

# L. V. Krishnan

CEO of TAM Media Research

## 'I believe in a third force'

Sun May 17 2009



**L. V. Krishnan is CEO of TAM Media Research, a TV viewership analysis firm that measures TRPs.**

### **What does spirituality mean to you?**

Having lived a life with all kinds of ups and downs, with both the worst and best periods, I now feel that the essence of spirituality is about trying to serve a cause. I used to think that I owe service mostly to my family but in the last eight years I have gone through a huge internal sea change and I have gradually extended it to the people I work with, my industry and so on. If I can be of use to others till my life ends, then there is a meaning to being alive. The rest is only an accompaniment.

I went through a really tough time for instance when my mother had to undergo a very difficult back surgery. During that whole period, I found somewhere a Third Force, call it God if you wish, which gave me tremendous strength to overcome the challenge, and move ahead with life. It was one of those moments when I really felt and saw there can be a huge amount of Third Force that can actually help. If it is catered in the right direction, it can bring organizations or countries together.

### **Did you always feel that "Third Force"?**

Definitely. When I was a kid for instance, I was really passionate about astrophysics. I had absolutely no connection to advertising or media. My entire focus was on Russia as the home of cosmology. Many people from India were going to Tashkent to study. I was about to go there as well. Then perestroika happened, and overnight the house of Soviet culture closed down in Bombay, no more

contact, everybody left floating, and all my dreams fell apart. It was a complete no-go in that direction.

Yet there was a need in the family for me to start working. I saw an ad for "space marketers" in the Times of India. I walked into the meeting with my articles on astronomy, thinking the position was related to space matters. It actually was about space marketing, meaning marketing advertising space for Tol. I had absolutely no clue what it meant. The gentleman assigned to interview me was kind enough to explain it to me, and even more so, not to discard my candidacy. I ended up being hired. And I do not think it could have happened without a Third Force walking along with me. It was a very implausible outcome! And that is how I got into advertising. That was my first clear encounter with that Third Force. And it put me on a career platform I would have never thought of.

I stayed for a year and a half with Times of India. Then again the Third Force was at work. Because of my mathematical background I was keen on moving into media planning where research was heavily used. Usually people in the selling side of space are not accepted in the planning side. But one person there decided to give me a chance. And again, the Third Force made me realize that potential.

This is one of the reasons we very rarely go for pure researchers at TAM. We take people from the widest and weirdest backgrounds. As long as there is a passion to learn new things, that is what we are looking for.

### **Was the Third Force absent at some difficult moments?**

Well, when difficulties pile up and the Third Force is not preventing them, I see it as a test and eventually It always is there to show me the right path. One of the ways It does so is by strengthening some core values inside of me, such as honesty, compassion, sincerity, forgiveness. Over time, they have become so strong that even in the midst of the worst calamities, I will not hesitate about sticking to them, even though shortcuts may be tempting.

In 2001 for instance, we went through a serious crisis as an organization. It could have crumbled us all. But the Third Force got us to face the cyclone, go back to our core values and in the end saw us through the crisis.

We carry on thanks to the fundamentals being so strong. And over time I learnt there is always a Third Force.

### **But what about children being mutilated in order to become beggars for instance, where is the Third Force at that moment?**

I don't think the Third Force is necessarily there to come and save everybody. It may come after, to give that person the strength to go through the ordeal. Why not earlier? If you don't go through the pain, you never realize the outcome of it. I guess it is destiny to go through a certain phase before the Third Force lands you a hand.

### **What do you mean exactly by destiny?**

It is what is written in one's hand, and it changes according to what we do in our lives. If you sit down, thinking it is all written and not doing much, the outcome may be gloomier than what is written.

Whereas if you strive and try your best, you may still not reach your wanted destiny, but at least reach the destiny written in your hand. So destiny is a potential, depending on your outlook and strive.

**But can't you say that your strive and efforts are also ordained and destined?**

There is no end to that questioning and mystery. If you look at the evolution of the cosmos, from the moment of the Big Bang, was it predetermined? What took place just before the Big Bang to make it happen? Similarly, the odds in nature for something to take place are so little, that we have to think of the idea of destiny. But we cannot know it in advance.

**Many scientists refuse the idea of God, so you are more on the side of those like Einstein who talked much about It?**

Today, theories like the string theory talk about 22-plus dimensions whereas we are only conscious of four in our day-to-day lives. The idea of a unifying force of all creation is there in science. And somehow, you could also call it the Third Force, and here science and spirituality meet.

**Going back to your work, the obsession with TRPs is being blamed for many negative trends in this country, how do you actually see the impact of your work?**

Television rating is just a mirror. Everyday you look at the mirror and wonder what is happening to you. If you see you are growing old or heavier for instance, you take some measures to cope with it. Similarly, television ratings are only a mirror with a scale of what you do in terms of TV content, advertising, distribution efforts and so on. For many people involved in the broadcasting, marketing, advertising arena, it is only a measuring scale. It creates benchmarks and hope to take over competitors.

**But doesn't this mirror encourage crass sensationalism and dampened content quality?**

Here I segregate between mind and performance. You have to understand what is happening in people's minds that make them watch crime, cricket and cinema more than anything else.

**Why are people so interested and fascinated by crime?**

There are two angles to this. One is because crime is presented in a soap opera form. From our youngest age, we are used to hearing stories of good and evil, with good winning in the end. When crime is also told in that story-form, with the evil ending up in the dustbin, it appeals to people. The narrative form makes it easy for people to relate to it. The second reason people relate to it so much is that it is close to their lives. It is relevant and localized. So on a subconscious level, it touches people's fears, as much as the thrill of seeing the evil being caught and squashed.

**What about soap operas, why are they so popular?**

The drama that spreads out is very relatable to people's lives, to their neighborhood and their family. It is something people can easily relate to and it is dramatized in an easily absorbable way. So with the right settings and story, with the right chord touched within the viewers, people live and breathe those characters. They become like a family member.

It is not only an Indian phenomenon. It happens all over the world.

It basically takes into account the emotional sentiments audiences have. It is able to capture that emotion in the form of a story. Besides, the family dynamics as shown are very much like the ones of the marketplace.

Third, the gossip element is crucial. People need to talk and vent. And there is only a limited amount they can do about relatives and friends. So in a neighborhood for instance, for housewives especially, discussing soap characters and stories form a major topic of conversation.

On the overall, women mostly watch soaps and Bollywood, while men are into news (crime) and cricket, plus a bit of Bollywood. Politics is not such a strong item on the agenda. This year particularly, it has been interesting to see that the election campaign has not attracted eyeballs. We measure news' audience item by item and could see how this year's viewership for political matters has been even lower than last year.

### **Why so?**

There is no flashpoint issue. The economy, inflation, terrorism are issues, but for an election to hit the crescendo, they need to be much hotter topics in people's minds, and there needs to be key polarizing, fascinating personalities, which we haven't had in this campaign. It's been a whitewash at this point of time.

### **What is spirituality in your day-to-day life?**

I spend about 45 minutes a day connecting. It is broken in smaller parts all day long. I disconnect myself from everything and connect with Him for a few minutes. Most of the time, it is a prayer of thanks, for showing me the way especially.

### **If you could ask God one question, what would it be?**

Why isn't everybody happy with whatever little they have?

While it is important to keep moving up in the eagerness to find more and more happiness, it is important not to lose the present state of whatever you have and lose out on happiness here and now. In the quest for new things, we forget that there is already so much that the Third Force has given us.

### **If you were to be reincarnated, what would you choose?**

I would not mind being a dog, because I feel it is a creature that never disobeys his master. He assumes him to be the Third Force in his life. And whatever he says, he does it calmly, with no element of dissent. He cares for his master, even when he may be ignored by him. He loves everybody in the family. And even in the worst of times, he tries to cheer up everyone. Whatever the little amount of food is given to him, he tries to be happy with it. And he always walks behind his master to protect him. So it is one of the nicest living forms, from which humanity can learn so much.

**What is your idea of happiness?**

If my environment is happy, then I can find happiness. Yet those are passing moments. When you look at a line, it is not actually a continuous line, it is an accumulation of dots. Similarly, there is no such thing as a continuous line of happiness.