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Defence Minister Marapana at STC - Prize Giving says

### **Thomian culture shaped us for the future**

Defence Minister Tilak Marapana, PC who was the Chief Guest at the annual prize giving of S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia kept the entire audience including the Kindergarten children regaled by narrating some of his student day experiences at College.

One of them was the story of a colleague who ended up in the Jaffna remand prison after being suspended from school several times for his childhood pranks.

Defence Minister Tilak Marapane and Mrs. Marapane were escorted to the venue by the Warden, all senior and junior prefects of the S. Thomas College.

Minister Marapane, a distinguished old boy of the College, paid a glowing tribute to the students who received prizes and urged the students who did not receive prizes to work harder to obtain a prize at the next prize giving.

He said "Though college had been founded as a Christian school, during our time, I believe, we had more non-Christians than Christians. As youngsters we Buddhists were awed by the Hymns, the organ music and the ceremonies associated with the chapel. We used to yearn to attend service in the chapel. On rare occasions we were allowed to attend chapel. Never once was anyone encouraged in the slightest to become Christian.

On the contrary, every facility was afforded for us to visit the Temple next door. No wonder that we Buddhist Thomians respect and admire Christians. Buddhists, Christians, Hindus or Muslims we were all moulded and fashioned in one tradition. We learnt to respect diversity to befriend and love one another.

In the classrooms, every facility was there for proper instruction with dedicated teachers virtually institutionalized at S. Thomas'. It is with deep gratitude that I

keep thinking of them. They seem to haunt me. Though we may not have learnt very much due to our playfulness the subjects they taught so painstakingly we were greatly influenced by their sterling qualities. They were dedicated to college, just like I believe our present staff is. We are lucky that those who come to teach here don't consider it as a career but they treat their work as a devotion. Whether they had studied here or not they too end up Thomian.

In our time only a very few students took studies too seriously. But unknown to us we were all getting educated by our mere presence at college. Unwittingly we were absorbing the Thomian culture and slowly but surely we were being shaped for the future. Whether we passed our exams or not every one of us left college well equipped to conquer the world.

I must confess that I too was not one of the best behaved boys. I may have given enough headaches to my teachers and my parents must have spent many sleepless nights! But I know they had their fullest confidence in me. Whatever we did was in good humour without harming or ridiculing anyone.

I remember the time when our whole clique was on permanent "Conduct Report" which meant that the report form had to be signed with the comments of all the Masters and finally taken to Warden every week. Invariably the result was a caning from Warden Saram. But unknown to him we were wearing swimming trunks beneath our shorts. So the caning didn't matter very much. One smart guy went further and tucked in a chalk duster also inside the swimming trunk. He got caught with it when chalk particles began to seep out from his trouser with each cut!

I sometimes wonder what characteristics make a true Thomian. I believe that this is the way to look at it. Not start with someone who attended S. Thomas' and examine his attributes. We know the attributes that are expected in a Thomian and with the knowledge we identify the characteristics. Anyone who displays these characteristics we could regard as a Thomian. He may never have been to or seen or even heard of S. Thomas' College. In the same way, one may spend his entire

lifetime at S. Thomas' but yet lack those Thomian hallmarks and no one will regard him as a Thomian.

What are these attributes? And what are these characteristics that distinguish a true Thomian. We know it, feel it and easily identify some of these characteristics. But the whole alludes definition or even expression. Such is the Mystery of the Thomian legend. We know, however, that this spirit is omnipresent at S. Thomas' College.

Parents send their children to school to be taught, to study, pass exams, do sport and be equipped to live a comfortable life. Education is foremost. It broadens one's knowledge and outlook and of course if you do well at exams it helps one to find suitable employment. Sports helps us to be physically fit and teaches to tolerate and disciplines one to respect the rules. But there is always something more that children acquire from teachers and fellow students - That something is peculiar from school to school and what we acquire at S. Thomas' we brand as Thomian. It keeps passing from master to master and student to student and from generation to generation. It is acquired by association and interaction with others who are Thomians. It is unmistakable and can be found nowhere else and in my humble opinion it is the best for any man.

You boys should imbibe the Thomian spirit that surrounds you and equip yourself for the future to achieve something in life and to be of service to our countrymen. Thomians don't reach out and grab. And if you get a benefit by reaching out for it or grabbing it, this can hardly be called an achievement. Achievements, are those that are bestowed on you when you deserve it. You should set an achievable target. Not be over ambitious and resort to unholy practices to get to an otherwise unachievable target. You must equip yourself to be deserving that which you have set to achieve. It is not easy. But then you have to live up to your name and not let the side down.

Thomians try to be what they are. They don't put false airs or make false pretences that they are bigger than what they really are, nor do they descend to levels beneath the stations in life. They maintain their own dignity. They walk straight without

sticking their noses up or down. They maintain a balanced disposition, characteristic of gentlemen. They are charitable and helpful – They give what they can. Neither too much nor too little. The rest of the time they mind their own business. We don't meddle in other people's affairs uninvited.

So I say to you my young Thomian friends, consider yourselves most fortunate that your parents have done the best for you by getting you into S. Thomas'. You should profit by this opportunity and acquire that Thomian quality. Then and only then that you can be proud that you are a Thomian. But remember that Thomians never boast. Don't loose your head or be stuck up. It is not necessary that you advertise that you are a Thomian. You have only to be what you are. You are then sure to be recognized as a Thomian.

In conclusion, I would like to thank each and everyone of you for having so patiently listened to me. I owe a special "thank you" to the Board of Governors and Warden Ponniah for having bestowed upon me this great honour. I must congratulate the prize winners.

You have done well. I am confident that you will do well in the future. And for those who were not lucky enough to be prize winners, there is yet time for it. For the present you may console yourself with the knowledge that I myself didn't win too many prizes but I don't think I have done too bad", Minister Marapane said in conclusion.

By Sarath Malalasekera