

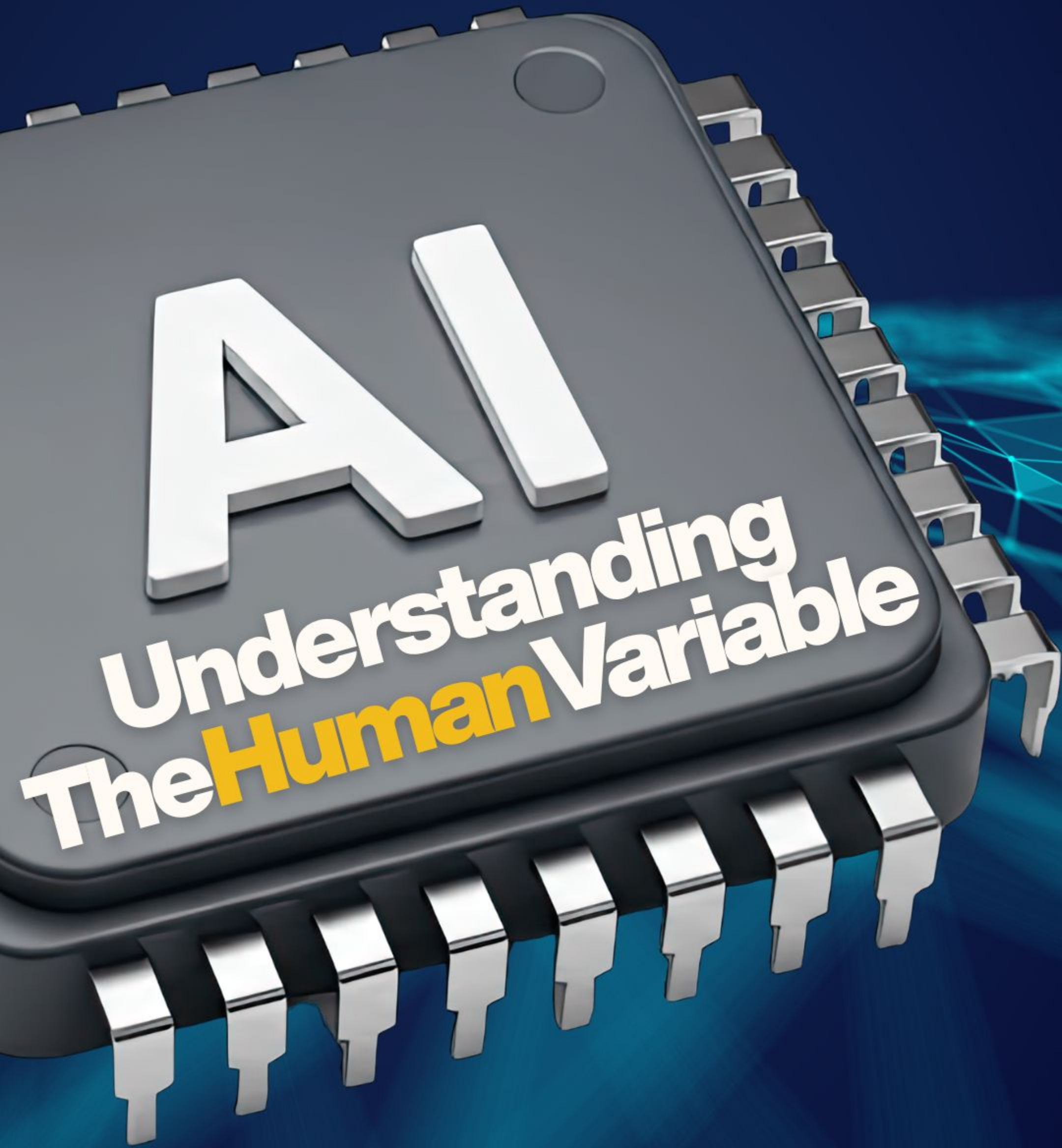
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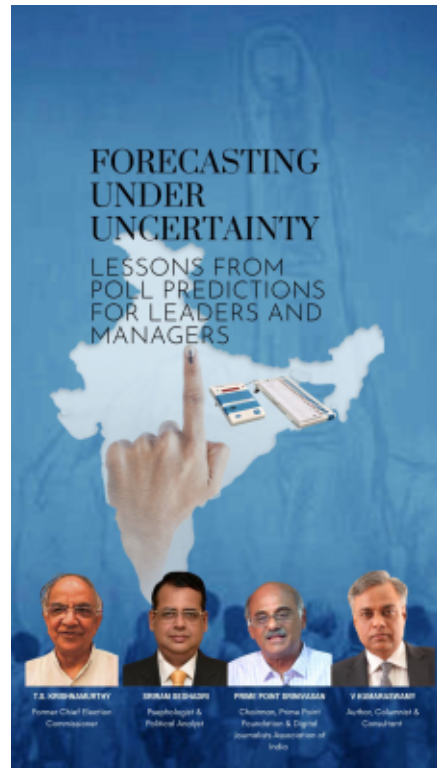
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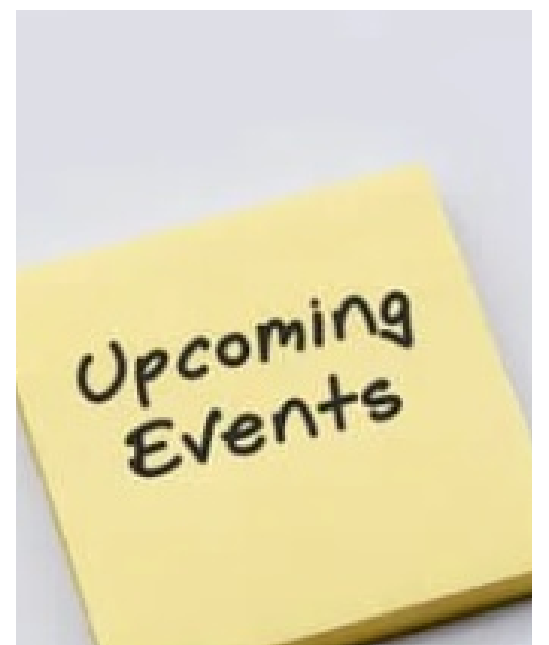
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## The 'I' in AI: Empowering Individuals in an Intelligent Age

**A**s India's digital economy scales new heights, it is increasingly anchored in open-source technologies that power our code, digital infrastructure, and governance systems. While this has enabled innovation and accessibility, it also brings into sharp focus a growing vulnerability—cybersecurity. As we build on open foundations, the need for a robust “AI armoury” to safeguard our digital stack becomes imperative. India's journey in AI must therefore go beyond developing indigenous models; it must equally prioritise resilience, security, and trust.

At the same time, the global AI race is often misunderstood. Organisations are not lagging because

*The true advantage will not come from deploying more models, but from meaningfully integrating intelligence into decision-making, operations, and human capability.*

they are slow, but because their AI strategies are frequently disconnected from their core business realities. The true advantage will not come from deploying more models, but from meaningfully integrating intelligence into decision-making, operations, and human capability. The real differentiator lies in bridging these “compound gaps” with relevance and purpose.

It is in this context that the Madras Management Association hosted the *Sixth V. Narayanan (Pond's) Memorial Endowment Lecture* instituted by the Pond's Veterans on the theme ***“The ‘I’ in AI: Empowering Individuals in an Intelligent Age”***, delivered by **Mr. B. Santhanam**, Former CEO - Asia Pacific & India, and Chairman, Saint-Gobain India held on 09 April 2026 at MMA Management Center. His insights underscore a critical perspective—AI's transformative power ultimately rests in how it empowers individuals, not just institutions.

In this issue, we are pleased to present an article based on this thought-provoking session, along with an embedded video for deeper engagement. We hope these perspectives will help you better appreciate the human dimension of AI and inspire you to harness its potential effectively—both for your organisation and for yourself.

Read on and get inspired!

## **MINIMUM WAGES: ITS IMPACT ON LABOUR AND INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION COST**

The recent developments in the manufacturing hubs of Noida have once again brought the issue of minimum wages to the forefront of national discourse. The Government of India's consideration to revise the Minimum Wages framework reflects a broader need to balance worker welfare with industrial competitiveness.

An upward revision in wages is both necessary and inevitable in a growing economy. It strengthens the purchasing power of labour, improves quality of life, and contributes to inclusive growth. However, it also presents a complex challenge for industry. Rising wage costs can lead to increased production expenses, potentially impacting price competitiveness—especially in sectors exposed to global markets.

One likely response from industry is an accelerated shift towards automation. While automation enhances efficiency, consistency, and long-term cost optimisation, India's current level of automation adoption still lags behind many advanced economies. A rapid transition, if not carefully calibrated, could widen the gap between productivity gains and employment opportunities, particularly at the shop-floor level.

This brings us to a critical inflection point. The question is not whether wages should rise or automation should advance—both are integral to progress. The real challenge lies in managing this transition thoughtfully. It calls for coordinated action between the Centre and States, supported by robust labour market analysis, sector-specific insights, and

forward-looking policies.

Reskilling and upskilling of the workforce, incentivising balanced automation, and ensuring that productivity gains translate into shared prosperity will be key. Industry, government, and institutions must work together to create a framework where growth does not come at the cost of employment, and competitiveness does not undermine equity.

As India aspires to strengthen its position as a global manufacturing hub, achieving this balance will be crucial. The path forward must be one of harmony—between labour and technology, cost and competitiveness, and growth and inclusion.

## **INDIA'S UNIQUE INITIATIVE TO TAILOR FARMING PLANS FOR STATES**

India's agriculture sector, the backbone of its economy, is undergoing a quiet but significant shift—from broad, uniform policies to more nuanced, state-specific strategies. This evolving approach recognises a fundamental reality: Indian agriculture is too diverse for a “one-size-fits-all” framework.

With climate change increasingly disrupting crop cycles and water availability becoming a pressing concern, especially in monsoon-dependent regions, the need for localised solutions has never been greater. State-specific farming roadmaps offer a pragmatic way forward. By leveraging granular data on soil health, water resources, and crop patterns, states can prioritise interventions that are both relevant and effective.

This initiative has the potential to improve

productivity, enhance climate resilience, and strengthen farmers' incomes. It also places greater responsibility on states to design and implement policies tailored to their unique agro-climatic conditions. However, the success of this approach will depend critically on execution—robust data systems, institutional capacity, and coordination between the Centre and States will be key enablers.

Equally important is the integration of technology, sustainable practices, and market linkages to ensure that these plans translate into tangible outcomes for farmers. As uncertainties in agriculture continue to grow, a clear and actionable roadmap at the state level can provide much-needed direction and stability.

India's move towards customised agricultural planning is both timely and necessary. If implemented effectively, it can redefine the future of Indian farming—making it more resilient, productive, and responsive to the challenges of a changing environment.

## **INDIA'S NUCLEAR REACTOR MILESTONE**

India has taken a decisive step forward in its energy journey with the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) in Tamil Nadu achieving criticality—a stage that marks the onset of a sustained nuclear chain reaction. This milestone is not merely technological; it is strategic. It brings India closer to long-term nuclear fuel self-reliance and strengthens its position in the global clean energy landscape.

Fast breeder reactors hold the promise of significantly enhancing fuel efficiency by generating more fissile material than they consume. For a country

like India, with limited uranium reserves but abundant thorium potential, this advancement is particularly significant. It aligns with the nation's long-term vision of achieving energy security while transitioning towards low-carbon power sources. The ambitious target of 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047 now appears more attainable with such breakthroughs.

Equally noteworthy is the evolving policy environment. The recent passage of the SHANTI Bill 2025, opening nuclear power generation to private sector participation, marks a paradigm shift in India's nuclear ecosystem. It paves the way for increased investment, innovation, and operational efficiency in a sector that was hitherto the exclusive domain of the public sector.

In this context, the Madras Management Association recently hosted a detailed discussion on the opportunities and implications of this landmark legislation. The deliberations highlighted how the private sector can responsibly and effectively contribute to this critical domain, while adhering to the highest standards of safety and governance. Link for the article with embedded video is given below for better appreciation...

As we present in this issue an overview of these developments along with an embedded video of the discussion, we invite you to reflect on the broader implications of this milestone. India's nuclear journey is entering a new phase—one that blends technological prowess, policy reform, and strategic foresight.

Read on and engage with the future of India's energy landscape.

## TALKS – IRAN AND USA: THE OUTCOME MATTERS

The evolving situation in West Asia once again underscores the fragility and fluidity of geopolitics in a region critical to global stability. The recent oscillation—from tentative signals of engagement between Iran and the United States to renewed uncertainty—reflects how delicate and complex these negotiations remain. Developments such as the brief assurance on keeping the Strait of Hormuz open, followed by reversals in stances, highlight the unpredictability that continues to define the region.

At stake is far more than bilateral relations. Any escalation or prolonged instability carries serious implications for global energy markets, supply chains, and economic stability. The Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery for the world's oil supply, remains central to this discourse. Disruptions here would have cascading effects across industries and economies worldwide.

Equally significant is the broader shift in the global order. Recent developments suggest an acceleration towards a more multipolar world, where traditional power equations are being redefined. In this changing landscape, the consequences of conflict—or the benefits of constructive dialogue—extend well beyond the immediate region.

For India, these developments are of particular importance. As a major energy importer, the country's economic resilience is closely tied to stability in West Asia. This calls for a proactive and agile policy response—diversifying energy sources, strengthening strategic reserves, and deepening diplomatic engagement to safeguard national interests.

While uncertainties persist, the need of the hour

is clear: dialogue must prevail over discord. The outcome of these talks will not only shape regional peace but also influence global economic trajectories. One hopes that prudence and statesmanship guide the way forward.

## **CAVINKARE–MMA CHINNIKRISHNAN INNOVATION & GREAT IDEAS AWARDS**

Innovation remains the cornerstone of India's growth story, yet its journey from idea to impact continues to face structural challenges. While the country today hosts over a thousand incubators and accelerators, the translation of ideas into scalable, sustainable ventures has not always kept pace with expectations. Initiatives such as the Atal Innovation Mission have laid a strong foundation, but a decade on, concerns around effectiveness, transparency, and outcomes in several incubators merit thoughtful reflection.

Colleges and academic institutions were envisioned as vibrant hubs of innovation. However, many incubators are yet to realise their full potential—be it due to limited industry linkage, inadequate mentorship, or gaps in governance and visibility. The opportunity before us is not merely to expand the ecosystem, but to strengthen it with purpose, accountability, and real-world relevance.

It is in this context that the *CavinKare–MMA ChinniKrishnan Innovation & Great Ideas Awards* assume special significance. This initiative seeks to rekindle the spirit of innovation by recognising and rewarding original ideas, encouraging young minds, and providing a credible platform for visibility and

validation. Beyond accolades, such efforts play a vital role in fostering confidence among innovators and bridging the gap between ideation and execution.

India's innovation ecosystem holds immense promise. The challenge—and the opportunity—lies in unlocking its true potential through collaboration between academia, industry, and institutions. Platforms like these awards can serve as catalysts, inspiring a new generation to think boldly and act decisively.

As we celebrate innovation through this initiative, we hope it will not only recognise excellence but also energise the ecosystem to realise its larger potential. We invite you to nominate or recommend innovators to participate in the awards process and gain well-deserved recognition. [Click here to view the brochure.](#)

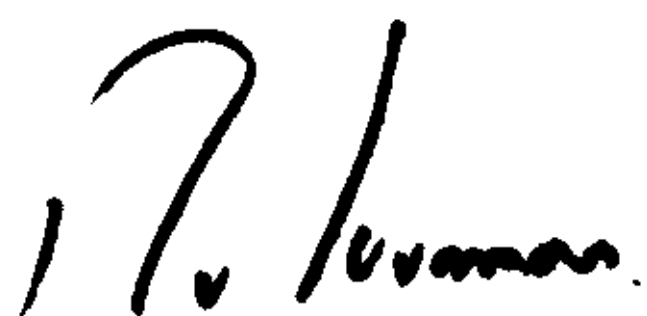
Let ideas flourish—and let innovation lead the way.

I am also delighted to present in this issue a thoughtfully curated selection of insightful articles on innovation, women empowerment, and the often-overlooked cost of not listening to children—each complemented with embedded videos for a more immersive reading experience.

Do read on, reflect, and draw inspiration.

As always, we would be happy to hear your views, comments and suggestions.

Happy Reading!!





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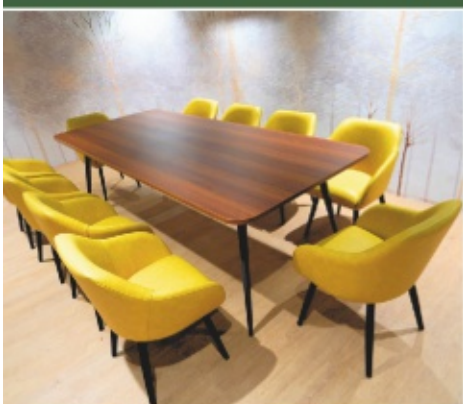


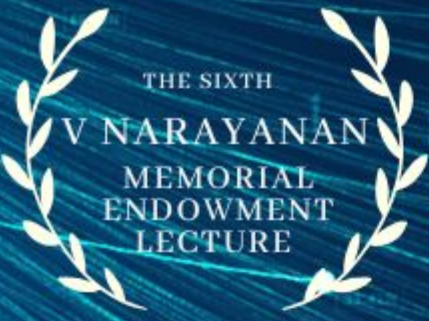
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# THE " " IN



## Empowering Individuals in an Intelligent Age



**Mr B Santhanam**  
Former CEO, Asia Pacific & India  
Chairman - Saint-Gobain, India

**Mr. B. Santhanam** delivered the *Sixth V. Narayanan Memorial Endowment Lecture* in April 2026, on Artificial Intelligence, its imperatives and the various questions that it rises.

**W**hen Group Captain Vijayakumar informed me that Shri V. Balaraman had recommended me to deliver the **Sixth V. Narayanan Memorial Endowment Lecture**, I was deeply honoured and personally delighted, because I share three serendipitous connections with VN.

### **THE FIRST CONNECTION: A FRAGRANCE FROM CUDDALORE**

The first goes back to my early days on the morning bus from Cuddalore to Chennai. You didn't need a signpost to know you had arrived in the city; the unmistakable fragrance of Pond's Dream Flower Talc drifting from the factory was an alarm clock signalling: You have reached Chennai. VN had built a sensory memory and a standard of excellence that defined the landscape.

My second connection jumps to my time at IIM Ahmedabad. Pond's wasn't just a corporate recruiter; it was the dream company, the ultimate validation of your capability. VN didn't just build consumer products; he built a gravitational pull for the brightest



minds. Three of my closest friends—Kandy, Deepak, and Vaidy—joined Pond’s. Through their decades-long journeys, I had a front-row seat to the culture of excellence VN cultivated, engineering high-performance human networks long before it became a buzzword.

My third connection is deeply personal. In the 1980s, while reading standard corporate AGM speeches, VN’s stood out. He referred to Pond’s as a ‘culture of character and competence’. That phrase stayed with me. Decades later, as the founding Managing Director of Saint-Gobain Glass India, I established our *4C Framework: Competence, Commitment, Credibility, and Continuous Improvement*. Those four C’s are the undeniable legacy of VN.

Recently, reviewing VN’s AGM speeches in The Hindu archives, I was astonished by his foresight. In the 1980s, he was already eloquently articulating ‘*stakeholder capitalism*’ and *corporate ‘purpose’*—concepts that wouldn’t gain global mainstream traction until a full decade later. He was a visionary

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who constantly looked around the corner. Because of that, I am absolutely certain that if VN were standing at this podium today, he wouldn't be looking in the rearview mirror. He would be examining the most profound shift of our era. He would have chosen to speak on Artificial Intelligence. But AI is a vast, noisy subject. To honour his legacy of practical, continuous improvement, I am consciously staying away from classical debates tonight—whether AI is just hype, an investor bubble, or how governments should regulate it. Those are discussions for another time.

## **THE “I” IN A.I.: WHY IT MATTERS**

Tonight, I want to focus entirely on the ‘I’ in A.I. And that ‘I’ is all of you. And it is me as well.

To answer that, we must understand what this technology actually is. For most, Artificial Intelligence was born in November 2022, dropping onto our phones as ChatGPT. It is easy to view this as a sudden tech trend. But the truth is, this is exactly a 90-year journey of science. As I was preparing this, my family gave me a strict warning: ‘Do not get up there and give an intellectual, scientific lecture’. So, instead of a textbook history of algorithms, here is that 90-year journey in five short paragraphs.

Ninety years ago, Alan Turing and Alonzo Church asked a radical question: *Is ‘thinking’ just math?* They proved intelligence isn't magic; it can be calculated. Soon after, Norbert Wiener added a crucial piece: ‘feedback loops’—the idea that an intelligent system must be able to make a mistake and correct its behaviour.

*Across those hours of conversation, distinct patterns emerged. I realised that when faced with this new intelligence, we adopt very specific masks. I have observed several distinct personas.*

In August 1956, John McCarthy officially coined the term ‘*Artificial Intelligence*’. Beautifully, just two months later, Shri S. Anantharamakrishnan founded this very institution. The MMA and the name ‘Artificial Intelligence’ are exactly the same age. For decades, scientists tried to build AI by writing a logical rulebook for everything in the world. But the real world is too messy for a rulebook, leading to a deep freeze known as the ‘AI Winter’.

In the 1980s, researchers like Geoffrey Hinton had a radical idea: stop writing rules and start mimicking biology. They built digital neural networks. Using those old feedback loops, the AI began to learn by trial and error, much like a child.

For over two decades, these digital brains were too small. But then three things collided: infinite internet data, lightning-fast chips, and a breakthrough architecture called the ‘Transformer’. The secret wasn’t being overly clever; it was scale. If you pump in enough data and computing power, intelligence grows predictably—leading directly to the ChatGPT moment.

Today, with advanced models, we have moved beyond an app that just ‘predicts’ words. It pauses, searches its own logic, and reasons through problems. We are no longer interacting with just software but

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## **HOW ARE WE HANDLING THIS COLLABORATION?**

So, the natural question is: How are we handling this collaboration? To answer that, I decided I couldn't just read industry reports or listen to Silicon Valley executives. I needed to understand what was actually happening on the ground. Over the last few weeks, I invested more than 20 hours in deep, personal conversations with 17 different people. I spoke to a wide spectrum—from those intimately connected to the AI industry, to highly successful professionals who are, admittedly, absolute beginners when it comes to AI. I asked them how they were using this technology and where they were getting stuck.

Across those hours of conversation, distinct patterns emerged. I realised that when faced with this new intelligence, we adopt very specific masks. I have observed several distinct personas.

## **THE ABSENT INDIVIDUAL: THE OSTRICH SYNDROME**

But before I get to the mask I once wore, I must tell you about the one that shocked me into writing this lecture. I call it *The Absent Individual*. I recently spent an hour with Kannan, an academically gifted 24-year-old techie working for a GCC. He had the pedigree, the youth, and the proximity to the machine. But when I asked about AI, his answer was chilling: 'We're just not into it,' and, 'Our company has strict controls.' For him, AI simply was not on the radar. This is the 'Ostrich Syndrome'. This persona isn't afraid; he is simply absent from the arena, while the

technological frontier moves forward.

## **THE ARMCHAIR INTELLECTUAL: BRILLIANT IN THEORY, STAGNANT IN PRACTICE**

I must move from Kannan to the one that defined me a couple of years ago: *The Armchair Intellectual*. I was a high-concept, low-friction observer. Perhaps many of you in this hall today fit this mask. I tracked Silicon Valley scaling laws and debated AGI ethics. But for me, AI was a philosophical subject, not a functional partner. I was in the ‘stands,’ not on the ‘field’. I possessed a deep understanding of the ‘Why,’ but zero muscle memory of the ‘How’. I suffered from a profound Execution Gap—brilliant in theory, but stagnant in practice. Fortunately, I started to embrace AI.

During a focus group with five PhD-level researchers at an R&D centre, I saw the entire spectrum of AI fluency. One was a pure Sceptic, stuck in the ‘Scientist’s Paradox’. A second was paralysed by fear and doubt over ‘cognitive atrophy’—the worry that the machine would shrink his mind. But there were glimmers of the climb. A third was at an early stage, using the tool for speed. A fourth was occasionally using AI to discern the signal from the AI noise. And finally, the Anthropologist in the group was consistently using the machine to broaden the surface area of his expertise. Even in a high-tech lab, the ‘I’ in AI was at different stages of the ladder.

## **THE ABDICATED INDIVIDUAL: FALLING ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL**

As we move to action, we encounter a second

persona, more dangerous because it wears the mask of productivity: *The Abdicated Individual*. They are on the field, but they've handed their equipment to the machine and taken a nap. They use AI for what I call 'Dump, Lift, and Drop'. They dump a messy context into the AI, issue a lazy command like 'Fix this,' lift whatever it spits out, and drop it into their workflow with zero validation. They have outsourced their agency. Harvard Business School researchers call this 'falling asleep at the wheel'.

## **THE ACCELERATED INDIVIDUAL: VELOCITY WITHOUT ORCHESTRATION**

Our third persona is wide awake, gripping the steering wheel tightly, and flooring the gas pedal: *The Accelerated Individual*. They use AI as a massive productivity spring. They perform the quick fact-checking that the Abdicated persona skips. They use AI in a strictly transactional mode, treating it like a vending machine: put a prompt in, get a product out. They lack the iterative collaboration required to build true cognitive control. They have velocity, but no orchestration. They are just doing their work faster.

I found the proof of this friction in a major manufacturing multinational. I spoke with a dynamic leader heading a group focused on Industry 4.0. She revealed a startling truth: despite being the engine of transformation, active AI adoption within her own team was less than 25%. Most were relegated to the sidelines or stuck in the 'vending machine' mode of the Accelerated Individual. They were often operating in 'Shadow AI' mode—using unsanctioned personal tools outside of work to improve their productivity.

The company had imposed severe restrictions on the use of AI tools until it could get its guardrails up. It reminded me that even at the frontier, habits remain stubbornly linear and companies impose control on innovation.

## **THE AMPLIFIED INDIVIDUAL: COGNITIVE COMMAND OVER NOISE**

To reach the next rung, we must move from the raw speed of the Accelerated Individual to *The Amplified Individual*. They do not just ‘use’ AI; they use AI to broaden the ‘surface area’ of their Subject Matter Expertise. Because they are deep experts, they have the Cognitive Command to hear the signal in the noise. If the AI suggests 10 chemical pathways, they don’t try them all. They use their expertise to instantly discard 8 and double down on the two that will actually make a difference.

## **THE AUGMENTED INDIVIDUAL: THE T-SHAPED EXPERT**

But the Amplified Individual still operates within her own kingdom. To break new ground, we reach *The Augmented Individual*. This is the T-shaped expert. They possess deep Subject Matter Expertise, but through AI, they connect to entirely different domains. They move beyond amplifying what they already know and start augmenting their perspective. They use the AI to see from other points of view—discovering how manufacturing, Sales, or Finance might view their report. They connect the dots across disciplines.

## **THE AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUAL: MASTER OF MULTI-PHASE ENGAGEMENT**

*One of them confirmed that the pace of AI evolution has broken Moore's Law, making traditional job descriptions obsolete. Their mandate for the modern professional was simple but profound: you must reimagine your role as if you are managing a team of incredibly smart, but sometimes erratic, interns.*

Finally, we reach the summit: *The Autonomous Individual*. They are the masters of Multi-Phase Engagement. They understand that AI interaction is a continuous sequence of Preparation, Iteration, and Validation. They stay in total control—thinking, planning, and executing, while ruthlessly filtering for hallucinations and sycophancy. They have figured it out.

## **THE I.C.A.N. FRAMEWORK: A PATH TO THE SUMMIT**

The key question is: *“How does one climb to the summit of AI proficiency without falling asleep at the wheel along the way?”*

The answer didn't come from a global consultancy; it was forged in my family crucible. After deep, multi-hour sessions with my wife Rajani, son Navaneethan, and daughter-in-law Aishwarya, we made a decision: we retired 'IDEAS'—the legacy mentoring framework Rajani and I had used for years. We realised that the AI era demands a more urgent behavioural model. Aishwarya, operating in an AI-first startup, was the living proof—her deep, personal immersion in these tools made her significantly more

advanced than many peers doing the exact same job. To capture that leap, we crystallised the framework we will discuss tonight.

This framework isn't just a local observation. A prominent US-based academic and tech CEO, a gifted academic heading a global research centre, and a celebrated Data Scientist provided external validation for this exact shift. One of them confirmed that the pace of AI evolution has broken Moore's Law, making traditional job descriptions obsolete. Their mandate for the modern professional was simple but profound: you must reimagine your role as if you are managing a team of incredibly smart, but sometimes erratic, interns.

### *Pillar 1: INCLUDE – The Cognitive Partnership*

The journey from an everyday professional to an Augmented Individual begins with the first pillar: Include. At first hearing, 'Include' sounds simple. It sounds like logging into a platform, typing a prompt, and getting to work. But that is not inclusion. That is just software adoption. When a radically new technology arrives, human beings usually fall into one of two traps. We either reject it out of pride, saying, 'A machine cannot do what I do.' Or, we abdicate our thinking entirely.

Let me introduce you to Maya, a PhD in Chemistry working in a GCC, deeply immersed in solving a complex practical problem; she was originally afraid of using AI. However, a colleague nudged her. She realised a dangerous truth: if you use AI as a crutch, your own expertise will quickly atrophy. So, she changed how she interacted with the tool by mastering

a core practice of AI fluency: aggressive administrative offloading. Maya looked at her workflow and realised she spent almost half her time doing mechanical work—formatting raw data, summarising decades-old papers, and structuring reports. She decided that this was the work she would ‘include’ the machine in. She handed over the administrative burden entirely.

With that friction removed, her cognitive bandwidth opened up. And that is when she redefined the partnership. She stopped treating the AI as an oracle that gave her answers, and started treating it as a cognitive sparring partner. She did not say, ‘*Write this research proposal for me.*’ She said, ‘*Here is the research proposal I wrote. Act as my harshest critic and find the three biggest flaws in my logic.*’ Do you see the shift? She didn’t surrender her domain expertise; she used the machine to stress-test it. To ‘Include’ AI does not mean handing over the steering wheel. It means intentionally bringing a collaborator, ensuring that the technology acts as steel for your mind, rather than an excuse for sloth.

## *Pillar 2: CURIOSITY - The Cross-Functional Expansion*

Once Maya established that cognitive partnership, she reached the second pillar: Curiosity. Most people misunderstand curiosity in the AI era. They think it simply means asking the machine a lot of technical questions. But for a professional, curiosity is not passive wonder. It is the deliberate practice of stepping outside your own expertise. Maya is a brilliant polymer chemist. But a chemical formulation does not survive on chemistry alone. It has to be manufactured at scale. It has to survive the South

Indian supply chain. It has to be sold by the sales team. In the past, you worked in a silo for months, handed the project over to manufacturing, and prayed they wouldn't reject it. The probability of success was entirely dependent on surviving that late-stage scrutiny. Anticipating their objections early on was almost impossible, because she simply did not have the domain knowledge.

This is where Maya deployed her curiosity. She used the AI to step directly into the minds of her collaborators. She mastered the practice of Persona Assignment. She didn't just ask the machine about chemistry. She prompted it: *'Act as the Head of Manufacturing. Tear my proposal apart. Why will this formulation fail on the factory floor?'* Then she pivoted: *'Now, act as the Director of Sales. What is the biggest customer objection to this new material?'* Do you see the shift? She was actively mapping the friction points of domains where her own knowledge was limited. She was subjecting her work to cross-functional scrutiny on day one, rather than day one hundred.

She used her curiosity to move from being a pure, isolated deep expert into a professional with a broad, systemic connection to the entire business. Because in the Intelligent Age, curiosity is the tactical discipline of using the machine to break out of your silo, anticipating the needs of the entire system before the rest of the system even sees your work.

### *Pillar 3: AGILITY - The Practice of Compounding*

As Maya pushed deeper into this collaboration, she reached the third pillar: Agility. When we hear the

word ‘agility,’ we usually think of speed. But in the Intelligent Age, agility is not about moving fast. It is about compounding your capability.

To understand this, you have to look at how Maya used to work. Classical research methodology is, by its very nature, a rigid, linear process. You define the problem, you spend weeks on the literature review, you form a hypothesis, you collect data, and finally, you analyse it. You cannot move to the next phase until the previous one is complete. It is a slow, sequential grind that creates massive cognitive fatigue.

Maya changed this by mastering two distinct practices. First, she learned to draw a sharp line. She took the heavy, administrative lifting—like synthesising decades of past research papers or formatting raw data—and delegated it entirely to the machine. She used the AI to instantly separate the wheat from the chaff. But true agility came with her third practice. She didn’t just hand off tasks and wait for answers; she began intertwining her workflow with the AI at a micro-level.

Instead of completing a whole experiment before analysing it, she engaged in a continuous, real-time sparring match with the machine. She would prompt the AI with early data, read its analysis, instantly adjust her chemical hypothesis, feed the new constraint back into the prompt, and refine the model. Every interaction left her smarter. Her learning began to compound. We often cannot see our own exponential growth. But her Research Director certainly did. He was used to getting a solid, linear proposal from Maya every three weeks. Suddenly,

Maya handed in a structurally flawless, systems-level argument in just a week. But it wasn't the speed that surprised him. She had included a risk-mitigation appendix that anticipated exactly where the chemical formulation might fail in the South Indian supply chain. She wasn't just reacting to problems anymore. She was anticipating the friction before it happened.

The Research Director realised that because Maya had mastered the practices of AI fluency—strategically delegating the heavy lifting, anticipating challenges from manufacturing, supply chain, and sales, and continuously intertwining her thinking with the machine—she had achieved true cognitive freedom, integrating several phases of the research methodology simultaneously. And that is the true definition of Agility. It is the discipline of using the machine to break out of linear thinking, compounding your own cognitive capital so rapidly that you outgrow your original job description.

#### *Pillar 4: NETWORK - The Practice of Serendipity*

In fewer than a few months, Maya had transformed from being an 'Absent Individual' to becoming an 'Augmented Individual'—the professional who actively mastered inclusion, curiosity, and agility to achieve true cognitive freedom.

The question for the audience is this: in this era of disruption, you are going to become an 'AI' no matter what. The only question is which one you will choose to be: the Absent Individual, or the Augmented Individual. And observing the Augmented persona taught me one final, critical lesson.

Once they achieved that individual cognitive

freedom, they realised that brilliance in isolation eventually hits a ceiling. To permanently leave the 'Absent Individual' behind, they had to scale their impact. And that required them to reach for the fourth and final pillar: Network.

Like many brilliant technical professionals, Maya is an introvert. For years, she was an invisible expert, working in her silo, entirely unaware of massive industry shifts like AlphaFold. In the past, 'networking' posed a challenge. It meant forcing small talk, and that drained her. But in the Intelligent Age, Maya realised she could use the machine to move from a state of isolation into a state of 'Active Serendipity'. She turned the AI into her social proxy.

First, she used it to build bridges. When she had a breakthrough, she didn't let the anxiety of public posting stop her from sharing it. She simply prompted the AI: *'Translate this complex research into a LinkedIn post for the Women in Science & Engineering group. Make it engaging for non-chemists, but keep the scientific integrity.'* Instantly, her expertise was visible. Instead of being overwhelmed by hundreds of long forum posts about new tools, she used the machine as a discussion partner. She would ask: 'Summarise the core debate in this advanced chemistry forum. What are the three new ideas that a traditional researcher like me needs to know to stay relevant?'

As her confidence grew, she used the AI to actively pull ideas toward her. She had the machine draft highly specific technical queries to share in these groups, asking: *'I am exploring this formulation; has anyone seen friction with this specific variable in hot and humid climates?'* And finally, she used the AI to

vet which professional forums were actually worth her limited social energy, having it draft introductory messages to onboard her into exactly the right communities.

Do you see what happened? Maya used the machine to remove the friction of human connection. By doing so, she attracted new ideas, external validation, and high-value peers back to her, all without ever draining her social battery.

### **I.C.A.N.: YOUR DECLARATION OF AGENCY**

Maya is no longer afraid. She has moved from being an immured, invisible scientist to a visible leader who drives new product introduction. How did she do it? She followed a mantra that is as simple as it is powerful: Include the tool. Be Curious about the friction. Agile for the curve. Network for the impact.

When you put them together, you get the definitive answer to the Intelligent Age: I.C.A.N. This isn't just an acronym; it is your declaration of agency. Just as Nike told us to 'Just Do It,' the era of AI tells us: 'I.C.A.N.'

### **I.C.A.N. IN ACTION: FROM THE BOARDROOM TO THE BIRD FARM**

But don't take my word for it as an armchair intellectual. Let me show you what happens when this mindset is deployed at both the highest levels of enterprise and the grassroots of our community. I am going to cite an example of an individual whom the MMA audience is very familiar with. He is the ultimate embodiment of this agency. He dedicates two and a

half hours every single morning to his ‘Council of 7’—seven different AI models he uses to challenge his own Manufacturing, Supply Chain, Marketing, R&D, and HR teams. He isn’t just using AI; he is orchestrating it. It is our own C.K. Ranganathan who, I believe, is the Autonomous Individual driving adoption not just in his enterprise, but in his bird farm—coincidentally in Cuddalore. There, Ranga’s team trained a supervisor from a fishing community named Kamakshi, a school dropout, to use AI tools. Today, Kamakshi uses Grok to analyse bird health data via photos and generate medical insights that challenge professional veterinarians. She also used the same tool to help her daughter considerably reduce her migraine intensity.

## **THE GREAT LEVELLER: AGENCY OVER PEDIGREE**

This is the Great Leveller in action. The contrast couldn’t be sharper: we have a 24-year-old pedigree computer science graduate, Kannan, who is ‘Absent’ because AI isn’t even on his radar. And we have Kamakshi, who is ‘Autonomous’ because she chose to step into the driver’s seat.

The choice of which ‘I’ you will be—the Absent Individual or the Augmented Individual—has nothing to do with your degree, your geography, your age, or your profession. It is entirely a function of your agency. The machine provides the logic, but you provide the intent. You are the ‘I’ in AI.

## **CONCLUSION: AN INVITATION TO STRESS-TEST THESE IDEAS**

Now, let us go lead the transformation.

Now, as a self-confessed armchair intellectual, I know that a framework like this is only as valuable as the scrutiny it can survive. We have about 200 of us gathered physically in this room today, and thousands more joining us digitally. I want to invite all of you to put Pillar Two—Curiosity—into practice right now. Challenge these ideas, ask the hard questions, map the boundaries of what I have just shared, and let's stress-test this together. ■



**15<sup>TH</sup>.  
CavinKare-MMA  
ChinniKrishnan  
Innovation and  
Great Ideas  
Awards**

**CALL FOR NOMINATIONS:  
ALL GREAT IDEAS AND  
INNOVATIONS DESERVE  
THE SPOTLIGHT.**

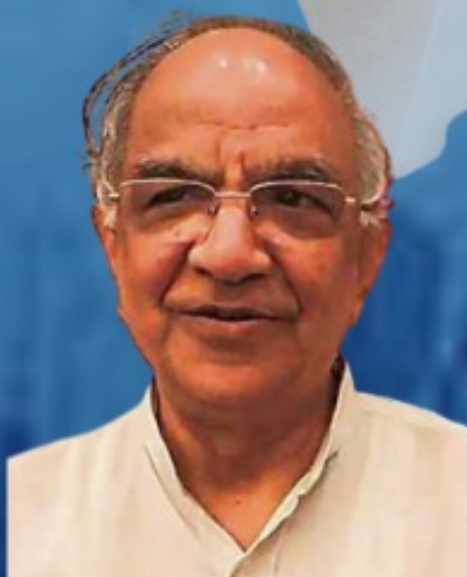
**GREAT IDEAS**

**INNOVATION**

**NOMINATION ENDS ON:  
MONDAY, 22 JUNE 2026**

# FORECASTING UNDER UNCERTAINTY

LESSONS FROM  
POLL PREDICTIONS  
FOR LEADERS AND  
MANAGERS



**T.S. KRISHNAMURTHY**

Former Chief Election  
Commissioner



**SRIRAM SESHADRI**

Psephologist &  
Political Analyst



**PRIME POINT SRINIVASAN**

Chairman, Prime Point  
Foundation & Digital  
Journalists Association of  
India

Can election polls teach boardrooms to forecast better? Three experts explore uncertainty, bias, and the limits of prediction.

### *Mr T.S. Krishnamurthy*

Former Chief Election Commissioner

**T**he question before us is not merely technical — it is one of democratic integrity. As far as opinion polls and exit polls are concerned, the intention has always been to help the voter and the political parties gauge the public mood. But their value to the actual management of elections is limited, and their limitations are considerable.

The Election Commission did attempt, some decades ago, to impose restrictions — for instance, banning exit poll results from being published between phases of a multi-phase election, so that early results would not influence voters in later constituencies. The Supreme Court, however, held that freedom of speech and expression could not be curtailed by banning opinion polls or exit polls outright. So we settled on a regulatory mechanism: disclosures must be properly made, methodology must be stated, and publication must be timed so as not to distort the polling process. But we do not treat these polls as authoritative — and there are good reasons for that.



The first reason is voter psychology. A large bulk of voters — and the studies bear this out — make up their minds only on the day of voting, or in the final two or three days before. They keep their eyes and ears open throughout the campaign, hear everyone out, form tentative opinions that shift, and finally decide at the booth. Fence-sitters, by definition, resist prediction. The uncertainty continues almost until the moment of voting.

The second reason is the truthfulness of respondents. Voters who give their opinion in a pre-election poll need not be giving their true opinion. Opinion polls may reflect broad trends, but they do not necessarily reflect the actual voting intention of the electorate on polling day. The sample may even include people who ultimately do not vote at all.

There are also concerns about neutrality. Political parties have expressed to us — quite directly — that some opinion polls appear designed to benefit a particular side. I am not accusing anyone, but the suspicion exists and it is not without basis. What the Election Commission can do — and what I would

personally advocate — is to push for greater disclosure rather than deeper auditing. Pollsters should be transparent about their methodology, sample sizes, timing, and funding. So long as intentions are honourable and quality improves, the Commission should not interfere further in their working. Free elections require free expression, and that includes the expression of poll forecasts.

### *Mr Sriram Seshadri*

Psephologist & Political Analyst

I fully agree with Mr. Krishnamurthy on voter psychology, especially the late-decider phenomenon. In my experience, at least 35 to 40 percent of voters decide in the final three days before an election. That one fact alone should make any forecaster deeply humble.

Let me explain how psephological polling actually works in India — and why it so often falls short. There are two distinct instruments: pre-election opinion polls, conducted weeks or months before voting day, and exit polls, conducted outside booths on election day itself. They differ fundamentally in what they can capture. An opinion poll surveys likely voters and tries to predict both turnout and vote choice — two variables, both uncertain. An exit poll surveys actual voters who have just voted, so it needs only to predict vote share. Even so, exit polls have a stronger information base, which is why their accuracy tends to be higher — though far from perfect.

The complexity of Indian elections makes all of this immensely difficult. We have over 970 million



# 24<sup>TH</sup>. MMA AWARD FOR MANAGERIAL EXCELLENCE 2026

NOMINATION CLOSES ON  
**20 MAY 2026**



voters, 22 scheduled languages, dozens of dialects, and profound caste arithmetic — where sub-caste, not merely caste, determines voting behavior. Coalition politics shifts constantly: what held in one election fractures in the next. The shy voter phenomenon is real — in several constituencies I have worked in, voters from subordinate caste groups refused to share their true preference in front of dominant-caste neighbours who were present at the time of data collection. In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in 2019, male community members in certain Muslim-dominated areas told us they would vote one way, while the women inside the household — audible but not visible — were saying something entirely different. The women voted as they said they would, not as the men declared.

My most instructive personal failure was Karnataka 2023. On the ground, all signals pointed toward a hung assembly or a BJP-JDS combine. We did not capture the Lingayat community's resentment against BJP, nor the way Vokkaliga JDS supporters chose to back D K Shivakumar as their community leader through Congress rather than waste their vote on a non-viable JDS. Congress won over 130 seats. I had predicted something very different. That failure forced me to rebuild my model from the ground up.

Now, what can corporate leaders and managers take from all of this? The parallels are direct. First: build multiple scenarios, not a single forecast. Just as opinion polls show a trend rather than a certainty, business forecasts should present a range of outcomes — including a wave scenario and a black-swan scenario. Second: beware of urban and elite bias.

Business planning that draws only on upper-class or digitally-engaged consumers misses the rural majority — exactly as a poll that over-represents English-speaking respondents misses the mood of the ground. Third: late momentum matters. The last-mile execution — distribution, word of mouth, point of sale — can shift a market as dramatically as a final-week election event can shift a constituency. Fourth: invest in ground intelligence. Your sales force on the ground often knows more than any survey. Fifth: triangulate. No single data source is enough. The more independent sources that converge on a finding, the more confidence you can have in it. Sixth: embrace humility and adaptation. In 2019, I predicted BJP at 300–305 seats; they won 303. Then I grew overconfident, and Karnataka punished me for it. Models must be continuously revised, and forecasters must be prepared to say — publicly — when they got it wrong.

### *Prime Point Srinivasan*

Founder & Chairman, Prime Point Foundation &  
Digital Journalists Association of India

Let me start with a ground-level experience that tells you something fundamental about the limits of exit polling. Some years ago, students from a mass-communication department were engaged by an agency to conduct an exit poll at a polling booth in T Nagar, near Panagal Park. That booth had 1,200 registered voters. In an educated urban area like that, turnout is typically around 30 to 35 percent — meaning roughly 400 people would vote. Yet the students arrived with 600 response sheets to fill.

<p><b>TUE, 5 MAY</b> 5:00 pm onwards TAJ CONNEMARA, CHENNAI</p>	<p>SRM-THE HINDU-MMA FUTURE CAREER CONVERSATIONS <b>FOR STUDENTS ONLY - BY INVITATION</b></p>
<p><b>THU, 7 MAY</b> 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm MMA MANAGEMENT CENTER</p>	<p>INDIA IN THE CHINA+1 ERA: NAVIGATING GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS AMID SHIFTING GEOPOLITICS</p>
<p><b>SAT, 9 MAY</b> 6:15 pm to 7:30 pm TANISHQ, ANNA NAGAR</p>	<p>TIMELINKS GOLDEN EDGE SERIES LECTURE FIND YOUR TRUE NORTH (FINDING PURPOSE CLARITY, AND SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS IN A DEMANDING WORLD)</p>
<p><b>THU, 14 MAY</b> 6:00 pm to 7:15 pm MMA MANAGEMENT CENTER</p>	<p>READ &amp; GROW SERIES THE HARD THING ABOUT HARD THING: BUILDING A BUSINESS WHEN THERE ARE NO EASY ANSWERS</p>
<p><b>WED, 27 MAY</b> 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm ANDHRA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE</p>	<p>LECTURE AT ANDHRA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE</p>
<p><b>THU, 28 MAY</b> 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm MMA MANAGEMENT CENTER</p>	<p>LAUNCH AND DISCUSSION ON THE BOOK BETTER NEVER STOPS BY MR SHYAM SRINIVASAN, FORMER MD, FEDERAL BANK</p>
<p><b>FRI, 29 MAY</b> 9:30 am to 5:00 pm MMA MANAGEMENT CENTER</p>	<p><b>HIGHLY SUBSIDISED FEE</b> MMA - IIA - KAS CONCLAVE LEADING WITH TRUST: FINANCIAL LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE &amp; STRATEGY IN A DISRUPTIVE WORLD</p>


## [● REC] ▶ RECORDED EVENTS

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MADRAS MMA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION ESTD. 1956

POND'S VETERANS

**The 'I' in AI: Empowering Individuals in an Intelligent Age**  
The Sixth V Narayanan Memorial Endowment Lecture  
9 APRIL 2026 | MMA MANAGEMENT CENTER, CHENNAI



B Santhanam

MADRAS MMA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION ESTD. 1956

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

**Launch & Discussion on The Enlightened Manager**  
A Transformative Approach to Work and Life  
24 APRIL 2026 | MMA MANAGEMENT CENTER






Vishwanath Alluri    Dr S Rajkumar    S Meiyappan

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**READ & GROW QUIET LEADERSHIP**  
Six Steps to Transforming Performance at Work  
28 APRIL 2026 | MMA MANAGEMENT CENTER

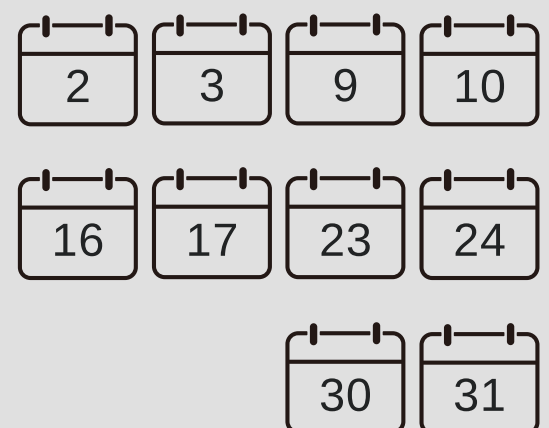





Sreenivassan Ramaprasad    Vimal Issarani    Karthik Narayanan

## weekend ONLINE QUIZ

MMA – KAS Weekend Quiz on every Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM - MAY 2026



When I met them at the booth, they told me their target was 700. The math simply did not add up. By evening, I learned from their professor that 600 completed sheets had been returned. The students had collected responses from people who never voted. That is not a rogue incident — it is a symptom of a structural problem in how polling data gets collected and reported.

The deeper issue is that people rarely reveal their true political preferences — not to pollsters, not even to family. I discovered this years ago when I used to travel between Delhi and Chennai on the Tamil Nadu Express. Fellow passengers, strangers to me and to each other, would share the most intimate family grievances within hours of meeting. I was struck by how much more candid they were with strangers than they would ever be with people they knew. I studied this carefully and arrived at a finding I have used ever since: people are brutally frank in precisely three conditions. First, when they are anonymous. Second, when they are speaking to a third party with no stake in the outcome. Third, when they are in a group of peers who share a common identity.

From this insight I developed what I call image audit — a structured method of capturing hidden perceptions by recreating those conditions deliberately. When I applied it to organisations and politicians, we were able to surface 95 to 98 percent of perceptions that would never emerge in a conventional survey. The moment a respondent suspects the interviewer belongs to a particular party, or might report their answer back to someone with authority over them, the truth disappears. Pollsters

face this every day in the field.

I run the Sansad Ratna Awards, which recognise outstanding parliamentary performance, and Mr T.S. Krishnamurthy is co-chair of the selection committee. Every MP we have interviewed in confidence tells me the same thing: in the final 10 to 15 percent of the electorate — the genuine fence-sitters — the decision is made not by ideology but by the last narrative they hear. We have seen candidates blast Sansad Ratna recognition on their hoardings on the day before the election and gain a meaningful vote margin from it. Uddhav Thackeray's candidate in one constituency, a consistent Sansad Ratna awardee, won by two lakh votes in 2024 — one lakh more than in the previous election. That last-minute shift in narrative is real, and it is exactly what makes polling so unreliable in its final numbers even when the directional trend is correct. ■

## InConversation

Can artificial intelligence improve poll predictions?

**Mr Sriram Seshadri:** AI can definitely perform far better analysis of past historical data than any human being and generate sophisticated forecast mechanisms. But here is the critical constraint: AI is only as good as the data it is trained on. If the underlying data is biased —

because people did not tell the truth, because phone-based collection captures only 30 seconds of a respondent's attention, because ground realities were not mapped — then AI will simply produce biased results faster. It can remove human analytical bias from the modelling stage, but it cannot enrich data that was poorly collected in the first place. Ground truth still matters above all else.

**Mr. Srinivasan:** I have spent years studying how perceptions form — and my conclusion is that the deepest problem is not the tool but the moment of asking. People reveal their true opinions in three specific conditions: when they are anonymous, when they are speaking to a third party who has no stake in the outcome, and when they are in a group with shared identity. Outside those three conditions, they play it safe. When I started doing image audits for organisations, using exactly those conditions, we were able to capture 95 to 98 percent of hidden perceptions. The same logic applies to electoral polling. No AI model can solve the fundamental challenge that voters will not tell you the truth unless the conditions are right.

***What distinguishes robust electoral forecasting from environments prone to misinformation?***

**Mr T.S. Krishnamurthy:** Uncertainty is universal — even internationally. The Trump versus Clinton and Trump versus Biden outcomes confounded the most sophisticated Western pollsters. Human behaviour simply is not fully predictable. In India, given our electorate's scale, the variations can be substantially larger. Rather than treating opinion polls the way one

treats an astrological forecast — as if they must be right — we should regard them as directional indicators only. And instead of attempting to audit poll agencies, the Election Commission would do better to mandate rigorous disclosure: methodology, sample size, funding source, and timing. Transparency, not regulation, is the right response.

***What are the ethical responsibilities of pollsters and the media in communicating uncertainty?***

**Mr. Srinivasan:** This is where the deepest problem lies. Turn on any evening debate and you will see so-called senior journalists who are more vigorous party advocates than the official party spokespeople themselves. The audience watches — but increasingly does not believe. Media has become entertainment, and people have learned to discount it. What I find most troubling is that some exit polls are not merely inaccurate — they are manufactured. I know of at least one instance where a political party, knowing it was going to lose, approached television channels and offered to pay for exit poll coverage that showed them winning, hoping to generate favourable stock market momentum in the interim days before the actual result. Some channels refused. Some did not. This is the reality.

**Mr. Sriram Seshadri:** I agree entirely, and I will add one structural point. The moment opinion polling becomes a commercial business, the incentive structure is distorted. A pollster who depends on a channel for airtime, or on a party for access, cannot be independent. If independent pollsters reported their findings exactly as the data showed — methodological

limitations included — it would build genuine public confidence in the exercise. Greater disclosure is not just the election commission's responsibility; it is every pollster's and every editor's ethical obligation. Without it, public trust in forecasting — whether electoral or corporate — will continue to erode, and the entire enterprise becomes less than worthless. ■



# WORKSHOPS

## MAY 2026

**UNLOCK YOUR CHILD'S TRUE POTENTIAL**  
**GROWING BIG – WHERE YOUNG MINDS**  
**TRANSFORM INTO FUTURE LEADERS**

12th-16th May 2026 |  
09:30 AM to 12:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

**EFFECTIVE MANAGERIAL SKILLS**  
**FOR SENIOR PROFESSIONALS**

**ESSENTIALS OF KAIZEN**

16th May 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

12th May 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

**GREEN BELT - SIX SIGMA**  
**CERTIFICATION**

22nd May 2026 | 23rd May 2026 |  
28th May 2026 | 29th May 2026 |  
10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

**NAVIGATING COMPLEX B2B**  
**BUYING CYCLES**

19th May 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

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# WORKSHOPS

## JUNE 2026

**AI ENABLED - ADVANCED B2B**  
**SALES MASTERY - 2DAYS**

05th-06th June 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

**LEADERSHIP- SITUATION DECISION**  
**MAKING**

11th June 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

**HR COMPLAINT & PRACTICE**

13th June 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

**DPDP COMPLAINT IN AI USAGE**

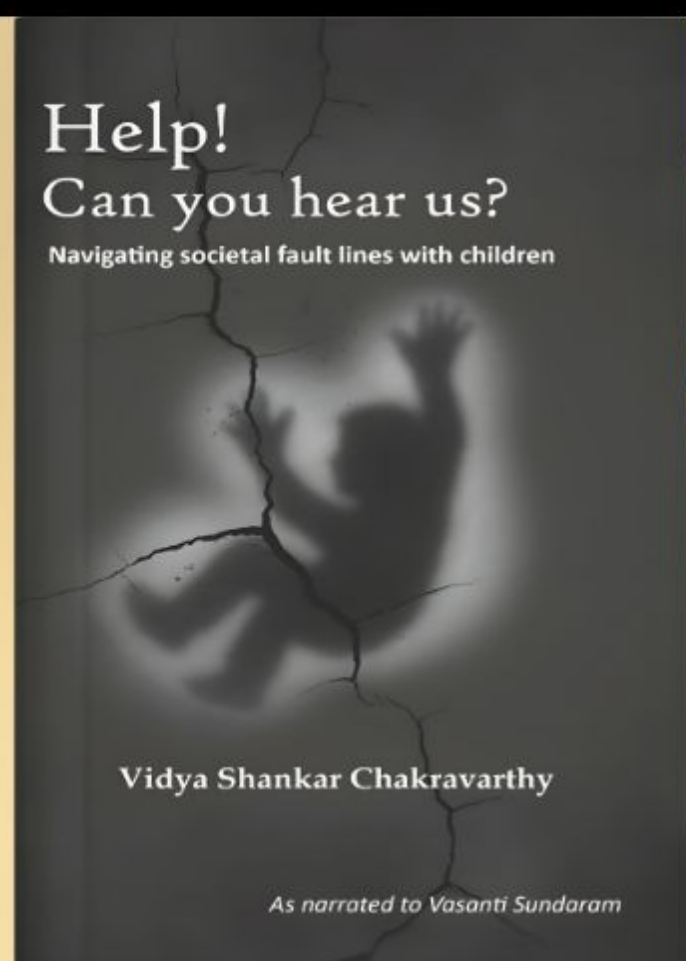
27th June 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:30 PM  
MMA Management Center

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# THE COST OF NOT LISTENING TO OUR KIDS

DISCUSSION  
ON THE BOOK



**Vidya Shankar Chakravarthy**  
Author & Founder, Relief  
Foundation



**Dr S Muralidhar**  
Senior Advocate &  
Former Chief Justice, Odisha High Court

A book, a judge, and a child rights activist ask the question India keeps avoiding: can you hear its children?

### ***Dr S Muralidhar***

Senior Advocate & Former Chief Justice,  
Odisha High Court

I want to start by congratulating Vidya on this remarkable publication. This is not an easy book to conceive of and to put together, and I want to thank Vasanti for extracting the book out of Vidya. The topic Vidya is dealing with is not easy, and many of these stories are not happy stories. For people asking how children in India live and how they see the justice system, this book is a good starting point.

There are two broad categories in law. One is children in need of care and protection — essentially abandoned, neglected children — and how the law looks at them. The other is children in conflict with the law: children involved in crime, accused of crimes, navigating the criminal justice system. This book straddles both worlds, which is something unique about Vidya Chakravarthy, who has served on the Juvenile Welfare Board as well as the Juvenile Justice Board. Very rarely do you find a person who has straddled both.



What is important about this book is that in law we always look for empirical data and we are rarely able to get it accurately. Even today, if you ask how many children India has, you are taken back to the 2011 census — fourteen years old and wholly inaccurate. The decisions of Juvenile Justice Boards are never published anywhere for lawyers or researchers to refer to. So first-person narratives are extremely rare, and this is a first-person narrative from someone who has been part of that system. It is invaluable as a document for research, for planning, for understanding the limitations of the law — and for seeing whether any course correction is possible.

This book asks us to introspect. It asks: what is the kind of world children are finding themselves in, and what kind of alternative are we offering them as a society? Let me paint four scenarios.

In August 2023, a Dalit student in Nanguneri, Tamil Nadu, was attacked by upper-caste boys because he was performing too well in school and they were envious of that. His younger sister, who tried to save

him, was attacked too. Both were critically injured. When the boy finally confided in his school principal, he was attacked in his own home. The Chandru Committee Report that followed — 'Nanguneri Never Ever' — reveals that as far back as 2015, students in Tamil Nadu government schools were wearing coloured wristbands signalling caste identity, and policing the social interactions of their peers. A major national party protested the government's circular banning this practice, calling it an affront to Hinduism.

The second scenario is from Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh: a private school teacher instructing class seven students to queue up and slap a Muslim boy because he could not recite his multiplication tables. The teacher's words were communal and deeply scarring. The Supreme Court intervened. But this is the poison being injected into children at the level of schools, and we, as a society, cannot leave it to the state to fix. This is a collective responsibility.

A third disturbing scenario: three sisters in Ghaziabad jumped from their apartment terrace. They had become addicted to an online game that assigned increasingly dangerous tasks. Digital addiction is causing depression among our youngsters and driving them to extreme acts of violence — against others and against themselves. We are talking not just of teenagers. I was once on a flight, seated beside a mother unable to control her three-year-old. She gave the child a phone. Instant silence. Complete absorption in a moving image. We are introducing toddlers to devices, and the effects are pernicious.

The fourth scenario is a hopeful one: the Bal

Puraskar Awards. A boy in rural India saved his father from a crocodile. Another saved thirty-seven people from fire. These are not ordinary acts of bravery; they are remarkable. Children are capable of extraordinary things. We must remind ourselves that one-quarter of the world's population — 220 crore children worldwide, 44 crore in India alone — is under eighteen. Seventy-four percent of these children live in rural areas. We have 1.1 crore child labourers by official count. That figure excludes children in prostitution, begging, and criminal supply chains. In India, never go by percentages — go by numbers. The numbers are staggering. Read Vidya's book and you will make the connections. A child fleeing exploitation at home ends up exploited by a police officer or a criminal gang, and remains scarred for life. What I find most heartening about this book is that Vidya does not mind admitting where she failed and where she succeeded. She lays it bare before us, posing the challenge: is this the kind of world we want to offer our children? These questions cannot wait.

### *Vidya Shankar Chakravarthy*

Author & Founder, Relief Foundation

What I had locked up in my heart and never thought of bringing out as a book became one at the prompting of a few elders in my life. It took the Himalayan patience of Vasanti to bring it out of me, and I am happy to see it in this form today. The journey of those ten years would not have been possible without government staff, senior police officials, NGO members, and civil society who came forward, spoke up, and advocated for children.

The future of India lies in liberating its children from the clutches of adult-centric systems. As Dr. Muralidhar was speaking, many other instances came rushing to me — cases I have not recorded, cases that were never written about. I recollect every case of trafficking, every raid on buses where children were being picked up and sent to other states in droves. Police would raise their hands and say they could not do much. That is why the public conscience is the third eye — the one that must move its gaze from the screen and truly look at the lives of children around us. We have learned to selectively insulate ourselves, and it must stop.

My plea is this: first tune your ear to hear those cries. Only then will their syllables make sense. Children have a voice and a capacity to speak. We must stop calling their silence obedience and their cries unruly. Can you hear us? Dr. Muralidhar is right that we must replace the word 'hear' with 'listen.' Listening requires the synchronicity of eye, heart, and mind — something we have denied these children for far too long. I wish to thank everyone in my family and friends who have been my cheerleaders while I worked in this difficult, gravitas-laden space. Special thanks to Vasanti — for prodding, pushing, shouting at me, and making me go deeper. Memories will go on, and possibly a second edition will emerge with additions that this book has already triggered. I thank MMA for readily accepting and validating this event. If there is one takeaway from this evening, let it be that we cry out, listening to children, making their voices resonate with us and echo louder.

# InConversation

## *What does justice look like when a child is involved?*

**Dr S Muralidhar:** It looks very harsh, very intimidating, and very confusing. Sit as a family court judge deciding custody between two parents. You have this conversation with a five-year-old or nine-year-old, you are supposed to determine the child's best interests, and the child asks you: 'Why should I choose?' The justice system has no answer. You are forcing the child to make a choice they do not want to make. Children are torn in broken relationships, switching loyalties between parents, and that scars them. In the criminal justice system it is far worse — judges look at a muscular, six-foot-tall fifteen-year-old and say: 'This cannot be a child.' The reduced age of criminal responsibility from eighteen to sixteen for serious offences is going to have very pernicious effects. These children will be kept with adults in jail. If you lose a child at the cusp years of sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, you lose them to crime forever.

## *Do our systems treat children as little adults?*

**Dr S Muralidhar:** When the crime is heinous, they stop looking at the child as a child and only look at the child as a criminal. We have a way of collectively deciding whom we should keep out of society — sex workers, beggars, pavement dwellers, and now children in conflict with the law. We do not take responsibility for producing these conditions. Vidya's

book is replete with examples of ruthless acts by children — acts that all have a background. If a child has been continuously tortured at home, subjected to corporal punishment, you harden the child. If the child has lived on the streets, they must survive gangs. We have failed to introspect because we expect the state to care for children. The state is incapable of caring for children.

***Some children prefer staying in juvenile homes to returning to their families. What does that say?***

***Vidya Shankar Chakravarthy:*** They are running away from poverty, from drudgery, from abusive parents, from a society that has not prioritised their safety. They sense that they are safer as their own masters than in a vulnerable, known setting. Some have told me they do not want to go back home because they know they will be pledged again — rented out, sold, exploited again. I remember a boy of seven or eight, a bag-lifter on Ranganathan Street, who explained to me eight ways in which they cheat customers and said, 'I am a master in all of it.' When I asked if he wanted to change, he said softly: 'If I go back, the brokers will come and take me again.' Within fifteen days, a broker obtained a High Court order and we had to release him. In those moments, I have felt like a victim myself.

***What is the most urgent thing that needs to be done?***

***Dr S Muralidhar:*** First, accurate statistics. We still go back to the 2011 census. We are either ashamed or in denial. The number of stunted children in India is shocking; the number of children not attaining full,

healthy childhoods is alarming; and we are not able to get those real numbers. Second, all forms of exploitation must be accounted for — begging, prostitution, trafficking, smuggling, child soldiers. Third, our homes must be made safe spaces. POCSO cases show that over seventy percent of perpetrators of sexual exploitation against children are inside our own homes and extended families. We have a complete veil of secrecy, and it is time we actually did something about it.

**Vidya Shankar Chakravarthy:** Public consciousness must rise. Focused child safety procedures cannot happen because of some system alone — they can happen only when the public engages, when there are platforms where children can express themselves and public can speak up for them. Civil society members must get educated on children's rights, understand how systems work, and then become participants — in child welfare committees, in juvenile justice boards. The next ten years, our country must focus on child safety policies and systems. Only then can we be sure our nation will become truly great.

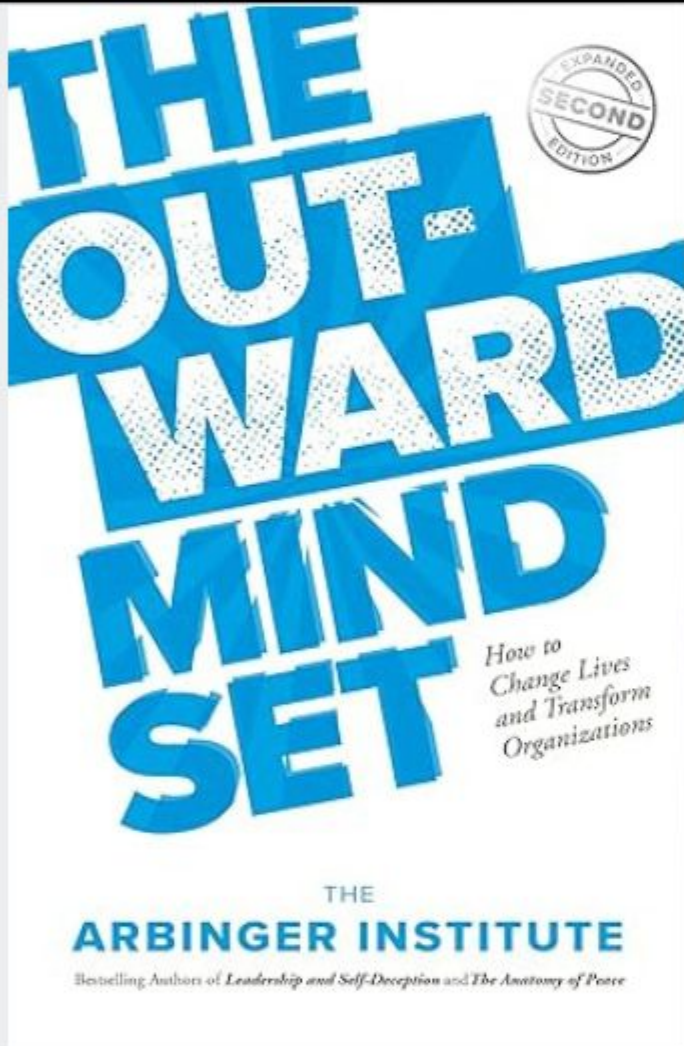
***What is your single piece of advice for a young person who wants to work in child justice?***

**Vidya Shankar Chakravarthy:** Start volunteering. My colleague Murali was a software professional who volunteered for several years before approaching me. That culture of volunteering is the foundation of everything we have built at Relief Foundation. Read about child rights. Get educated. Speak to people. Engage. Only then will the floodgates of real information open.

**Dr S Muralidhar:** Get the more privileged children to interact with the less privileged. When I was Chief Justice of Odisha, I worked on an idea of bringing students from class eleven and twelve in public and private schools to meet their counterparts in villages and observation homes. Child-to-child communication is very different from how an adult communicates with a child. Everyone in control of these institutions is an adult. A child will open up only so much to an adult. You need repeated visits to earn trust, because some adult has already exploited that child and exposed their secrets. We have ghettoised these children behind institution walls. We must allow children to breach those walls and interact with other children in society. That is one way forward. No child is a failed child — unless we come to that point, we cannot take the first right step. ■

# THE POWER OF AN OUTWARD MINDSET

DISCUSSION  
ON THE BOOK



**Babu Krishnamoorthy**  
Chief Sherpa, Finsherpa  
Investments Pvt Ltd



**Sivakumar Palaniappan**  
Leadership Keynote  
Speaker, Growth Coach,  
and Corporate Trainer



**M L Raghavan**  
Head of Digital Business,  
Sun TV Network

What if the biggest barrier to leadership success is not skill, but the way you see other people?

### *Mr Babu Krishnamoorthy*

Chief Sherpa, Finsherpa Investments Pvt Ltd

I see this book as a powerful extension of how we traditionally understand performance. For years, we believed that results are purely driven by behavior—what we do determines what we get. But what struck me deeply is the idea that behavior itself is shaped by something more fundamental: mindset. If the mindset is flawed, behavior will eventually follow suit, no matter how polished it appears on the surface.

What makes this work particularly compelling is that it is not attributed to a single author but to an institution that has spent decades studying leadership transformation. That lends a certain depth and credibility to the ideas. The Arbinger Institute has built its work on real-world engagements across organizations, and the insights feel grounded in practice rather than theory.

The central tension between inward and outward mindset is what I find most thought-provoking. An inward mindset is about focusing on oneself—my goals, my success, my outcomes—while an outward



mindset is about seeing others as people with needs, aspirations, and challenges. That shift, though simple in concept, is incredibly difficult in execution.

I often reflect on how leadership styles have evolved. There was a time when being authoritative was seen as essential. But increasingly, we see leaders who succeed not by commanding but by understanding. I think of examples where empathy has driven transformation, where listening has replaced instructing, and where collaboration has replaced control.

To make this practical, the book introduces the SAM framework—See, Adjust, Measure. I find this extremely useful. “See” asks us to observe others and understand their reality. “Adjust” challenges us to change our approach in a way that supports others. And “Measure” reminds us to validate whether our actions are truly helping. Often, we assume we are helping, but unless we check, we may actually be missing the mark.

For me, the biggest takeaway is that leadership is not about driving outcomes alone—it is about shaping mindsets that enable outcomes. And that begins with our own.

### *Mr Sivakumar Palaniappan*

Leadership Keynote Speaker, Growth Coach & Corporate Trainer

**W**hat drew me to this book was its simplicity. Leadership literature can often be complex and abstract, but this book is remarkably clear in its articulation. The distinction between inward and outward mindset is explained through everyday situations, and that is what makes it powerful.

If I look at our daily lives, I see examples of inward mindset everywhere. When someone leaves a public space unclean, blocks another vehicle, or ignores shared responsibilities, it reflects a mindset that prioritizes self over others. The question that drives such behavior is always, “How does this affect me?” rather than “How does this affect others?”

An outward mindset, on the other hand, shifts that lens. It asks us to consider the impact of our actions on people around us. It is not about grand gestures—it is about small, consistent acts of consideration. Whether it is in a public space or a workplace, the principle remains the same: do we see others as people or as obstacles?

In organizations, this distinction becomes even more critical. Leaders operating from an inward mindset focus on their own growth, visibility, and success. But outward-thinking leaders focus on

enabling their teams. They ask, “What does my team need to succeed?” rather than “What do I need to succeed?” Ironically, when leaders enable others, their own success follows naturally.

The SAM framework provides a simple way to operationalize this. “See” is about understanding what others are trying to achieve—their goals, challenges, and aspirations. “Adjust” is about taking proactive steps to support them, often without being asked. And “Measure” is about checking whether those actions are actually making a difference.

I often encourage people to apply this in a very practical way. Think of one person you work closely with. Understand what they are trying to achieve. Take one small action that can help them progress. Then observe whether it has made a difference. This is not about large-scale transformation—it is about consistent, intentional actions.

Another important aspect is context. In a country like ours, competition is intense and resources are limited. People are constantly striving to get ahead, and that often pushes them towards inward thinking. But that does not mean outward mindset is impossible. It simply means we must consciously choose where we can apply it—within our teams, our families, and our immediate circles.

Ultimately, the outward mindset is not about being selfless at the cost of success. It is about redefining success as something that is shared. When others succeed, we succeed. That is the essence of sustainable leadership.

## *Mr M L Raghavan*

Head of Digital Business, Sun TV Network

**W**hat resonated with me most is the idea that success is fundamentally about people. You can have the best strategy, the best systems, and the best intentions, but if you cannot carry people along, none of it matters.

At the heart of this is empathy. Empathy is not just about understanding others—it is about genuinely connecting with their aspirations, fears, and motivations. When people feel understood, they are more likely to commit, contribute, and collaborate. And that is what drives long-term success.

I have seen this play out in multiple contexts. In organizations, especially during challenging times, leaders often resort to authority. They push harder, demand more, and expect compliance. But that approach rarely sustains. What works is when leaders take the time to understand their teams and align individual motivations with organizational goals.

The example of leadership transformation through empathy is something I find particularly relevant. When leaders listen—not just hear, but truly listen—they create an environment of trust. And trust is what enables people to take ownership. Without that, you are merely managing compliance, not driving commitment.

Another aspect that stood out to me is how deeply cultural this mindset is. In many everyday situations, we tend to operate with an inward mindset. Whether it is on the road, in public spaces, or even in professional settings, the tendency is to prioritize

personal convenience over collective good.

But I have also seen contrasting examples. In certain environments, there is a strong sense of shared responsibility. People follow rules not because they are enforced, but because they understand the impact of their actions on others. That is the essence of outward mindset—it is not imposed; it is internalized.

In the workplace, this becomes critical. Leaders must create conditions where people feel that they are part of something larger. It is not enough to assign tasks—you must create a sense of ownership. People must feel that the success of the organization is tied to their own success.

The SAM framework is useful here because it provides a structured way to think about this. Seeing others requires active observation and empathy. Adjusting approach requires flexibility and willingness to change. Measuring impact requires humility—to accept that what we think is helpful may not always be so.

What I find most challenging is that this is not an easy path. It requires patience, consistency, and discipline. In high-pressure environments, the temptation to revert to control-based leadership is strong. But if you can sustain an outward mindset, the rewards are significant—stronger teams, better collaboration, and more durable success.

For me, the key takeaway is simple: individuals do not win—teams do. And teams succeed when leaders create an environment where everyone feels valued, understood, and committed. ■

MMA WOMEN MANAGERS CONVENTION 2026

# BREAKING BOUNDARIES

WOMEN ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN  
LEADERSHIP & BEYOND



**Ms Vilasini Subramaniam**  
Financial Services, Podcast  
Host, Chartered Accountant  
& Founder, The V-Women  
Project



**Sqn Ldr Ramita Choudhary**  
Indian Air Force (IAF)  
Qualifier, Ironman 70.3 Goa  
(2025)



**Ms Anu Hasan**  
Indian actress, television  
anchor & Entrepreneur



**Ms Lakshmi Narayanan**  
Whole-time Director  
T Stanes & Co

Purpose, power, and generosity: four remarkable women dismantle the myths around what it takes to lead and excel.

### *Ms Anu Hasan*

Actress, Television Anchor & Entrepreneur

**W**hen I look at the women seated here, I see resilience in motion. Success is never a straight line—it is often circuitous, filled with setbacks and breakthroughs. Whether it is nurturing a 160-year legacy, navigating finance at scale, or flying in the Air Force, excellence comes from embracing complexity rather than avoiding it.

One thing I strongly believe is that our response to challenges defines us. When something goes wrong, instead of asking “Why me?”, I ask “Why not me?” and more importantly, “What next?” That shift changes everything. It moves us from helplessness to action.

On reinvention, I would say don’t try to emulate anyone else. The path I have taken suits my personality, my strengths, and the consequences I am willing to accept. If you want to diversify, understand yourself deeply—your capabilities, your strengths, and your appetite for risk.

I don’t fear failure. I may feel embarrassed after failing, but fear has never stopped me from trying.



That distinction is critical. Fear prevents action, but failure teaches you who you are. Every role I have taken—actor, entrepreneur, author—has been about exploring my own potential.

Balancing tradition and modernity is often seen as a dilemma, but I think it becomes simple when you are clear about your values. Once you know what defines you, navigating cultural expectations becomes easy. The world is changing, and we must evolve with it, but without losing our core.

Ultimately, the question to ask yourself is: “What am I capable of?” The answer is always bigger than you imagine.

### ***Ms Lakshmi Narayanan***

Whole-time Director, T Stanes & Co

**L**eadership for me has always been about responsibility—towards legacy, people, and the future. When I entered our 165-year-old organization, I was deeply conscious of the impact of our products on health and the environment. That led me to

question our direction and eventually shift from agrochemicals to eco-friendly biological solutions.

This transition was not easy. There was resistance in the market, skepticism within the ecosystem, and uncertainty about acceptance. But conviction guided me. We conducted extensive field trials, demonstrated results, and built trust with farmers. When they saw higher yields and better quality produce, it validated our direction. That moment reaffirmed my belief that leadership requires courage to act on conviction.

I believe leadership rests on three pillars: clarity of vision, capability to execute, and collaboration. You must know your direction, build competencies, and work together as a team. Communication ensures alignment, and alignment drives success.

Leadership is not entitlement—it is earned through hard work, commitment, and sacrifice. Women often underestimate their strengths, but resilience, multitasking, and empathy are powerful assets. We must leverage them consciously.

To young women, I want to say this: there is no perfect balance between work and life. It is about integration and making choices. Do not feel guilty about those choices. Gender bias may exist, but do not let it define you. Focus on your performance—recognition will follow.

The glass ceiling is not external; it is internal. Believe in yourself and aim higher.

***Sqn Ldr Ramita Choudhary***

Indian Air Force (IAF), Ironman 70.3 Goa Qualifier

**I**n the Air Force, the machine does not differentiate between a man and a woman. When you are in the cockpit, only your skill, preparation, and confidence matter. That is the mindset I carry—competence over everything else.

Preparation is the key. In our profession, there is no margin for error. The only way to handle that is to prepare thoroughly and consistently. Preparation builds confidence, and confidence drives performance.

My Ironman experience reinforced this belief. The total distance feels overwhelming, but when you break it down into smaller parts, it becomes manageable. Even during the race, I focused only on the next step. Leadership is similar—break big challenges into smaller, achievable goals.

At a certain point, everything becomes mental. The biggest challenge is not physical endurance but mental resilience. That inner strength determines whether you finish what you start.

Growing up, I was afraid to try new things because I feared judgment. But I later realized that fear only limits you. There is always something better waiting beyond fear. So my message is simple—do not be afraid to try.

Women do face more expectations and restrictions, but many of these are mental barriers. With the right support system and self-belief, they can be overcome. Confidence comes from preparation, and preparation is always within your control.

***Ms Vilasini Subramaniam***

Over the past year, I have interacted with many women leaders, and a few consistent themes have emerged. The first is showing up—no matter how difficult things seem. The second is resilience and curiosity—continuing to learn and stay engaged.

The third, and most important, is generosity. Leadership is not just about personal success—it is about lifting others. When we “pay it forward,” we create ecosystems that enable more women to succeed. For a woman’s success, it truly takes a village.

From a business perspective, I strongly believe in focusing on fundamentals. Solve a real problem, stay customer-centric, and build strong governance. Avoid chasing vanity metrics like valuations. If your fundamentals are strong, success will follow naturally.

Perfection is something many women struggle with, including myself. We try to be perfect in every role, and that pressure is unnecessary. Let go of perfection. Stay the course, and growth will happen—even if it is not linear.

Another challenge is isolation. Many professionals feel they are alone in their struggles, but that is rarely true. When you reach out and talk to others, you realize that everyone faces similar challenges. Build networks, seek mentors, and stay connected.

Authenticity, strong fundamentals, and meaningful relationships are the foundations of sustainable leadership.

## Q&A

**Ms Anu Hasan:** When I was asked about navigating multiple careers, my first response was simple—don't emulate anyone else. Understand yourself deeply. Know your strengths, your limitations, and your willingness to take risks. That self-awareness will guide your decisions better than any external advice.

Fear of failure is something I have consciously worked on. I may feel embarrassed if I fail, but I don't let fear stop me from trying. If you remove fear, you open yourself to possibilities. Trying something new always teaches you something about yourself.

On balancing culture and modernity, I believe clarity of values is the anchor. If you know what matters to you, navigating expectations becomes easy. The world is evolving, and we must adapt, but without losing our identity.

**Ms Lakshmi Narayanan:** When asked about introducing change in legacy organizations, I believe trust is the foundation. Values, integrity, and ethics must remain constant. Change should be introduced with transparency, dialogue, and calculated risk-taking. When people trust your intent, they support transformation.

To young women, I would reiterate—do not seek balance; seek integration. Make your choices confidently and stand by them. Do not let guilt hold you back.

One trait I wish to see in every woman is self-belief. Confidence is the key to breaking all barriers.

**Sqn Ldr Ramita Choudhary:** On the question of boundaries, I believe women face more expectations and restrictions. However, many of these are mental. The fear of judgment often holds us back more than actual barriers.

Safety is a real concern, but beyond that, we must overcome internal hesitation. Surround yourself with supportive people and focus on your goals.

If there is one message I want to leave, it is this—don't be afraid. There is always something better waiting beyond fear.

**Ms Vilasini Subramaniam:** When asked about leadership skills for young women, I emphasize strong fundamentals and authenticity. Communication skills also play a crucial role—they can give you a significant advantage as you grow.

For young professionals, especially those starting out, networking is essential. Build relationships early, seek mentors, and engage with communities. Growth is not just about knowledge—it is about connections.

If I had to choose one trait, it would be fearlessness. When you are fearless, you can achieve far more than you imagine. ■

MMA WOMEN MANAGERS CONVENTION 2026

# WINNING MINDSET

INSIGHTS FROM SPORTS, FINE ARTS, AND  
PUBLIC LIFE



**Ms Jayashree Sundaresan**  
Vice President  
Freshworks



**Ms Vishakha Hari**  
Renowned Carnatic  
Vocalist & Harikatha  
Exponent



**Ms Chitra Shah**  
Founder/Director,  
Satya Special School &  
Vice-President, Special  
Olympics Bharat Board



**Ms Charvi Anilkumar**  
Chess, Under-11  
Champion

Leaders across domains unpack the mindset behind winning, where consistency, courage, and compassion matter more than outcomes and recognition.

### *Ms Jayashree Sundaresan*

Vice President, Freshworks

When we hear the word 'winning,' most of us think about trophies, medals, awards, and applause. But if you talk to a sports person, a musician, or a social reformer, they will tell you it is rarely about only the final moment. It is thousands of unseen moments that truly lead up to it — the early morning practice when nobody is watching, the tremble in your voice that you overcome when you step on stage, the quiet patience needed when change is painfully slow.

Personally, I think about this often. There is a term for it: transferable skills. I lead engineering teams professionally, but I am also deeply connected to sports, to singing and dancing, and to creating positive impact around me. What I have realised over the years is that what helps you win on a badminton court is the same mindset that helps you deliver a project successfully. The discipline needed to perform on stage is the same discipline that helps you deliver a killer presentation. The resilience required to pursue a social



cause mirrors the resilience needed to create organisational impact.

### *Ms Vishakha Hari*

Renowned Carnatic Vocalist & Harikatha Exponent

**L**et me ask you this directly: what does winning mean to you? For some people it is name and fame. For others it is wealth. For some, success is simply living a peaceful life or having a good family. Success means something different for every person — and recognising that is the first step to an honest relationship with it. According to our ancient Indian wisdom, true success is that fulfilling moment when you say: I feel blessed. I feel complete. When a professor watches his student answer questions on stage, that is his winning moment. When an autistic child who could not speak for twenty years suddenly says 'amma,' that is a winning moment for an entire family. Winning is not about laurels, trophies, grades or ranks. It is that moment of fulfilment.

On the question of discipline and sadhana — there

is no shortcut. Everyone today, especially the younger generation, wants instant success the way we want instant coffee. But the only route is through sustained practice. Let me tell you about my guru, the violin maestro Sri Lalgudi Jayaraman. He had performed on thousands of stages, won national and international awards, and then suffered a severe stroke. Most of his fingers failed him. Most people in their fifties would say their career is done — but not someone with a true calling. He began his sadhana from scratch, using the fingers that remained, practicing four and five hours a day after his illness. Soon he was performing again. Behind what looked like magic was willpower and practice. Sadhana doesn't end at a certain age or after a certain number of achievements — it continues precisely because you love what you do.

When things go wrong on stage, the answer is surrender — not giving up, but releasing into the art and the tradition. At a packed concert that started an hour late, I walked on at 8:30 to a restless audience with all the microphones malfunctioning. I could not hear myself, the instruments were unbalanced, and the monitors were silent. In that moment I simply surrendered to my Ista devata, to the art form and to my gurus, and began with a simple devotional song — inviting the audience to sing along. For twenty minutes, while the sound engineer worked quietly in the background to fix everything, the audience sang, danced and clapped. Afterwards, they told me the first twenty minutes were the best part of the concert. What you cannot control, you offer. That offering always returns something.

On storytelling: Valmiki, Vyasa and our great

Rishis were far-sighted beyond measure. In the Ayodhya Kanda of the Ramayana, there is a section called Kachchit Sarga — a hundred questions that Rama poses to Bharata on the subject of management alone. It covers staffing, delegation, planning, deadlines, bonuses, work-life balance, health and sleep. Present that text authentically before any leadership audience and a dozen leaders will walk away transformed the next morning. I did not choose Harikatha. Harikatha chose me — just as Lalgudi Jayaraman once said the violin chose him.

### *Ms Charvi Anilkumar*

Chess Under-11 World Champion, FIDE Master

**W**hen I am deciding my next move in a match, I first evaluate the position — king safety, pawn structure, control of key squares. Based on that evaluation, I identify a few candidate moves, then calculate several moves ahead while anticipating my opponent's best responses. I check for tactical possibilities, trust my intuition from patterns I have trained on, and finally do a quick blunder check before committing. My goal is always to choose the move that improves my position while making my opponent's plan more difficult. I think this process translates directly to any field: identify the problem, explore possible solutions, anticipate the other side, and choose the best available path.

Composure is partly natural, but most of it comes from practice and accumulated experience. Playing many games across many kinds of pressure situations trains you to stay calm and focus on the position rather

than on the pressure itself. When you stay calm and focused, you can find the best move even from the worst position. I used to feel very bad when I lost. Now when I lose, I try to understand my mistake and learn from experienced players. I either win or learn — there is no other outcome. To stay centred during long matches, I practise breathing exercises, meditation and yoga daily. My first victory over a grandmaster took more than six hours. I was fighting until the very last moment. And to prepare: my coach always says do not prepare for one tournament. Prepare for all competitions. Consistent preparation is everything.

### *Ms Chitra Shah*

Founder/Director, Satya Special School;

Vice-President, Special Olympics Bharat

**B**efore I say anything else, let me clarify a distinction that matters enormously. Paralympics involves physical disability — what you can see. Special Olympics is the invisible disability: someone who looks exactly like you and me but carries an intellectual or developmental difference. Our work is to find the ability within that disability. I started in 2003 as a young mother and social work student wanting to spend my time usefully. Volunteering with a psychiatrist, I met a 13-year-old girl with Down syndrome who came to us with cut marks on her hands and legs. When I visited her home, I found her tied to a plastic chair with nylon ropes, locked inside for eight hours each day while her mother worked. When I asked the mother why, she said: my husband left the day he realised this was a special-needs child, my family

rejected me, everyone calls me a sinner, and if I go out to work without securing her I risk her being sexually abused — as had already happened, twice, leading to pregnancies. That mother's words are the reason I am standing here today. I wanted to build a place where mothers could safely leave their children, and where every child — ability or disability — could be happy.

From twenty children, we now reach over four thousand across Puducherry down to the tip of India at Karaikal. I believe every child, whether urban or rural, has the right to dignity, inclusion and to be heard. Working in this space cannot be a job. It has to be a passion. The graph is never consistently high — but the wins are profound. We took a basketball team to the Special Olympics World Games in Berlin, qualifying by the thinnest margin. When we arrived, the Australians walked like professionals. We had eight athletes from eight different states with eight different abilities, many of whom had come together as a team barely a month before departure. In the 400-metre final, one of our athletes — whose own village had urged her mother to abandon her — stayed within her lane, ran her own pace, and won the gold because every other runner crossed out of their track. Afterwards she came looking for me and asked: are you happy now? When she returned home, that same village invited her as the chief guest for their temple festival. The midwife in Usilampatti who refused to participate in female infanticide changed an entire district — and today the first thing you see when you enter Usilampatti is a women's college. One person's refusal to accept the impossible changed history.



***What personal experience reinforced your belief that social change is possible through sustained effort?***

***Ms Chitra Shah:*** As a social work student I wrote my thesis on female infanticide in Usilampatti. One midwife decided she would no longer do what she was forced to do, and let her voice be heard. That single act of refusal changed an entire region. As a young student, watching that happen made me understand: if women decide something is going to change, it will change.

***What qualities define a winning mindset that helps individuals succeed consistently over time?***

***Ms Jayashree Sundaresan:*** My mother shared something with me when I was six years old that has stayed with me every day since: whether you do small things or great big things, do every small thing in a great way. I have applied that to my life whether it is the smallest of projects or the biggest decisions I face. The joy I try to draw from every moment is in doing each small thing excellently. Even if I don't end up doing great things in life, I know I am going to be happy — and I believe that is the winning mindset that has truly carried me forward.

***What made you move from being a first-rank taxation professional to a Harikatha storyteller?***

***Ms Vishakha Hari:*** Every person's journey is divine will — though we believe we are planning and navigating it ourselves. I would say the same thing Lalgudi sir said when asked why he chose the violin: I did not choose the violin. The violin chose me. I did not choose Harikatha. Harikatha chose me. ■

# GALLERY



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MEMORIES