

## Chief Guest Speech at IIT Palakkad 6<sup>th</sup> Convocation, 20 July 2024

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Good afternoon graduating class, respected Chairman Board of Governors Shri Ramesh Venkateswaran, respected Dr. Sekhar the Director of IIT Palakkad, distinguished guests on the dias, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here and honored to be invited to this ceremony. I am thankful to the Dr. Seshadri Sekhar and the [IIT Palakkad](#) administration for this invitation. As you can see from Prof. Sekhar's presentation, IIT Palakkad is on high growth trajectory and you should all feel joy and happiness in its blooming.

First of all, my heartiest congratulations to all of you who are graduating today. May you do well in your life and be happy in doing so. For it is our personal happiness which drives us to do what we do – though each one of us may have our own [definition of happiness](#).

I would also like you to acknowledge the role of your teachers at IIT Palakkad and your parents - both of whom helped you achieve this milestone. So please give a resounding round of applause for them.

Standing here brings back my memories of graduating in Mechanical Engineering from [IIT Kanpur in 1972](#) – which was almost 50 years ago. There was trepidation about what I will do after graduation. In those days jobs were few; there was no startup culture and going to the US for higher studies was not easy. And yet there was *umang* and *junoon* to do something wonderful with my life. It is this *junoon* for knowledge and learning which took me to the [US in 1974](#) to study solar energy under a pioneer engineering professor and it is the same *junoon* which brought me back to rural Maharashtra in 1981.

Coming back to rural India in 1981, after a successful teaching career in US, was a bold decision. Some people did come back to India but coming back to rural India was even a much bolder decision.

At that time when the students from India were going to the US in large numbers, I came back to rural India because of my arrogance, *junoon* and madness.

Arrogance - that with my knowledge in Solar Energy I will help to facilitate its use in India. *Junoon* and madness that I will change India. India is an ancient civilization. How foolish I was to think that I could change it. It did not change but it changed me. Living in rural India taught me humility, spirituality and sustainability.

Humility in the sense that it made me realize that the problems in rural India are humongous and so many that I could not solve them even in 7 generations. And I learned about spirituality and sustainability by simplifying my life.

The decision to come back to India and devote my life for rural areas also taught me lessons that I would like to share with you today. Thus, I am going to talk about the philosophy of life. You know how to pass exams and being smart students, you will also learn the tricks of the trade in your profession. Unfortunately, you are not taught the philosophy of life, how to help the society, or how to work ethically and be a good citizen. This is what we will touch upon.

I will be brief since I know you want to go and celebrate your graduation with your friends and family.

### **Lesson No. 1**

Develop a powerful brain. We are what we think. The history of the world is the history of people who moved the world with their powerful thought process. Great inventions and discoveries were made and working principles of various devices were developed by people who had tremendous power of concentration; ability to synthesize information and dream the future.

We are defined by our way of thinking and the capacity of our brain. With a powerful brain we can achieve anything. This power can be developed anytime in your life. Right now, is the right time since you are entering the world of stress, competition and challenge. A powerful brain will help you analyze and overcome the challenges.

Focus on anything that you like or are passionate about. This focus on a [single object or subject for a long time is called meditation](#); it increases concentration and will bring in tremendous joy and satisfaction. This is the nature of brain. When it is working at full capacity it gives you a high and joy.

This meditation can be achieved in stages – do it every day for 15-20 minutes. It is also called [Sanyam in Patanjali Yoga Sutras](#). Concentrating on anything is fine. You will have better concentration when you think of subjects or objects which you like very much. This deep concentration on any subject or object makes us spiritual, gives us wisdom and makes us search for truth – the ultimate aim of life.

As you progress on this path of concentration you will perceive lots of new opportunities which will introduce clarity in your life. Besides creating a powerful brain this will also help you become fearless since you can analyze things clearly and deeply. This helps in removing lots of uncertainties and anxieties.

So, my *junoon* and madness to come to India in early 1980s could only happen because of my ability to think deeply about various issues and be fearless. [This process started when at the age of 14-15 I got](#) deeply involved into the art of meditation. During my [Ph.D. studies in the US](#) I honed and developed this process further, and it gave me great joy and satisfaction. Besides it also helped me in charting my journey back to India.

I have written about this aspect of my life in the book [“1970s America – An Indian Student’s Journey”](#). It is the story of my journey from IIT Kanpur to US and back to rural Maharashtra. I have made it available free of cost on the net. Please read it and I do hope some of you get inspired by it.

## **Lesson No. 2**

[Develop \*junoon\* for anything that you are passionate about.](#) *Junoon* is a natural outcome of a powerful brain. A powerful brain is hungry for information and seeks new avenues to keep itself occupied and in the process it becomes extremely curious. Curiosity then fuels *junoon* to make us do new and interesting things.

Having *junoon* helps you forget about pinpricks and other impediments in your work since you are intensely focused on your passion and goals. Doing this will give you a high and is very enjoyable.

It also makes you mad, since you want to achieve your goal at any cost. So, you do not pay attention to what others say or think. Besides it gives you a single point focus and this focus used regularly for different things helps you discover new things and makes you creative.

When [I left the US in 1981](#) everybody said that I was committing suicide by going back to a socialist India where nothing moved and it was difficult to motivate oneself or do anything, etc., etc. The madness and arrogance in me prevented me from listening to any of these people including my father who was very unhappy with my decision. However, I did what my inner voice told me to do. When you listen to your inner voice then only you can do wonderful things with your life.

So, live your life the way you would like to live; not how others want you to live. But for that you have to become fearless. This will also help you to increase your intellectual capital since you will do what you are interested in and not what others tell you to do.

## **Lesson No. 3**

Use your increased intellectual capital to help the society. You were born in India and have lived here till now. Don't you think you want to make this country great, so that you don't have to go abroad, but live nicely and peacefully here.

Your family and friends are here and no matter where you go you can neither change the color of your skin nor remove your Indianness.

So, help to make this country great through your knowledge of technology and hard work by improving the life of the rural population. Once most of the population of our country is brought into mainstream development then we can make our country worth living. Nobody will do this except you since you are the future of this country. I am sure some of you will go in corporate world and later on become big honchos. [Use the CSR funding](#) to help the society and rural development.

For example how to make farming productive so that the income of farmers is doubled or trebled; [how to use Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) and develop small, autonomous, electric-powered machines for small farms](#); how to improve the quality of life of rural poor while maintaining their “*man ki shanti*” are the greatest challenges for any engineer. If you help solve them then you would have solved the problems of 1/5<sup>th</sup> of mankind. Can any challenge anywhere in the world be greater than this? Taking up challenges and solving them makes life interesting and worth living. I have done this all my life and my life story is an outcome of this thinking.

So helping improve the life of rural population is true nation building! But to do this difficult task you have to be [attached to the story of India](#). Read ancient Indian classics like Mahabharata, Panchatantra, Patanjali Yoga Sutras, etc. Try to incorporate their teachings in your modern life. This will give you new insights. Be proud of our ancient Indian traditions, music, and philosophy.

One of the main reasons for my coming back to India was that I was attached to the story of India. [My father had gone to jail](#) with Mahatma Gandhi in 1942 Quit India movement. I was very inspired by the story of our Independence movement. I felt that if we could get rid of the British by a superior thought of Mahatma Gandhi, then we could also get rid of poverty and backwardness by modern science and technology. And that is what I have attempted to do in a small way in rural Maharashtra.

Thus, when I came back to Phaltan in rural Maharashtra it was a small overgrown village with hardly anything available. Sometimes to make an important long distance call I would hop on the bus and go to Pune - a four hour one way journey and make phone calls.

But the *junoon* to solve the local problems through technology was there so such pinpricks were forgotten.

We started solving the problems that I saw first hand in Phaltan; lack of proper lighting, chulha cooking, burning of agricultural residues; and lack of mobility solutions. Our work therefore resulted in setting up a national [policy on biomass power generation](#); improved [cooking and lighting technologies running on ethanol](#); development of [electric rickshaws](#); water purification through solar energy; among others. These were challenging issues but with hard work and *junoon* we set up the labs, purchased the required equipment and did some interesting technological work.

And the most challenging issue we tackled was in developing frugal innovations. With very little money we were able to do good science and technology development in rural India. I have always believed that R&D does not require too much money but great commitment, deep thinking on fundamental issues and hard work. Doing this work has been very satisfying and in the process we have received [many national and international awards](#).

I have written about this fascinating journey in my book [“Romance of Innovation – Human Interest Story of R&D in rural settings”](#). I do hope some of you read it and be inspired by it. It is also available freely on the net. I am also sure that some of you will do even better than what I did. I feel there have to be hundreds of such efforts all over the country to make a dent in the task of uplifting of rural poor.

We will be delighted if some of you can help us take this work forward. Joining our NGO will be a great learning experience for some of you and I am sure you will cherish this all your life. In hindsight this experiment of setting up a lab in

rural area and doing R&D in 1980s could qualify it as the first technology startup in rural India!

#### **Lesson No. 4**

Also, you need to temper your greed for money and resources. Money and resources are necessary for achieving goals but they should be based upon your needs and not on your greed. Once you have increased your intellectual capital, money will come to you. Lakshmi always follows Saraswati.

Happiness comes not by amassing huge amount of wealth but by using it to do meaningful work and having a purpose in life. Besides my technology work I also think deeply and write regularly on issues of spirituality and technology and feel that the mantra of India's development could be [“Spirituality+Technology = Sustainability + Happiness”](#). This is the theme of [my latest book](#). I also feel this could be new paradigm of development not only for India but also for the world.

This book is also available freely on the net. I have made all my writings, inventions, etc freely available on the net since I believe that knowledge should be free so that it inspires others to do even better.

I have also followed this path by my own example of living in rural India for more than [40 years in a sustainable and holistic manner](#). By consuming one fourth to one fifth the energy of an average American I live an emotionally happy and fulfilling life. Thus, high thinking and simple living is possible and is necessary for creating a sustainable and just world. This is [what Gandhi ji taught us](#). Be the change that you want to see in the world.

By creating a powerful brain, the greed impulse is tempered, and this helps in fulfilling our goals easily and without resorting to wasteful and unsustainable lifestyle. After all you will wear only one shirt and a pair of pants at a time or drive one vehicle at a time. So, what is the need to have 100 shirts and pants and 5-10 cars? Please have things to fulfill your needs and not your greed. This will also make you an ethical and better human being.

Having this perspective simplifies life and provides happiness and joy.

I will now end this talk by telling you a story, a tale from our ancient scripture the *Puranas*. It is a typical Indian story of a sage and his disciples.

The sage asks his disciples, “When does the night end?” And the disciples say, “At dawn, of course.” The sage says, “I know that. But when does the night end and the dawn begin?”

The first disciple, who is from the tropical south of India replies: “When the first glimmer of light across the sky reveals the fronds of the coconut trees swaying in the breeze, that is when the night ends and the dawn begins”. The sage says “no”.

So, the second disciple, who is from the cold north, ventures: “When the first streaks of sunshine make the snow gleam white on the mountaintops of the Himalayas, that is when the night ends and the dawn begin”.

The sage says, “No, my sons, when two travelers from opposite ends of our land meet and embrace each other as brothers, and when they realize they sleep under the same sky, see the same stars, and dream the same dreams - that is when the night ends and the dawn begin”.

I feel that when you young and bright engineers help light up the lives of rural poor through technology and resources, then it will bring in the dawn of a new, prosperous and happy India.

Thank you very much and again congratulations on your graduation. Do well in your life and be happy.

[HOME](#)

July 2024

The [video of the convocation address is here](#). And [podcast of the address is here](#).

A small [newsitem about the convocation in HINDU is here](#).





INDIAN INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY  
PALAKKAD

The Board of Governors, The Senate, and The Director of  
the Indian Institute of Technology Palakkad

*cordially invite you to the*

# CONVOCATION 2024

of IIT Palakkad

## CHIEF GUEST

**Dr. Anil K Rajvanshi**

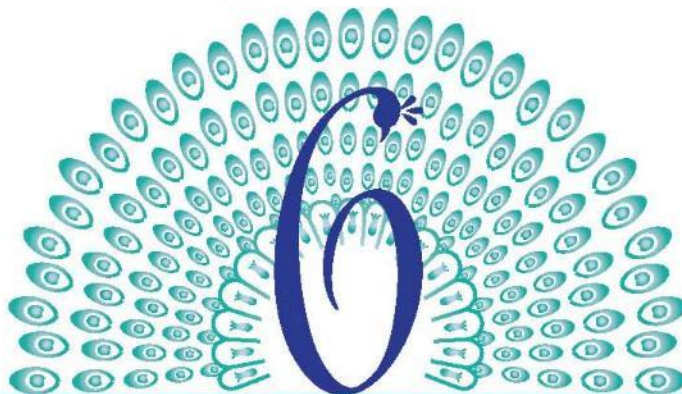
*Director and Honorary Secretary,  
Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute (NARI)  
(Padma Shri Recipient 2022)*

will deliver the convocation address

**Prof. Ramesh Venkateswaran**

*Chairman, Board of Governors,  
Indian Institute of Technology Palakkad*

will preside over the function



**Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2024, 3:00 pm**

*Venue: Agora Auditorium, Nila Campus, IIT Palakkad*

## Photos



Convocation Address



Being introduced to senate members before the convocation



**Group photo after interaction with the students**



**Planting fig tree on the IIT Palakkad campus**



**A beautiful lake on Malampuzha dam – next to IIT Palakkad campus**