

**Mr Azim Premji's address**  
**at J N Tata Auditorium, Indian Institute of Science,**

**Convocation**

**Date: 12 September 2019**

Good afternoon, It is a privilege to be with you on this occasion of the Convocation of the Indian Institute of Science. I thank you for inviting me.

I congratulate all the students who are graduating as also their family members. This is an important milestone in their lives. I also congratulate the members of the faculty who have played a central role in the graduating students achieving this milestone.

Let me start with a story that is of immense importance to Wipro and to me.

In 1979, Wipro approached the newly set up Centre for Scientific and Industry Consultancy at IISc for a consulting project. We had just set up our Information Technology Division, having decided to diversify into IT.

The Institute constituted a committee to advise us on what computer we should make. This consulting project involved surveying literature on the computers being made all over the world. And it was also a platform for technical discussions, conceptualization, and design review between Wipro's R&D team and IISc. It was here that we began to think about what chips, bus and microprocessor should be used in the first Wipro computer.

Apart from the transfer of technology and expertise, IISc helped build the R&D manpower of Wipro. Victor Jayakaran, the first employee of our IT Division, was a M Tech student at IISc and was hired to anchor the project in its initial stages. Sridhar Mitta, from ECIL joined us soon after. In the first few months of their joining, they worked out of the Digital Lab of IISc.

This really was the birth of our IT business – what is now the globally successful business by which Wipro is most known across the world. So, it would be quite accurate to say that the Wipro IT business was born in IISc.

We have immense gratitude to your wonderful institution. This is our birthplace. Let me thank you – all of you who are here and the generations that have built IISc. I am also happy to note that our association has continued over the past 40 years – we have continued to recruit from your institution and do collaborative projects at the cutting edge of technology, for example, we are together doing a project on ‘driverless cars’ and building India’s first indigenous ‘Metal 3D Printing (Additive Manufacturing) Machine’.

I also think that there two big lessons in this story. The first one is that collaboration matters more than we realize. We must encourage and foster collaboration across different sectors – across education and research institutions, industry, civil society and government.

The second lesson is that the role and contribution of good and open-minded institutions in society, cannot be measured in money terms. They have far-reaching and deep impact. We must build more such institutions, which pursue excellence in their chosen fields – and are deeply engaged with society. IISc has

been an excellent example of this – but we have too few of such institutions in India, we must build many more.

Let me share another story. A few months ago, I was in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand. I was there for a week in that area. I was visiting government schools and meeting teachers, with whom our Foundation works. You can all imagine the sheer physical difficulty and challenges of that mountain region.

Across the small towns and villages in that difficult terrain, in the evening after school hours, and on the weekend, I witnessed scores of teachers working together in workshops, to learn and improve their teaching. They were investing their own time. They were investing their own money on the commute and meal. And there was no order from any official for them to do this. They were doing this voluntarily.

When I asked them why they do this? Their answer was quite simple: that they realize that the future of their students is dependant on how well they teach – and so it was their duty to become better teachers. They also said that the students in their schools came from the most disadvantaged sections of our society – and so the quality of education they receive can potentially transform their lives.

I must mention that this spirit of selfless commitment is not unique to teachers in Uttarkashi – our Foundation works across multiple states in the country – and we see the same spirit in a large number of government school teachers across the country.

The stories that I have shared have one thing deeply in common. This is what I have mentioned before. The contribution of educational institutions to shaping a better world and a better society is unique. A two-room school on a remote mountain top in the Garwal Himalayas and this great institution where we are, with its sprawling leafy campus, with a track record of stellar research, both play pivotal roles in developing a better society.

This pivotal role of institutions in society is certainly determined by the quality of the work they do. There is widespread understanding of this matter. Institutions must pursue excellence – and it is through this pursuit of excellence that institutions contribute more and more to this world.

However, I think that there is something that is even more fundamental than the pursuit of excellence that shapes the institutions and their contributions.

This most fundamental of things is the Values of the institutions. And when I mention Values, I mean what is lived and practised every day in institutions, not merely what is professed. When I use the word ‘institutions’ it does mean the people in these institutions – the teachers, the researchers, the leaders and others. This matter of Values being so fundamental, including to the pursuit of excellence is also well known. But I do think that it does need continuous repetition. Let me talk about three Values, which I think are critical to a good institution and its contribution to the world.

First is Integrity. The basics of integrity are quite clear – of honesty, truthfulness and consistency. In the scientific endeavour there must be integrity in all aspects – with the purpose, in the process & methods, and with the outcomes. But we

also must recognize that the real test of integrity is in adversity. It is in the courage to stick to the truth and the pursuit of truth when things are against you, and in fact when the truth may be against your self-interest. Integrity really is the energy that is the core of human beings and good institutions.

Second is empathy and humaneness. Unless we relate to other people, see things from their perspective, and accommodate their needs, we cannot live and work together. But this is again just the basics – we have to have the same empathy for people who are different from us – in fact the real test of empathy is not with people like us but with people who are not like us. And we must have the same empathy for nature and world around us. We must be able to realize deeply that we are all connected and connected with nature. All progress is meaningless if we are not able to reduce the burden of human misery and live in harmony with nature. The crisis of climate change that faces humanity is one manifestation of this loss of connectedness. So even for climate change, while we must act on many fronts – technologically, industrially and politically – at its core we will have to foster the spirit of empathy, connectedness, and humaneness.

Third is fairness, equity, and justice. We cannot rest till we have a fair and equitable world. The kind of inequity that we have in this world, within our country, within our own city, must give direction to our work and endeavour. Education and research must play a key role in all efforts to such an equitable and fair world.

Both IISc and the school teachers that I talked about uphold these values in their own ways. I would exhort all of you to continue this – and be exemplars for what good institutions can do for a society and a country.

On this path of integrity, empathy, and equity, I can think of no better than Mahatma Gandhi's talisman. It is his 150<sup>th</sup> birth year. Let me just quote him in full:

“I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest person whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him or her. Will he or she gain anything by it? Will it restore her to a control over her own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your-self melt away”

Again, thank you inviting me, and I wish everyone here the very best!

Jai Hind.