

What Shapes Us – Ep 07 – In Talks with Ms. Gangapriya Chakraverti

Recorded on 29th April 2026

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (0:15 - 1:42)

Welcome to What Shapes Us, podcast by Great Lakes Institute of Management. I am your host Vidya Mahambare. In this series, with the help of our guests, we discover their life and career journeys with the framework of 5 Es.

These 5 Es are Endowment, Environment, Education, Effort and Equality of Opportunity. Today we have with us Gangapriya Chakravarti. Thank you very much for joining us.

Gangapriya is Managing Director and India Site Head at Ford. Now most of us when we hear Ford, we would imagine something like, you know, cars rolling out of some assembly line.

But no, that is not the case. Gangapriya heads a 12,000 plus workforce in a GCC, something like Global Capabilities Centre, for Ford. So that is Ford Business Solutions.

They help out all the Ford businesses globally in terms of, you know, IT, design, AI, ML, you know, all sorts of technology. Of course, we'll get to know much more about it. Her journey has been unusual, I would say, to the leadership role because she was at Ford for many years, but she was HR Director and, you know, HR Director becoming a Managing Director is a relatively, you know, rare thing, we'll hear about that.

Before that she was with Mercer and before that with Murugappa. Such a rich experience. So let us get going.

Thank you very much once again.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:44 - 1:47)

Thank you Vidya. Thank you for having me here. Pleasure to be here.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:48 - 2:33)

Let us start at the very beginning in our framework, which is Endowment. By Endowment, what we mean is what we are born with. So it's sort of a birth lottery, something that is not in our hands.

It may be the place we are born. It is a family that we are born into because maybe in India social hierarchy matters. So where we are born, gender, traits that we are born with. Some people are born with some kind of talent. So in general, all this will be put into the Endowment bracket.

If in hindsight now, if you look back and think about what were your, you know, Endowments, how would you describe them as?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (2:33 - 7:07)

I think it's quite interesting and I think as you grow older, you think more about, what are some of the things that really made a difference to your life. And I certainly believe that my family, my bringing had a very significant role to play in who I have become as an individual

and what values and beliefs I carry. So I was born in a sort of, my father was a government servant in the customs and my mother was a homemaker.

I was one of three children, the youngest, two elder brothers, and we lived in a colony which had my father's colleagues very close to where his workplace was. I went to a Kendriya Vidyalaya.

This was in Cochin. And I would say my father was sort of, my parents were middle class. So in a sense, you know, in school, I was in a naval base.

We met people from all parts of India. At that time, you don't understand, you know, the exposure that you get. But I had people from pretty much all parts of India who were my classmates.

And then, of course, at home, I had two elder brothers and therefore, you know, a situation where as the youngest, but as a girl, I had both positives as well as negatives when I think about it. And in a lot of ways, for instance, the positive was that I was the youngest. So, you do get a lot more than, I would say, only girls. But there were also restrictions for the same reasons. My brothers would be allowed to do a lot of things while I was not. I was a girl. Therefore, I was not allowed to do a lot of things.

So that was really my early 10 years. And then we moved to Chennai. And Chennai was an entirely new place, but my father had decided to settle in Chennai and that was our own place.

And again, I continued in Kendriya Vidyalaya, which gave an exposure to, again, a wide variety of people. And we lived very close to government quarters. So you meet people from all kinds of places in India.

I can tell you that even with my parents, I went to school on a cycle when I was in class six or seven, riding almost seven kilometres every day, up and down. Of course, traffic was not so bad. It was considered quite safe for children and I had a very dear friend who cycled along with me.

Just this, that freedom of having your own mobility made a big difference to how you thought of yourself. So that was an experience that I think that in a lot of ways, perhaps shaped me because you felt that that independence counted. Somebody trusted you to sort of do the right thing.

You were mobile and therefore free in a lot of ways. So I think that that was certainly one thing that I, and then of course, for a short while, my parents, my father got transferred and we moved to a place called Vellore. And again, that was a very interesting experience because I was in a school which had mostly children of doctors who were in Christian Medical College.

It was a totally different ethos. Something that exposed me to what excellence meant because, you know, it's a fabulous hospital. These are very dedicated doctors and their children were all my classmates and all of them were wanting to do well academically.

So there was a healthy competition. You know, at that time, I really realised what healthy competition was. Nobody tried to put each other down, but, you know, everyone tried to do well for themselves.

So that was an interesting experience that I had.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (7:07 - 8:12)

You said at every point in time as a child, you met people from all over India, all over different cultures, you know. In the classroom we teach - the affinity bias - many of us have affinity bias because we generally make friends because we come across only people of our similar background and similar, especially we are in India, the language matters.

And so we end up becoming friends with people who speak the same language, similar kind of socioeconomic background. And then the affinity bias, you know, sets in. It's an unconscious thing, unconscious bias, but it sets in very early.

But if this kind of exposure is there, you know, very early on, like it's a big, big positive I feel for, you know, any child. And you also touched upon, upon mobility. So especially for a girl, I feel, you know, even now at an early age, if they get that sense of, you know, freedom and mobility, the confidence will increase, you know, significantly.

So they are able to make their decision, perhaps, you know, when they grow up somewhere it will stay.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (8:12 - 8:29)

Very true. Very true. And, you know, just the point about this meeting people of different, from different parts of India, you know, at that time you're just one amongst many people, very different kind of people.

Yeah. And then you don't really pay attention to who you are.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (8:30 - 8:30)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (8:30 - 10:25)

Yeah. And so you're, you're absorbing, I had all kinds of people from the Indian Navy, you know, how it is. And even my, the colony that we stayed in had people from different parts of India, mostly from the South, but many other parts of India as well.

So you don't pay so much attention to your identity. And what this has led me in later in life is also to say, yes, I appreciate everything else, but is there something about my identity that I need to understand more, that I can relate to much more, that stands for what I have become or has helped me to become what I am? And what about that is really playing up in my personality?

Yeah. So I've had the ability to sort of think through all of that, that, you know, and also build this belief that, you know, I have, my identity has strings, but other identities also have strings. Yeah.

Who I am is important, but who others are also is important. And each one will define how they see themselves and how they show up in very, very different ways.

Just as I have discovered who I am, and I mean, it's an ongoing process. Just as I feel proud about it and I know what the shortfalls are. I'm sure others also have the same kind of thinking process.

So I think it has enabled me to accept people for who they are. Yeah. And it's also, I mean, I must, I'll just step a little into the culture that we have in the company.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (10:25 - 10:25)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (10:26 - 12:07)

And, this is my second multinational organisation that I'm working with. I feel that in a lot of these multinationals, at least the two that I have worked for, the individual is given a lot of importance. The person is, that you have views, you have a point, you have your beliefs, yeah, and that we need to be focused on the individual.

We have to listen to the individual because, you can't sort of wipe it all under the collective. I think somewhere that has stayed as a very important thing for me. So that's one thing that I would think.

And in my class 12, I really sometimes think about what prompted my parents to do this. Actually, it was my class 11th, 12th holidays. They put me on a train to go from Belo to Kerala.

Not something that I thought most parents would have done at that time. And I went alone. It was an overnight train.

So there was a family in Kerala and they told me, it's your holidays, you can go. And I realised that I was alone in the train, nobody, and I had to mind myself. I had to look after myself.

I had to look after my things. But I also feel my parents had the confidence at that time to let me go on a train alone. Circumstances were very different.

I mean, we need to keep that in mind. Perhaps it was a lot safer, unsafe. I don't know.

But circumstances were very different. And sometimes when I look back, I said, my parents, they just didn't bother about.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (12:08 - 12:14)

I'm sure they were confident that you have, even at that young age.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (12:14 - 14:20)

But in a lot of ways, it builds confidence, you know, you can figure out your way. You need to look after yourself.

There's nobody to sort of watch over you. You have to keep an eye on what can go wrong, what cannot go wrong. Yeah.

And so, therefore, you build all that is required to be independent. And I think that has certainly played a role. And you know, I also remember that in college, I had just after college, I had to go to a friend's wedding.

And again, I was in Kerala for a holiday with my grandparents and my parents were also there. They told me, take a bus and go. And it was a four hour bus drive.

And I remember I left my place and I got to this wedding venue at about eight at night. The entire town was in darkness because there was no electricity. And I was thinking to myself, why do my parents allow me to go to all these places?

How unsafe is this? And, you know, I managed myself. Yeah.

It was really nice that I could attend my friend's wedding. In fact, we met a few weeks ago and she really remembered that. So when I think back, there were a lot of experiences that helped me to sort of develop the streak of independence or I won't say independence.

It's like looking after yourself, looking after yourself and being mindful of the environment and, you know, doing things on your own, which I think helped me throughout my life. Also, my parents, while they focused a lot on academic achievement, in fact, they were like any South Indian parents, you know, OK, you're not you're you've got 96. So what happened to the four marks?

That was the kind of conversation with me.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (14:22 - 14:26)

But you had pressure from your because brothers also were doing very no, no, not at all.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (14:26 - 16:01)

Each one for him. Yeah. Each one was for.

Yeah. And for each one, it was their own targets. But that was the kind of what are you aspiring for?

Yeah. What have you lost out on? What do you need to sort of get to the top?

And I don't think my parents wanted me to get into a job or it was not for any of those reasons. But, you know, the instilling in me that you need to be at the top, that's what whatever you're doing, you have to excel. And also having your set of hobbies like I was sent to dance classes and, you know, they wouldn't want me to miss any of that.

And you built a network of friends from there who have stayed with you. So in a lot of ways, they focused on education, certainly, but they also allowed me to pursue other things. And, you know, another thing that I noticed is that I lived in a locality which was predominantly all government servants.

And the locality that we stayed in had produced a number of collectors, collectors of Chennai, including my own friend's mother. And, you know, you lived in a milieu where you saw a lot of successful women who were running cities. So early role models.

Very early. Very early. You never thought you'd be that, but, you know, that was a possibility.

So, you know, it just reminded you that you could be a collector. You could work. Right.

You could have a career.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (16:01 - 16:02)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (16:02 - 16:22)

Now, it didn't appear so at that time. But when I look back, I feel that these were all things that perhaps left an imprint on me and allowed me to sort of figure out what I have become and figure out and helped me to make the choices.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (16:23 - 16:47)

That's why I feel it's, you know, very important for those who do not have this opportunity that we do something to bring in front of these role models very early, because not everyone has this opportunity. They just don't, you know, as you said, it's not that immediately they are going to, but somewhere that is inspiration, somewhere that imprint will stay with them as they, you know, grow up.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (16:47 - 17:28)

My family, extended family, they have been women working, but, you know, mostly as teachers. Right. Yeah.

Government departments. I don't think I met a woman in the industry or a career professional till I was, till I was maybe in my 20s. That was the first time that I met somebody, not 20s, maybe late teens, that I met somebody who was in a corporate job, had done a management degree, yeah, and was very successful.

That was the first time I was seeing somebody.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (17:28 - 17:57)

There are a lot of industries and academia that work together in higher education. So we are an MBA school and there is a lot of it. But I also feel this should happen much earlier, like in the school age, there should be people from the corporate sector going to the schools and just, the kids will not understand much what they are doing or something, but just for them to be able to see what are the possibilities.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (17:57 - 18:09)

And maybe one of the things I tell employees, women employees in particular in my office is that, you know, you need to work because you have to normalise it for your children. Right.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (18:09 - 18:10)

Yes.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (18:10 - 18:15)

Yeah. That there is a career possible for a woman, for both boys and girls.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (18:16 - 18:16)

Yes.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (18:17 - 18:28)

Yeah. Because I think there is a doubt there itself that career is meant primarily for a man, which is also not a good thing because they don't have an exit path. No, no, totally. It's a big burden.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (18:28 - 18:30)

It's a huge burden now for them as well.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (18:30 - 18:32)

Correct. And it sometimes can be burdensome.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (18:32 - 18:32)

Yeah, yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (18:32 - 19:06)

Very much. So, I keep telling women employees that don't underestimate the work that you do because you are creating a certain mindset in the next generation, which is in your own homes. Correct.

About, you know, what is work, who can do it, how well you can do it, who is better at what. You're normalising, you're teaching them some of those things by just living. Correct.

Your life as an employee also. True. I mean, you're a mother, of course, that's there, but you're also an employee.

So you're seeing that it is possible to manage both.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (19:07 - 19:40)

So since you're talking about employees and we're talking also about endowment, if you see your, you know, 12,000 plus, you know, workforce, how much of your workforce you think are like, you know, these first generation engineers or first generation graduates, those kind of things, and how much you think will be, you know, like already, how like us, like parents were educated and then so they were already endowed with a good, you know, background and so on.

Or do you see more and more young people, you know, where the endowments are not.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (19:40 - 21:13)

I don't have data, but, you know, there is a good influx of people into the company who are first time graduates, yeah, and who are first time working in a corporate job. So we do have a significant number of those people who may not have lived in a city, quite a number of them, because that also is an advantage in many ways, you know, that because perhaps it's

a little more open in a city and it's more, you know, there are not too many judgments as you would find if it was a closed town or a village that you're coming from. So I think being in a city is also quite an advantage in many ways.

So we have a large number, I think, of people who come from backgrounds where, you know, they would be the first time. And it's a good thing because it's a totally different environment. They get to test many of their beliefs.

Yes. Yeah. They get to take some risks in their lives.

And they can question a lot of the values and beliefs that they have been brought up with. Yeah. And, you know, it also is an opportunity for them to discover who they are.

So that's another thing that, besides, of course, the economic consequences of working in an organisation like us.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (21:13 - 21:15)

Holistically, so many, you know, things.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (21:16 - 21:44)

And you know, how it impacts who you are in the family, how you're seen as a family member, how you're seen in society. Yeah. So I think all of this really makes a difference when they join a company like Ford.

You know, a lot of our ability to retain employees is because it gives them a status in society. It gives them a position in the family to say that they work for a multinational company. So all of those are important as well.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (21:44 - 22:12)

So slightly different question, though on endowment only. You come across a very calm person, at least from the exterior. Is that something you think you're born with or did you work on it as a trait?

And even if you're not calm, at least, you know, perception is that way. So also there is something consciously you put an effort to work any of the traits or you think some of it has come naturally.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (22:12 - 24:42)

So I think it has come quite naturally. And sometimes, you know, it sort of also shows up as something negative. People say you don't show any reaction when we tell you things.

So that's the other side of it. But I think I have worked as a consultant for many years. Yeah.

And you meet all kinds of clients and you have to give clients all kinds of news, good, bad, ugly. Right. Yeah.

And you have to present yourself in a way that, you know, it is not me who is saying what I'm saying. It is, you know, data. It is analysis.

Yeah. It is maybe a comparison with best practices. As a consultant, you have to say it's not me who's saying all of this.

Yeah. I'm conveying from the analysis. And therefore, you know, somewhere I believe that in those years I perhaps put this facade or whatever, this straight face up, which works well in certain circumstances.

But I also feel that what it helps me do is not jump into any conclusions quickly. It helps me to sort of have a calm mind and think about things before I respond. It helps me to listen better.

It helps me to sort of be, try and be present. Not always am I able to do all of these things, but, you know, and to just let the conversation be as it should be and rather not, you know, be somebody who's conveying the news, take cues from how I'm looking and feeling and then sort of alter the message. Yeah.

So perhaps that's what it is. I'm trying my best now to sort of show emotion because I think increasingly people tell you that, you know, that you don't get excited, you're not getting excited, you're not showing your disappointment enough. Yeah.

Yeah. And yeah, I can do that in a close circle with a few people, with known people. But I feel that it, I think it is my consulting, I have really not thought about it, but I feel it is my consulting thing because you had to tell a client, you really have not done this thing well.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (24:42 - 24:42)
Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (24:42 - 25:22)
You need to improve in this certain area. And it is not coming from me as a person, it's coming from data, it's coming from analysis, it is coming from, you know, all the research that we have done and that, you know, it has to be a neutral kind of a message backed by data rather than, you know, an emotional kind of thing. Because more often than not, when somebody hears bad news, they go all ballistic.

Right. Yeah. And you don't want that because then it sort of stops all conversation beyond that.

And they are stuck on that and they don't see possibilities beyond how they can improve. Right. Yeah.

Then they just get stuck to that idea and, you know, it becomes difficult to get them out of it.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (25:22 - 26:35)
Since you are talking about, you know, consulting, maybe I'll just pick up just one question to digress a little bit. Do you think in lot of this consulting work, like clients give this consulting assignments many time just for confirming, like what we say confirmation bias, like I have this hypothesis, I feel this is how it is going and it is, you know, going well or this product is going to succeed and essentially that is what I am hoping will come out of that assignment. And as you say, then if it doesn't come out that way, then it's, I suppose,

difficult to accept because even when we read newspapers or anything of that sort, normally people will read our websites or whatever.

Suppose some political party, whichever political party is favourable, we tend to see all pros, positives. No one goes and searches negative for that, you know, political party. Because we have already made up our mind about buying a car or whatever, you know, we just look for confirmation for what we are, that what we already think.

So how difficult it is in that sense in consulting or many times then consultants also end up having to go because finally the client is paying, I suppose, right or.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (26:36 - 27:58)

I think you mature as a consultant, you know, you start off by saying all good things and then you realise that, you know, your credibility is linked to saying the right things. Right. Yeah.

People like to hear good things and they like you for it. But if you don't tell them the things that are not right, you're not serving the purpose. Yeah.

And you're not being true to your profession and to the work that you have done. So of course, it also needs to go with how senior you are and, you know, whether you have the credibility and the position, the organisation to say that to a client. You know, if I'm talking to a managing director and a young consultant goes and says that, you know, you don't have proper policies in your company, I think it's taken a lot more lightly than compared to if a person at senior level would.

So there are a lot of facts that the realities are very much dependent on what the situation is. But in consulting, I don't know if it is always about, you know, confirming what people have to say. I think the best use of consultants are where I have seen them challenging the consultants for what they say works well or does not work well.

And they're trying to use the investment that they have made to make some change for themselves.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (27:59 - 27:59)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (27:59 - 28:12)

I mean, that's ideally the situation that it needs to be. And it works for both the consultant and the client well. You know, you feel very satisfied as a consultant if somebody is serious about taking your word for it.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (28:12 - 28:12)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (28:13 - 28:32)

And wants to really challenge you and ask you questions to confirm the kind of recommendations you're making vis-a-vis somebody who's just looking for good news or, you know, somebody who's just sort of interested in surface level recommendations that you're making. So it's very much that as well.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (28:33 - 28:48)

So let us come back to your story. You talked about your school a little bit, Kendriya Vidyalaya and all. And then from the school, which was a co-ed school.

Yes. I suppose. Right.

And then you moved to a college in Chennai.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (28:48 - 28:48)

Chennai. Yes.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (28:48 - 29:06)

All women. All women. All girls.

Yes. Right. So how did that happen?

Was it because of some stream or course or whatever you wanted to take? Or was it a conscious choice? I suppose not.

But how that shift happened and how that change in environment, because second E is our environment. You talked about the home environment and all.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (29:06 - 30:07)

Yeah. it's an interesting question and I've thought a lot about it because when I was in school, particularly high school, I was bullied a lot by the boys. And it was not physical bullying, but it was emotional bullying.

You know, they would exclude a few of us girls. They would sort of harass us in many ways. And it was very difficult for us to sort of function normally.

And you know, the three or four of us were amongst the toppers in the class. And I didn't like that environment at all. And I hated my boys in the class because they would all gang up against me.

But I think in a lot of ways, it sort of builds your resilience as well. And then I went to Vellore where I found that, like I said, competitive, but a very, very healthy competition.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (30:07 - 30:08)

Now I have the context to it.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (30:09 - 31:01)

Very, very healthy competition. So I said, oh, this is a place where they respect you for what you do, what you achieve. And you know, they have great pride in saying that you were part of their class.

So that was a totally different experience. That was two years. And then I went to college, which was all girls.

And I said, oh, God, this is going to be a terrible place because I've never been in a girl's only place. And then I realised that in college, it's a totally different lens, you know, a world. Oh, OK.

Because it's all girls, the dynamics are very different. The way we work with each other, the way we talk to each other, the way we build teams, the way we do our work, it's very, very different.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (31:02 - 31:02)
OK.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (31:03 - 31:37)
Yeah. And in a lot of ways, you know, I was part of the students union, as it was called. So it is elected representatives last two years, second year and third year.

And I just felt that, you know, it opened up one portion of me that was not known primarily from a perspective that it was not considered a trait to have at all, because, you know, the lens that we look at for most things is male.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (31:38 - 31:38)
Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (31:39 - 32:51)
Yeah. So you have to be successful to be associated with male. And then, you know, you apply the same to a woman and you have to be male like to be successful.

I know I'm generalising a lot of things, but, you know, I felt women could work together. Yeah. I could be a leader in many different ways.

My leadership showed up in different behaviours. How I negotiated was very different. So very, very, if we had to do an event, how we came together as a team was very different.

How we played our roles were very different. So it was a very, very eye opening experience, I would say. And so there was a part of me that began to respect who I was as a woman and what I brought to the table.

Yeah. And I say that because it was really the start of that. And as I've grown in my career since then, I've realised that women have a lot of things to bring to the table, which are very different from what men bring, but which can equally be effective.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (32:52 - 32:54)
So for example, which would be those?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (32:54 - 35:09)
So for instance, just the ability to sit and listen. You're listening to so many different viewpoints. And then you have a considered decision that is made based on everything that you listen.

It's not to say men don't listen, but women, by listening to, that's what the normal thing is. They're used to listening more. Yeah.

And they don't have the space to talk. They're not given the chance many times to talk, but just listening improves perspective and they're able to sort of put things that have come from different people together, synthesise it and sort of present it. So that is one.

The second thing is to have a point of view, which is very different from what would have been conventionally thought of as the right point of view. How do you work in teams? How do you divide work?

It's very different how all women teams manage it. At least that's what I realised when I was in college at that time. And that you could be a leader and how are you seen as a leader?

How do others respond to you when you're a leader? I think it was very different. So more than the leadership, I would say just the all women's environment taught me that there is a different dynamic at play, which is something that we need to watch out for.

So when I went to Tata Institute, which was again a co-ed school. So that is for your master's. For my master's.

It was again co-ed. I was very comfortable with the male majority class, because remember, this is 1988. And you always had a skewed gender balance.

We had, I think, 10 girls and 20 men in the batch and what. So it was again a very comfortable kind of place to be for me, because somewhere I had, there was some portion of me that believed that, you know, there was something that I had to offer that was different, but it was equally valid. So that was very important.

Of course, Bombay as a place.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (35:09 - 35:19)

Yeah, I had that question. Chennai as a place, Cochin as a place, Bombay as a place, you know, these are different environments, different cultures. Very true.

How was it?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (35:19 - 36:59)

So I feel that Bombay as a place really sort of concretised my way of looking at career. It's such a professional city. Everybody is working and everyone is so professional about their work.

If they say time, of course, their time is determined by the trains and commute and all of that. But, you know, time is important. The effort is important.

And there is a certain professionalism that you see that sort of is invigorating. And in TIS, we had this particular internship process where through the two years you would be associated with five different companies, one per semester and then one internship between the two years. And of course, the final summer also was there.

So actually six companies. So you got a wide variety of companies that you got associated with. And you saw how they worked, how people there worked.

And Bombay is, I mean, I feel that anybody who works in India should spend the first few years of their career in a place like Bombay because it teaches you professionalism. It teaches you work ethic. It teaches you what it means to earn a living.

And it means, it teaches you what economic prosperity can do to people's lives. It is tough, but it can be life changing.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (37:00 - 37:40)

Being born and brought up in Bombay, I can relate to it. I feel like I missed out on not knowing what the other side was because we grew up exactly what you are saying. So the first time when I moved to different cities, then it's very different.

I love being in Chennai now, but as you say, professionalism wise and opportunity wise and equality wise, safety wise, you know, it was very different back in when we were growing up as well.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (37:40 - 38:17)

And Vidya, you'll be very surprised if I tell you this, that when I want me time, I go to Bombay. When I have to think about my work, when I have to think about my career, my long term goals, Bombay is the place I go to because in that crowd, in that environment, I feel that I can really think about what I am doing with myself, particularly about my job. And I like that.

I like that energy. I like it because somewhere I also feel that that's the place that I come from as far as my career is concerned. That's that.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (38:17 - 38:25)

So you worked in after you finished your master's from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, then you worked in. No, I didn't. No, you didn't.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (38:25 - 38:46)

No, two years in Tata Institute. But I had these some what they call as it was some kind of project. OK, so you had to spend two days a week through the entire semester in a company.

OK. Yeah. So I've done Oberoi Hotels.

I've done Indian Airlines.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (38:46 - 38:47)

And this was in Mumbai.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (38:48 - 39:17)

Yeah. Mukundayan and Steel. And then, of course, there was a pharmaceutical company.

So I've done all of these two days a week. You have to go to the office. You are like an employee.

You have the canteen food. You have to be there on time. Excellent.

Yeah. Excellent. Yeah.

And, you know, that's the way I don't know, it's still there with this, but it is the USP of an organisation like this, because you are running side by side.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (39:17 - 39:17)

Correct.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (39:17 - 39:20)

You're seeing all that you're learning in the workplace.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (39:21 - 39:21)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (39:21 - 40:08)

And you get an experience of that. You have the ability to speak to your supervisor at the workplace about what you're learning.

You have the opportunity to bring what you're seeing in the workplace when you're in the institute. So it's a fabulous, fabulous curriculum that they had. And in five in the two years, I rotated through four companies that were all very different industries.

So you get a sense of how Indian Airlines work? How does Steel sector work? What is important in those companies?

How do they manage human resources? So you learn. I mean, it's not in-depth, but you get a sense of how all of these organisations work and the role HR plays in all of these organisations.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (40:08 - 40:12)

And different organisations. Very different organisations. Not just from one sector.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (40:12 - 40:13)

Very different organisations.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (40:13 - 40:14)

So you get a sense of what environment. Very true.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (40:15 - 41:45)

So Mukundayan and Steel, we had to go to the corporate office, but we also had to go to their factory, which was beyond Thane and take the train. So you so you it's not just about the work and the experience, but you know, what does it mean to have a canteen? How does that work?

What kind of food is given in the canteen? I mean, everything you learn because those are important when you're running an HR function. For me, Bombay was a turning point.

And again, it's a very interesting thing. My parents just put me on a flight and said, go for the exam. And I said, they're really abandoning me.

And they called an uncle of mine and said, you go and pick her up. And my uncle also, he said, it's just walking distance you go. And you know, in Bombay, walking distance is like long distance.

And you're walking on these large highways, which you can't even cross the road. And so I went and first saw where this was from his house. The next day I went for the examination and I stayed on.

I packed my things, assuming that if I get in, I have to stay back. Yeah, if I don't, then I'll have to come back. But they just put me on a flight because there was very little time to go on a train.

The notification came to me very late, and they said, no, please do this.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (41:45 - 41:52)

Have you had this conversation with your parents that....

[Ms. Gangapriya] (41:52 - 41:58)

I don't even know if they'll remember it. Because I don't think they thought much about it.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (41:58 - 42:06)

They just have been super confident that you will manage. I don't think if you tell them now that... As you, maybe you did not have, because you're young, but...

[Ms. Gangapriya] (42:06 - 42:16)

Yeah, I mean, I must ask my mother, but, I really don't know if they even remember that they sent me on these... Or they even think much about it. Yeah, that's right.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (42:16 - 43:23)

We knew you would have gone. You will handle yourself well. Very true.

You will manage. Very true. So, yeah, another environment I want to ask you about is three different places or main companies at least where you have worked.

So, if we see, for our audience, Murugappa Group in South India or a Chennai-based, which is a family-owned group, diversified, but a family-owned. And then you went to Mercer, which is like a multinational, but a consultant kind of organisation. And now for several years you are with Ford, again a multinational, but a manufacturing company as such.

But you are, of course, in business services or HR, but company-wise, a product is car or whatever vehicles. So three very different environments. So, can you talk a little bit about those?

How are these, how do they differ and which environments are like more punishing, but essentially how it works? Are they really very different in your, you know, day-to-day functioning?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (43:23 - 45:49)

So, Vidya, I must tell you something about placements itself. And since it's for your students, I think it'll be quite useful. I had a dream company that I wanted to get in.

And, you know, I was stopping the class in this and I thought that this was going to come my way. So we had all the interview process for that company. And they had a funny question that they asked everybody who was in the group saying, who do you think would be in this group would be the best for this job?

And they all apparently told my name. But as it happened, I was not selected. It left me very, very, very, very disappointed.

And I said, this is the only company that I really wanted to work for. I didn't even think I was going to work in any of the other companies. And I was very sure that, you know, with my track record, with my academics and the way I had also done in the selection process that I would make it.

It left me so disappointed that I didn't participate in the placement process after that. Oh, yeah. So despite topping my class, I hadn't got a job.

I was the only one who hadn't got a job. And, you know, that was in a lot of ways when I think back, my way of dealing with the grief of not having found that job. And also about not knowing how else or what else I should be sort of aiming for.

When suddenly in those days the telegram came in and to the placement committee and they said that, you know, some company in Chennai is looking for a job. And they would pay for an airfare to attend. And in those days, airfare was a big thing for a big attraction for us.

So I said, OK, then let me go for this interview because I have nothing to lose. At least I'll be at home with my parents. It's Chennai, I know the place.

So I'll maybe try this out. What also happened was that I not just got selected for the job that was with Murugappa group. They were looking for women that they could put in their factories.

And I had said that my first preference would be for an industrial relations job.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (45:50 - 45:50)

OK.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (45:50 - 48:48)

Yeah. And so it was really meeting my requirements for the kind of job that I wanted to do in a company that I felt was reasonably good. Then, of course, the most important was the advantage of being close to home.

So when I look back, I think that many times we are disappointed with what we don't get. Yeah. And that's something that we need to acknowledge.

It can be quite devastating sometimes to not get what we want and what we desire. And when we think particularly that we deserve to get that. But what I also learned from that

experience is that sometimes you may end up in a situation better than what you ever imagined from some of these experiences.

So think about those failures as sort of being stepping stones to discovering that there are other options that you never even opened a new door for me. Isn't it? And it was something that.

So I had the opportunity to work in a factory in Ranipet in Murugappa group. And though it was a family run company, it was very professionally managed. They had a whole bunch of professional managers and leaders.

And I would say the foundation for HR that I had could not have been possible and could not have been better in many other companies because I was working with a team of people who are extremely competent, who are extremely professional. They didn't differentiate between me being. So they would make me work late in the night.

They would drop me back at home every time I stayed back late. They put me in a factory. They ensured that I went into the shop floor even for a night shift.

So I got opportunities that I don't think a lot of people would have got at that time. Certainly. I don't know if they'll get it now, but, you know, certainly at that time it was all very unique experiences.

And I because it was a smaller organisation and I also got to work with senior leaders more often because as a management trainee coming from this, they felt that they needed to give me exposure. So, you know, it's very, very interesting. The three people who joined on the same day.

One person was head of HR of a large Indian business group and continues to support the group after his retirement. Yeah. The second person, again, continued in Murgappa group, went on to become the managing director of one.

So I just feel that the kind of experiences we had laid the foundation stone. Of course, we worked really hard and work was primary.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (48:49 - 49:06)

But generally the image of family businesses is not that. But it was entirely professionally managed. But, you know, from experience one should not generalise.

Yes, you can't generalise. Excellent exposure, even in a professionally run family business.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (49:07 - 55:00)

So that was a great start. And, you know, it was really the grounding in the realities of HR, exposure to things like industrial relations. So it gave me a wide exposure to various activities.

Of course, it was an Indian company and it came with a lot of positives about how you treat employees. How do you negotiate with employees? What do you lay as?

So I think in a lot of ways it was very foundational and therefore a very, very strong building block as far as my career was concerned. And I was inspired by the managers and leaders I worked with. And you always wanted to be like them and they taught you, you know, how do you deal with various situations?

So I think in that sense it was very good. I took a break when my son was born, which was after six years in Murugappa group. And then I went to Mercer.

At that time it was a company called CRG. How difficult or easy was it to reenter? That's a totally different subject.

But it was difficult because I was with very young colleagues who knew much more than me, who are much savvier than me. And the two and a half years that I had taken a break and with the Murugappa group background that I had, I didn't know a lot of things that were happening in the corporate world. So these were younger colleagues who were doing extremely well, very savvy, had worked in places like Bombay, you know, that kind of exposure.

And I had to sort of compete and sort of, which was a good thing because, you know, in a lot of ways I felt that I was very comfortable learning from younger people. I was very comfortable asking them, how do you do this? Can you can I learn from you kind of thing, which I think was, again, something that has sort of worked well for me throughout my career.

So that was the biggest challenge of getting back after a break. Your mindset is very different. You need to compete with people.

You have to work with people who are much smarter than you, but much younger and know much more than you. So there is some catching up that you will need to do. And then, of course, you also have family and work to manage.

So you'll have to ensure that whereas young people may not yet be in that stage. So in Marsa, what I learned was that, you know, it was an interesting thing. Again, it was a women dominated organisation.

Most were women. And that's when, again, I felt that, you know, there was no word of diversity spoken. But everything that the company did was so conscious of individual requirements.

So we had people who were physically challenged, who needed help. We had all kinds of people. Let me not even call out because it was a mix of all kinds of people.

But it was the most harmonious organisation created without ever mentioning DEI as a factor. Yes, it was just and of course, it was a small organisation. Yeah, it was easier to manage.

It was that that was certainly an advantage. But without really being so talking about it, it just was sort of very much part of the ethos of the company. So that was and of course, you know, the client interactions, you learn so much being a consultant.

So you moved from HR to being a HR consultant. And then you had to specialise also because in consulting you sort of over time become a specialist in a particular area. So that then you get to work on projects, very different kinds of projects you get to meet with.

So consulting is a heady profession. You get to see CEOs, MDs, you are advising them, you're chasing revenues. You sort of have your highs and lows of achieving targets.

There's a lot of travel, both internal to India as well as, you know, travel abroad. So it is a very, very heady profession. It sort of becomes a lifestyle.

And if you don't look after yourself, you can sort of impact you as an individual. And that's when I realised that, you know, I needed to take a break from it because it was consuming a lot of who I am and who I was. And sort of I didn't have it was not balanced in that sense for the other other parts of me.

Yeah. So that was when I decided that I was going to. But after working in consulting, I didn't know if I would be good for any other job.

So I took a break again and I was trying to figure out what I would do because a lot of times you're not given a job saying, oh, she's a consultant. Yeah. She may not know the realities of working.

She's only consultant she can only recommend. And she may not know the reality. So I didn't get it. I didn't know if I would get a job or what kind of a job I would get.

So I just let it sort of be till I got a call from Ford, who was a client at some point in time asking if I'd like to join as head of HR for the business service organisation. And that's how I did. And Ford was a great client when I was a consultant.

So I said, yeah, if they're a good client, I wouldn't mind being part of it. Of course, it was in Chennai also. That was a consideration for me.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (55:00 - 55:04)

So this happened without you planning it. Yeah. Without Ford.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (55:05 - 55:05)

Yeah.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (55:05 - 55:09)

It's not that you are looking and you went around meeting people.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (55:09 - 56:30)

No, it was just good luck. I would say. Yeah.

Very good luck. I would say. Yeah.

And again, in the interviews, I wasn't sure because Ford had not taken people from outside at senior levels. They hadn't recruited people from senior level at all for many, many years. So I wasn't sure if the company would be open to it and, you know, if I would be.

But I actually was a little intimidated when I joined the company because, you know, I am somebody who's just parachuted in from outside at a senior level above everybody who's been in the company for 10, 15 years. You sometimes wonder how they sort of take somebody like that. But it was a very warm, very welcoming environment, you know, very, very supportive to help me make the transition.

For me also making the transition from a consulting job to an operational job was a big change. So and then, of course, being part of the leadership group, all that was very, very big changes for me. So that was something that I went through.

And then, of course, you know, in Ford, I've had very, very good bosses. And, you know, at the end of the day, I feel that that is something that makes a big difference. Are you valued for what you bring to the table?

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (56:30 - 56:31)
Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (56:31 - 56:53)
And, it's not really a salary and it's not really an environment. It's really about, you know, do you have any, do you have the opportunity to contribute? Can you make an impact?

So Ford, I think there were a lot of things that we were able to do. This entire growth that we have seen in the last so many years, the new campus that we put up.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (56:53 - 57:01)
Maybe you can tell us a little bit more about it. What and all exactly Ford Business Services, how it supports Ford globally?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (57:01 - 58:08)
We are fairly big. We have this campus in Chennai that houses pretty much all of the functions that we have in headquarters. In fact, it's also the second largest concentration of what we call salaried staff.

That is the non-worker category outside of our headquarters. And we provide support. The largest team, of course, is enterprise technology, which is IT software engineering and data and analytics.

So that's the largest group, more than 50 percent of our workforces in that area. The second largest is finance and accounting. And the teams here do everything from, you know, payables, receivables, intercompany transactions, property accounting, legal accounting.

Book closure, travel expenses for everybody across the world. So a whole bunch of and all the financial analysis, all of that is also done from here.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (58:08 - 58:10)
For Ford globally

[Ms. Gangapriya] (58:10 - 59:49)
For Ford globally. Yeah. And so that is the finance and accounting team.

Then we have Ford Credit, which is the credit arm of Ford Motor Company, and they have an operations and an IT team and an analytics team. So Ford Credit is like, you know, a finance company that supports dealers and retail buyers of vehicles with loans. So we have the operations team, almost 1,500 of them.

Operations, IT and analytics. So that's a fairly large group that we have. We have materials planning and logistics, which is those that do the incoming materials into our plants from our supplier sites and outgoing finished vehicles to the dealerships.

So all of that is coordinated from the facility that we have. So these are the large, large teams. We have many, many smaller teams, HR.

We have shared services. Then we have a small quality team. We have a marketing and sales team that does some things like, you know, digital marketing, CRM.

So that works. Then there is a 700 odd member customer service team that sort of looks at all warranty claims, that looks at all extended service business that we have. So I would say many Ford Motor Company in terms of from an operational perspective and supporting pretty much every location that Ford has.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (59:50 - 1:00:09)

Any of these functions means, I guess if I remember you started way back in the late 1990s or something. 1990s with a small team. Any of these other functions that time where they outsource to other Indian companies and then it.

You brought it back into the IT business. Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:00:09 - 1:00:25)

Because that is what is happening now. That is also happening. Yes.

In fact, IT, there are many areas where we have brought it in house in the last few years because, you know, that's core and it's become important. I forgot to mention we have a large product development team.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:00:25 - 1:00:26)

Okay.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:00:26 - 1:00:38)

Yeah. So they are helping in design. That is cars.

So they help design vehicles, software in the vehicles. Yeah. All the CAD drawings, the virtual testing of.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:00:38 - 1:00:43)

So it's quite high value. Yeah. Quite, you know, many of these units are.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:00:43 - 1:01:25)

Correct. Yeah. So, you know, a lot of the ADAS work, the testing for ADAS, all of that is done out of this facility.

So it's quite a number of things that we do from the facility here. Yeah. We have been bringing work, insourcing work from vendors, but also that not just insourcing, but actually improving the work also because it's come into us.

Yeah. But it has taken an entire better life. Yeah.

Once it has come in because, you know, we know exactly what we need to be delivering. Therefore, we are much closer to what the output is and the outcomes are and that we are able to deliver better.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:01:25 - 1:01:51)

So just moving on, you know, endowment, environment and third is education. And you talked quite a bit about your education already in masters. But what I want to ask is, you know, in one of your articles, I remember reading you saying that you wished you had a mentor early on.

Is that maybe a reason why you also became a certified coach or anything or that has nothing to do with it at all?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:01:51 - 1:01:52)

No, nothing at all.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:01:52 - 1:01:57)

We can talk about the role of the mentors and how you decided to become this.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:01:58 - 1:04:43)

So I must say I got a mentor at the right time. I mean, you know, isn't there a proverb which says that when you're seeking inspiration, inspiration will come in front of you. So I do have a mentor and she's played a very significant role in my career.

She advises, she challenges, she opens opportunities for me that I don't see. And I see that is the biggest value that I see of the mentor. And I think that is something that I would ask if you can get a mentor, do look out for one.

And there may be different kinds of mentors at different times in your career. But one that can stay with you, that'll be great. And, you know, people are willing to mentor.

And, nowadays with LinkedIn and all that, you can get to people who may be ready to mentor. So in my case, she was somebody who wanted to hire me when I finished this. And in both cases, I sort of turned down the offer.

And somehow, you know, it turned out that our paths crossed again when we were consulting. We worked together in consulting and she has been the person I'd call first if I have an opportunity, if I have a thought about my professional life and how I manage that. She is the one who would call me to ask if I would be open to taking a new opportunity, which I may not even have thought about.

So spurs that thought in me and, you know, the idea. So I'm really just like you think about mothers and fathers and them giving you the boost that you require for your life. I feel that

I'm blessed to have a mentor like her who has sort of kept me on this path of professional growth, development, and new opportunities.

So even at some point she said, you know, I need you to think about being an independent director on a board. What is the right time? And we had that conversation and then she opened up some opportunities and she keeps track.

How are you doing? How are you feeling? How is your contribution?

How has it changed? So I would say that having a mentor is very, very important, not so much for opportunities, but for pushing you to think beyond what you feel comfortable about. Yeah, it is really about opening up aspects that you never even imagined you had the capability for.

I think that is really what a good mentor can do.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:04:43 - 1:04:43)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:04:44 - 1:04:47)

Yeah. So I think that I've been quite blessed.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:04:48 - 1:05:05)

Lovely. And then why did you become a coach or how? Because that is a sort of, you know, formal education.

There is a lot of informal education we always continue to do.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:05:05 - 1:06:52)

So the coach was really, you know, when you become a leader, I felt that. At that stage, you can't teach people anything. You know, everybody is a leader.

So they're not going to listen to you easily. Yeah. And that coaching may be the best way to deal with people when you have to be particularly peer level.

As a leader, if I have to influence my peers, I felt coaching was perhaps the best way to deal with it. And as the head of HR, there were many opportunities where I had to coach people. You know, when leaders don't show up well, when they don't do the right things, when they're not taking the right decisions.

Yeah. So you have to sort of deal with them. I can't use my position power.

I can't use my authority in the company. I can do it. But that was not what I preferred to use.

I would rather that, you know, they make the change from a place where they feel that, you know, the change is important and is required. And somewhere I felt that that coaching came from that place. Of course, I met some interesting people in coaching also.

And I said, yeah, that's what I want. I love the way they carried on that conversation with me. And I said, that's something that I would like to do.

Of course, I'm nowhere near doing the way they do it. But, you know, I was also influenced by a few people who to my mind were excellent coaches. So I said, OK, if I can be like that, I can conduct myself like that.

That would be a good thing to add to my toolkit. Right.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:06:53 - 1:07:27)

Yeah. So, you know, education wise, you know, the world has changed, changing so fast with AI and, you know, all sorts of things. How do you see this for this young generation?

How do you see this education changing? You know, previously we had this school college, you know, typical. Now, of course, there is continuous learning and now it will have to be like adaptability will have to be like much, much more.

So how do you see young people coping up or what's happening, you think? Because a lot of your workforce will be relatively young.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:07:28 - 1:07:54)

So, I look at how search, for instance, has impacted our life. You know, for everything that we don't know, we just go and search. Many times not even checking if what search results come out are true or not, isn't it?

And we listen, learn something on the surface and then say, OK, this is what it is. And, you know, increasingly you find that everyone is an expert at everything.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:07:54 - 1:07:56)

Illusion of skill acquisition.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:07:56 - 1:09:56)

There is no respect for somebody who has done research, who has studied the subject, who knows a lot, who has seen how things have changed. So I feel somewhere that that's really where we have come to, which is not a good thing. Yeah.

And just a surface level knowledge, like you rightly said, you know, sometimes that knowledge is not even tested. It's not even checked for accuracy and we are consuming it and saying that, you know, we know something about it. I think AI also has the potential to be that.

Now, if you search, you know, more often than not, you're getting an AI answer for your search results. It has. I can just give you an example.

I had a deck that I had. Somebody told me, can you summarise that? And I said, OK, let me use AI to just summarise the deck.

And when I read it, I said, this is all patently wrong. So we need to be careful. I'm not saying it's wrong all the time.

In fact, I use AI quite a bit in my work, but I need to know what I'm doing well enough to use the output that I get from AI in a way that is authentic, correct and will serve my purpose. Yeah. And that comes only if I know something about the subject.

Yeah. If I'm blindly going by what AI says, where is your identity in it? Where is your knowledge in it?

Where is your contribution to it? And isn't that what makes us happy? That, you know, we are creating an impact.

We are adding to the conversation. We have something more to say than what is there. I think that is really where we feel most fulfilled, isn't it?

When we have something to add to the entire conversation and create an impact.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:09:56 - 1:10:09)

Yeah, totally. I very much agree. I think today's young generation must, I think, still understand that they themselves need to be experts in something.

They need to understand their domain very well and AI can complement.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:10:10 - 1:10:27)

And if they don't, then AI will take over what they are doing. If you don't have anything unique to offer, if you don't have anything specialised and in-depth knowledge to offer, it's very likely that, your job can quite easily be taken over by AI.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:10:27 - 1:10:32)

And you can very much use AI to learn as well.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:10:32 - 1:11:01)

But still finally. And to even do your job so that you can evolve to doing a higher level job. Yeah.

So, that certainly is something that is a possibility and perhaps will certainly happen as well. But, you know, it should make your contribution that much more valuable. And therefore, you need to equip yourself to, in a sense, put yourself on top of what AI is able to provide.

Indeed. I think that is, that is going to be the challenge.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:11:02 - 1:11:32)

So, coming to now the fourth E, which is effort. And you talked about your HR director in Ford, right, handling that position. And then I think in 2020, you became the head or site head or the managing director, as you call it.

How did that transition happen? Like, did you aspire for it? Did you make an effort for it?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:11:32 - 1:11:55)

Not at all. Not at all. In fact, my boss at that time came and told me that I'm considering you for the managing director's position. And I just pooh-poohed the idea. Actually, I said, no, not for me.

I don't think that's the job for me. Well, I don't even, I didn't even think that I would be the person in contention. That I would be even considered for the job, that I would be good for the job.

And this is something that I think is a woman thing.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:11:55 - 1:11:56)
Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:11:58 - 1:12:03)
And, and then, she told me, I mean, this is what I least expected from you.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:12:03 - 1:12:05)
That was, that was a woman already?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:12:05 - 1:12:55)
A woman, a woman leader. She said, I'm really disappointed. I'm saying that you are good for the job and you're saying you're not ready to take it.

She said, go and think about it and come back to me tomorrow. And then, you know, what I thought back and I said, if she thinks I'm going to be good in that job, maybe I'll be good in that job. So it didn't come from a place where I was convinced.

So I think, and then I took the job and I said, OK, I've now taken this job. I need to figure out a way to be successful. And all my role models, all the people before me were expats and they were men.

Yeah. I was the first person who was not an expat and a woman. And then I'm thinking, I can't be like them. I'm very different.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:12:55 - 1:12:56)
So you have to evolve.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:12:57 - 1:13:17)
Correct. And then I said, OK, now this is I can see this as a weakness or I can see this as an opportunity. I can bring my own style.

I can bring my own thing. Of course, it didn't come so easily at all. It was a struggle.

It was after so much struggle and debate and internal doubt that I came to the conclusion that I have an ability to do this in my way.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:13:17 - 1:13:18)
Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:13:19 - 1:14:21)
And maybe that is a good way. Maybe that is a successful way. And I can take some risks.

Yeah. I can try it out. So I think this is another thing that I think women particularly should realise that all models of competence, leadership, capability are all male orientated for the last so many years.

If you look at research, it's all based on men and their behaviours. We don't have any research which says that, you know, it is things I mean, it's during COVID that people said that, you know, leadership is all about empathy, collaboration and all of that. That's like 2020.

Right. And that diversity is sort of a key ingredient to making companies successful and things like that. So I think what it taught me is that it can be a different style.

It can be a different way of dealing with things. And it is different.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:14:21 - 1:14:22)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:14:22 - 1:14:23)

That's because I am different.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:14:23 - 1:14:24)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:14:24 - 1:15:17)

I'm different in many ways from anybody who has been before me. And I can do this my way. And it may be a good way.

It is also a possible way. So I think that is the feeling that I'm increasingly believing that, you know, it's not just a woman and male thing, but it's about an individual thing. Right.

There is no set way of dealing with a job like this. So even when I go to conferences, when I see peers of mine and they behave in a particular way, I'm quite comfortable being myself. Because that's my way.

Right. That's the way I am because, you know, you go to a conference mostly made by men. Yeah.

And you may be one of few women. And then you realise it's not what you want to be. It's not what you are.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:15:17 - 1:15:17)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:15:18 - 1:15:34)

Yeah. So being comfortable with that, it's not easy. No, it's not.

It's not easy. Because, you know, you'll be seen as standoffish. Yes.

It'll be seen as you're being snooty. You don't join all of that. But that's not it.

That's not my style.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:15:34 - 1:15:56)

So, but it partly also tells me when you said, you know, you did not consider yourself at all at that point. So some sort of, you know, glass ceiling that we talk about in corporate India, that part of it maybe it's like self-imposed by women. Oh, yes.

Because they are, you know, so much self-doubt and I'm not ready. I'm 110% ready. I will not raise my hand.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:15:56 - 1:16:03)

No, for women, it is only self-imposed beliefs. I feel increasingly that it is only self-imposed beliefs.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:16:03 - 1:16:03)

Okay.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:16:04 - 1:16:47)

That, they can't do it because of various reasons. Women also don't like to fail. That's also there.

I mean, a lot of things and that I have to do it all. I mean, we have a lot of hang-ups also as women and that's the way we have perhaps socialised or that's the way that's how role models have sort of shown up for us. We have negatives also, but I feel that a lot of what is hampering women from taking leadership roles are predominantly self-imposed beliefs and about being this unique person in a group, being different in a group.

I think all of this plays a major role.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:16:48 - 1:17:13)

Yeah. So then the last which is, you know, equality of opportunity. And since we're talking about, genders as such.

So you're saying even if there is equality of opportunity given to women, unless this kind of conditioning, you know, changes, it's still going. So, it can come from social norms or whatever you have, you know, grown up the kind of risk you can take.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:17:13 - 1:18:41)

And how women are generally wired, you know, we have to be 110 percent sure before we do anything, because somewhere we have learned that everything has to be controlled. Only then can we function. You know, our home has to be controlled.

The rest of us, only then can we do well at our work. Right. So that is being wired into us day in and day out.

Of course, times are changing and attitudes are changing because I find that, you know, a lot more men are willing to sort of let women take leadership roles and they are very comfortable with it. And they sometimes feel good about working with women leaders. So all of that is certainly changing and a lot more of it is out there for people to see.

And I feel the younger generation, they are already being brought up with ideas of, you know, equity, equality. And, yeah, so they're a lot more sensitive to all of these things. I feel there are a lot more fair but judgemental as well.

So the quick to come to conclusions. So all of that is there. But I feel we are moving to a more equitable and equal world.

That's my hope and what I see. I feel that that's really happening.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:18:41 - 1:18:41)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:18:41 - 1:18:46)

Which is a good sign, because a lot of times we only talk about the woman.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:18:46 - 1:18:46)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:18:47 - 1:18:51)

I feel that men are also pressurised, pressurised to be the breadwinner.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:18:51 - 1:19:03)

So I was coming to it - one of the equality of opportunities in India in say last 20 years for men, women as well, but also for a lot of men was the entry level IT jobs.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:19:03 - 1:19:03)

Okay.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:19:04 - 1:19:45)

Right. Because a lot of the men who first, you know, from backgrounds which initially their parents were not educated, they became either diploma in IT or, sort of a degree or data entry or whatever these kind of jobs, because India's IT industry expanded, a lot of them could get those jobs. Do you see, how do you see, do you see this is going to change with the AI thing if a lot of the things will get, you know, automated and things will, the entry level jobs will be like, you really have to have like a very high level of skill or how will it affect you think those, because we hear a lot of news, right, like this company's so and so company getting rid of.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:19:45 - 1:20:01)

Not so much AI, but, you know, I mean, you look at women, they have an option of choosing what they want to do. I don't know if men have much choice. Choice, yes.

So when you choose, you pick up something that you love to do, you want to do.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:20:01 - 1:20:01)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:20:01 - 1:20:32)

Whereas men, they're just forced to take up what, to take up what appears before them as something that will help them with this bread. So they may not be sort of following their passion. Sometimes they may be in the wrong jobs.

Right. Yeah. And they may be feeling miserable in those jobs with no exit path because of social norms, saying that, you know, men have to work, they have to be breadwinners, they have to be the primary breadwinners.

Yes. So that's also pressure for men.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:20:32 - 1:20:52)

Yeah. For example, you, how you said, like, you know, you took a second break. Correct.

The first break is understandable. Correct. You know, related to the child.

Correct. Childcare and all. But the second break was sort of voluntary, because there's a burnout and all.

But that kind of option for men doesn't exist. Absolutely. You can't, as a man, you can't have a blue thumb that will sit at home for a year.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:20:53 - 1:20:59)

Absolutely. And, you know, that has other pressures. Right.

And I find that the younger generation is speaking up about those pressures.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:20:59 - 1:21:00)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:21:00 - 1:21:06)

Saying that, you know, I can't deal with this, so I want an exit path. Whereas nobody questioned when women take the exit route.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:21:06 - 1:21:07)

Right. Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:21:07 - 1:22:29)

And women take exit for various reasons. It's not because, you know, this job is not fulfilling or anything. It's considered the norm, you know, if you have a child to look after, a woman takes a break.

If you have a mother-in-law or a mother to look after, you take a break. If you have, you know, it's a default option. It can be men also, isn't it?

So that is one. The second thing is that, you know, the fact that we are all, we all believe that male is the primary breadwinner. Yes.

I think if it's a more equal world, I think it's a much harmonious place to be in. Because, you know, each one can follow what their passion is, find the jobs that make the most difference to them as an individual where they can contribute the most, you know, chart their careers

as a pair, as a couple. You don't have to sort of be one person primary, the other person some out of it.

Of course, you know, in all of this, the important thing to mention is that we measure economic productivity in a particular way. So if you go by that, then I think everybody has to work. If there was a different measure of economic productivity, then maybe sitting at home, bringing up children well and making sure the next generation is.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:22:31 - 1:22:32)

It is equal.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:22:33 - 1:22:43)

Yeah, that's right. So, we have a different way of measuring growth and progress and development, don't we? But so we are bound by that in a certain way.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:22:44 - 1:23:12)

Towards the end now, we didn't speak much about your family per se.

But again, I remember somewhere reading you, you said that you have learned so much from your son. Correct. Right.

That is a different generation. So what sort of a thing, if you have conversations at home or something, do you take his advice or, you know, what have you learned?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:23:12 - 1:23:35)

Yeah. So I think lots and I mean, I feel that I take more advice from him than anybody because they see a world which is very different from how we see it. They have a lot more information about things than we have.

If I look at a topic from five different angles, I find that he looks at it from 10 different angles.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:23:35 - 1:23:35)

Okay.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:23:36 - 1:24:40)

So he's able to provide five more different perspectives. And like you said in the beginning, you know, if you see something, you constantly find ways to validate what your belief is. We don't sort of challenge the belief and look for contrary opinions.

But I find that with my son, he's looking at all kinds of opinions. So that's, that's because they have access to it. Right.

Through social media, through podcasts, so much of sub content that's out there. So that is one. The second one is this entire concept of equality, equity that I spoke about.

I find that younger people have a slightly more real, real understanding of that. And because of the way we are brought up, we can never understand it. But I mean, for us, we take a lot

of things as hard work and all of that without realising it may be partly a privilege also that gave us all of those opportunities.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:24:40 - 1:24:43)

It may be just the endowment. Yeah, that's right.

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:24:43 - 1:25:26)

And increasingly, I'm believing that, privilege is embedded in so many aspects of my life that I take it for, I don't even, first of all, realise it exists in many parts. Second is that, you know, we gloat over some things which we believe is our work, when in reality, it may just be as part of our endowment. So I feel that he is a lot more conscious of checking me on some of those things, which I find is very, very helpful.

And also about, you know, what are new things that are of interest to younger people, you know.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:25:27 - 1:25:29)

So that helps you with your work, younger work.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:25:29 - 1:26:07)

Yeah, that's right. And, it's really where the world is going to. Yeah.

I look at the conflict that we have in West Asia. Yeah. And, you know, how that is impacting the lives of young people, this entire idea of AI and how it's going to change everyone's life.

And, you know, the concerns and the worries that people like him have, and, you know, how do they respond to it. So it's interesting to listen to some of that, because that's really where the world is headed. You know, we can keep talking about our past experiences.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:26:07 - 1:26:10)

But that's all. We tune into what's going to happen.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:26:10 - 1:26:15)

That's all the past. We can't do anything about it. Yeah.

And it's the, it's a world that is very different.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:26:15 - 1:26:15)

Yeah.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:26:15 - 1:26:23)

So we need to be preparing ourselves for the new world. And I think that's, for me, the fascinating part.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:26:23 - 1:26:56)

Right. So then the last couple of questions on this note are only for the next generation, current, you know, current young person, what would be your, you know, maybe you don't like to give advice, but what should they really be looking out for, for someone young. And

similarly, if you look back, and when you were in your 20s, is there anything else that now you think you would have done or should have done differently?

What advice will you give your younger self?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:26:56 - 1:27:05)

So, it's advice, I don't know whether, but I really think that young people should start cultivating a hobby.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:27:05 - 1:27:06)

Cultivating a hobby.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:27:06 - 1:27:17)

I think it's very important to have something that provides perspective on to your life itself.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:27:17 - 1:27:18)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:27:18 - 1:27:28)

Yeah. Because, you know, you can be career oriented or you can be looking for your family. It's all one aspect of your life.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:27:28 - 1:27:28)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:27:29 - 1:27:36)

Yeah. So, I think an interest or a hobby is very important to provide perspective.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:27:36 - 1:27:40)

So, what do you do when you want to get away from work as your hobby?

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:27:40 - 1:28:17)

I have so many things that, and you know, I love to be out in nature. I tried some bird watching. I mean, I try to do that.

There's so much to see in our country. I travel quite a bit. Of course, I have a little garden.

I sort of try to manage that. So, I need those things to provide. Yeah.

One is de-stressing. The second one is also to provide perspective. Right.

Yeah. You know, you grow a plant, you realise that you cannot be successful so easily. It's not easy.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:28:17 - 1:28:18)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:28:18 - 1:28:20)

That doesn't dance to your commands.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:28:20 - 1:28:20)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:28:21 - 1:29:10)

Yeah. You can do that in your office, but maybe. So, I think it's important and that there is.

So, I think I feel that people should have a hobby because it's just a little more balanced. It gives you a little more balance in life. And when I say hobby, it's not to say I like reading.

It's about doing something with your hands. And I think in this AI age, that is going to make a big, you should be doing something with your hands, whether it is maybe gardening, something that will allow you to use your hands. I feel that.

I mean, that's my personal view. It could be completely wrong. Yeah.

And something that will be different from what you're doing at work.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:29:10 - 1:29:11)

Right.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:29:11 - 1:30:03)

So, that's one thing that I would say. And as for the second question that you asked

What would I, what would I do differently? I think it's a blessed life.

Yeah. So, I have nothing to complain about. Really nothing to complain about.

More than blessed. I feel I got opportunities and people and, you know, like you rightly call endowment, family, sometimes, you know, even a marriage, particularly for women, you know, you're getting. So, all of this is, these have all sort of all come together to make me what I am.

[Prof. Vidya Mahambare] (1:30:03 - 1:30:10)

Yeah. So, on that lovely note, thank you very much. I had a wonderful time and it was very fascinating to know about your journey.

[Ms. Gangapriya] (1:30:11 - 1:30:23)

Yeah. Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure talking to you.

It's been so conversational. I don't think we have seen how much time has gone.

Let us see now. Thank you very much.

Thank you.