

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

86th Convocation | Tata Institute of Social Sciences

22 August 2026

Prof. D. P. Singh

Chancellor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Former Chairman, University Grants Commission

Dr. C. S. Pramesh, Director of the Tata Memorial Hospital and our Chief Guest today;

Prof. Badri Narayan Tiwari, Vice Chancellor;

Prof. Sunil Santha, Dean of Academic Affairs;

Dr. Narendra Mishra, Registrar;

members of the Executive Council and the Academic Council;

distinguished guests;

my colleagues on the faculty;

proud parents and families;

and, above all, the graduating students of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences,

नमस्कार।

To our graduating students: **congratulations.** This day is yours, and you have earned every hour of it. And you did not earn it alone. Behind each of you sits a family that went without something so that you could sit here today. To your parents, and to everyone who carried you to this morning, this degree is theirs as much as yours. And to my colleagues on the faculty, thank you. Yours are the quiet hands behind this bright day.

Now let me speak to you simply, as an older man who is honestly, deeply hopeful about your generation.

You are the most empowered young people who have ever walked this earth, and it is science and technology that placed that power in your hands. Just look at what they have given you. A vaccine dreamed up and delivered in a single

year. A slab of glass in your pocket that holds more than all the libraries of the ancient world. A signal that lets a farmer read tomorrow's sky, and a village girl learn from a teacher she will never meet. A hundred years ago, a king could not do what you can do this evening from a bus stop. So do not be shy about that power, or about wanting a full life, good work, a wide world. That hunger is nothing to apologise for. It is the engine of everything you are about to build.

And here is the quiet beauty of the education you were given, the idea at the very heart of our National Education Policy. For too long we kept knowledge locked in separate rooms. Science in one. The social sciences in another. Technology in a third. The NEP opened every door, and sat you down, on purpose, at the crossroads where all three meet. You were taught to read a dataset and a human face in the same afternoon, to honour a laboratory and a village with equal seriousness. That is a rare and precious preparation, and you may not yet know how rare.

I dwell on this because something has now arrived that lives at exactly that crossroads where you were taught to stand. **Artificial intelligence**. It writes, it calculates, it translates, it diagnoses, it predicts. It belongs to no single subject. It moves through all of them at once, through economics and medicine, law and social work, history and design. The very walls your education taught you to climb over, AI simply walks straight through. That is a gift. But, my young friends, it is not only a gift.

Let me tell you why, in the language of our own oldest stories.

You all know the **समुद्र मंथन**, the churning of the great ocean. Gods and demons set their long war aside for a while, took Mount Mandara for a churning rod and the serpent Vasuki for a rope, and turned the sea to draw out **अमृत**, the nectar that gives eternal life. Everyone remembers the nectar. But think back to what rose first. Long before the nectar, before a single one of the treasures, the

churning threw up **हलाहल**, a poison so fierce it could have turned all three worlds to ash.

That is the wisdom the old story has been keeping for us all along. **Every great churning brings up the poison before it brings up the nectar.**

And make no mistake, artificial intelligence is the **समुद्र मंथन** of our age. The churning has begun, and it will not slow to suit our comfort. It is bringing up real **अमृत**, wonders that will heal the sick, teach the poor, and lift millions into lives their parents could not have dreamed of. But it is bringing up **हलाहल** too. And I would be failing you this morning if I sang only of the nectar and said nothing of the poison.

So let me show you three drops of that poison. Plainly, the way a friend would.

The first drop falls on your own mind.

Reason is a muscle. It only grows when it lifts. Every time you wrestle a hard problem to the floor by yourself, you walk away with more than the answer. You walk away a little more able to think. Now picture a tool that lifts every weight for you before you have even reached for it. What a convenience it is. And what a quiet danger. A person who asks the machine before he troubles to think will, slowly and without noticing, forget how to think at all.

Our old stories saw this coming. **भस्मासुर** was granted a boon: whatever head he touched would crumble to ash. Giddy with the gift, he finally turned it on the very god who had granted it. A power you cannot control does not serve you. Sooner or later, it turns and comes for you. So treat AI the way a wise wrestler treats the training pit, as a place to grow stronger, never a place to escape the effort. The day you can no longer tell whether the machine's answer is right or wrong, you have not been handed a servant. You have taken on a master.

The second drop is meant especially for you, the social scientists.

A machine learns from data, and data is nothing more than a record of what has already happened. Sit with that for a moment. The poor, the far away, the excluded, the very people this Institute was built to serve, are exactly the people who go missing from the data, or get counted wrongly inside it. The machine has read a million reports on poverty. It has never once gone to bed hungry. It has never sat up through the night with a family the records forgot to mention.

So if you hand your judgment over to the machine, and the machine knows only what has already been, it will give you back a future that is just the past in fresh paint. It will repeat yesterday's injustice at the speed of light, and we will call it progress, only because a computer did it. The machine knows the world as it is. You were trained, every day in this place, to picture the world as it ought to be. Never surrender that difference. A number can record a person's hunger. It will never feel it. That gap, between the record and the real, is your life's work.

The third drop is the most bitter, because it can go down without our even tasting it.

The machine knows only what someone wrote down and fed to it. But the greatest part of human wisdom was never written down at all. The farmer who reads tomorrow's rain in tonight's sky. The grandmother whose hands know a cure that sits in no book. The elder who settles a bitter quarrel with a fairness no law school has ever taught. This is our traditional knowledge, the **विवेक** of thousands of years, carried not on paper but in memory, in stories, in songs, in the doing of things.

The day we start believing that whatever is missing from the data must not be real, we insult the wisdom of most of humanity, and we risk losing it within a single generation. Do not let that happen on your watch. Progress has never meant burning the old to flatter the new. It means having the sense to know

which of the old things are gold. Respect the machine's knowledge, of course. But bow your head to your grandmother's wisdom. She was running a vast and subtle system long before anyone on this earth had spoken the word "algorithm."

And so here we stand, before our very own समुद्र मंथन, nectar and poison rising together out of the same sea.

Go back to the story one last time. How was the world saved from the हलाहल? Not by the gods, who took one look at the poison and fled. Not by the demons, who shoved past it to snatch the nectar. The world was saved because one among them, Shiva, had both the courage and the विवेक to gather that poison up and hold it in his own throat. He did not swallow it. He did not hurl it back at the world. He simply held it, and it stained his throat forever blue, and from that day we have called him नीलकंठ.

Graduates of TISS, that is your work in this new age. **Be the नीलकंठ of your generation.** Do not flee the churning, as the frightened do. Do not gulp down everything it offers, as the greedy do. Be the ones with the wisdom to tell the nectar from the poison, and the strength to hold that poison in your own throat, so that the nectar reaches every last home in this country, and not only the few at the front of the queue.

So go, and lead. Take AI in your hands without fear, and use it better than anyone, precisely because you will use it with a conscience. Let the machine do the calculating; you do the caring. Let it keep the data; you keep the dignity. Let it remember the past; you go and imagine the future.

तकनीक हमें गति देती है; विवेक हमें दिशा देता है।

Technology gives us speed. Wisdom gives us direction. Carry both and let wisdom lead.

Be the नीलकंठ. Hold the poison. Share the nectar.

That is my charge to you, and it is where I will end. Before I do, my deep gratitude to Dr. Pramesh for gracing this morning, and my heartfelt congratulations to our Vice Chancellor, our Dean, our Registrar, and every teacher and every hand on the staff who built this beautiful day.

And my last words are for you, my dear graduates:

Dear students, you are the future of India. Wherever you go, hold compassion with knowledge, service with success, and values with achievement. Let the blessings of your parents, your family, and your teachers, along with patience, curiosity, and a spirit of service to others, be the greatest wealth you carry forward

प्रिय विद्यार्थियों, आप ही भारत का भविष्य हैं। जहाँ भी जाएँ, ज्ञान के साथ संवेदना, सफलता के साथ सेवा और उपलब्धियों के साथ अपने मूल्यों को सदैव बनाए रखें। माता-पिता, स्वजन और गुरुजनों के आशीर्वाद, धैर्य, जिज्ञासा और लोककल्याण की भावना को अपनी सबसे बड़ी पूँजी बनाकर आगे बढ़ें।

जय हिन्द।