each day is a process of learning and re-inventing himself, and, oops!! probably starting another new venture. Indeed, I always wonder how he can possibly fit in so much into the 24 hours that God has given to us!!

I go back to my favourite poet H.W.Longfellow, who has said in his poem "The Builders":-

All are architects of fate.
 Working in these walls of time;
 Some with massive deed and great,
 Some, with ornaments of rhyme.
 Nothing useless is, or low,
 Each thing in its place is best;
 And what seems but idle show
 Strengthens and supports the rest.
 For the structure that we raise,
 Time is with materials filled;
 Our todays and yesterdays
 Are the blocks with which we build;
 Truly shape and fashion these;
 Leave no yawning gaps between;

Think not, because no man sees,
 Such things will remain unseen.
 In the elder days of art,
 Builders wrought with greatest care;
 Each minute and unseen part,
 For the Gods see every where.
 Let us do our work as well;
 Both the unseen and the seen;
 Make the house where Gods may dwell;
 Beautiful, entire and clean;
 Else our lives are incomplete;
 Standing in these walls of time;
 Broken stairways where the feet
 Stumble, as they seek to climb.
 Build today then, strong and sure,
 With a firm and ample base;
 And ascending and secure,
 Shall tomorrow find its place.
 Thus alone can we attain
 To those turrets where the eye
 Sees the world as one vast plain,
 And one boundless reach of sky".

None can deny that Dr.Thomas has been such a builder, and he has reached the stage when only the sky is above him. For him, though, that is still not enough!!

Last, but certainly not the least, Thomas is a loving husband and parent. His wonderful wife Elsamma, children Julie and Liju, their spouses and his grandchildren have always been close friends and Thomas has never been adversely changed by success. On the contrary, he and his family only get nicer with the passing years. If I have been given the singular honour of being made a member of the Board of GSIS, it is not because I have done anything for the school. It is my long acquaintance with the school and the sincere friendship of Dr.Thomas that have contributed to this nomination.

As I said earlier, I am truly proud to have been called upon to speak about what little I know of Thomas. Believe me, what I have said comes from the heart and not a word is intended to be plated with flattery; indeed, to do so would only amount to gilding the lilly. I am flattered, though, to felicitate

Thomas in the August presence of another great achiever, Justice Venkatachaliah, who is himself a living legend.

May God bless Dr.Thomas, and may he and his institutions grow from strength to greater strength, and attain those turrets of achievement from where there will be seen only the boundless reach of sky. I request you all to rise and give Dr.Thomas a standing ovation, as a mark of our good wishes for him to continue batting to score a well-deserved century!!

Thank you.