

VALEDICTORIAN'S ADDRESS

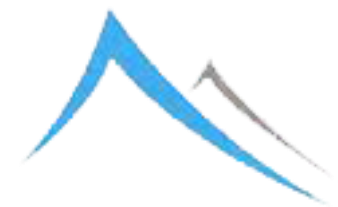
Respected Chief Guest, Shri Subodh Bhargava, Guests of Honour, Shri M. Natarajan, Chairman Board of Governors, members of Board of Governors, and the members of the Senate of the Institute, distinguished guests, the graduating students and their family members, my faculty and staff colleagues, dear students, media persons, friends, ladies and gentlemen - it gives me a great pleasure to extend a very warm welcome to you all on the occasion of the First Convocation Ceremony of the Indian Institute of Technology Mandi.

Let me start by narrating my experience with IIT Mandi. Before joining the institute I had no idea about the place and that it even existed in Himachal.

New IITs had never been a part of my plan and I was all set to take a drop and prepare for JEE again, since my rank would not allow me to get computer science in any of the old IITs. But my parents encouraged me to apply for at least one new IIT and so I did. But even then I had only opted for IIT Indore CSE as a choice since it was closer to home and in a relatively decent city. But fate had something else planned for me, there was a printing mistake in my counselling brochure, the codes of IIT Indore and IIT Mandi had been exchanged and so I ended up getting CSE at IIT Mandi. I still remember how shocked I was and afraid of what the future held for me



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when I was informed about this. But looking back today, when I can connect all the dots, I have no doubt that it was the best thing that could have happened to me.

We've all had similar beginnings here. As the first ever batch to come to Mandi, most of us did not know much about IIT at Mandi. And most of us were skeptical about the future prospects of becoming a member of the first batch of a new IIT in a remote location. There were so many uncertainties and no guarantee of success. We were all in a way risking the founding years of our careers on an adventure, much like the founding members of a startup do. And looking back now, as we are out there in the world, working as engineers, pursuing higher studies and making a difference, I can confidently say that it all turned out well.

IIT Mandi has been a journey of transformation for all of us. We've had an experience of venturing into the unknown and emerging out successfully. We have been an integral part of the building up of our institute from the very beginning both in terms of people and infrastructure. Things were never easy for us in either the academic or the non-academic arenas. While people in other colleges have an existing extra-curricular setup waiting for them to excel through, we had to setup everything from scratch. Our academic curriculum was also designed from scratch and stabilized. We knew it wasn't going to be easy to cope up with the new environment and excel. This new start, however, helped us gain unique knowledge and experience that set us apart from our counterparts in other institutes. At IIT Mandi, with so many things to setup and handle, juggling responsibilities was a norm. The average number of courses that our batch did per semester was higher than what most of our contemporaries in other IITs had to. The extra-curricular responsibilities that we undertook as a part of growth of the institute were also extraordinary. Developing multiple projects along with managing responsibilities in several extra-curricular activities was more of a norm than an exception. This, I personally believe has proved to be a great gift. Today, I see my fellow new hires finding it stressful having to participate in more than one project at a time in the workplace, while I easily cruise



through on juggling responsibilities in multiple projects and work areas at the same time.

The defining quality of our batch is that each and every one of us sitting here is capable of handling extreme stress in constantly changing environments with no clear knowledge or instructions on how to proceed. We know how to forge our own path even when no precedent exists. It's true that being a part of the first batch at a new IIT in a remote place was tough, but the journey has refined our capabilities as a result. On the lines of what Robert Frost says in his poem, we went down the road not taken before and it certainly made all the difference for us.

Today we are here, with a graduation degree in our hands, prepared to move on in life, nicely dressed up in traditional attire, living up to our goal of becoming an IITian with a difference. It is one of the biggest days of our lives. This assembly is brimming with emotions. Emotions of Joy, nostalgia coupled with a little sadness, a sense of achievement and for some the sense of freedom of finally graduating from here. Today we step out into the world. Just like we had the responsibility and opportunity of building up our institute from scratch, we now have a similar responsibility of making a name for our alma mater. Every organization is known by its products. For an educational institute, it's the alumni. We are the first ever products of our institute, and it is up to us to take its name and reputation to big heights.

This responsibility is very challenging on its own, but I am very confident that IIT Mandi has prepared us well to bear it. The first time I introduced myself to my team at my company, they didn't know that a place called Mandi existed and I also got the usual skeptical question of "When did that IIT open". But today as I rub shoulders with graduates from other well-known older institutes, excelling at what I do and earn their respect, I feel the satisfaction of fulfilling a part of my responsibility to my alma mater.

Out in the world, all of us are again faced with the familiar situation that we faced 4 years ago. We are going



out in the unknown, faced with uncertainties about what the future holds for us. The going will never be easy for us. Wherever we go, we will be considered underdogs. We will never have the perks that come with an established brand. But it will be up to us to establish the brand of IIT Mandi. And what is the fun in having an easy ride anyways? Being an underdog gives us the drive that none of the people from established institutes have. And I have no doubt that each and every single one of us is capable of enormous achievements.

I would also like to thank all the faculty and staff of IIT Mandi who helped us in our journey of 4 years. Just like us, they were also on a similar adventure and I would like to thank all of them for coming through for us. The staff was always working hard to provision and maintain facilities for us even though their task was made tougher by the temporary nature of the whole setup. The faculty members were always there to guide and motivate us when we were lost or were having a tough time. The major perk of being at IIT Mandi was that with such a small, closely-knit community, we all knew each other well. Nowhere else do you get to meet your director and the deans on such a regular basis and interact with faculty members on such a personal level.

As I draw up to a close, I will urge my classmates to never underestimate what we are capable of, never underestimate the power we have to be successful. We are all lucky to have had an opportunity of being the first batch of IIT Mandi, and the experience we gained as a result has helped us become more capable than the rest. So let's just go out there in the world and show them what IIT Mandi graduates are capable of. All the best for your future endeavors dear students and once again a big thank you to my Alma mater IIT Mandi for having instilled in me the virtues of being an IITian.

