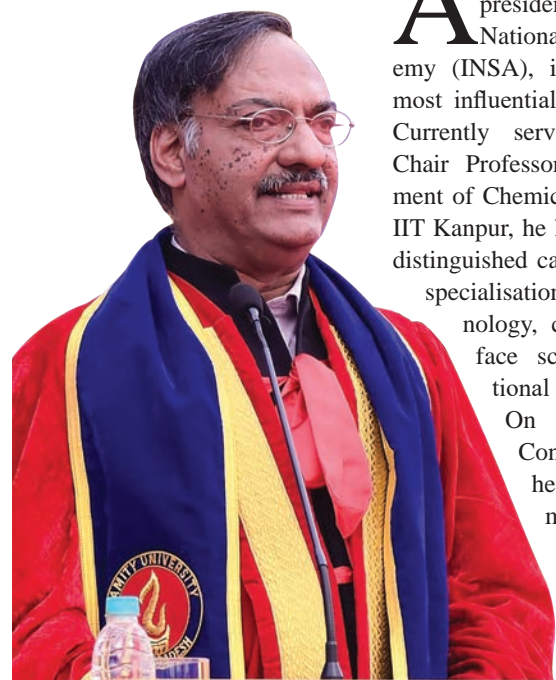


Thinking ahead of time

Ashutosh Sharma: The Man Who Laid The Foundation For India's Mission On AI

INTERVIEW

Naisha Parnandy & Saanvi Pruthi, AIS Noida, XII I



Dr Ashutosh Sharma, former president INSA

Ashutosh Sharma, former president of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), is one of India's most influential scientific minds. Currently serving as Institute Chair Professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering at IIT Kanpur, he has to his credit a distinguished career that includes specialisation in nanotechnology, colloid and interface science and functional nanomaterials.

On the occasion of Convocation 2025, he shared his remarkable journey with GT reporters. Read on as he tells GT all about it.



Dr Ashutosh Sharma with GT reporters

Enduring philosophy

My original plan was to study philosophy and not engineering. To pursue that interest, I enrolled at Rajasthan University. But around the same time, the IIT Joint Entrance Exam came along, and everyone was of the opinion that studying philosophy would lead only to a teaching job, while engineering promised a better-paying and more secure future. So I went ahead and gave JEE exam. Ironically, I became a teacher anyway, even after going to IIT Kanpur. For me, it never really mattered what I studied, for I always knew I wanted a life of intellectual pursuit, not a bureaucratic position.

Decoding AI

When I was Secretary in the Department of Science and Technology about eight years ago, I found myself witnessing the advent of artificial intelligence. AI, at the time, was still widely unheard of, but I knew we had to wake up to its dangers at the right time. I advocated for a national mission on AI long before the term entered everyday vocabulary. Today, India's National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems - an investment of nearly 4,000 crore INR - has been operational for over five years, establishing foundational research hubs across universities. The future of AI lies in convergence of areas like communication, computing, auto-

nomous decision-making, and autonomous action through machines and algorithms.

Importance of choice

There is a powerful parallel between AI and the first Industrial Revolution when machines took over physical production. AI will do the same for the human mind. Even creative products - art, literature, education, scientific research - will increasingly be produced by machines. AI will transform nearly everything, so the deeper question is - what will be the role of humans fifty years from now? In my opinion, while production is becoming increasingly automated, humans remain as the final consumers. Hence, there will be a profound shift in how society defines purpose and value. Eventually, it will all come down to the choices one makes in life.

Message for Amitians

Take ownership of your life. Make your own decisions, learn to live with their consequences, and avoid blaming others. Success is shaped by circumstances, collaborations, and support, while failure is deeply personal. Above all, avoid stereotypes. Deal with people, not images... and you'll be happier. **GT**

Book Review

From text to emotions

Book: Wonder
Author: R. J. Palacio
Published in: Feb 14, 2012
Genre: Contemporary fiction

Synopsis: Wonder, written by R. J. Palacio, reaches the depth of the reader's heart, leaving an imprint in the form of a question: "How would I react if a student who had a visible physical deformity like Auggie (August Pullman) came to my school?" The story can have different reviews because emotion is not defined; the reader may see Auggie like his classmates Jake or Summer do, some with initial

reluctance and others with immediate compassion. Jack Will is one of the three students tasked by Principal Tushman to welcome Auggie alongside Charlotte and Julian. Auggie's character imparts insights to the readers as well, for he is a boy who has physical differences but he too, longs for a true friend who would support him even in the toughest of situations and accompany him not out of pity but because of his pure heart. The plot also features Auggie's resilience, antagonists shaped by familial biases, and friends with redemption arcs and deeper loyalties; making this book a trove of profound empathy.

Why is it worth reading: Wonder is a story which creates a realistic modern school environment and also presents the personal motivations of each child. The story is also relevant to the lives of many students, who feel prejudiced and go through the challenges of social interactions, especially those facing special challenges. Wonder stands out because it is backed by the author's real-life encounter; its gripping plot truly makes it a crackling page-turner.

Iconic quote: "It's not enough to be friendly. You've to be a friend."

Rating: 5/5

Review by: Ananshi Maheshwari, AIS Gur 46, IX I

