

A tribute to Frank Richard

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to pay my humble tribute to a great Mauritian – *“Un grand fils du sol”* – Frank Richard, whose birth centenary we are celebrating today.

I have had the good fortune of having known him as a teacher at the Royal College of Port Louis and as the Director of the MIE. I will dwell on 3 of his main professional occupations and bring out his outstanding performance in each.

1. First as the teacher of English Language and Literature

When I joined the Royal College of Port Louis in Form I, the name ‘Frank Richard’ resonated in my ears as of a highly respected and admirable teacher. I got a strong impression and understanding that when it comes to the teaching of English Language and Literature he, in the words of Shakespeare *“he bestrides the world like a colossus”*

I learn from his contemporaries and former students how he was very popular as a teacher for private tuition in English Language and Literature. SC and HSC students would throng in large number to his home in Curepipe. Not only was he a competent teacher, a *“faiseur de lauréats”* but he was also very generous, as in a number of cases private tuition was free for those who could not afford to pay.

2. He had such a mastery of the Literature texts, especially those of Shakespeare that when he had to present educational programmes at the MBC, he would do them without any written material in hand. He would arrive at the MBC studio and would inquire then and there what was on the programme for him to speak on. It would suffice for him to be informed of the text and the

section therein – Julius Caesar Act 3 Scene 2 – and he would proceed to make a masterly analysis of that text for nearly 30 minutes.

3. Frank Richard has shown great leadership and authority as an administrator.

Here is an anecdote to exemplify my assertion.

There was the case in the late 60's of a boy who had brilliantly passed the Junior Scholarship exams but was refused admission to the Royal College of Port Louis by the Rector on the grounds that the boy was under aged-as he had not reached 11 years.

The parent went to see Frank Richard, the then Permanent Secretary. Subsequently, Frank Richard contacted the rector and explained to him that if the child was over aged he should not have been allowed to take the exams in the first place. He convinced the rector to register the child and the child got his well-deserved admission.

Here is an example, NOT of bending the rules, but of being reasonable, fair and understanding. Frank Richard demonstrated his enlightened leadership and authority.

But, what is more, here is a case where due consideration is given to a gifted child, a policy which is in force today at the Ministry of Education.

Today, that student is a world known Urologist practicing in France.

4. As Director of the MIE, Frank Richard has indeed left his imprints.

It was he who spearheaded the Mauritianisation of the curriculum for the primary and secondary sectors. Under his leadership, subject panels were set up to produce textbooks in the various subjects, reflecting the Mauritian reality.

Teachers Guides were produced and teacher training went along hand in hand. Mauritianisation became a reality.

5. In the Pre-primary sector, Frank Richard has bequeathed a reference book to the nation, that is, what is commonly called “The Richard Report” entitled **‘Laying the Foundations’**. A look at the recommendations today would reveal that most of them have been implemented in the years following the publication of the report.

6. In the day to day running of the MIE, former staff members are unanimous in stating that Frank Richard was for many like a father figure, given his caring attitude and his readiness in giving responsibilities to help the staff members forge ahead and advance in their career path.

Let me conclude with a glimpse of Frank Richard as an exemplary Mauritian a patriot and a Universal man, by quoting Surendra Bissondooyal, former Secretary of the MIE.

I quote: “Il était toujours humble et à l’écoute des autres. Il était un homme hors du commun. Lui qui a vécu à une époque où le racisme battait son plein; que ce soit à Maurice ou en Angleterre, où il a fait des brillantes études universitaires, il était dépourvu de tout réflexe raciste ou communaliste. Linguiste chevronné, pas seulement en Anglais, mais aussi en Français, Latin et Grec, il voulait en même temps avoir une bonne connaissance de L’Hindi. Il venait souvent à la maison pour parfaire sa connaissance de cette langue, avec l’apport du Prof. Basdeo Bissondooyal” end of quote.

7. Finally, I was told by Jean Marie, Frank Richard’s son, that at home his father would impress upon him and his brother to read and recite

Rabindranath Tagore's poems, especially "***This is my prayer to thee my Lord***" and "***Where the mind is without fear***"...from Gitanjali.

A close analysis of this second poem, side by side with Frank Richard's life achievements and personal qualities leads me to conclude that Frank Richard indeed lived up to the ideals expressed by Rabindranath Tagore in this poem.

And I think this can be taken as his message to us all:

Indeed Frank Richard's mind was without fear,

And his head was held high,

For him knowledge was free,

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls,

Where words come out from the depth of truth,

Where tireless strivings stretches its arms towards perfection,

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habits,

Where the mind is lead forward by thee into ever widening thought and action,

Into that heaven of freedom my father let my country awake.

Let me say to Jean Marie and Regis that you can be proud of your Dad and his achievements.

There was a man, when comes such another.

Thank you