“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found, but made; and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.” These are the words of Peter Ellyard, a well-known futurist and they are so relevant today.

A very good morning to you, my young student friends, distinguished Chief Guests, Staff and Faculty of the Institute, members of the Academic Council and the many proud parents present here.

Today’s convocation marks the special day when students crossover the threshold towards the world of work and towards your life goals. As of today you also begin to play a more responsible role in society, you alone are responsible for your actions.

This is a big step, an important milestone. So, keeping Peter Ellyards words in mind, what future will you create for yourself? What role are you scripting for yourself, the others you care for, and society?

As students of TISS you, are sensitised to the fact that we are all a part of a larger societal organisation that must operate for the good of all the people. Social phenomena are central to the quality of our lives and all of you are custodians of civil society.

Today Indian society is in a state of flux and transition. We are an emerging economy, and this phase in every nation’s journey is all about change. On one hand our economy shows good
growth potential, our cities are modernising driven by consumerism, and on the other hand many villages in the interiors of the country remain untouched by all this progress. Technology is changing the way businesses run, the way we communicate, but when used maliciously is helping cybercrimes and terrorism proliferate. The social fabric in our cities – the concept of family life, marriage, and friends is changing, yet superstitions, dowry, khaap and other archaic beliefs are plaguing us. All of these changes are leading to new fault lines in values, ethics and beliefs.

From a global perspective India’s voice in International forums is growing stronger, on the strength of our economic potential. As we get more globally integrated, companies across the rest of the world want to come here to sell their goods and services to the large Indian middle class. The India opportunity is also bringing back to the country many young Indians armed with American degrees, with them come global standards and a new way of looking at things

This is the India that welcomes you…full of opportunities, full of challenges.

Even as India’s young population and its economy continues to grow, it is becoming evident that more and more people are unable to secure their livelihoods, do not have access to fair credit and markets, and are not getting fair wages. Inclusive growth is the need of the hour.

Agriculture is the biggest employer in India; however its share in employment is going down in India for the first time. To some extent this is bound to happen in a developing economy where manufacturing and services sector have attractive jobs to offer. Land and labour productivity is low, and so is the average size of land holdings. Despite heavy input subsidies from the government, this puts pressure on avenues for growth and prosperity. Children of farmers do not want to remain in this sector, many are migrating to low productivity employment in cities. The Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR) 2012 estimated that between 60 to 65 million people are displaced since our nation was formed. This is the highest number of people displaced in the world. On one hand we need focus on agricultural innovation that enhances land productivity so that farmers can live off their land, at the same time we need to build more entrepreneurship opportunities locally to stem migration.

The enormous development activity when not managed wisely, is leading to erosion of the environment. Water, will in the near future become a scarcity, so will coal. Forest cover is reducing due to encroachments; our rising carbon footprint brings in climate change threats. Obviously dynamics between individuals and the environment is changing. Throwing effluents and waste into rivers or walking instead of taking a car are the simple everyday decisions that impact environment. We need to recognise that values, beliefs and ‘capacity to adapt’ guide responses to environmental change. As students of the social sciences you can
take the lead in developing a new awareness and sensitivity towards the environment. Your agenda could be to work “with society” and not only “for society”.

Equality, justice and eradication of poverty are concepts that the TISS experience would have familiarised you with. You are also aware that it is widely accepted that empowerment of people comes from access to education, health services and livelihood opportunities. There are many Government policies such as Right to education, NREGA that assures 100 days of employment and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana or RSBY that provides health insurance coverage for those below poverty line. Awareness about these schemes is critical to working with disadvantaged communities. Technology is helping build awareness and enabling such schemes reach more people and reach more efficiently. As an example attendance in NREGA is taken through biometrics captured in handheld devices at the site. There is no reason why absenteeism by teachers in Government schools cannot be reported by a mobile sms to a centralised system. In fact, all of you can be idea generators of technology solutions for simple everyday challenges faced in society both urban and rural. You should also be mindful that technology enables MIS systems in organisations making real time reporting possible. Systems and processes are becoming an imperative and our own work cultures need to change accordingly.

A Governmental effort to bring about transformational change in rural India is being made through Rural broadband to 250000 Panchayats. In a few years lakhs of villages will be connected by a 100 MBPS rural broadband. With India today having more than 800 Million plus mobile phone subscriptions most young people do have a mobile in their pocket. Mobiles bring the last mile connect right into people’s homes. This delivery channel can be used for all kinds of citizen services including education and skill development. Some companies are already teaching English communication through lessons on the mobile.

Our human capital is our biggest advantage. With well over half our population below the age of 25 years, India’s demographic dividend today is huge. As a nation it is imperative to invest in developing this talent, to enhance the competitive strength of industries and increase the living standard of our population. As a national priority, India too has set upon itself a task of skilling the nation with 500 million people by 2022—a task with no precedent in the world, with no previous models to follow. We need doctors, engineers and social scientists, but what we need in larger numbers are construction workers, welders, rural insurance agents, shop floor assistants etc. Making vocational education attractive to youth and then attracting them in large numbers is an effort being made aggressively by the Government. For example when I met with Ministry of Youth Affairs 2 years ago we made a decision to start transforming the National Service scheme by introducing Skill Development into it. I brought on board TISS as implementing agency and today we have a pilot programme called National University Students Skill Development Programme that aims to provide student’s employment oriented skills during their college graduation period. So
students will emerge with dual qualification – an academic degree and a job oriented diploma, this will greatly enhance chances of employment.

Much of our recent economic growth has generally been jobless growth. In the period between 2004-05 to 2011-12 that saw the highest GDP growth of 8.5% per annum, employment growth was just 0.5% per annum. More than one-third of our graduates are unemployed. Our true potential could be unlocked if we focus on employment intensive industries to ensure job creation. These are verticals like textiles and garments; leather and footwear; gems and jewellery; and food processing industries which are capable of employing large number of people.

It is also important to not just examine what jobs are available, it is equally important to examine where these jobs are. Migration of youth to towns and cities in search of jobs can be addressed by focusing on local entrepreneurship. One such example is the emergence of social entrepreneurs, who value not just their own growth but that of those around them, shift the equation between win - lose, to win - win, and explore new avenues of development and prosperity as well as create jobs in their own ventures.

These are some of the issues we face in this transitional phase, and you are part of this change, I view all of you as change agents. In creating and walking your chosen paths, your role as graduates of a higher education system committed to social well-being, to address people's development issues, has never been more critical.

For the first time, we have knowledge and technology that span scientific disciplines - humanities and natural sciences, and technologies that make collaboration possible across the globe. The powerful combination of these factors such as real time updates, real time decision making will create innovative solutions that can solve the problems of the vast majority of disenfranchised people.

In this new paradigm all of us are entrepreneurs, with the capacity to create new futures not just for ourselves but for others and their well-being. May you be endowed with courage and creativity in your journey ahead.

Thank You