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United Service Institution of India

Artificial Intelligence and Governance

Shri Abhay Tripathi Memorial Lecture by

Shri S Krishnan, IAS, Secretary
Ministry of Electronics and
Information Technology







About the Occasional Paper

The Shri Abhay Tripathi Memorial Lecture, delivered by Shri S Krishnan, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, on 21 July 2025 at the United Service Institution of India, examined the dual role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India's governance landscape: as an enabler of improved public services and as a domain requiring robust regulation. Shri S Krishnan outlined the pillars of India's AI strategy under the IndiaAI Mission, including compute infrastructure, foundational models, curated datasets, AI skills development, startup enablement, and ethical deployment. He stressed AI's transformative role in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, financial inclusion, and grievance redressal, where it enhances scale, efficiency, and inclusivity. At the same time, he highlighted concerns around data privacy, copyright, misinformation, and deepfakes, advocating a techno-legal regulatory framework. Drawing parallels with governance traditions such as the Ryotwari system, Shri Krishnan emphasised the enduring values accountability, accessibility, and responsiveness. He argued that AI, if harnessed responsibly, can democratise opportunities and accelerate India's ambition of becoming a developed nation by 2047. The lecture concluded with the call for India to shape global AI governance, balancing innovation with ethical safeguards, and positioning AI as a force for inclusive national development.

Shri Abhay Tripathi Memorial Lecture

Shri Abhay Tripathi Memorial Lecture was instituted by his family to honour his legacy of public service, policy innovation, and commitment to inclusive development. Designed as a platform for distinguished voices to address key socio-economic and governance challenges, the lecture series began in 2022. The inaugural lecture was delivered by Shri Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, at the Dr. Marri Channa Reddy Human Resource Development Institute of Telangana in Hyderabad, where he spoke on Economic Reforms: Yesterday, Today, and India @75', reflecting, reflecting on India's reform journey and the way forward. The second lecture, delivered by Telangana's Minister for Information Technology and Industries, Shri K.T. Rama Rao, explored the theme 'Challenges of Being a Young State', focusing on the administrative and development hurdles faced by newly formed states such as Telangana.

Building on this initiative, the family of Shri Abhay Tripathi signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Service Institution of India (USI) on 06 Jan 2025 to establish the Shri Abhay Tripathi Chair of Excellence. This Chair aims to promote cutting-edge research and dialogue on governance, technology, and public policy, aligning with Shri Tripathi's vision of strategic and inclusive nation-building. Under its mandate, the Chair will host the annual Memorial Lecture on every 21 July—his birth

anniversary—and undertake one major research project each year. For 2025, the lecture focused on 'AI and Governance', while the research project will explore 'Transforming Governance Using AI: A Strategic Framework for Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas'. Through these efforts, the Chair of Excellence will serve as a lasting platform for thought leadership and actionable policy research.

A Journey Through the Life of Shri Abhay Tripathi



Shri Abhay Tripathi was born in 1961 in Patna, Bihar. A committed civil servant and strategic thinker, he held a postgraduate degree in History and an M Phil in National Security and Strategic Studies. An officer of the 1986 batch of the Indian Administrative Service, he was allotted to the Andhra Pradesh cadre. Over a distinguished career spanning more than three decades, Shri Abhay Tripathi left an indelible mark on India's administrative and strategic landscape.

His early postings reflected steady progression through critical domains of governance. After training, he began as Sub-Collector (Sep 1988 to Sep 1990), followed by Vice Chairperson, Urban Development (Sep 1990 to Aug 1991). He subsequently served as Joint Collector (Aug 1991 to Feb 1993) and Deputy Commissioner, Finance and Revenue (Jun 1993 to Dec 1994), before taking up the role

of Joint Secretary in the finance sector (Jun 1995 to Jul 1996)

From Jul 1996 to Apr 1998, he was District Collector and Magistrate of Nizamabad, where his people-centric governance earned wide respect. Deputed to the central government, he served in the Ministry of Finance and Company Affairs as Deputy Secretary (Apr 1998 to Jul 2000) and Director till 2003, playing a key role in shaping fiscal policy and in the introduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT) regime in India, which brought uniformity and structure to indirect taxation.

Between 2003 and 2012, he held senior positions at Andhra Pradesh Bhavan, New Delhi, including Additional Commissioner, Joint Secretary (2003–2011), and Officer on Special Duty with the rank of Additional Secretary (2011 to 2012) to the Minister, where his experience and diplomatic skills made him a highly effective liaison officer between the state and central governments. (2003 to 2011).

In Aug 2012, Shri Abhay Tripathi transitioned into a significant role at the apex of India's strategic education framework—the National Defence College (NDC) under the Ministry of Defence. Serving first as Senior Directing Staff (Joint Secretary level) from 31 Aug 2012 to 14 July 2016, his position was upgraded in recognition of his capabilities and the importance of the role. From 15 July 2016 to 30 Nov 2019, he continued as Senior Directing Staff at the Additional Secretary level, where he mentored

senior civil, military, and foreign service officers. His tenure at NDC symbolised the fusion of civil service and strategic defence thinking.

In 2019, he was appointed as the Principal Resident Commissioner of Andhra Pradesh Bhavan, New Delhi—a prestigious post where he served as the face of the Andhra Pradesh government in the national capital, coordinating key administrative and intergovernmental functions with precision and poise.

Shri Abhay Tripathi's life exemplified the ideals of service, intellect, and dedication. A man of calm demeanour and deep insight, he was admired by peers and juniors alike for his clarity of thought, strategic acumen, and commitment to national service. His untimely demise in 2021 marked the loss of a towering figure in India's administrative and strategic community.

Opening Remarks by Director General, USI



Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM**, Director General USI, reflected on the inspiring journey of Shri Abhay Tripathi—a civil servant of rare integrity, vision, and intellect. A man who seamlessly bridged the worlds of administration and strategy, Shri Tripathi exemplified what it meant to be a scholar-practitioner. His tenure in the Indian Administrative Service was marked by quiet excellence and deep-rooted dedication to national interest.

He recounted Shri Tripathi's invaluable role in shaping public policy, especially during his time at the Ministry of Finance and Company Affairs, where he was instrumental in the groundwork for the VAT regime — a reform that transformed India's taxation framework. His leadership roles at Andhra Pradesh Bhavan, both as Additional Commissioner and Principal Resident Commissioner, reflected his meticulous attention to protocol, governance, and intergovernmental coordination.

A turning point in his journey came with his appointment to the NDC, where he served as Senior Directing Staff—first at the Joint Secretary level and later elevated to Additional Secretary level. His presence at NDC brought a unique civil service perspective to strategic and security discourse. As a mentor and guide to senior officers across military and civilian domains, he was known not only for his clarity of thought but also for his warmth, humility, and deep intellectual curiosity.

He fondly recalled Shri Abhay Tripathi's commitment to grooming the next generation of strategic leaders. His calm demeanour, combined with sharp analytical insight, made him a much-admired figure at the college. He brought to the classroom not just theory but lived experience—the essence of what makes strategic thinking relevant.

Drawing from personal interactions and reflections shared by colleagues, Major General BK Sharma noted that Shri Abhay Tripathi belonged to that rare cadre of officers who carried their responsibilities admirably but never casually. His work reflected a deep understanding of

India's strategic imperatives, both domestic and external. Even after leaving NDC, his contributions continued to influence civil-military synergy and public governance.

The Director General, USI concluded by stating that the legacy of Shri Abhay Tripathi is not just preserved in institutional memory but lives on in the values he stood for—commitment, intellect, and nation-first service. As the gathering paused to honour his memory, his life stood as a testament to the quiet dignity of public service and the power of ideas anchored in purpose.

Introductory Remarks by Smt Richa Mishra Tripathi



Smt Richa Mishra Tripathi, wife of Shri Abhay Tripathi extended a heartfelt welcome to all those present, expressing her deep gratitude to the USI and Major General BK Sharma for their collaborative efforts in organising the Abhay Tripathi Memorial Lecture. She especially acknowledged the presence of Shri S Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY), who was invited to address the first memorial lecture under the newly instituted chair, and the third lecture in the series overall. She remarked that Shri S Krishnan was not only a distinguished policymaker at the forefront of India's evolving digital governance, but also

someone who had personally known and respected Shri Abhay Tripathi.

Smt Richa Mishra Tripathi then offered insight into the motivation behind initiating this lecture series. She shared that the fundamental intent was to foster healthy discussions on issues that tangibly affect people's lives, particularly within the sphere of economics and governance. In her words, "Economics is all about numbers, and one has to work strategically to achieve the targets". This philosophy was central to Shri Tripathi's work and vision and will continue to shape the themes under the Chair established in his honour.

Turning her thoughts to contemporary developments, Smt Richa Tripathi reflected on the growing influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Citing popular tools such as ChatGPT and the words of Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer of Google, she observed that while AI has remarkable potential to augment human capabilities, it also raises questions that merit serious reflection. She candidly expressed her personal concerns about AI's role in governance and its implications for a country like India-a nation rich in intellectual capital but grounded in human-centric challenges. She posed thoughtprovoking questions on the boundaries between technological empowerment and human reasoning, asking: When AI begins to think for humans entirely, what becomes of human agency? In a democracy driven by

deliberation and diversity, what is the role we are really delegating to AI?

In conclusion, Smt Richa Mishra Tripathi expressed her hope that this lecture would not only offer insight but also provoke meaningful dialogue on the pressing intersection of technology, economics, and governance—precisely the kind of conversation her late husband sought to encourage in public discourse. She thanked all attendees for their presence and wished them an engaging and thoughtful session.

Special Address by Shri S Krishnan, IAS, Secretary, MeiTY

Artificial Intelligence and Governance



The special address, by Shri S Krishnan at the Shri Abhay Tripathi Memorial Lecture held at the USI on 21 Jul 2025, highlighted the dual dimensions of AI in the contemporary Indian context: the use of AI for enhancing governance and the imperative of governing AI responsibly. The lecture provided a historical, institutional, and policy-oriented analysis of how India's governance landscape has evolved to integrate digital technologies and how AI is emerging as a cross-cutting enabler across sectors. The lecture outlines the strategic pillars of India's AI

framework: building compute infrastructure, developing foundational and sectoral models, curating open datasets, fostering inclusive skills development, and ensuring ethical deployment. Shri S Krishnan also addresses concerns around AI misuse, such as data privacy, copyright, misinformation, and deepfakes, proposing a techno-legal approach to regulation, with illustrative case studies from agriculture, health, financial inclusion, and grievance redressal, presenting AI not as a disruptive threat, but as a catalyst for inclusive development and improved state capacity. India's comparative advantage in talent, digital infrastructure, and innovation is identified as the foundation for its leap into the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Drawing inspiration from the legacy of Shri Abhay Tripathi, a distinguished civil servant, the speaker grounded the discussion in the foundational values of public service—accessibility, responsiveness, and inclusion. provides a fitting backdrop to the discussion on AI, a technology poised to redefine public administration and state-society relations in the 21st Century. The address explored India's strategic direction under the IndiaAI Mission, elaborating on its seven pillars, ranging from compute infrastructure and data platforms to foundational model development and AI ethics. He came out with an affirmation that AI must serve as a democratizing force, and if leveraged responsibly, it will accelerate India's

ambition to become a developed and inclusive nation by 2047.

Shri S Krishnan noted that holding the lecture at the USI was particularly appropriate, as it symbolised the coming together of different services and arms of government to work in coordination. This observation effectively set the stage for the broader discussion that followed—one focused on exploring the dual role of AI as both a tool and a domain for transforming governance.

Historical Context: Governance Traditions and the Ryotwari System

He began with a deep dive into the administrative legacy of colonial India, specifically the Ryotwari system instituted in regions such as Rayalaseema. This system, pioneered by British officers such as Sir Thomas Munro and Colonel Alexander Read, established a direct interface between the state and cultivators, ensuring that the ryot, or farmer, had secure access to land, justice, and grievance redressal. Shri S Krishnan situated this in the context of responsive governance, noting that "The state having replaced the monarchies of the yesteryear had to be more responsive to what the ryots needed." The emphasis was not just on tax collection but on ensuring the well-being of citizens. He argued that the values enshrined in the system—accountability, accessibility, Rvotwari responsiveness-should guide India's approach to AIdriven governance.

This philosophy, he added, continues in the culture of early morning grievance hearings by district collectors and sub-collectors in the southern states, demonstrating how public-facing governance traditions can be amplified through AI.

AI as a Governance Enabler

AI's role in governance is increasingly visible across sectors in India. Shri S Krishnan highlighted several areas where AI has enhanced the efficiency, scale, and inclusivity of public service delivery. In healthcare, AI-powered telemedicine platforms now enable over 10 million underserved citizens to access remote diagnostics and consultations. Machine learning is used to identify tuberculosis in chest X-rays and screening for diabetic eye conditions, significantly improving diagnostic speed and accuracy.

In agriculture, precision farming technologies enabled by AI have led to yield improvements of nearly 20 per cent, especially in regions where water and nutrient management are critical. In the realm of citizen services, AI has improved grievance redressal times on platforms such as Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System by more than 25 per cent leading to a more accountable bureaucracy. The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation chatbot, powered by AI, handles over 10 million queries a day, showcasing how AI can enhance scalability and customer service. In

financial services, AI-driven credit scoring, based on Unified Payments Interface and Goods and Services Tax transaction data, is helping underserved micro-enterprises gain access to formal credit, reducing the cost and risk of lending. Shri S Krishnan emphasized that AI enables not only smarter governance but also more inclusive policy design by allowing for data-driven decision-making that doesn't overlook marginalized voices.

The IndiaAI Mission: A National Strategy for AI

Launched in 2024, the IndiaAI Mission represents a watershed moment in India's digital policy landscape—a concerted attempt to build sovereign capacity, democratize access to AI resources, and project India as a global standard-setter in responsible AI. As Shri Krishnan articulated, the Mission is structured around seven strategic pillars, each addressing critical dimensions of the AI ecosystem: infrastructure, innovation, skills, data, application, safety, and entrepreneurship.

The first pillar pertains to compute infrastructure, arguably the bedrock of any serious national AI effort. Recognizing the bottleneck posed by limited access to high-performance computer resources, the Government has aggregated a pool of over 34,000 Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) through public-private partnerships. This includes an innovative model of compute-as-a-service, which will allow researchers, startups, and government bodies to access GPU time through a unified, cloud-based

platform. Additionally, a sovereign compute cluster is being developed for sensitive sectors such as national security, defence, and strategic research, ensuring that compute capacity is not hostage to geopolitical vulnerabilities.

The second pillar focuses on the development of foundational and domain-specific AI models, with a strong emphasis on multilingualism and inclusivity. Shri S Krishnan emphasised the strategic importance of creating large language models that reflect Indian languages, dialects, and cultural contexts. The first four government-supported consortia, comprising academic institutions, startups, and technology firms, have already been selected to build these foundational models. These efforts are designed not to compete with global models such as ChatGPT or Gemini, but to localize AI tools for use in India's social, legal, and economic contexts.

The third pillar, AI Kosh, is a government-led initiative to build an open-access, curated repository of datasets. As of early 2025, over 500 machine-readable datasets—spanning sectors such as health, agriculture, finance, and public services—have been uploaded, cleaned, and annotated. These datasets are intended not only to train AI models but also to promote transparency, reproducibility, and academic research. The data governance framework accompanying AI Kosh places a premium on privacy preservation, consent management,

and bias mitigation, ensuring that AI is trained on ethical and representative data.

The fourth pillar, application development, shifts focus from research to implementation. Through challenge-based grants, the Mission incentivizes the development of AI solutions for high-impact areas—particularly in public service delivery. Specific problem statements have been circulated by ministries and departments, inviting academia and industry to collaborate on deployable prototypes. Whether it's using AI for early crop disease detection, personalized learning in schools, or optimizing logistics for public distribution systems, the intent is clear: AI must move from laboratory to locality.

The fifth pillar, AI FutureSkills, is a recognition that human capital is as important as computational power. The FutureSkills program aims to train over 5,00,000 individuals—ranging from school students and mid-career professionals to government officials—in AI literacy and deployment. Importantly, Shri S Krishnan underscored the need to move beyond computer science departments: "AI needs to be taught not just in computer science... but across the board. This includes public health workers, agricultural extension officers, and even legal professionals who will increasingly interact with AI-assisted tools".

The sixth pillar is devoted to startup ecosystem enablement. Acknowledging that the most path-breaking AI innovations—globally and in India—have come from

startups rather than legacy firms, the mission provides targeted support in the form of grants, accelerator programs, testing infrastructure, and mentorship. Special attention is given to Tier-II and Tier-III city entrepreneurs, who often face disproportionate barriers to funding and market access.

Finally, the seventh pillar focuses on safe and trusted AI, a domain Shri S Krishnan described as 'Nonnegotiable'. This includes developing model evaluation protocols, watermarking generative content, mandating disclosures for AI-assisted decisions, and building frameworks for explainability and accountability. India's proposed approach blends technical safeguards with legal enforceability—a techno-legal model designed to future-proof the regulatory ecosystem.

Together, these seven pillars form the foundation of a uniquely Indian approach to AI governance—one that prioritizes sovereignty, inclusion, and public value over mere commercial competitiveness. The Mission is not simply about catching up with the AI race but about redefining the track itself, grounded in India's constitutional values and developmental priorities.

Building Ethical and Accountable AI Systems

Shri S Krishnan addressed the dual-use nature of AI, stressing the need for robust governance frameworks. He called for a balanced, techno-legal approach that enables

innovation while mitigating harms. 'Technology can go in any direction', he said, "But I think you have to balance between the risk of what can happen and all the benefits that can come out". At the heart of this effort is the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, which seeks to secure user data and uphold privacy in AI ecosystems. India is also developing standards for watermarking and auditing AI-generated content to combat misinformation and deepfakes.

Shri S Krishnan pointed to ongoing global debates around content ownership, particularly the use of copyrighted material to train AI models. India, he noted, is advocating for equitable sharing of benefits between content creators and model developers. Harmonization of AI regulation with existing laws such as the Consumer Protection Act, the Information Technology Act, and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (Indian Justice Code) reflects India's intent to embed AI oversight within a broader rule-of-law framework.

International Engagement and Global Leadership

India is also emerging as a key voice in shaping global AI norms. From the inaugural AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park to summits in Seoul and Paris, India has emphasized ethical innovation, responsible deployment, and the importance of development-oriented application. In 2025, India will host the AI for Impact Summit in New Delhi, focusing on how AI can tangibly improve lives. As Shri S

Krishnan put it, "We are much more concerned now that the rubber hits the road literally and we realize what good has come out of it." India's engagement is geared toward ensuring that global AI governance is not restricted to safety concerns but also addresses access, equity, and sustainable development.

Vision for the Future

Shri S Krishnan underscored the urgency of leveraging AI for national development. He noted that while other countries may worry about AI-induced job losses, India's low share of white-collar employment and large Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics talent pool position it to benefit from the deployment side of AI. He called for integrating AI into the broader national development strategy, arguing that it could help India achieve its ambition of becoming a developed nation by 2047. "If India is to become a Viksit Bharat by 2047, we must grow rich before we grow old. And AI offers us that leap". The future, he emphasized, lies in inclusive, transparent, and locally rooted AI solutions that empower citizens, improve public services, and drive economic growth.

Conclusion

The trajectory of AI in India is not merely a technological evolution—it is a governance imperative, a civilizational inflection point, and a strategic national choice. As

highlighted in this comprehensive exploration of Shri S Krishnan's lecture, the convergence of AI and governance demands both visionary policy frameworks and ethically grounded execution. The IndiaAI Mission exemplifies the state's ambition to lead not only in technological innovation but also in establishing normative standards for responsible AI deployment. India's approach, as outlined by Shri Krishnan, is one of pragmatic optimism—recognizing both the immense possibilities of AI in transforming public administration and the concurrent necessity of mitigating risks through robust regulatory frameworks. AI is positioned not as a disruptor to be feared, but as a transformative enabler that can bridge longstanding deficits in service delivery, institutional responsiveness, and policy precision.

The parallels drawn between historical governance models such as the Ryotwari system and contemporary AI-enabled governance underscore a deep civilizational continuity: the primacy of the citizen in the state's administrative imagination. In doing so, Shri S Krishnan reminds that technology, no matter how advanced, must ultimately serve the human condition and democratic ethos.

In positioning India as both a laboratory and leader for inclusive AI governance, this vision challenges the prevailing North-South divide in digital policymaking. By embedding AI into development strategies—across healthcare, education, agriculture, and financial inclusion— India is crafting a model that is contextually relevant and globally resonant. Furthermore, by anchoring its digital strategies in public-good infrastructure, federated data governance, and open innovation ecosystems, India sets a template for emerging economies worldwide.

While concluding, he emphasised that the future of AI governance in India will depend not merely on technological advancement, but on the ethical, legal, and institutional choices made today. With a solid foundation laid by initiatives such as the IndiaAI Mission, and guided by the leadership of committed policymakers, India is well-positioned to turn AI from a buzzword into a meaningful force for nation-building—grounded in equity, inclusion, and democratic values in the digital era.

Closing Remarks by Director, Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation



Maj Gen RS Yadav, VSM (Retd), Director, Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation extended sincere thanks, on behalf of the Director General USI, to Shri S Krishnan, Secretary, MeITY, for his insightful and thought-provoking exposition on the topic. He also expressed his heartfelt appreciation to Shri Abhay Tripathi's family, acknowledging their generous initiative to institute the Abhay Tripathi Memorial Chair, which provided the platform for this meaningful inaugural lecture and dialogue.

Speaking directly to the large student contingent in attendance, he highlighted a critical observation: India is renowned for its intellectual capital, and its demographic dividend is often cited as a key driver of the country's future growth. He urged the students to remain curious, responsible, and thoughtful in their use of emerging technologies — particularly AI. "Use AI intelligently and responsibly," he advised, "but never let it replace the activity of your own mind."

He offered a word of caution—that while AI is undoubtedly a powerful tool, it should serve as an enabler rather than a crutch. The vitality of human cognition, creativity, and ethical judgement must remain central, especially for those who will shape the nation's strategic and technological future.

Maj Gen RS Yadav then shifted focus to the broader challenge of national security. Echoing points made by earlier speakers, he emphasized that achieving India's developmental goals, particularly Vision 2047, would require a unified and mission-driven approach to national defence and strategic planning.

Expanding on this thought, he called for a comprehensive and integrated strategy that encompasses all dimensions of Comprehensive National Power—military, economic, technological, informational, and more. He stressed that without synergy across sectors, India's preparedness to respond to future threats would remain

constrained. "If we can begin integrating these strands in a mission mode," he stated, "we will be better placed to face the security challenges of the future."

In conclusion, Maj Gen RS Yadav once again thanked the Secretary, the Tripathi family, and all attendees for making the occasion a meaningful and reflective one. He called upon everyone to carry forward the spirit of the memorial lecture — rooted in service, intellect, and national purpose.

Photo Gallery























About the USI

The United Service Institution (USI) of India was founded in 1870 by a soldier scholar, Colonel (later Major General) Sir Charles MacGregor 'For the furtherance of interest and knowledge in the Art, Science and Literature of National Security in general and Defence Services, in particular'. It commenced publishing its Journal in 1871. The USI also publishes reports of its members and research scholars as books, monographs, and occasional papers (pertaining to security matters). The present Director General is Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM** (Retd).

Profile of Speaker



Shri S Krishnan is Secretary, MeitY, Government of India. A senior officer of the IAS, he has served in key roles in the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Ministry of Finance. He currently leads MeitY's strategic initiatives in AI and emerging technologies, including the IndiaAI Mission.

About the Compilers



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