QUEST ALLIANCE

By the Young For the Young Of the Young

A care-centric code for better AI futures

To better AI futures...

As leaders across the globe race towards AI dominance, we, the young people of India, want them to pause and think: given that we will inherit an AI-first world, shouldn't we be a critical part of building the nation's AI Futures?

The dream of becoming an AI-first Viksit Bharat@2047 will be brought to life by us. We will be the ones to build it, followed by future generations. Piece by piece.

The workers in the AI supply chain? That's us. Those at the receiving end of AI-led decisions? Also, us. And yet, we are not included in the decisions shaping India's AI vision. Within the discourse of national development, we cannot be 'AI-first' without due consideration for all of our citizens.
The current, unbridled hype around AI has put Generative AI platforms in the hands of every young person. Governments and private companies are aggressively pushing for its adoption across different sectors. AI is already becoming a part of our everyday lives, but are the young empowered enough to understand it? To critically engage with it? In reality, we haven't yet opened the hood.

When young people think of AI today, it rarely goes beyond conversational chatbots like ChatGPT. Most AI awareness initiatives are presently limited to the youth in cities and affluent communities. Basic, preliminary understanding of AI is currently accessible only to this section of the society among the youth. Even the nature of its use is presently confined to the completion of assignments or for quick-response led tasks. Our knowledge of AI remains superficial at best. We don't know what makes it work, what resources, materials, or data go into its making. Decisions about AI are being made behind closed doors; decisions that will shape our lives and our collective futures.

We are expected to jump on to the bandwagon with no critical considerations, and simply, unquestioningly accept the changes that these technology models will bring to our realities. We are expected to reskill, upskill, find ways to make ourselves "relevant", and neatly fit into a vision for a future created by someone else.

“Won’t the current trajectory toward becoming AI-first amplify the existing inequalities faced by citizens in India?”

India remains one of the most unequal countries when it comes to addressing fundamental human needs - be it education, healthcare, or a decent standard of living. The impetus on adopting a new technology at such a rapid pace will inadvertently result in deepening the inequalities that already exist. The fact is that the majority of the country is still not digitally literate; there are still those who cannot do simple tasks using a computer or smart devices. Even so, AI is being brought into the mix.

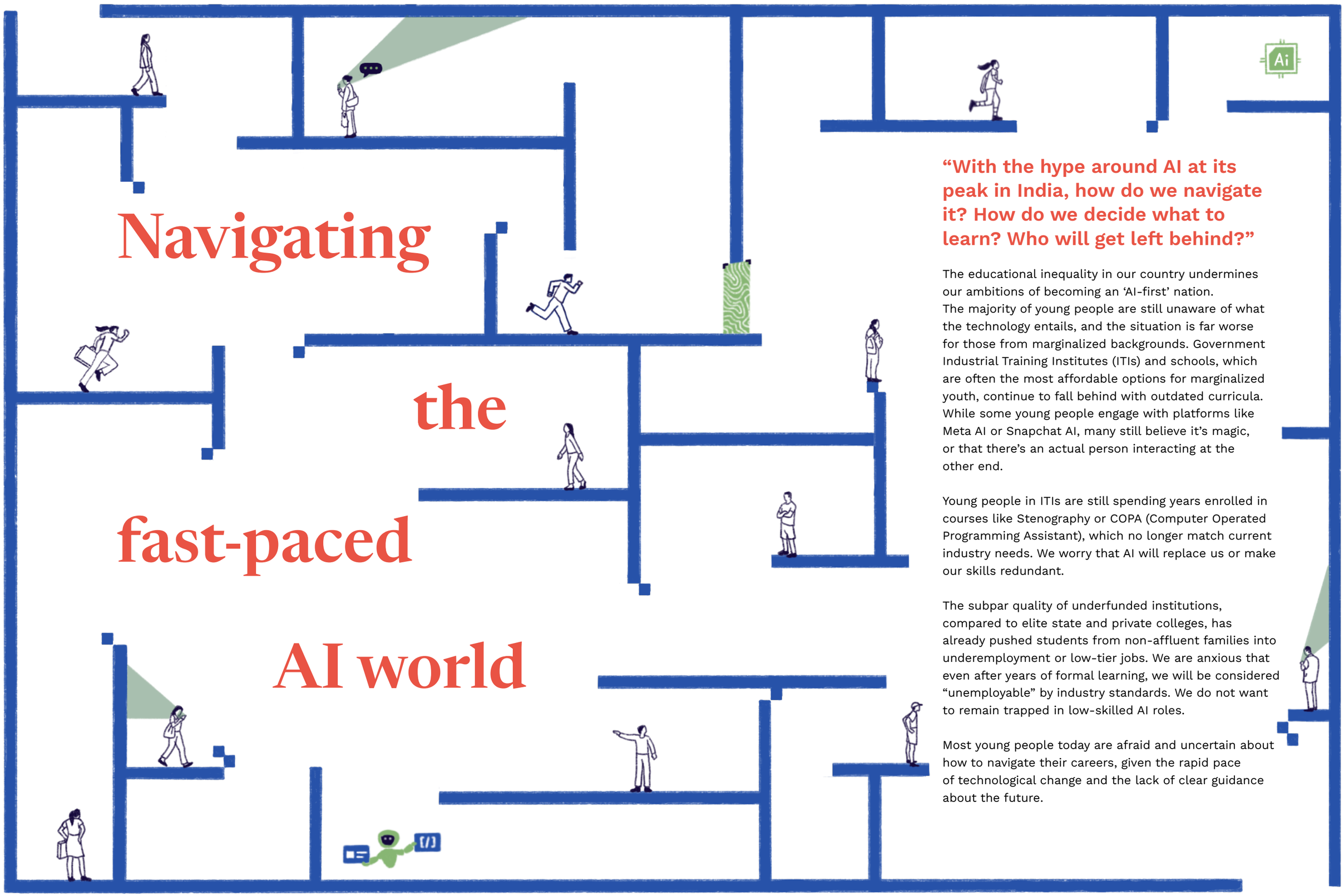
In light of this, the proliferation of AI is creating a population that is uncritically consuming whatever is fed to them. This fuels friction in society too. AI is fast becoming a tool to amplify hatred and misinformation against vulnerable groups.

If these trends persist, will we truly be able to achieve the dream of a Viksit Bharat?

We refuse to be limited to being passive consumers of AI! We want a say in how AI will shape our current and future lives. We are proposing a reversal of priorities, focusing on care, in favour of building a Viksit Bharat with a human, environment and labour-centric approach.

We call upon the governments, companies, non-profit organizations, researchers/scholars and anyone with decision-making powers to engage with us, and make us a part of this journey!

Navigating the fast-paced AI world



“With the hype around AI at its peak in India, how do we navigate it? How do we decide what to learn? Who will get left behind?”

The educational inequality in our country undermines our ambitions of becoming an ‘AI-first’ nation. The majority of young people are still unaware of what the technology entails, and the situation is far worse for those from marginalized backgrounds. Government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and schools, which are often the most affordable options for marginalized youth, continue to fall behind with outdated curricula. While some young people engage with platforms like Meta AI or Snapchat AI, many still believe it’s magic, or that there’s an actual person interacting at the other end.

Young people in ITIs are still spending years enrolled in courses like Stenography or COPA (Computer Operated Programming Assistant), which no longer match current industry needs. We worry that AI will replace us or make our skills redundant.

The subpar quality of underfunded institutions, compared to elite state and private colleges, has already pushed students from non-affluent families into underemployment or low-tier jobs. We are anxious that even after years of formal learning, we will be considered “unemployable” by industry standards. We do not want to remain trapped in low-skilled AI roles.

Most young people today are afraid and uncertain about how to navigate their careers, given the rapid pace of technological change and the lack of clear guidance about the future.

Innovation, but at what cost?

“If Artificial General Intelligence becomes a reality, we will stop thinking, we will lose all the jobs. Why are we even building it then?”

If tech companies continue their pursuit of AGI and eventually succeed, humans might not have to think at all in the future. We feel that this could make people lazy and over-reliant on machines. Our ability to think critically is already diminishing, with increasing cognitive offloading to AI tools.

We have begun to rely on AI to make decisions for us - where does it end? Are we okay to be in the passenger seat while technology and tech giants make decisions for us? We are also concerned that such technology could become a threat to humanity itself; that humans, as we know them, may cease to exist. Even now, AI is replacing many jobs: translators, customer service executives, coders, graphic designers, web developers, call centre operators, and more.

Should tech companies even aspire to build AGI in the name of innovation, when people are worried that it could harm society and diminish our quality of life?

Tech companies globally are investing heavily in AI, promising better AI-equipped technologies across all possible sectors. But the rush to become global leaders in AI is encouraging an innovation-at-all-costs approach, and does not consider the negative impacts of technology.

“Human welfare should be a greater priority than making profits!”

We fear that the AI technologies that are helpful would only be accessible to the privileged. People who own AI companies will be able to increase their profit margins. But what about those who will not be able to access these expensive technologies, from which they might have stood to gain considerably?

“Social media is using all our personal details and pictures. What then happens to the privacy of our data?”

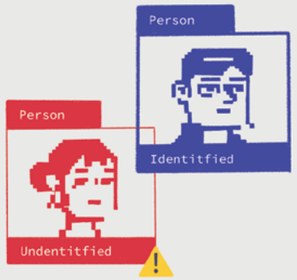
Social media has penetrated our lives so deeply that almost all our interactions, life updates, leisure, and even learning are slowly moving to these platforms. We share data - pictures, locations, interests, with these companies every day. But we are also increasingly worried about losing our privacy. We don’t know how these companies are collecting, storing, and using our data.

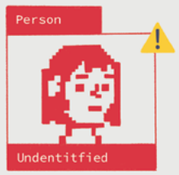
Many tech companies now offer advanced tools for free, and people use the AI models built into them without questioning the intentions behind such generosity. Nothing is ever truly free; we always pay in some way, and in this case, it’s with our data. Most people don’t realize how valuable their data is, where it goes, or how it might affect their lives in the future. Even those who are aware and concerned about data privacy are not being heard by those in power.

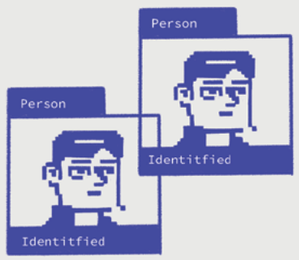
How will we know which parts of our lives have already been turned into data? How will we know what exactly our data  is being used for? How can we rely on AI models trained on skewed or biased datasets? What happens  when something goes wrong? Who will be accountable for the decisions  made by these AI systems?

All this AI hype - how well does it work?

“Bias exists at every level. When humans, with all our intellect struggle to overcome it, can a human-made system like AI ever be truly bias-free? Will it be as biased as humans or will it be worse?”



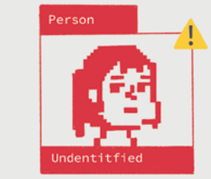




AI, as a field, is expanding into multiple sectors at a rapid pace, even though we know that AI can hallucinate, make mistakes, and produce biased outcomes. The output from many of its models is not inherently trustworthy.

We realize that the biases in AI systems exist because they are being built by a few people from specific ethnicities, cultures, or countries who may be oblivious to other lived realities. This is why ChatGPT gives similar kinds of responses regardless of who asks the question. Diving deeper into the phenomenon of AI bias, we were disturbed to learn that, based on historical data, AI can assume “Black people tend to commit more crimes” or that “poor people are less educated.” From the point of view of female students, we were especially troubled to find that AI can assume “men are more capable and women are weak.” This has raised doubts about how far we can trust AI.

If these models, even at the early stages of development, are being built this way, how can we trust any AI-led decisions? How will we know if these decisions are unbiased, or whether they will remain objective in the future?



Large Language Models (LLMs) often present incorrect information as facts. We have seen how ChatGPT can misrepresent cultural identities or provide biased information.

AI will inevitably learn about caste, religion, or family background through historical patterns, judging people based on their occupation or economic status. It could even wrongfully criminalize someone or predict a biased future. These models might end up thinking the same prejudiced thoughts that a human would. **If such data continues to feed AI models, it will only reinforce the caste and social boundaries that have existed in our society for centuries.** Indian society as it stands, is biased on multiple levels - gender, caste, language, color, religion, and culture, making true equality elusive and extremely difficult to achieve.

Predictive AI is already being used to make decisions for students, farmers, doctors, banks, and the police, often with harmful effects on people’s lives. We are rushing to deploy AI across sectors without setting up proper guardrails or reflecting on its long-term impact. We are hearing of multiple instances of AI being misused in ways that make it difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is fake.[1][2][3][4] Who’s to say that AI-generated decisions will be fair or unbiased, let alone trust-worthy?

If AI companies remain driven purely by profit and self-interest, they will ignore the social harms their technologies can cause. Allowing them to innovate without restrictions invites risks to both the people and the planet.

Instead of subscribing to an innovation-at-all-costs mindset, we want India to embrace emerging technologies through a care-centric approach, ensuring that we build ethical and equitable futures for everyone.

[1] Amnesty International. (2024). Amnesty International raises alarm over AI-driven discrimination in Danish welfare system. https://dig.watch/updates/amnesty-international-raises-alarm-over-ai-driven-discrimination-in-danish-welfare-system

[2] Heaven, W. D. (2021). Predictive policing is still racist. MIT Technology Review. https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/02/05/1017560/predictive-policing-racist-algorithmic-bias-data-crime-predpol/

[3] Naffi, N. (2025). Deepfakes and the crisis of knowing. UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/deepfakes-and-crisis-knowing

[4] Marwala, T. S. (2025). The Algorithmic Problem in Artificial Intelligence Governance. United Nations University. https://unu.edu/article/algorithmic-problem-artificial-intelligence-governance

Opening the hood

Uncovering the supply chain

“We are talking so much about the future of AI, but what about the people who are a part of creating this future? Shouldn’t their life be prioritized?”

The discourse around AI jobs focuses on these technologies creating new jobs that don’t yet exist, and is set in a distant future. However, AI models are creating, replacing or changing jobs at this very moment. This development is not under the critical scrutiny it deserves. We cannot just think about a grand future. We also need to think about the present - the people who are building AI today, the labour involved, and the wages they are being paid.

“People such as data labellers or miners play very important roles in the AI supply chain, yet their incomes are low.”

AI is beyond code. There is a long, complex supply chain behind it, spread across the globe, that remains mostly invisible and unacknowledged.

The labour distribution within this global AI supply chain is deeply unequal. Any kind of work that requires extensive human effort, physical endurance, or causes mental distress is being outsourced to countries in the Global South. Meanwhile, powerful and developed nations engage in tasks that are better paid, and less physically demanding. All the hard work that sustains AI is being imposed on poorer regions like Africa and India. If this continues, the rich will only become richer, and the poor will become poorer.

This supply chain includes countless invisible workers who operate in dire conditions without adequate protection from harm by their governments or technology companies that employ them. For instance, data labelling (integral to the AI supply chain), exposes workers to extreme, violent, and graphic content, leading to serious mental health challenges.

In a Viksit Bharat, we must prioritize those who enable the work behind AI, and recognize the value of labour across the entire supply chain. We must adopt a **labour-first approach, not a technology-first one.**

India needs to further invest in developing research capacity and infrastructure within the country, so that we are not overly dependent on others. Even when partnerships exist globally, we must ensure that **labour rights, fair wages, and worker safety** are never compromised at any point within the supply chain.

"Data scientists will probably be from the US or have degrees from one of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), but data labellers may come from ITIs - people like us."

If data is not labelled properly, the AI built with that data will inevitably be faulty. By this logic, data labellers should be paid well, which is not the case. These workers are mostly hired as contractual labourers, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. They are paid minimum wages despite the work requiring significant skill. With limited opportunities at their disposal, people from vulnerable backgrounds feel compelled to take up such jobs.

A similar situation exists in mining, which forms the foundation of AI infrastructure. In countries like Congo, people are forced to work without protective gear or safety measures, and many miners are young children. As India's AI Mission plans to expand the mining sector to foster self-reliance in AI, we worry that our situation could mirror that of Congo. Since India is still a developing country, helpless adults and children in rural areas might be forced into such hazardous work. Practices like manual scavenging are still a lived reality for some in our country, where people from marginalized communities continue to work without the necessary protection and safeguards. We fear that mining for AI could follow a similar exploitative path, if left unchecked.

These workers would have no means to migrate elsewhere in search of better jobs. Mining would also result in severe dust and water pollution, causing long-term environmental damage. Assuming that the government enforces the requisite regulations, the dual risks of corruption and poor implementation will still remain.

We worry that we will become these invisible workers in the future.

If the workers and builders behind AI development are not accorded the dignity they deserve, they won't feel happy about the Viksit Bharat that we would have become.

The [Hidden] Environmental Costs of AI

“We are promised that building AI would lead to development and jobs, but if it’s going to deplete our water and other resources, and contribute to climate change, what is the point of even developing it? Shouldn’t we learn from our past and prioritise saving the environment?”

People in positions of power are talking about building data centers, semiconductors, and AI chips. But these data centers require massive amounts of water, electricity, and land - resources that people in Indian villages and cities already struggle to access. Our cities are barely surviving. In many parts of the country, school-going girl students walk long distances every day to fetch water for their households - a task made even harder by depleting groundwater levels. Many villages run completely dry during the summer months.

Profit-driven companies setting up data centers are motivated by their own gains, rather than by a responsibility to build sustainable and equitable AI infrastructure.

If data centres take up our land and water, where will we go?

We live in a world where water scarcity, heat, and pollution are our lived reality and yet, companies are planning to build resource-hungry AI infrastructure which will worsen the situation.

Some of us come from a village which has a large dam a mere 100 kilometres away. We still have to struggle for water during the summer months - the duration of which is only increasing because of climate change. If we build data centers in such places, what will be the impact on the communities living there?

Communities from our districts have been displaced for other projects with no proper rehabilitation or compensation given. Data centers require large swathes of land. Local communities stand to be adversely affected. They will have to face severe water shortages or be forced to leave their lands. Many are likely to be displaced, as the government is gearing to become a data centre hub in the future. Where will we go if such is the case?

With our high population density, how will we be able to fulfil the requirements of building AI infrastructure in a way that does not displace people and harm our environment?

“So much e-waste. Where is it all going?”

Constant upgrades of Graphic Processing Units (GPUs), Central Processing Units (CPUs), chips and other equipment to catch up with advancements in the field, is leading to more electronic waste (e-waste). But we do not know how all of this e-waste is disposed of. Are we aware of how this is affecting our ecology?

Hope for a better India 2047

The current challenges that we as a country are facing need to be addressed on priority. If our citizens have basic amenities like education, good healthcare, and decent livelihoods, they will be able to intentionally and critically engage, and contribute to care-centric innovation and advancements in the field of AI.

There is great scope for AI in essential sectors like healthcare, elderly care, agriculture, education and infrastructure. We are optimistic that it is a positive addition to our lives. We have the benefit of the demographic dividend - many young people are part of the working population in India. Our youth should be given the opportunity to solve India's most pressing problems. Indians understand how diverse our nation is, and deserve the chance to build AI products that will actually help the country at large.

"It is important to develop AI for the greater good. Not to compete with other nations, but to be able to address our needs; for self-reliance. Cross-sector linkages are vital to ensure exponential growth."

To address these concerns, we are putting forward the following **6-C framework** that should guide the values of AI development in India.

Care

AI development must center human dignity, wellbeing, and empathy rather than competition or profit.

Workers in the AI supply chain, especially at lower pay scales - from mining to data labelling, must be entitled to workers' rights, safety and dignity. Their work should be acknowledged as the backbone of building AI systems, and all the requisite social security benefits must be made available to them.

"Companies are big. They make a lot of money. The reason that they can make these profits is because of the workers."

A labour-first approach

The focus must be on enabling a labour-first approach rather than being technology-first. We need to prioritize those who work behind the scenes, and ensure that AI systems are built with labour well-being in mind, and not with the mindset of unbridled, unidirectional innovation.

A dedicated Labour Rights Committee for AI workers

We must ensure that companies are held accountable for exploiting the workers for their profits. A dedicated labour rights committee for AI should be created in the Labour Department to ensure accountability.

- **Gender-sensitive policies:** Women should have flexible work hours along with more priorities and opportunities. If there is a physical office, the company should provide restrooms, cabs and a comfortable work environment for women. They should also make provisions for maternity leaves.

- **Protection against job losses:** With unemployment already on the rise, AI should not be built to replace jobs. The government and companies alike should ensure that such technology is used only to enhance human skills and capabilities, and not to supersede them.

The unequal divide of AI work

We notice that all the 'good' AI work is concentrated in the United States and Europe, whereas all the grunt work (data labelling, mining, e-waste segregation) comes to countries like ours. This needs to change. All the young people of India, not just the affluent ones, should be given a fair opportunity to do 'good' AI work.

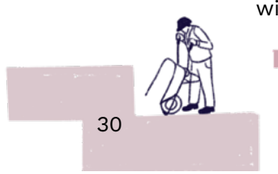
Protect the Labour Rights of Data Workers and Miners

01 Economic and Employment Rights

- The rights of data workers should be the joint responsibility of the contractors, tech companies, and the government.
- There should be fixed minimum wages with regular annual increments, ensuring a decent standard of living.
- Data workers should have opportunities for promotion based on experience to ensure they are not in a dead-end job.
- Salaries should be paid directly by the tech companies. If hiring through a contractor, the company must ensure ethical practices and monitor progress.
- Workers should receive benefits such as ESI cards (Employee State Insurance cards), insurance, pensions, and tax rebates.
- The company should support the health and education needs of their workers' families.
- Payment should be on a per-label basis rather than daily targets, thereby reducing stress, and making room for some flexibility.
- Each worker should have a written contract specifying payment terms, increments, and data security. Employees should be entitled to receive equity in the company.

02 Working Conditions and Well-being

- Mental health counselling should be mandatory for workers handling sensitive data and content. A balanced ratio which contains less sensitive data and more non-sensitive data must also be ensured.
- Schedules, pay, and workload norms should reflect the nature of content being labelled, with higher pay allocated for sensitive content labelling.
- Regular mental and physical health check-ups should be provided.
- Workers in distress should be allowed to take breaks without incurring penalties.



03 Governance, Oversight, and Accountability

- A dedicated AI labour rights committee should be established within the labour commission by the government.
- A complaint portal should allow workers to file anonymous grievances.
- The committee should monitor and analyze complaints, while the company and the contractor remain accountable for their resolution.
- Feedback and rating systems should enable employees to evaluate employers, and raise concerns which must be addressed promptly.
- The nature of work should be transparent, and workers should be informed in advance about the type of content they will label.

04 Equity, Inclusion, and Women's Rights

- Women should have flexible work timings, equal opportunities, and leadership prospects.
- Workplaces should provide safe restrooms, transportation, and a comfortable working environment.
- Paid maternity leave should be guaranteed.

05 Awareness and Empowerment

- All workers should be made aware of their labour rights and entitlements.

06 Responsible Mineral Sourcing for the AI Ecosystem

- The health and safety of mining workers should be given the highest priority.
- The working age at mining sites should be between 25 and 60 years.
- AI tools should be used to predict the health vulnerability of each worker and ensure that no one is overworked beyond their physical capacities.

Creativity

All young people should be equipped with the expertise to navigate and build AI technologies. We should be provided with the critical knowledge of not just the algorithms but also the infrastructure, resources, and data that enable them. This will empower us to move beyond being just consumers of AI, but also its creators and challengers.

Creating an ecosystem of AI awareness

Everyone should be made aware of the infrastructure and the functioning of AI tools and models. This knowledge should not be confined to those from cities and affluent communities alone, but also extend to those young people who may be disadvantaged.

Early exposure to AI awareness

School students should be taught about the fundamentals of AI, its harms, benefits etc. This must commence from middle school onwards through proactive campaigns and workshops. This exposure will help us upskill, while also enabling us to be future-ready for the sectors which work with AI. Such guidance would lay the groundwork for us to have better careers moving forward.

Critical AI literacy

A lot of young people believe that models like ChatGPT give them accurate information. They blindly place their trust in them to get support with their homework and assignments. At present, a very minuscule proportion of youth have figured out that Generative AI can also be wrong. It is imperative that young people be made aware of shortcomings of AI systems to help them make informed decisions. They should also be empowered to critically engage with AI to understand its socio-political impacts and algorithmic harms. The information shouldn't just be shared at the surface-level which helps them just use AI, rather the youth should also be made aware of the entire AI supply chain. We should open the hood and help people understand the infrastructural harms of AI as well.

Data and privacy literacy

People should know how and where their data is being used. Most people don't realize how valuable their data is, where it goes, or how it might impact their lives in the future. Young people should be made to understand the importance of data in how AI functions. The voices of those who are aware and concerned about data privacy, are not being heard by those in positions of power and influence. Privacy activists' inputs must be valued, and everyone needs to understand the nuances of data security from them. AI isn't magic. It's us who are giving our data to these models to make "magic" happen. Our data is also what's generating profits for tech companies.

Integrating AI within the existing ITI curricula

Modules on AI should be included in the traditional courses to empower us to be employable in future. AI curriculum should not just be limited to urban ITIs but also be introduced in the remotest ITIs as well. Given the rapid pace of tech advancement, mandatory curriculum updates within 2-3 years along with the addition of future-oriented courses, such as AI Auditing and AI Ethics should be factored in, at all affordable government institutions. There is a further need to introduce semiconductor manufacturing courses in colleges and ITIs so we may manufacture our own chips. A greater focus on research in electronics and semi-conductors is also warranted, as these too will generate good prospects for us in the time to come.

Equipping youth to build AI platforms that address real needs of the country

The government should seed fund AI research and development, incentivise the usage of AI, and organise small scale hackathons, in order to create a sustainable and trustworthy AI ecosystem. Educational institutions should be equipped with cutting-edge tech infrastructure to empower us to tinker, challenge and build our own AI systems. There is an imminent need to provide agency and resources such as AI awareness, seed-funds, and entrepreneurship training to the youth, so they may proactively use AI for identifying and solving their problems.

AI systems should not be built in silos without the democratic participation of the communities it is going to impact. We want them to be developed in a participatory manner to ensure that youth and community voices are heard and acted upon, every step of the way - from deciding which problem to address through AI, to labelling relevant data that train the models.

Youth and community voices in decision-making

Youth and community participation to address social issues by deploying AI selectively and thoughtfully is the need of the hour. The government should also consult youth groups to experiment and come up with new, innovative ideas to solve their uniquely local problems. Tech companies should also include end-users and young people at every step of decision-making about AI systems that will impact their lives.

Diversity and representation

To ensure the absence of bias, equal representation must be ensured (across states, ethnicity, religion and community) when data is being labelled for AI. This would train AI to understand the diversity in our people, dialects, slangs, cultures; thereby generating unbiased outputs.

Community impact

- Form tripartite committees with the government, company representatives and community members (whose lives will be impacted by these AI systems) to ensure the safety of the local community at all the times; even after the establishment of the infrastructure. A permanent national committee must monitor all data centers across the country, conducting regular checks and analysing real-time data to resolve emerging issues.

- A local governance committee should oversee every stage of the infrastructural project - from planning to operation, in order to ensure transparency and accountability. This committee should include representatives from the government (state and central), educated local citizens, farmers, human rights and legal experts, data center workers, and company officials. Strict anti-corruption measures must be in place and duly applied.

- The government should undertake a thorough study beforehand to understand the potential harms that a data center could cause to communities. Adequate planning must be done to reduce any and all potential harm. Before establishing any AI infrastructure, the government must conduct a Community Impact Assessment to ensure that they are not adversely affecting the communities. The assessment reports should be shared with the people to ensure that communities will not be harmed in places where AI infrastructure will be deployed. Community members must have the right to refuse the setting up of these establishments if they consider their impact to be detrimental or harmful.

- Participatory committees should be formed with representation from community members whose lives will be impacted by AI systems, as well as from AI companies and the government. All AI-related decisions should be reviewed by these committees to ensure that no unintended harm is caused.

Climate-conscious

As a climate-vulnerable country, India must protect and safeguard the environment at every stage of AI development and deployment.

AI infrastructure, including data centers, should be designed around the welfare of local communities and the preservation of essential natural resources.

We must build AI that enables both the people and the planet to thrive.

“If there is no planet left, what will you build AI for?”

Community, land and water safeguards

An environment-first, community-first approach must guide all AI infrastructure development. Local communities' wellbeing and rights to essential resources like water must not be compromised. Industries should not lay claim to community water sources. Agricultural and forest lands should not be taken for data center construction.

Data centers should be built on government-allocated land or under government-issued licenses, based on transparent site assessments. Companies must specify their land and water requirements in advance, ensuring that they do not use water meant for nearby communities. **Stop the companies from using our drinking water for their data centers.** Strict action must be taken against illegal land acquisition.

In places with limited land availability, data centers can be multi-storied, underground, or submerged in the ocean. Such developments should benefit local areas through infrastructure growth and employment opportunities.

Regulation of mining and environmental protection

The government must play a major role in regulating mining activities for AI-related materials, and ensure that excessive mining is never allowed.

A central body or independent third party should oversee site selection, pollution control, and transportation planning. Mining sites must not be located in ecologically sensitive regions such as mountains, where risks of landslides are higher. They must remain far from human settlements to avoid health hazards and potential displacement.

E-waste and sustainable innovation

Data centers producing e-waste must take full responsibility for recycling and reusing electronic components. Recycled materials should be integrated into building and maintaining AI infrastructure.

Companies and the government should invest in research to reduce the burden on natural resources and dedicatedly develop sustainable cooling and energy systems. Innovations could include reusing wastewater or seawater for cooling, relying on solar power, and generating energy from waste.

Research, innovation, and youth involvement

Research and development must be prioritized to design sustainable AI systems that minimize environmental impact. Companies should be incentivized to find alternatives for resource-intensive processes and technologies, especially finding alternative ways of cooling. Large-scale data centers must not be built till a working model for non-water cooling systems is developed.

The government should collaborate with researchers, universities, and youth groups to explore innovative, climate-resilient infrastructure solutions, including the potential for outer-space or satellite-based data centers.

Local employment and skilling

Communities affected by AI infrastructure projects should directly benefit from them. People who lose their land or live near project sites should be given priority and preference in employment.

The government should introduce dedicated data center technician courses and training programs for local youth, with progressive skill levels from basic to advanced. Workers must receive decent wages, healthcare benefits, and have safe working conditions.

Conscientious

We need to build a human-centric approach to AI, rather than a profit-centred one. AI systems should prioritize ethics, and always keep humans at the core. AI models and tools must not be given the autonomy to make decisions about human lives.

Humans in the loop

The power to control AI should rest with us. For ethical legitimacy, AI tools and platforms should keep humans at the center, across the entire supply chain, rather than reducing their role to mere supervision. Human experts should be given the power to challenge AI decisions to avoid overreliance.

Data transparency and sovereignty

End-users should have the right to their own data. People from whom data is collected should retain its ownership, with full authority to decide what to share and what to withhold. Data about Indian citizens should remain within the country. Companies must be held accountable if anything goes wrong with the data.

Safeguarding against algorithmic harms

The data used to train AI models should be curated carefully by an expert team. The historical data selected should be filtered out to reduce any bias that might arise from it. Data privacy should be prioritised. Companies must be incentivized to hire an expert team that can anticipate potential biases in an AI model. This team should involve experts skilled on ethics, social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, history, law etc.

An independent regulatory body for AI auditing and grievance redressal

India should ensure that there is an independent regulatory body that is assessing AI systems and auditing them to verify that they are fair and ethical. They should test, pilot, and conduct quality checks before deploying the AI tools on people. Strict laws need to be in place instead of relying on self-regulation. The body should also house a grievance redressal mechanism to ensure accountability. It should have adequate representation from communities, industries/companies, and the government.

Regulations fostering human-centric AI innovations

The government needs to regulate the AI tech companies to ensure that people are protected from the negative impacts of such innovations. Nothing must supersede human welfare.

C6

A Case for Caution

Moving with caution in AI development is paramount. The implementation of AI for decision-making should follow a comprehensive risk assessment framework to ensure that the benefits outweigh the harms, and prevent short-term thinking. This framework should be based on the principle of proportionality: the higher the impact on an end-user's life, the stricter the safeguards must be.

People must also be protected from the misuse of AI technologies, particularly deepfakes. AI systems should undergo rigorous testing and quality checks to ensure their outputs remain equitable for all people, regardless of caste, class, religion, gender, or other identities.

Unlike humans, these systems must remain objective and unbiased at all times. The power to control AI models and tools should always rest with humans. We should be able to integrate AI into our lives without the fear of harm or uncertainty about its long-term effects.

The European Union's AI Act serves as a strong example of responsible governance.

More governments need to adopt similar frameworks to protect and safeguard their people from potential misuses and risks associated with AI use across sectors.

"If AI is the future, we need more human-centric frameworks that create opportunities and can solve our problems."

C6

We urgently need to deploy a **risk-based framework** for AI regulation and **categorise AI systems into three levels: low risk, medium risk and high risk.** Regulatory frameworks for the three categories will be different:

Low-risk AI

Low risk AI should be implemented where the risks are negligible, and everyone can fully benefit from it.

Medium-risk AI

Medium risk AI are the systems where the possibility of risk is present to a certain extent, but well within our capabilities to address or correct them.

High-risk AI

High risk AI are platforms that directly cause harm to humans. Deployment must be permissible only through a rigorous **license-based approach**, where companies must first demonstrate that the harms have been mitigated.

Where not to use AI

We should recognize that not all problems can be solved by AI. We should resolve to not deploy AI solutions in scenarios where its harms can outweigh the benefits, and the negative impacts can be life threatening or cause life-altering impacts.

We have identified certain examples for the three risk levels:

Low to medium risk: Education

AI can help in language translation and creating modules in diverse languages making learning accessible. AI can be used by educators to enhance their lesson plans that would initiate more discussions and facilitate critical thinking. For students, AI can be used for self assessment modules enabling students to track their performance.

AI in education will fall under Medium to High risk when AI is used to make decisions for the students. For student assessments, it cannot be relied upon, considering potential biases which can have long term effects on the students. Even personalized learning (AI tutors) should fall in this category as there is a potential risk of influencing students, reducing their independent cognition as well as thinking and decision-making capabilities. There is also risk because these systems collect personalized data of the students which can be an intrusion of privacy.

Medium to high risk: Healthcare

AI can be used to assist patient queries. It has started to play a supporting role these days in healthcare, by assisting doctors in myriad ways. From analysing and interpreting medical reports to clarifying prescriptions to monitoring patients on their recovery journey, there's much that AI can assist with.
All these instances have possibilities of risk but can be rectified by ensuring that there are humans in the loop, and by avoiding automatic decision-making processes.

It can be deemed as high risk in cases where a patient can be harmed through minute errors in diagnosis made by AI. There is also a risk of these systems being biased to a certain population or demographic groups. One must bear in mind that if AI were to be used in healthcare, there are bound to be concerns among patients about the privacy of their data. There is the possibility that they would not be willing to share their medical histories.

We want the decision makers to create a robust system based on a risk framework so that innovation in AI can be truly inclusive and uplift all the sections of people in India; helping us move towards ⇨ the AI Viksit Bharat vision.

Our Vision for the Use of AI in India

We see the potential for the use of AI in India in the following sectors that will benefit our young people and the generations to come - Education, Healthcare, Farming and Waste Management.

Education

AI has a crucial role to play in education, and hence should be integrated into the system for all the stakeholders - learners, teachers/facilitators and the government alike. It can assist teachers with lesson plans, evaluation and quality assessment, but should not replace them. It can also support them with updated and timely information. With the help of AI, facilitators can create a collaborative and engaging environment for an accessible and efficient learning process. Interactive tools can enable students to better understand their modules and enhance their conceptual understanding. The deployment of such AI frameworks can help the government to track the progress of various initiatives and projects.

However, there is an emerging concern among learners about the privacy of their identity - both personal and educational. Hence the information obtained should be transparent, when it comes to its purpose and usage. AI frameworks can further be utilised in upskilling facilitators, and helping them understand their learners better. AI users should be well-acquainted with its benefits and consequences, so they may critically think about its usage and consider possible alternatives.

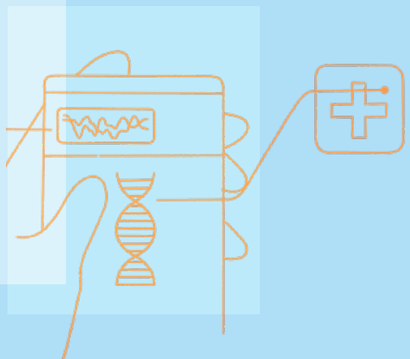
That said, concerns do exist with the use of AI in education. Critical thinking and creative capabilities of learners may be impacted due to over-reliance. Biased systems are another pressing concern.

For example, what if the system is only trained to focus on the students from certain classes, thereby overlooking others? Will it further entrench or perpetuate the existing discrimination in society?

Healthcare

AI in healthcare should act as an assistant to doctors. It can also be used to maintain a directory of resources like medical journals, research works, clinical testing of new diseases, and the creation of educational videos for the general public. It can also work as a precautionary advisor for patients to get regular health checkups.

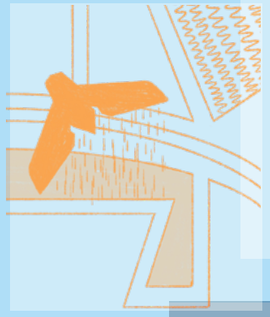
However, AI cannot be used as a replacement for doctors. It restricts actual communication between the patient and the doctor. It does not take into account native knowledge, geography, and lived experiences of the patients. AI can potentially improve the population's access to quality healthcare but strict regulations should be placed on the advice these AI systems are allowed to provide. AI should be utilized to gather and record more relevant information because the healthcare sector routinely deals with a wide range of people. The local administration must work closely with the people in their respective regions to understand their needs better. This will make the platforms easier for people to use.



Agriculture

AI should not take away a farmer's entire means of livelihood through automation. Rather, it must assist them to improve their livelihoods and yields. This can be done through reducing manual work, soil testing, along with the support of institutions for financial assistance, training and research. Although our country is one of the leading agrarian economies in the world, many of our farmers are not well-versed with new technologies. They may not have enough information to know of and source high yielding seeds, and may not be up to speed with evolving best practices that could benefit them.

AI can also help with water management in farmlands. This technology should be made affordable to all farmers, so they may stand to gain from it.

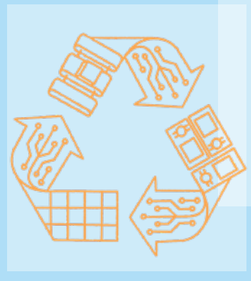


While weather prediction is a promising area that can provide hyperlocalised information, an over-reliance on the predictions is an expensive affair in addition to the risks that come with it. For instance, inaccurate prediction or overconsumption of natural and chemical resources will have a negative impact on the farm. Safeguards and social safety nets should be provided to farmers whose livelihood and existence may be impacted.

Waste Management

AI should be used in all cleaning-related tasks in the cities. It should definitely replace manual scavenging; a high-risk job that leads to many deaths every year. Government and private bodies in this sector historically do not invest in technology solutions because human labour is cheaper than AI. However human safety must always be given the utmost priority. We should invest in research and innovation to use AI in fields where there is a risk of loss to human life. These processes need to be automated.

We could also use AI that can assist us in managing waste. We can look for ways to convert waste into energy. This would not only make the process more efficient, but also profitable. Companies that are involved in providing and managing labour-intensive services like these, should mandatorily invest in the latest and most updated technologies to ensure better workers' safety. These workers should be made aware of, and given proper training to use these technologies effectively.



We believe in the transforming power of emerging technologies. **We imagine India @ 2047 to be equal and just.**

An India where young people are thriving, and emerging technologies are assisting us and our future generations in building an equitable and just nation, rather than exacerbating inequalities and anxieties.

We, the youth, believe that we can build an AI-collaborative future that is for all Indians; one that celebrates its diversity and culture. We would like the opportunity to solve India's most pressing problems. We ask to be heard and looked at as allies, not as a user base or as inexpensive labour.

We want the decision makers to hear our voices because #ItsOurFutureAfterall. Join us in this movement to build an equitable, care-centric AI future for India!

In Solidarity

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Age 22

Gyaneshwar Mehta
ITI Pusa, Delhi
Age 22

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Rajoda Model School, Bavla Gujarat
Age 15

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Kiran Tusamer
ITI Rajlugadi, Haryana
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ITI Rajlugadi, Haryana
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Behind the Scenes

The Youth Futures Studio at Quest Alliance went on a year-long expedition to understand the digital lives of young people. The team travelled across 5 states in India - Delhi, Haryana, Gujarat, Odisha and Kerala to talk to school-level and ITI students between the age group of 14 to 25 years.

For the next leg of the study, a 5-day workshop on critical AI futures pedagogy was conducted, with the aim to:

Demystify emerging technologies - This framework helped young people understand how AI works in the backend
Understand the socio-political impacts of emerging technologies - It urged young people to understand how AI affects their lives
Imagine probable and possible AI futures - It prompted young people to move away from the dominant narratives, and imagine different possibilities with AI
Imagine desired AI futures - It empowered young people to imagine the kind of AI futures they wanted to build

Through these workshops, the students challenged the dominant narratives of AI and were able to imagine alternate hopeful futures with AI, contextualized to their own circumstances in life.

In September 2025, we invited around 30 students with whom we had interacted earlier, to participate in a **5-day residential workshop on Critical AI Futures** at the Quest Learning Observatory, in Bengaluru to take the conversation forward with these young minds. School and ITI workshops were held separately so that the students could feel comfortable.

The idea was to bring different perspectives of young people together in imagining AI futures, that can be taken to the decision makers. Students were introduced to the AI supply chain, and visions of AI Futures by global leaders across the world were explored through gamified and role playing activities.

We built a card game to uncover the infrastructural harms of the AI supply chain, which is largely invisible to the public eye. The game was based on Ana Valdivia's work on **'The supply chain capitalism of AI'[1].** India's Viksit Bharat vision for 2047 centers AI as a pathway to our development, and our young people have very pertinent questions to ask of the world leaders.

[1]*Valdivia, A. (2024). The supply chain capitalism of AI: a call to (re)think algorithmic harms and resistance through environmental lens. Information, Communication & Society, 28(12), 2118–2134. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2024.2420021*

This document collates these questions, anxieties, concerns and hopes that the young people shared with us during our 5-day interaction with them. After the workshop, two ITI students who were on-boarded as Youth Design Researchers represented these youth voices, and led the framing of this document.

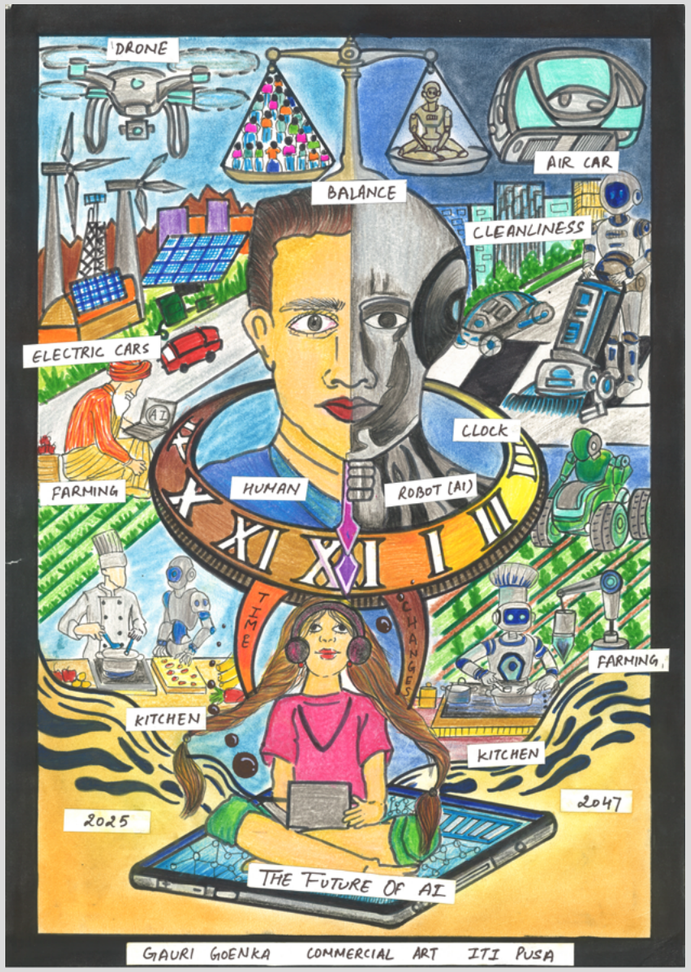
At this critical juncture, where the future of AI is being imagined and drafted, this document is an attempt to bring the voices of young people from different parts of the country, who will take forward this vision not as passive consumers but as active citizens.

Credits

This manifesto grew out of a youth-led workshop where 30 students came together to imagine more human, ethical, and inclusive AI futures.

It was written and compiled by **Gauri Goenka and Gyaneshwar Mehta**, Youth Design Researchers at the Youth Futures Studio, Quest Alliance.

The Youth Futures Studio team, **Bhawna Parmar, Risha Ramachandran, and Sahana HM**, designed and facilitated the workshop, and guided the editing and completion of this collective vision. Report design by **Udisha Madan**.



Artwork by Gauri Goenka

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