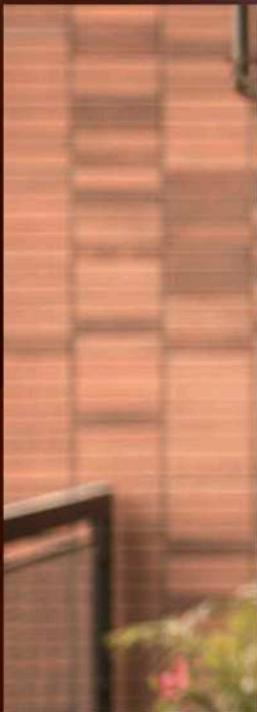


**55th Annual
Convocation**
of Nettur Technical
Training Foundation



**Convocation
Address by**

SUBROTO BAGCHI

**Chairman
Odisha Skill Development Authority**

**Bangalore
International Exhibition
Centre(BIEC)
25th October 2019, 11 AM.**

Dr N. Reguraj,
Managing Director, NTTF,
Dr Sarosh J Ghandy,
Chairman, Edutech-NTTF,
Dr B.V. Sudharshan,
Director, NTTF, teachers
and staff members, parents, well wishers
and most importantly, my dear students.



Heartiest congratulations to all of you who are graduating today. I pray to the Almighty to bless you with character, competence and good health to make a big difference wherever you go. NTTF is one of the most admired skill development institutions in the country, its reputation is now going global. You are indeed very lucky to have received your education and training in this great institution. This has already given you a leg-up in life. You are trained to succeed in whatever you may do in your life.

As I was preparing for this event, I realised that I have never delivered a convocation speech at a technical training institution in my life. I have done so at engineering institutions in India and abroad but never have I been invited to a place like NTTF. This opportunity is unique for me, it makes me very proud because for the last four years of my life, I have devoted myself to the world of skill development. This is my life now and this is my purpose. Thus, in inviting me for this great occasion, you have greatly honoured me. Thank you so much for your kindness. On my part, I want to leave behind a few thoughts that may help you craft your journey with a different perspective on who you are and take you to a discussion on who you are meant to be. The starting point for that is to see yourself, not as a bonsai but as a big tree, one that is larger than life, tall, strong, elegant and beneficial to everyone.

Let me talk about who you look like in my eyes today. How you may be markedly different from countless others, some with so-called higher education.

You are trained in the art and the science of extreme focus. It is unbelievable how huge it is inside of you and how far behind others are in this all-important requirement to excel in life. You have it in great measure because focus isn't a choice for you.

For a politician, a bureaucrat, a businessman, even a doctor, the occasional loss of focus is quite accepted. But if you are setting up a drilling rig on the high seas, if you are welding a gas pipeline, or you are programming a PLC device, you must be in the moment, you must be present in body, mind and soul. You must do it to the exclusion of the entire world. You are the Master of Focus.

You have learnt, as part of your training here, how to directly convert resources into things of value. If I give you the raw material, consumables, a machine, the required energy, your output is not vague or indeterminate. What you do with the resources at your command is directly visible to the naked eye and commands instant economic value. There are no ifs and buts about the conversion that takes place in your hands. The same isn't true of most white-collar workers.

A photograph of a conference room. In the foreground, there are several rows of dark-colored chairs with light-colored seats, arranged around a long wooden table. The room has a large window on the left side, showing a view of a building exterior. The lighting is warm and soft, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light coming through the window. The background shows a dark wall with a framed picture or artwork.

They may spend days, weeks and months and it is quite possible that there is no visible correlation between what they have consumed and what they have produced and if at all, what they have produced has any economic value to anyone. Another interesting thing about you and your work: there is no lag-factor between your effort and your tangible output. There is no scope of fudge, there is no place for you to hide. For most of your counterparts in the larger economy, there is.

Skilled professionals like yourself possess kinaesthetic intelligence. It is one of the Multiple Intelligences that the great psychologist Howard Gardner talked about. People who have kinaesthetic intelligence have superior physical dexterity. Their intelligence isn't just in their brain, they build what is called muscle memory. Your kinaesthetic intelligence is comparable to what great sportspersons must have. It is best understood with an example from sports.

When a fast ball spins towards a batsman at more than 80 kilometres an hour, he takes no more than a split second to decide whether to hook or duck. In that moment there is no time to think. If you think, you are dead. You must act swiftly, without conscious effort. That ability to deal with the ball effectively, comes from kinaesthetic intelligence.

Your kinaesthetic capacity comes from the harmony between your body and your mind. On the shop floor, while fixing a robotic arm, or under the sea, welding a ship, you must have a high degree of physical fitness and matching mental agility. Without these, you cannot achieve excellence and you have understood that during your years at NTT.

You have great problem-solving capability. When your work is impacted because of a machine breakdown, your first effort is always to fix it by yourself. When a tool is broken, malfunctioning or missing, you don't sit down helplessly. You try and fix it, get it from elsewhere. When you cannot figure it out, you admit your lack of knowledge and seek help because the production line has come to a halt. In other words, when you see a problem, you are not in denial, you are spurred to fix it. Unlike you, many white-collar workers tend to shun problems. If something is broken, as in a banking system, in the implementation of a government scheme or in the pursuit of a research project, people find places to hide, they can be in denial. The shop floor you are trained for is a naked place.

In it, problems are there, in the open, for everyone to see and they must be solved in real time; then and there.

Your skill training has given you the ability to see the big picture and know how your work fits in. Ability to see the big picture isn't optional for a professional like you. Someone who is painting an automobile door must know what use that door is going into. Someone who is programming a circuit to control the air-quality of an ICU in a hospital must know what happens in there. In contrast, many white-collar workers struggle with what is the big picture, how they fit into it, what form and functionality their own output must deliver in the larger context. In fact, that inability can lead to serious dissatisfaction, self-doubt and frustration for many people. Without understanding the link between the big picture and the small, we lose perspective and purpose. That leads to loss of self-worth.

You have been trained in the art of learning to learn. You learnt to tame and operate one kind of machine. Tomorrow, the machine becomes obsolete. Another one, more advanced, takes its place. You rapidly move in to tame it. You may be graduating in one trade today but through the very ability of mastering that trade, you now have the capacity to master others without much effort. An economist has a hard time learning physics. A welder would have little difficulty mastering carpentry. This comes from the basic aptitude for skills per-se. In most cases, that aptitude is like thinner to paint. If there is an impending possibility of obsolescence of a trade, someone like you can easily learn another. This is markedly difficult for people in other professions.

You are trained to work with deadlines. It is now second nature to you.

If you are given a production target, it always comes with a deadline. Many people have difficulty working with deadlines. On the shop floor, your success and failure are visible in real-time. This means you have instant feedback. The capacity to deal with instant feedback is a non-trivial one. Even today, despite the 'like' and 'don't like' buttons of Facebook, in most jobs, appraisals are an annual affair.

It causes feedback delay. Delayed feedback causes loss of signal strength and doesn't lead to perceptible performance improvement. Worse, over time, the delay erodes the ability of an individual to receive any feedback in a meaningful, constructive way.

At NTTF, you have been taught to be frugal in everything you do. You respect resources. You have learnt to do with less. You have internalised the idea of sustainability; one that tells us to convert raw material into a finished product with minimum or no wastage. Frugality is a hugely valuable quality in our world today. It is also the essence of great character. But it requires observation and practice. Your counterpart who is studying liberal arts, MBA, science and engineering, has little scope to practice frugality. Their idea of saving the planet is comparatively passive.

Your years of intense training has told you that you are not alone on the shop floor. You have learnt that someone else's output is your input and your output is someone else's input. You depend on others for your quality and delivering excellence depends on working closely together; it is the way bands jam, it is the way emergency response teams work in hospitals. It is not a nice-to-do thing. It is critical to your functioning. Professionals like you seep-in and sharpen Social Quotient.



Everyone knows about Intelligence Quotient or IQ. Some know about Emotional Quotient or EQ. But only now, in the wake of the post-Information economy, people are beginning to talk about “Social Quotient”. It is the one critical ingredient of the collaboration economy that requires us to learn how to work collaboratively, globally and often virtually. In that new reality, people with higher Social Quotient are at advantage.

I hope, you now know that the trade reflected in your diploma is not everything you possess. Your trade is not the sum of your parts.

It is just another part. What NTTF has chiselled out of you is someone very valuable, whose worth is well beyond just serving a machine, however glorified, however hi-tech, how much 4.0 it might be. But for now, let us pause and ask ourselves one fundamental question. If you are made of all the things that I am saying you are, what could you be doing beyond a well-paying job at this company or that?

Well, some of you, at least 10% of all of you here, are potential entrepreneurs. The qualities that we spoke about are the kind that are the essential requirement for entrepreneurial success. But for that, you must know that you are not merely equal to the first skill you learnt for the rest of your life. That you aren't the caterpillar you think you are; you are the butterfly even if you don't look like one today. Your skill in your chosen trade is just the key to a door, and beyond that door are many other doors waiting for you to open. In saying so, I make an important point.

Look at the qualifications of most entrepreneurs and see what they have gone on to build. In countless instances, there is no connection between what they formally learnt and what they formally do.

I studied Political Science but co-founded an IT company. Bhavish Agarwal, Founder of OLA, studied Computer Science but started a ride-taxi company. Ritesh Agarwal who didn't go beyond high school started OYO, one of the highest funded companies in the hotel and hospitality business. The founders of Swiggy didn't study food at college and the ones who are building Nestaway were never in the rental business themselves.

Just the same way, most entrepreneurs from Tirupur, the knitwear capital of India, had no formal education in textile and garment making. What you studied at NTTF is a launch pad, a platform, it need not be the journey, nor the destination. So, don't get reduced to a trade. You are the master of your trade and not the other way around.

Ironically, even as your future employers are well-meaning people, most of them are waiting for you to arrive so that they can quickly reduce you to your trade. There is a reason for it. It keeps things simple. It enables them to pair you to a machine. That machine already exists. It is there, before you. To many employers it is more valuable than you. That machine will not change because you have come.

It will not learn anything about you. You are the one who would be required to change, you would have to learn everything about it and fit into its pre-determined form and functionality. In that paradigm, the machine will be of greater importance and value than the one who operates it. Your value would be determined by how much you are able to fit into the world of that machine.

So, for the rest of your life, you become a turner, fitter, electrician, welder, CNC machine operator or whatever else is written on the diploma you are receiving today. I wonder why that same doesn't apply to an MBA, a doctor or an engineer whose primary role is not seen as subservience to a machine? They are valued for their ability to lord over equipment, why should your value be determined by your ability to serve a machine? There is a serious anomaly here that needs to be addressed so that we break free from what I see as workplace apartheid. It looks like the skilled professional is at the bottom of the pyramid, on top of them are the machines and on top of those machines are the unskilled but so-called educated people.





My dear friends, the starting point of this anomaly is our own lack of understanding of who we are. This stems from our own lack of perspective on what our skill training truly gave us. After being in the world of skill development for the last few years, I have come to realise what professionals like you have really been trained in. The qualities required to be who you are, here and now, surpass in what measure others, those with the so-called degrees in MBA, Engineering, Medicine and Humanities may have. Look inside of you and you will see, you are not a trade. You are not a bonsai. You are much bigger than you think.

Historically, India's progress has been equated with industrialists, policy makers, educationists, scientists, doctors, engineers, management graduates and such like.

Today, I have the conviction to say that this ring must be broken in order that India becomes a truly developed country. From Germany to Japan, from Singapore to South Korea, economic progress of a nation goes hand in hand with the quality of its technical and vocational workforce. India has a very long way to get there. Thankfully, there is increasing realisation that it is imperative. For this to be actionized, we need beacons, we need bellwethers and your own institution NTTF, has been exactly that. For this, I salute the great vision of its founding fathers, and the relentless pursuit of its purpose by the leaders who have carried forward the burden of dreams for 55 long years.

In closing, I once again congratulate the graduating class and wish each one of you the very best.

Go, Kiss the World.



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