

Gauri Mudkavi Kulkarni Podcast

Recorded on 15th February 2026

[Vidya Mahambare] (0:15 - 2:38)

Welcome to What Shapes Us, a podcast by Great Lakes Institute of Management. I am your host Vidya Mahambare. In this series, we discuss what factors really truly shape our lives.

Is it hard work, is it our free will, our agency or is it our nature or nurture or is it simply luck. But we know no one factor determines how the complexities of life unravels. So in this episode, with the help of our guest, we will discover how her life shaped up with the framework of five E's.

These E's are endowment, environment, education, effort and equality of opportunity. We have with us today Gauri Mudkavi Kulkarni, welcome Gauri to the episode and thank you very much for giving us your time. Gauri is currently Vice President Information Technology at Renault, a global automotive group.

She is currently based in Paris and is in Chennai to visit her office and her factory. Before Paris, Gauri has lived and worked in many cities across the world that includes she has worked in China, she has worked in Indonesia, of course in Europe and way back as I understand, she has worked in India as well to begin with, with Godrej Consumer Products. We go a long way and I know Gauri since childhood, we were in same school till the 10th standard.

It was a Marathi medium school in a suburb of Mumbai called Vile Parle. I used to walk to the school and her home was on the way as well and many of us will walk or sometimes cycle. But it so happens after 10th standard, we went to different colleges and our paths departed.

So in fact, today we are meeting for the first time after 35 years. So it has been lovely to meet Gauri and this happened because of our common friend, school friend called Prachi.

Gauri, to begin with just to give the context to our listeners because you know Renault manufacturing company, Auto Group, Indian lady sitting in Paris. Can you just tell us currently what your job involves and then we will go back to you know endowments and everything else.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (2:38 - 4:39)

Sure. So first of all, thank you Vidya for inviting me and it is lovely to see you after 35 years as you said.

In Renault, I am part of the global IT leadership team.

My responsibility is I am head of ISIT for corporate functions. So corporate functions include three part, we call it People, Workplace and Compliance. So people part is all the HR related applications and tools.

My responsibility is to define global strategy for those functions, the digital strategy and execute them. The second part is Workplace. So it is physical and digital workplace. Physical workplace include all the facilities of Renault is what digital tools required for all of them. It also includes employee safety and employee security related applications. And the second part of it, which is the digital applications, it is like Microsoft like tools which are required for employees on their day to day basis, which are required just to do their normal work.

So these are transversal tools and Microsoft is a major part of it. And third part is compliance. So compliance, especially in the automobile company, it is evolving and it has become extremely important with the ESG requirement.

In EU and in different parts of the world, we have to follow different regulations around ESG. So my responsibility is along with the heads of the functions in the corporate office define what tools will be required when they have to when Renault or has to follow these regulations. This is an open area, evolving area and of course then compliance, legal, corporate audits and all other functions also come under it.

This is what is my responsibility currently.

[Vidya Mahambare] (4:39 - 5:33)

Right. you have a wide spectrum of things that you handle at your workplace. So we will go back to it, as we continue our conversation.

But maybe we can now start off with your early, very early childhood, what we call in this framework endowment, that is something that we are born with. It's a kind of a birth lottery. It's completely out of our control.

It may be some level of, intellect that we are born with or any kind of talent that we are born with. It can be you're born in US or India or Mumbai or Patna, that makes a difference over time. So maybe you can reflect back, what would you consider as your endowments that you're born with, you know, positive or maybe not so positive?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (5:34 - 8:02)

Sure. And so we kind of come from the same suburb. So very much born into a middle-class Marathi family.

So background is not where there was a material ownership, big ownership, but there were middle-class values. My parents are not highly educated, but of course, they understood and they pushed my sister and me to study a lot. And we were put into that kind of environment.

At the same time, you said that these are the cards that are dealt with and you have you just have those cards. So for me, probably one of the differentiating factors was that my father actually pushed me or rather gave me opportunities, to explore more practicalities of life and not just focus on academics. At times he would tell me, okay, stop studying and go out.

He actually invested in a different way. Early on although the sports facilities were not there, he would take me like at the age of 3, 4, 5 something to teach me swimming somewhere in a swimming pool. He taught me cycling very early on.

We were in the vernacular medium, but I think probably when we were in first, second, third standard, so seven, eight years of age, he appointed an English teacher for me to learn English. So it much earlier than when it would come in the normal education. Conversational English.

Then he pushed me as well at a later on when we were in the middle school, actually some eighth or ninth grade, where I used to meet up with this family friend of ours. She was a professor and she used to teach English language. And I would go to her to learn conversational English. So in a way, I had an advantage where my micro environment provided me freedom.

For example, I was not raised particularly as a girl. I did not have as many restrictions as I would see with other girls. Several of my close friends were boys.

There was a lot of trust and openness in my endowment.

[Vidya Mahambare] (8:03 - 8:31)

Parents, especially your father, played a big role. Any idea why your father chose to do this in the sense, is there anything in his background when he wanted to do - whatever he was involved in, in a job or in a business? Somewhere he felt that he lacked or he had to overcome and that is why your children should not have to go through.

Is there any background of that sort he learned from his experience? .

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (8:31 - 9:30)

It is always context. So he comes from extremely poor family, although his own father was a lawyer at that time. And he used to fight court cases for the freedom fighters. So obviously there was no money in the house and it was really dire poverty. At the age of 16, he had to leave the house and he had to build all his life on his own. So he was completely away from his family.

That is, I think that was the reason it taught him the practicalities of life. And then he rose up, he attended evening schools by which he could complete his graduation, then did some other courses. So he earned it in a hard way.

He had, because of that, I think he had this entrepreneurial angle and the practicalities that mattered more for success in life.

[Vidya Mahambare] (9:30 - 10:34)

But it is very interesting in the sense that he chose to send you and your sister, send you and your sister both in a vernacular medium school, where he had option to send in an English medium school. But there must be a reason, cultural or whatever, he wanted you to go to Marathi medium school, but then he provided outside coaching with English, so you do not lose out on that. Very interesting combination of both.

But going back to your own endowment, your own personality, what do you think your innate characteristics? Like say some are introverts or born introverts, some are extroverts.

Some are born with fantastic memory or someone are born with singing skill or dancing something or very high level of it.

Do you think any of that, what are your in-born characteristics? And some of them you would have developed over time or new ones you would have taken effort later on to develop, but what is your innate characteristics, you think?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (10:35 - 12:14)

My personal endowments, I would say that I was born with intellect, which was above average. Also, I had this ability of problem solving that was visible. I could take competitive examinations much better than the normal examination.

Problem solving ability and analytical thinking, that was inbuilt. The third thing I had was as well the practical thinking. So that is absolutely carried all through and I can see myself very different as compared to others because I can think of what the situation requires.

I am not so emotionally attached to a decision or a particular circumstance. I can detach myself and look at it differently. And that was there which I could observe myself also early on in school.

I did not have any art or such kind of abilities. And I would say I was extrovert because I was born in such environment. I have a big family on my father's side as well as mother's side.

So it was just normal thing to be extrovert. It was normal thing to have lots of people at home and I was comfortable with that. So I get my energy from working with people and that was I think my endowment.

[Vidya Mahambare] (12:15 - 13:29)

Excellent. I think you have ended up in a job which suits your inbuilt characteristics. And nowadays problem-solving and analytical thinking anyway is so important. We should train ourselves to do that. If you are born with something of that capacity to begin with, it was a good advantage as well to start with.

You talked a little bit about your, you know, school that both of us went to, the, you know, same school, Marathi medium school. Marathi is, of course, a language of native people in Maharashtra, which is a state in India.

Can you tell our audience a little bit more about our school and what the school environment was like? And if I remember correctly, what was unusual in those days was you had more friends who were boys and it was not so easy to talk to boys, socially or culturally and we always will push them away, but you had many good friends who were boys.

So how did it happen? What did you gain from those friendships and in general, the school environment?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (13:29 - 16:12)

The school that we went to..imagine this is a suburb in Mumbai, a very, very vernacular suburb. This school was a government-aided school. For every grade or every standard, there were eight or nine divisions and in each one of them there will be 50 to 55 students.

So even for me or you to, for a teacher to remember our names was an effort. We had to make a special effort to get noticed. So that was like the breadth of the school.

The second thing was that school was very, very academically driven. Academics were the only important criterion for success. Not many opportunities as well as focus, was given to sports or cultural activities.

Academics was the core and somehow we were in that kind of special training where we, apart from the normal school exams, we had to take many external exams. So I remember myself just taking exams after exams, year four, this exam, year five, these are two, three other exams. So it was always studies.

It was always very competitive. You were kind of recognised by the marks and scores you got. And it was very, very competitive because obviously there were always smart kids around you.

It was a tense environment, but it also focused a lot on effort, discipline and exploring some other areas around academics, but not just the school subjects. The friends, actually, my mother, mother was friends with these boys' mothers. So it became like family friends and they just somehow were in our class.

But at home in our microenvironment, there was quite a bit of freedom within boundaries. My parents trusted me and I could see the different perspective. It was not a boy or a girl, but we just were friends.

That's it. I could understand, they could understand me and we became friends. And the friendship was quite strong.

It is still strong right now as well. We would study together, which was probably not known in the school or not known to you.

[Vidya Mahambare] (16:12 - 16:13)

I did not know.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (16:14 - 16:29)

But we would study together at each other's houses. We would exchange notes and it was very comfortable for me. It was always this kind of like,, some go-to people other than the friends, the girlfriends.

[Vidya Mahambare] (16:30 - 18:45)

I would think back then, this is like 35, 40 years ago, having this co-gender, you know, environment and having trust between a parent showing the trust. I think it builds, so much of our character in terms of the ability to deal with different kind of people and genders, perhaps a bit unusual for that time. That was excellent.

But I wanted to say that little bit perhaps my memory of our school differs from what you mentioned in the sense that I always tell my son that our school had academics, but at the same time, our school was among the few schools who had sports and all types of sports teams. So we had Khokho team and cricket team and Kabaddi and then we had proper

sports day. We would also take part in this drama, meaning not everyone, those who get selected, but in this drama kind of thing, there was a separate music room.

There was a separate drawing room which are not there in many schools. We had a separate drawing room and separate kind of benches for that. I was never good at music or anything, but a specific music teacher and room were also there.

There were a lot of competitions, but also science exhibitions and these kinds of things. So I would have thought my memory was a little bit more academics and lot of other things also used to happen for those. But yes, I agree, the core emphasis was academics, like you had to, you know, do well to get noticed in academics.

So that is about the schooling and after we finished 10th standard, we departed. All of us went into different ways and you went on to choose commerce and then became a CA, Chartered Accountant. What motivated you to go for commerce specifically?

Because in general, when back then, when we were doing well, the tendency is always to go for science. It happened for me as well. I ended up choosing an art stream.

So why commerce?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (18:46 - 19:53)

And then it's interesting because most of us, I think most of our friends, they have gone or chosen science because you do well. You have to choose only science, commerce, or arts. But here as well, I would say my probably my endowment is I did a practical calculation in my head. And this despite from my mother's side, many of them are doctors.

My cousins are doctors. So somehow there was an expectation that I would choose science. Strong expectation.

There is no other way. I mean, science is what you do. Doctor is what you become.

But I did a bit of pragmatic calculation. If I do science, I can do engineering or medicine. Engineering is something it was it didn't attract me well.

And if I have to go for medicine and the government colleges, it would be extremely difficult.

[Vidya Mahambare] (19:55 - 20:06)

Then so just for the context, government colleges is to getting into government colleges where the fees for the medical would be lower.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (20:06 - 20:06)

Exactly.

[Vidya Mahambare] (20:07 - 20:13)

And the training will be better compared to private medical colleges, where the expenditure in India is just huge.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (20:13 - 21:30)

Exactly. And it becomes unaffordable. And at the same time, so that was one angle that was always playing is, do I want to go through that? And then, then the lottery is then you end up doing Bachelor of Science and then it's completely different.

The other part was early on, my father and my mother had this small business of small savings. They were the agents of small savings (instruments).

My father would make me go, go to this office, submit this paper, go to bank, do this work. And I was so much exposed to that corporate environment. And I used to talk to anybody, you know, at the age of 13, 14, 15, I was talking to, you know, go to ICICI office or UTI office, Parle West and talk to the people over there.

And that kind of attracted me. And I said, OK, corporate life is what I like.

And that drove me. So the two parts, one was this liking that I could understand. And second was, I did not fall for the pressure that was there on science.

And that was a practical thinking.

[Vidya Mahambare] (21:30 - 22:31)

So to be able to do at that age, I think 14, 15, all these, you know, calculations in the mind and choose wisely, commerce was critical for you. But also what is important is, see in India we don't have or at least that time we did not have this concept that teenagers do any kind of work. Abroad many teenagers work and earn; they may drop, not now, but previously newspapers and things like that and earn some money, their pocket money.

So they get some exposure for working. When I went to UK, I worked; I worked even in a cafeteria, canteen cafeteria, but I can never imagine myself or working while in India at that age in a cafeteria. But because your father made you do those things, you got the experience at a very early age as a teenager of some sort of working and what the work environment is and what, how you need to talk to people and, you know, find your way in that.

So that's great.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (22:32 - 22:46)

I worked at home with them. So in the evening after my father would come back from office and sometimes me, my father and my mother, we would sit recording things, counting money or, you know. So, yeah, I had kind of internship over there.

[Vidya Mahambare] (22:46 - 23:11)

Right. So at home internship.

So I think environment from, from what you have told until now, I think that environment played a big role as you were growing up. Yeah. And then you became CA and then you started working with Godrej, is that the first?

Yes, as a management trainee.

And what was the, what was your first corporate experience there?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (23:11 - 25:07)

So I finished my chartered accountancy exam and that was, I was selected to join Godrej and it was also intense interviews we know in India. My job was actually in corporate audit and the responsibility given to me was systems audit and the systems audit meant working with the software, with the ERP tool that Godrej had at that time and working with IT a lot. And that was really different.

Many of my colleagues or chartered accountant friends, they would not choose audit as a function to go to. Everybody would like to go for finance, finance management, controlling, etc. But it was different again.

And I said, let me try this. And this actually, this systems audit was so interesting. I could play with the system.

I could go in the ERP tool, I could do investigations on my own, come up with what are the problems, what not and, you know, the master data management and all those things, the processes and how the IT worked, because I would spend most of the time in IT department rather than finance department. I would visit many of the factories of Godrej. I used to come to Pondy and Chennai within that one and a half years, actually two years.

And this was around 2002 or something? No, it was after 97, when I became chartered accountant. 98, 99.

OK, right. And so that time, that exposure was extremely important. I liked it and probably it paved my way to shift my career and pivot to information technology.

[Vidya Mahambare] (25:08 - 25:50)

Right. And I think unknowingly, I'm sure it has turned out to be, a great advantage given the world went towards more and more technology and more and more information technology. So, I guess that turned out very well for you.

So, let us move on: you covered a little bit of endowment and a little bit of environment; we covered education; you became CA. So, now it's part of the effort. So, you had your first job and then, of course, after that, you for whatever reason, you left, and you went.

So, how did the transition happen? Is it related to marriage, or how did you move to, you know, the next job? And you went to China post that.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (25:51 - 26:25)

OK, yes. So, it was a big transition, actually. So, I got married and Amit, my husband, both of us, we didn't want to leave India.

That was a very clear agreement between us. But I remember first week or second week after our marriage, he came across a friend who approached him and said, do you want to explore this opportunity in Shanghai? And I remember this conversation is no Indians go to Shanghai.

I mean, why would you go to Shanghai?

[Vidya Mahambare] (26:25 - 26:29)

And this was back. This was back in ninety-nine, ninety-nine. Yes.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (26:29 - 26:32)

Ninety-nine. And why would you go quarter of a century ago?

[Vidya Mahambare] (26:32 - 26:32)

Yes.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (26:32 - 27:17)

Yes. And literally at that time, when we moved, there were like one hundred, two hundred Indians over there. And I just said, OK, just send it (the applications).

You can always say no, but just see what it is. And it just turned out to be a very good opportunity. And then we decided that he would explore it and I would wait over here to continue my job.

What if it's China? We didn't know anything. What if it doesn't turn out well?

So he can always come back. My job will continue. But he used to send the photographs of these big skyscrapers and the roads.

And I literally I felt this is not true. It cannot be. So he is somehow fooling so that I could follow him.

[Vidya Mahambare] (27:17 - 27:22)

So we did not have that many skyscrapers that time in India.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (27:23 - 29:41)

Exactly. We did not at all. Even now, I don't think what it was at that time is still there. OK, so then ultimately I decided I will study further.

I said, OK, let me try for two years. I will finish my additional education and then we can come back. And that's how I moved to Shanghai.

But when I moved and this comes to your point of efforts is, of course, I started studying. But then I thought, why not explore the job opportunities? Because it is not something in me that I would stay not working, financial freedom was extremely, extremely important to me.

This is like embedded. One of the things is that I should have financial freedom. So at that time, I prepared my resume and I would take a bicycle and go from office to office like KPMG, E&Y, you know, these big audit companies or consulting firms who might know what audit would mean and what chartered accountancy would mean.

And I would go and talk directly. Can I talk to somebody in HR? And this was like in English, too.

And I'm going to these Chinese companies. I did that for quite a bit. I met with as many people as I could, showing my credentials, what I would like to do.

How long did it take? It was around three, four months. I went in June or July.

And we were intensely and Amit was also..he was told by some other Indians and friends over there, it would be extremely difficult to get your wife a job because she is following you and it's not very common. But somehow we came across this friend of ours or he was an Indian acquaintance, Ramesh, and he was working in Danone at that time. And he just said, we are looking for an IT head for this company.

Why don't you send a resume? Let's see what happens. Because of my technology background a little bit.

[Vidya Mahambare] (29:41 - 29:45)

And so before that you had gone. I had gone to various places.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (29:46 - 29:49)

I had done lots of interviews on my own.

[Vidya Mahambare] (29:50 - 29:52)

And these interviews would happen that time in English?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (29:52 - 30:23)

Yes, they were happening in English. OK, yes, they could.

And then I came across Danone and then I even for Danone that time I was interviewed by six, seven people because Indian applying in China and in a French company and not Chinese. So it was not common at all. It was one of its kind.

Yeah, it's a it's a food and beverage company and medical nutrition as well.

[Vidya Mahambare] (30:23 - 30:23)

Yeah.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (30:23 - 30:26)

And so that's how that's how I ended up. Yes.

[Vidya Mahambare] (30:26 - 30:30)

Yeah. And then how long were you in Shanghai?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (30:31 - 32:28)

So Shanghai was about three years. Yes. And that time again, it was this effort and the drive that I want to now that I've got the job, I have to make it bigger.

I have to make it meaningful. So there was a lot of lot of requirement for technology advancement in that company. It was a company that was taken over from the government, of course.

So I pitched for implementing an ERP tool. There was nothing over there. When I joined, there were two helpdesk IT people and me.

So then I pitched that we need a proper tool for such a high growth company. There was no Asia-Pacific IT function. So I had to deal with people in Paris.

I somehow along with the head of the company, they were convinced we had a very strong business case and they were convinced and I took huge efforts and risks. When I look back, actually, I would if I have to do it again at that stage, I would think maybe twice. But I did it in that just knowingly or unknowingly with just this, you know, desire that I have to do this.

And it was a first implementation. It was done at a low cost with very limited number of people. We had to optimise.

We didn't have so much of budget and it was very successful. So that was a starting point. And I personally also did not realise it.

It was like one fine day the group CIO said, I'm coming to China to see what what did you do? And that was the time I realised, oh, this is really something big that happened. So, yeah, it was it was lots of sleepless nights.

[Vidya Mahambare] (32:28 - 33:04)

So in that you covered a little bit of like opportunity. If opportunity comes your way, you know how not to hold back and do the most that you can in that job, perhaps without worrying what the outcome will be.

In the sense, outcome will come. So if we give our, you know, the full effort, it will be success. But were there any any time that time where you felt the, should I divert my effort into something else or not maybe in Shanghai, but you moved on, right?

Later on, you moved on

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (33:04 - 33:36)

I moved to Singapore in Asia-Pacific with the same company, with the regional office because then only you moved or your family also moved. But it was my husband and me. It was kind of a conscious decision because the regional CIO at that time, she wanted me to help her and move to Singapore and help with the regional implementations.

And then Amit also got job in his company in Singapore. And so then we moved both of us.

[Vidya Mahambare] (33:36 - 33:40)

So a few years in Singapore, three years in Singapore, you had your kids.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (33:41 - 33:41)

Yes. So Singapore, My both the kids were born in Singapore.

[Vidya Mahambare] (33:41 - 33:49)

How did you manage with, you know, so small kids and work?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (33:50 - 34:33)

A couple of things. So first of all, I worked about one and a half year in Singapore. And then after that, I took a break.

When I came to know that I'm pregnant for the second one, I resigned from the company. And that time there were also certain transformations were happening. The office, regional office was moving from Singapore to Shanghai.

Moving to Shanghai was not in my plan. But that's why I said, OK, I'll take a break and I will look at it one more time after a year or two. At the same time, I knew that I what are the countries or where I can possibly get the job if I have to restart.

[Vidya Mahambare] (34:34 - 34:40)

So you are sort of planned means even if you stopped working, there was a plan of always coming back.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (34:40 - 35:18)

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I enjoyed that break period because that time I could do things that I could not do in India or which were not common.

I started learning tennis. I started getting into weights training. Then I could interact with the with the mothers, which I could not do it when my son was younger.

But, I could do all some of these things. I could got into I got into cooking a bit more, exploring some foreign cuisines, etc. So I used that time.

But always I knew that I have to get back.

[Vidya Mahambare] (35:18 - 35:25)

Yeah. OK. And so a post that you move to Jakarta, Indonesia. And both of you moved.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (35:26 - 35:42)

Yes. Again, it was it was also like it was a conscious decision. And among which where we can move.

So Danone had a big setup. I had worked for them.

[Vidya Mahambare] (35:42 - 35:42)

So you reapplied to them or what happened?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (35:42 - 36:06)

Yes. I approached them that I am ready and I'm moving to Jakarta. And if there are opportunities, I would like to. So you were always proactive.

Absolutely. Yeah. So I think that that was always the case.

I don't think in my case there was a kind of a luck or I took efforts for every move, every change, every volunteering of additional work.

[Vidya Mahambare] (36:06 - 36:12)

Right. So every opportunity that came your way, perhaps your effort led to those opportunities.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (36:13 - 36:29)

Yes. Or we can say being ready for the opportunities where I invested myself too, I took extra projects while I was doing IT. I did some other additional project of like completely different.

[Vidya Mahambare] (36:29 - 36:57)

Did you feel in while working that because because you're a woman, you had you you must take extra projects in the sense to to be to prove that you're on the same line as men? Or it was simply out of, your choice that you want to do extra. Or was there any because sometimes it happens, right?

Women have to prove more than men to be considered worthy for a particular job. Any of that kind of thing was happened or you just.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (36:57 - 38:01)

No, in in that particular time and case, it was not it was not. It was simply because I wanted to do something more, something different. And again, the leadership team at that time, they trusted me, gave that opportunity.

And the mentors and the sponsors supported me. It worked out well. Otherwise, again, it was a gamble.

I mean, it was quite a bit of risk. When I look back, why did I do that? It would have been such a risk.

But I did it. It was not that I had to prove extra. I could have followed the same career path that I have.

But then, of course, the visibility would have been lower. And that would have been true for any man or woman. You prove something, additional qualities, your extra skills.

Only when you take on, you take the initiative to take additional and get that visibility. So it helped me with visibility and showing beyond IT leadership skills.

[Vidya Mahambare] (38:02 - 38:54)

So until that point, you were in sort of developing countries, right? You were in Shanghai and Singapore; maybe by that time had become developed, but in Asia. Yes.

So either developing country or Asia. And then you were in Jakarta and then you moved to Paris. Right.

I suppose a big change, Europe, developed country. How was that transition? How it affected, you know, the family?

What was the new setup? Because I'm sure I suppose and you were telling me earlier that in, developing country, we can get a lot of help, that household help. It is easier to employ more people who can help us in our daily household activities.

And that is, of course, a good thing to do. But perhaps it's that choice is restricted once you move to Europe or something. So how have you managed all that on both the fronts?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (38:54 - 39:49)

So it was a big transition from Jakarta. It's a developing country to move to a corporate office. So first of all, professionally, it is completely different.

It is like you are in a market environment where speed, fast decisions, the cost, the people's motivation, all that matters a lot. In a corporate office, the posture differs. You are talking about strategy, which is mid- to long-term.

Two years from now, what will happen? And it is a lot about influencing big things without having the authority. So that was a big transition that I had to take.

I had to change my thinking that things will move slowly over here. And I have to persuade, influence, show the reality. And then only things will be accepted.

So a lot of alignments need to be done.

[Vidya Mahambare] (39:50 - 40:06)

So previously, when you were in, sort of, a field, it was up to you to take certain decisions and you can implement those decisions and things like that. Now, in this environment, there is essentially a lot of collaboration, and people have to convince top management to do something.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (40:07 - 40:55)

So because it was a global impact. And whereas in one country or one region, you have quite a bit of freedom. And especially in the case of IT, the head of IT is the only one.

I mean, there is no other parallel role. So you have freedom and you can do quite a few things and bring that speed. OK, so that was one.

The second part was at that time, it is developing market versus a developed market. So the thinking is different. Indonesia, as a country, you know, culturally, it is a very collaborative way of working.

OK, people are soft spoken. They like collaboration or community-driven. They don't confront very openly.

[Vidya Mahambare] (40:55 - 41:01)

Right. We call it more like a collectivistic culture compared to like individualistic culture.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (41:02 - 41:34)

Exactly. And France is a very individualistic culture. People are grown or they are brought up to think individually.

It is OK to have differences of opinion. It is OK to have debates. And it is OK to, respectfully challenge each other.

That was initially quite uncomfortable for me because I was used to it. After 8 years in Indonesia, I switched to this way of working. Probably in India, maybe it was like that as well.

We are very argumentative.

[Vidya Mahambare] (41:35 - 41:41)

Yeah. Somewhere we are more argumentative, but also, collaborative.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (41:41 - 45:03)

Yeah, exactly. The individualism is more respected and accepted in France.

So I had to change that. The third thing on the family front was that, as you were rightly saying, I had a very good setup and support system in place to take care of the two kids. There were nannies staying with us.

There were househelps, etc. The second part was both of us were working in Indonesia when we decided to move to Paris. Just around that time, Amit, my husband, he had decided to set up something on his own.

So by that time he had resigned from his company and he was setting up his own company. So it was a good time as well for him. Then he said, OK, let me do it over there.

But then, for the first six months, we switched the roles. Although I had help, but it was me who was deciding a lot of things at home. He was travelling a lot and there was like he would not interfere in there. He was absent.

It was difficult for me when we switched roles, with him deciding what was in the fridge and how to manage the inventory. We had completely different.

In Indonesia..I was the one who was taking care of the home front; now, after coming to Paris, it was him. It was until we got settled.

He was the one because I would go to the office the whole day. And he was the one who was managing at home and also supporting the kids, taking care of the kids, taking them to school, et cetera. So that was what we had to learn.

Both of us, we had to learn to manage it. Yes. But again, what I consciously did.

And it was also the lesson in Paris at that time. Initially, we thought that, OK, let's do why not we just do what others are doing and do things on our own and have little help. But soon I realised that I would rather spend time with my kids or my husband, reading a book, watching a movie, or doing something for myself than cleaning.

So I decided consciously whatever it takes. And it costs a lot. Yes.

But I decided to have house help. And it was mainly for four of us to have time with each other in the environment. So it was not common.

But it was a deliberate decision that if I have to work, if my professional life requires extra time, efforts, more mental energy, then I have to free myself of something. And that final that that cost was an investment in myself.

That is how I look at it. And that is how I always suggest to my colleagues as well, as well as the young managers, women managers, is it is an investment in yourself and don't do the things that you don't like, rather, you outsource it and invest in yourself.

[Vidya Mahambare] (45:04 - 46:00)

Yeah, totally. In my first class, we'll discuss the principles of trade-offs and opportunity cost. So, what is the marginal benefit and marginal costs... those things.

So for you, the marginal benefit of that time. Yes, that time trade-off was so high that whatever the monetary cost was was worth it for you. So I totally understand, but that's a brave, in the sense unusual, decision because not many people would be doing it that time.

So you made the decision to have household help. So, as a family unit, you get some time to spend.

I suppose it would be a good lesson for kids as well. Maybe in Indonesia, they were well taken care of nannies and that kind of stuff, I suppose. But after moving to Paris, did they have to do their things on their own?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (46:01 - 46:17)

Yes. It was a very good lesson for both the kids to be independent and to take care of things on their own.

There would not be somebody who would give them clothes in the morning, including taking shower on their own, which was very different back then in Indonesia.

[Vidya Mahambare] (46:18 - 46:21)

But they were younger. They were much younger then.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (46:21 - 49:28)

Yeah. But it was a sudden change that we did. Also, there was like they had to take care of themselves.

And they became more independent. They became like, "OK, I have to take responsibility." It was also a simple thing like for my son.

We were talking about a year after he would go to the same school, but the building would be somewhere else. And my question to, some consultant who was helping us for the move was, then how will he go? Is there a school bus?

He says, no, we don't have school buses. He can go by bus, public bus. He can go by metro.

He can walk or he can use the scooter, the trotternet, it's called, the scooter. So it was an eye opener. OK, it is it is different over here and he will have to go alone.

They had to manage. So I think it was it changed their perspective. I think it changed them as individuals.

Efforts. It was hard work for all of us, but it changed. And also, I think there was one thing that really hit us was the weather, because we moved last week of December, early January.

And from a tropical country to go at that time where most of the time it would be dark, grey, raining, it was a big change. And in all these countries, did you end up learning a local language or? Absolutely.

In Indonesia, I'm fluent in Bahasa Indonesia. I would talk to my colleagues in Bahasa Indonesia. I can do presentations for an hour or so, or when I would visit factories, my colleagues would be they would not speak in English in the head office.

Yes, but not in the factories. And I would speak in Bahasa Indonesia. So I could I could speak a bit of Mandarin as well at that time.

Not fluently, but I could get along French, of course. After going there, I started and I'm still learning. So, yeah, absolutely.

You cannot be there and say I will not learn the language. Everywhere, you have to put in effort to understand the culture. So it was also in all these places.

The first thing Amit and I would do is we would read a lot of history books and the cultural education books as well. So history is because people behave the way they behave because of certain history, because how the geography is, because how the things happen and that's how they are built up. There is nothing right or wrong.

And I am there as a foreigner. And, you know, I have I respect that culture and it comes for some reason. So once you understand the history, it becomes clear.

Obviously, they grew in that way. So I invested time in understanding that. So what was Indonesia's history?

What is France's history? UK history, of course. But from UK perspective.

[Vidya Mahambare] (49:28 - 49:32)

OK, so you lived in UK as well for a while.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (49:33 - 49:55)

So Paris was it turned out to be a shorter stint. It was it just turned out to be 18 months. Then I was asked that if I could go to London to lead again market CIO role for UK Ireland region.

It was interesting. There were some challenges, so I thought it will be nice.

[Vidya Mahambare] (49:56 - 50:03)

And that's good to hear. There were some challenges, so I thought it will be nice. So yes, which is a good way of looking at it.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (50:03 - 50:32)

Yes, of course. I mean, otherwise it is not interesting, right? You just maintain the things.

It's not interesting. So then in 18 months, actually, we moved to London. So that was kind of that part probably was not planned.

But again, I got that job because again, children moved, family moved. Their schools change.

So everything changed

[Vidya Mahambare] (50:33 - 50:36)

And now they can adapt. Yes.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (50:36 - 51:08)

So, different adaptability, I think, is probably one of the things we four of us know well. It takes everybody their own time. Maybe my son will be, you know, he would be OK in a month's time.

Maybe my daughter will take three months. But we know what is the pattern. We know what it takes and we know what actions to be taken if it is very stressful or what needs to be done.

We understand that. So that adaptability is a factor that we are aware of.

[Vidya Mahambare] (51:09 - 51:21)

And then how did this move happen after many years with one company? You changed the company and now we are in Renault. How did this happen?

And you went back to Paris.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (51:22 - 52:25)

Yes. So actually, I went back to Paris for Danone. So there was an opportunity.

And then I moved back to Paris to the corporate office. And it was also the time when, you know, I was there for a quite quite a bit. It was 21 years in Danone.

And it was in India that I was thinking, what do I want to do for the next 15 to 20 years of my life, my working life? One thing was clear: I would like to work until I die. OK, probably I would have no retirement.

And then if I have to be relevant, then I have to have a better exposure. It cannot be just one, one company, one environment, one culture. So that was a trigger to consider something different environment.

So you chose to discover opportunities. Yes, I was discovering the opportunities. Yes.

[Vidya Mahambare] (52:25 - 52:26)

So how did that happen?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (52:27 - 52:38)

I mean, there was a headhunter who contacted me and then it matched. I was in Paris and the role was interesting again. And then I shifted.

[Vidya Mahambare] (52:38 - 53:54)

Let us little bit change tracks and talk about the manufacturing environment, manufacturing company environment as such, corporate office as well as factories. Where I am coming from is India has been trying to this 'make in India'. So we started in 2014 and we want to increase the share of manufacturing to GDP from 15 to 25 percent.

We are nowhere close to it as of now, but there are consistent effort to try and increase the manufacturing. Of course, Chennai is known as an auto hub. But given your experience of so many years, what has changed in the manufacturing setup in terms of, because previously manufacturing was labour intensive.

The only reason you want manufacturing is that it creates more jobs than what an IT company would do, right? Because they work with machines and, you know, are much more productive. Here it is a lot of assembly and things like that.

And, manufacturing will create more jobs. But over time, is that still true or how are these factories and where do you see the future going in terms of either automobile companies or in general?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (53:54 - 54:31)

In general. The thing is, it depends, of course, on the product that you are manufacturing.

Is it labour intensive or it is not? In I have seen some of the factories in Europe where there are only limited people working in one room. All other things- machines are working on their own.

They are driven from one control tower. You have, let's say, an entire virtual twin developed.

And you know exactly what is happening, testing exactly you can do. All testing, everything is getting done.

[Vidya Mahambare] (54:31 - 54:31)

Everything.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (54:32 - 57:04)

Yes. Yes. The entire factory runs automatically.

So, in the European context, there are not, these are not labour intensive factories, especially in the food and beverage and also the type of activity like medical nutrition or the food, formula, milk, etc. It required not to have a human intervention because, the contamination is something that you would not tolerate. So, those are designed for that.

Whereas in Indonesia or probably in India as well, depending on the product, there can be lots of people, lots of labour working for packing, folding and things like that. I would just make up, make it understandable something, how the factory works. Factory is like one closed environment where there is a head, there is a small leadership team.

Everything has to work in a rhythm. It has to work in a discipline because from start to finish, there is a process. If it stops, literally your trucks will not leave the factory, then it will, it is going to affect your revenue.

It cannot stop. So, it is a constant effort to optimise this process, constant effort to make sure things run as they are planned. So, it, there is no trying, different things or long term things unless they fit into this rhythm.

You always go for optimisation of the processes, but the decision making is very clear. It is top down and people have to follow. Whereas in corporate offices, it is completely different.

You are debating, you are consulting very external factors as well, what will happen. Here it is a closed system. So, if I have to answer your question, which is how do I see it moving?

I am in technology field and I can really say what we are moving towards is more and more automation and it will be more and more automation. There are robotics which are happening. I have seen in Renault, in the factories, there are these vehicles, you know, moving on their own.

These are robots, yeah. So, these things will happen because those are faster and safer. They are 24, they work 24 by 7.

So, these robotic vehicles, the robotic way of manufacturing is what is required.

[Vidya Mahambare] (57:05 - 57:19)

But your factories in, say in Europe, vis-a-vis your factories in, say Chennai, I suppose the kind of work that is done will be different. Correct, yes. So, is it that here you do more work which requires more labour?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (57:20 - 57:23)

Correct, yes, it is, it is,

[Vidya Mahambare] (57:23 - 57:34)

Yeah, but because of that also the value captured here will be, do you think Indian factories also are going to move towards, you know, more auto, because otherwise how will we compete with factories elsewhere?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (57:34 - 57:57)

Exactly, I would say so, I would say so. It would, it would require that level of automation and precision. Of course, it is a long-term thing, but overall, I would say, not just overall, I would say is automation is something that is happening. All, everyone is looking at it, I would say.

[Vidya Mahambare] (57:57 - 58:37)

Going back to your story, just maybe few last questions. Over the years, you would have seen several women working, right, wherever you work. Which is the one thing you feel like women underplay in, during their, you know, career?

Of course, you talked about your effort and this, but what you have seen around you, why say capable women are not able to get the opportunities or if they get the opportunities, not able to maximise the opportunities, what is one, one of the main factors which they underplay for themselves?

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (58:38 - 59:46)

I think if I have to say one, it is difficult. There are several, I will say a couple of them or three of them probably. So, number one is they, or rather they overplay perfectionism.

Overplay perfectionism. Women, as women, I, and this was before I went through a certain training of women leadership training, which was rigorous training, and that triggered and that changed my thinking. But women, we just thrive for perfectionism.

We want to be perfect in everything. We want to be a perfect employee, perfect mother, perfect wife, perfect daughter, perfect sister, daughter-in-law, perfect sister. And if we are not perfect, we are like criticising ourselves so much.

So, that is what is overplaying, whereas that is different in case of men. They naturally, they do not do that. So, in case of the work environment, what happens is women do not raise their hands until they think they are ready for the job.

[Vidya Mahambare] (59:47 - 59:48)

More than fully ready.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (59:48 - 59:50)

More than fully ready, exactly.

[Vidya Mahambare] (59:50 - 59:55)

So, this kind of endowment that women are born with, I think that they need to work on.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (59:56 - 1:01:09)

Consciously work on. Consciously work on. Because that will never happen.

You cannot be perfectly ready. Because there will be one line in the responsibilities, in the job description, that you will not fit. So, that is probably we overplay or we underplay our capacity that we can learn on the job.

So, that is one thing. The second thing I would also say is, it is about awareness and the communication skills. So, I tell you what is awareness is that awareness about what are my strengths, what I am good at, as well as if I have the problems, how do I communicate that.

If I do not tell my boss, if I do not tell my husband, if I do not tell maybe somebody else in the social environment of what are my problems and how do I overcome that, nobody will help. Because what happens is men are not wired for understanding that. I can understand you probably because we are women, but men are not wired.

It is not their fault. They do not understand that. So, do not assume things.

Do not assume things.

[Vidya Mahambare] (1:01:09 - 1:01:10)

You have to communicate.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (1:01:11 - 1:01:48)

And there are tools given through these training programmes. And we ran this training programme also in Indonesia for the young managers is how to communicate. Because if you put forth your problem, people are there to help you.

And I would say the last thing as well is the networking. It is again, it is not very natural, the professional networking. I am not just talking about chit-chatting.

It is about professional networking. As women, we are not wired for that and we highly underestimate that. Whereas for men, it comes just naturally.

[Vidya Mahambare] (1:01:49 - 1:01:57)

Men also, from the beginning, have a lot more opportunities in general to form networks. So, it becomes, I guess, easier. They get into habit of...

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (1:01:58 - 1:02:50)

Exactly. But also, like men, it is absolutely okay to talk about, okay, we are colleagues. What are the other job opportunities coming in? What is happening?

What is happening outside? Or talk more about the business. And this is conscious networking.

Women, we are not wired for that or maybe we do not take those conscious efforts. And I think this is required. Because organisations or any of these social networks they are quite designed by men for centuries.

And that is the way they were thinking, that things work that way. And now that the women are there, an intervention occurs. So, we need to know the rules of the game.

So, these three things I would say that we underplay.

[Vidya Mahambare] (1:02:51 - 1:03:42)

Right. So, I suppose this is what you will tell the young women today to do.

So, one last question.

We have talked about your endowment, environment, education, effort and the equality of opportunities, where you said you created the opportunities through your efforts. Out of all these five things, where will you place the most emphasis? Means from what I have understood, it would be your endowment and effort or how?

Or is it just difficult? You think everything is interlinked? Or is that education?

Means really education did not matter. In the sense, whether you are a CA or something else, maybe you could have still done the same. Life would have still panned out same.

Because many times in formal education in India, you take degrees. But not necessary that we learn a great amount of things.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (1:03:42 - 1:05:19)

That is a good point. Maybe I will take two minutes to share something to share about education, which is, education is one set, which is a classroom education. In my case, my education, lot of my education happened outside classroom.

And those that was one, it was on the job. It was through all of these moves, because you need to, I need to adapt the leadership styles. I needed to adapt the cultural aspect.

I needed to adapt the communication styles, the way I speak. I consciously slowed down my pace of speaking. I use simple words.

So all that education happened outside. I also invested in myself too. As you grow in your career, your personal alignment and the purpose is your identity and purpose is so important because it is you're not doing it for somebody to say, oh, you did well, you literally doing it for yourself. So that's very important.

Then your identity and purpose has to be aligned with what you are doing. And for that, I invested in getting myself trained into external training, like there are trainings like I discover in London where you go through identifying really deep down who you are and what what you want to do, what impact you want to create.

Or I did Vipassana where I could be grounded and, you know, think about the current time, you know, here and now.

[Vidya Mahambare] (1:05:19 - 1:05:22)

For the listeners, Vipassana is, if you could.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (1:05:23 - 1:06:30)

Vipassana is this a technique of meditation where you go to one place. There are Vipassana centres. You be there for 10 days.

You are not allowed to have any outside communication. Neither you are allowed to have mobile phones, writing material, books or anything. So you are on your own.

You are not allowed to look at anybody, speak to anybody. You are quiet. And 10 days you go through this technique.

Day by day you learn this technique. You wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning. You eat very simple food and then you focus on what is happening and you learn through your body, scanning your body is what exactly happens because ultimately it is a chemical, you know, it's a combination of chemicals that is happening.

And there are these, you know, you understand what is happening and through that you understand what is life and what it means for you. So it was that. So these are the things that I invested in.

Then this woman leadership training, I consciously do that. Then having some mentors and some coaches.

[Vidya Mahambare] (1:06:30 - 1:06:36)

Yeah, I'm so glad you mentioned that. Yes, having mentors is very, very important at every stage.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (1:06:36 - 1:07:18)

Extremely important because you are always uncertain. There is no stability. You are as good as your last game, right?

There is no stability. So as a result, you need somebody to talk to who can understand the professional environment and probably the personal environment, but mainly the professional environment to guide you to say, OK, good, follow that or don't do that or don't venture into that. Those mentors are needed and you have, it is good to have some mentors who you can pick up the phone, talk to them, explain what was there.

[Vidya Mahambare] (1:07:19 - 1:07:23)

Also, you took the efforts to reach out to these people who thought you could be your mentors.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (1:07:24 - 1:07:55)

I was consciously in touch with them always. So that is how the mentorship works in textbook style is like if you want, you have to approach the person has to approach and I always kept contact every time I had challenges. I would call them, ask them for their time, have a discussion for an hour or couple of hours and different mentors at different times in different locations.

[Vidya Mahambare] (1:07:56 - 1:08:19)

Wonderful, Gauri. It has been a pleasure talking with you. I'm sure after this recording is over, we'll go out and talk lots more, but wish you the best till the time you want to work and explore new opportunities and have your purpose and identity, whatever you want to form going ahead.

[Gauri Mudkavi - Kulkarni] (1:08:19 - 1:08:23)

Thank you so much, Vidya. Thank you. It was a pleasure talking to you, Vidya.