

MindTree

**4th Convocation Address by
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**at
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Rourkela**

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Chairman Dr. Bansidhar Panda, Members of Senate, Director Dr. Sunil Kumar Sarangi, Registrar Mr. S.K. Upadhyay, graduating students, members of faculty and staff, ladies and gentlemen:

I am deeply honoured to be invited here for this great occasion. I can imagine the excitement, the sense of completion and voyage, this momentous occasion brings to all of you.

Fifty years back, I was born in this land; this very land sustained me and raised me and gave me the displacement necessary to experience the miracle of the world. Consequently, I have gone to many places, met many people, stood in wonder and awe and felt a sense of joy in being alive every single day of my existence. There is something eternally great in this land that gave me the capability to go, kiss the world. I pray to that power to make your journey worthwhile, beautiful and more memorable. I bless you to be eternally enchanted in your voyage. The sense of wonder and enchantment are very precious, I pray that you keep them in every step of the way.

Journeying along, your life will take you to so many places; you will get there with many avowed purposes. Today, I want to leave behind a few thoughts; a few ideas that would make your journey little more worthwhile, as mine have been.

I so clearly recall my first train ride from Koraput to Cuttack when I was a little boy. I sat mesmerised by the window throughout the entire journey. I saw the land extend from the railway tracks, cross the phone lines with a lone blackbird on them, to the patch of water with white lilies, to the changing magical landscape dotted with stoic palms, sometimes the harvest ready paddy, sometimes the arid tracts that led all the way to the timeless mountains and beyond them all, a horizon that changed every time I looked at them.

Ever since, whenever I get the chance to travel, I seek a window seat. Aboard a train, an airplane, a bus or a car, I must have a window next to me.

I want to gift you that window so that you too feel it's magic.

As you graduate and enter the world of work, like me, you will travel on work to many places around the world; each time you do, ask for a window seat.

Experience the cruise over clouds in the big blue sky and watch the sunrise and the sunset at a height of thirty-thousand feet above ground. Never be too tired or too pre-occupied for it. If you have not felt the receding darkness and the first, thin, crimson line that then fills up an entire horizon before the day dawns, it is a life less lived. Just the same way, if you have not seen the day fold itself in the womb of the last crimson rays, like an innocent child that now must sleep, how would you wake up to the possibilities the window will present when your plane lands?



Born in 1957, I belong to the first of the “free generations” of India. You are part of the second free generation that this land has produced in many centuries! Your freedom is purer, because your parents were never subjected to the foreign yoke as were mine. Your parents were born under the Tricolour. You will therefore be free from all shackles — political, economic and intellectual. And you can go anywhere.

Your journeys will take you to so many distant lands. One day, you will go to New York and to London and to Paris and to Istanbul, to Nagoya. Be fascinated by their history, their culture, their progress and their people. When you get there, take a moment to go to their rivers.

Take a long walk by the river bank all by yourself and sense time and timelessness.

In New York, stand by the river near Queens and see the expanse of water that separates and unites the land, look at the seagulls that watch the giant ships go gently past and ordinary people with simple needs and aspirations sit with their young children to hold a moment in their hearts or just walk past or jog or simply watch the waves lap the land.

In Paris, take the time to walk slowly past the Seine and alongside her banks, watch the artists take out their easels, their colours, set up their canvases and pour their heart into the portraits, the landscapes, the still life and the abstracts.

When you go to Lahore, walk past the Ravi flowing in from the border across India, take a moment to dip your feet and feel the molten snow that travels the Himalayan slopes, into the Punjab and across the artificial borders that separate two people who look the same, eat the same food, wear the same clothes, have the very same hopes and fears and aspirations but can not cross over at will, because unlike the water that is caressing your feet and flowing on, they have been taught the language of hate. When you know no hate, your heart will take you wherever you want to go.

Go to Nagoya and watch the Shonai, the Shinkawa, and the Nikko rivers as they flow into the Port of Nagoya. Look at the snipe and the plover and the many other migratory birds of the wetland that is an important halfway point in their flight to their breeding grounds in Siberia, and to their winter habitat in Oceania and other places in the Southern Hemisphere.

If you do not go to the river and watch how it flows even when it is bound by the banks, how would you ever know what it means to be free?



When I grew up in this land and I traveled from place to place, I crossed her many rivers— the Mahanadi, the Bramhani, the Baitarani, the Suvarnarekha and the many others. While doing all that, I started my fascination for bridges. Every bridge to me is as unique as the river flowing below it. Men build bridges over rivers, over time and over human constraints. How many times I have woken up from my early morning slumber of a three-tier railway compartment of the Puri Express, as the train would rumble over the Mahanadi Bridge, signaling one more arrival.

Or when I have woken up startled in the middle of the night as the train went over the long spans over the Godavari. As everyone slept, I would look out of the window, enchanted to see the moon over the silvery water.

In those moments I felt one with a certain stillness far below, a kind of silence in the moonlight over the waters, even as the wheels made their metallic sound rolling over gridlocked iron spans. The ability to hear the din and the silence at the same time is a precious gift you must never lose.

I have seen bridges big and small over rivers, backwaters, lagoons and canals. I have seen them in the midst of bustling cities and in the silence of the canyons. Of the many bridges I have gone over in the course of my work with the world, I remain fascinated with the Brooklyn Bridge over the Hudson River. When you have the occasion, I want you to see the bridge.

They started building this 5989-foot-long suspension bridge in 1870 and it was completed thirteen years later. At the time it opened, it was the longest bridge of its kind in the world, the very first to use steel-wires for suspension. At the time, it was the tallest structure in the entire western hemisphere. The Brooklyn Bridge was designed by a man named John Augustus Roebling.

Right at the beginning of the project, Roebling's foot was seriously injured by a ferry when it crashed into a wharf; and within a few weeks, he died of tetanus. His son, Washington, took over the task, but was stricken with something known as the caisson disease. It is a disease that occurs commonly among divers who work under pressure. As a result, he became crippled and could no longer visit the site of the construction. It seemed for a while as if the bridge was doomed. It was then that Washington's wife, Emily Warren Roebling took charge. She became his aide; she learnt civil engineering from her husband and started overseeing the project on-site. When the Bridge finally opened, she was the first to walk across.

Bridges are work of architectural design, tensile strength of material and sheer human labour.

But every bridge is first a matter of man's vision and then, the sheer tenacity to deliver on that vision. Every bridge is an affirmation of the possible. If you do not develop Emily Warren Roebling's strength of the heart, how would you build the bridges to our future?



But, what about the bridges to the heart?

Sometimes, at the end of your long day, you would be rushing through the peak hour traffic in London or Paris or Shanghai. In the crowd of humanity, you may suddenly see two nuns from the Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. It is amazing that they simply stand out wherever they are; you have no difficulty spotting them. The same coarse white sari, their heads covered with Mother's trademark blue stripes, a cloth bag and the rosary in hand. I have seen them in San Francisco and in Cochin— in New York City and Calcutta. They serve in 133 countries all over the world hugging new born babies abandoned at birth, healing the sick, the dying, and the

destitute irrespective of their religion, caste, color and creed. Even though you may miss the 6.56 to Heathrow or to Charles De Gaul, stop that moment, walk up to the Sisters and just tell them that you are from India.

Just the same way, wherever you go, in case you happen to walk past the signage of the Mother in any city in the world, enter the gate of the Missionaries of Charity and spend a few moments with them. Do not worry— they ask you for no money, they do not enlist you nor they do make you feel guilty for chasing a capitalist dream.

In just spending that little time of your life with them, you will come back richer, healed and more complete.



In the quest of the world that you must traverse, I want you take the time to see your own country. Not as a tourist but as a contemplative student of engineering.

Some day, I want you to visit the thousand-year-old Chennakesava temple in Belur in Karnataka and behold the breathtaking creation of man. Built under the reign of Vishnuvardhana — legend has it that it took 103 years to complete. I want you to stand in front of the facade of the temple, filled with intricate sculptures and friezes with no portion left blank and be engulfed in its history. The intricate workmanship in the sensuous dancers, the elephants, the lions and the horses will tell you the difference between engineering and creativity.

In their timelessness, you will also realise how easily we all reduce our lives to the ordinary. Because, unlike the sculptors of Belur, Halebidu, Konark and Hampi, most of us are not driven by the desire to leave behind a legacy.

A life that leaves nothing behind is a life wasted on the Planet.



I grew up in tiny places in Orissa. One of the many happy memories I have is of growing up in the tribal districts of Koraput and Keonjhar. I have felt the innocence in the faces of the tribesmen, their women and children who came down from the mountains once a week to sell their meager produce, a chicken or a dozen eggs, wild berries or the wood they had gathered. To bring them closer to civilization, occasionally, the government sent a jeep with a movie projector that screened patriotic and such other harmless fare. The first time these were screened in Koraput, the tribal folks ran away in fear that the government had indeed brought ghosts to their village. Gradually they started trusting, and we all sat on the ground to watch the shadows.

Many years after, I sat transfixed at the performance of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Phantom of the Opera, first in London and then in Broadway, in which the angel of music is actually the spirit of Erik who is seeking love from Christine the opera singer who unmasks him to discover that he is

a ghost. In revealing desire and distress, Erik banishes himself and the curtain falls just one more time on the world's most enduring performance of all times. I have watched the ingenuity of stagecraft in Broadway, the brilliance of theatre and stage performance in Westside, I have also squatted on the cobbled town centers of little known places to watch the road side performers and one day, listened to the Vienna school choir sing.

As you journey around the Earth, I want you to feel the music people create in the many different lands. How else will you know that the harp and the lyre are work of great engineering, yet, it is people who make the music and feelings that write the song?



When I was a little boy in Keonjhar, every morning, after the preparations for school got done, my mother would give me a cloth bag, a rupee and fifty paise to get her fresh vegetables from the local market where the sellers brought what they had grown. There they sat with their produce in small bunches and lots, only the traders sold the potatoes and onions with a scale.

Most homes did not have refrigerators so you purchased only that much you needed for the day.

I loved the smell of the fresh coriander, the chilies, the cauliflower and the greens that still had the dew on them. After I delivered the vegetables, I would run to the municipal tap under which all the little boys took their bath in the open, to come home with two buckets of water for mother, eat the fresh cooked meal and walk my way to school.

Whenever I go to Hong Kong or Honolulu, even today, I go to the farmer's market and just walk around to smell the fresh produce, to watch people inspect the pieces in their hand, haggle for the price and return home with the spirit of life that makes living such a beautiful experience. I like the energy of the vegetable market and the fish mongers. I like the sense of living for that one day in a fresh, wholesome manner, the prospect of the aroma in the kitchen, the conversation around the seasonality and the price—the many little things that make us not just jostle for existence but find meaning in small things.

Nowhere in a vegetable market would you find the rich and the famous. It is here that ordinary people come, devoid of the trappings that the concrete busyness of life imposes on all of us. So my friends, as you make it a point to conquer the conference room, do find time to feel the energy and the vibrancy of the vegetable market wherever work takes you.

How else would you ever meet the real people?



We grew up in small places of Orissa like Patnagarh, Raigada, Chatrapur, Balasore and Keonjhar. In none of these places, you had a public library. For someone hungry to read, there was no opportunity. These were places where the English daily arrived only the next day in the

afternoon. Not having enough books to read, we read up every book we could lay our hands on from Gopinath Mohanty to Pablo Neruda, from Radha Mohan Gadanayak to Rabindranath Tagore, from Fakir Mohan Senapati to Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

The expansive hunger to read was developed in the void of the small places we grew up in. I felt ignorant each time I had not read something new in literature, in science and sociology, in religion and politics and everything else.

Today, availability and access are no longer a problem, particularly in Institutes like yours. But I lament the decline in reading habits of young people, especially engineers around me. A few days back, I met two young engineers from Gujarat. Hoping to make conversation, I told them about the last two books I had read; Suketu Mehta's "Maximum City" and Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss". They looked blank. I persisted, "The Booker Prize?" My effort to create a synaptic link at least for Kiran Desai.

The two continued to look blank. The conversation broke.

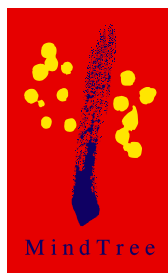
As you don your convocation cap and gown today and prepare for your long journey ahead, remember to carry a new book each time you pack your bags. Read things unconnected to your profession so that you begin to understand the expanse of the human mind. In the poetry and prose of humanity, all wisdom has been recorded for posterity. If you lost your reading, how would you connect to your heritage and how would you converse with a stranger?



It is time for me to close. I am grateful that I had this wonderful opportunity to speak to all of you today. In joining you for your convocation, for this moment in time, you have become me and I have become you. I hope you will keep this moment with you just the way I will.

My best wishes to the graduating students, my gratitude to the teachers and administrators who are gifting the nation with the talent to build a future we will all live in and congratulations to the parents who are here to see their legacy carried forward.

Thank you ever so much.



Subroto Bagchi is co-founder and chief operating officer of MindTree Ltd. MindTree is one of the most admired IT & R&D Services Company. His book "The High Performance Entrepreneur" has been critically acclaimed and is a Penguin Portfolio best seller. Many of his other writing can be archived at [www. mindtree.com/subrotobagchi](http://www.mindtree.com/subrotobagchi)

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