



Let's read and reflect:

Success requires vision and perseverance rather than luck, doesn't it? Problems should be seen as opportunities and failures as practice. Do you agree?

Now, let's listen to a visually challenged visionary who has changed his own life and the lives of many others.

Breaking Barriers, I will Fly

- Srikanth Bolla



Hello, I'm Srikanth, an **entrepreneur**. Do you know that 51% of Indians are self-employed? Let me share the story of the richest

entrepreneurial couples in the world—my parents. They earned just ₹20,000 a year from their small plot of land. Giving birth to a child is the happiest thing for every married couple. At that moment in time, the term *'apple of the eye'* did not mean much to them. Neither of my parents had ever seen an apple, nor did I have an eye.

When I was born without eyes, society saw me as a burden. Some even suggested that I should be **smothered**. But my parents showered on me immense love and care. They felt they were the richest couple in the world, and I consider myself the luckiest person.

As a child, I spent much of my time with my father in the fields. However, my short legs made it difficult for me to help. My father began to think that perhaps the people who doubted my future might be right. He realized I didn't fit into the traditional farming model. Then he decided that education was to be my path.

While we read

- Why does Srikanth say that his parents were the richest couple in the world?
- Why did Srikanth's father believe that education would be his path?

My words

**very much valued or beloved*

My questions

Despite the challenges of **trekking** to a faraway school and being ignored by teachers and classmates, I **persevered**. For two years, I sat on the last bench, excluded from activities. I then felt like the poorest child in the world—not on account of lack of money, but because of loneliness and isolation.

Eventually, my parents and relatives decided that I should study in a school with students like me. So, I was sent to a special school in Hyderabad. There I excelled, becoming an outstanding student, earning top ranks, and representing India in chess and cricket. I had the privilege of working with Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on various projects like the Lead India Youth Transformation Project.

When I completed my 10th grade with over 90% marks I wanted to study science at the A.P. State Board. However, I was told I could only take arts because I was '**impaired**.' I did not consider myself visually impaired but visually 'challenged.' I was not allowed to pursue my passion due to the **perceptions** of others. Rather than accept this, I decided to **sue** the government.

After six months of legal battle, I received a government order allowing me to study science, but at my own risk. Despite the lack of resources, I worked hard, with the help of a mentor. She recorded my textbooks on audio, and I scored 98% in my exams. This proves that anyone, regardless of their 'impairment' or challenges, can achieve great things.

However, my journey didn't end there. When it was time to apply to top engineering schools like IIT, I was told that I couldn't sit for the competitive exams because of my blindness. If IIT didn't want me, I decided I didn't want it either. I applied to top schools in the United States and was accepted into MIT, Stanford, Berkeley, and Carnegie Mellon. I chose to attend MIT, becoming the first international blind student in its history.

While at MIT, I began to think deeply about my future.

While we read

- c. How did Srikanth excel as a student at the special school in Hyderabad?
- d. Srikanth says that he is not 'visually impaired' but 'visually challenged'. Why?
- e. How did Srikanth overcome the obstacles in pursuing his studies in science?

My words

My questions

Should I just get married, settle down and work in corporate America? No, I wanted to solve the problems



I had faced. Why should blind children be made to sit on the last bench? Why should 10% of India's population, who are disabled, be excluded from the economy?

These questions led me back to India, where I returned, giving up all the opportunities in corporate America, to build a strong support system for the disabled.

We established a platform, Bollant Industries together with my partner, to find, **rehabilitate**, nurture, and reintegrate disabled individuals into society, rather than separate them from it.

We have supported over 3,000 students in education, vocational rehabilitation, sports, and much more. Our company now employs over 150 disabled individuals. It grosses over a million dollars in sales. But we're still at the initial stage of our growth, with much more to do.

I want to leave you with three lessons. First, show compassion and help others thrive. True wealth doesn't come from money but from the happiness of others. Second, remove loneliness from people's lives, as it is the worst form of poverty. Finally, remember that when you do something good, you will be the first to benefit.

The world may look at me and say, "Srikanth, you can do nothing." But I look at the world and say, "I can do anything." Thank you.

(Adapted from INKtalks)

While we read

- f. What do you understand about the attitude of society to disabled individuals when Bolla was a student in school? How did he help to change the situation?
- g. Why did Srikanth return to India instead of pursuing opportunities in the corporate sector in the USA?
- h. What do you think the word 'reintegrate' means in this context?

My words

My questions

About the Author

Srikanth Bolla was born in 1991 at Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh. His parents were uneducated farmers. He has been a youth leader since 2005 and a member of the Lead India campaign of 2020, the National Youth Movement started by the former President of India A. P. J. Abdul Kalam.

In 2012, Bolla set up Bollant Industries with a partner, Ravi Mantha. It produces eco-friendly recycled Kraft paper and packaging products from natural and recycled materials.

Srikanth Bolla is the director of Surge Impact Foundation, which he founded in 2016. The organisation aims to enable individuals and institutions in India to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In 2017, Bolla was named in the *Forbes* magazine list of '30 under 30' across all of Asia. A biopic on his life, *Srikanth*, was released in 2024.



Let's rewind:

1. What were the challenges Srikanth faced in his education, and how did he overcome them?
2. What motivated Srikanth to return to India? What did he do on his return?



Let's recall and recreate:

Activity 1

Srikanth Bolla is an entrepreneur and a pillar of support to many. You would like to interview him to know more about his journey to success. Prepare a set of **questions** to **interview** him. You may ask questions regarding:

Personal life
Professional life
Challenges
Mentors and guides
Achievements and awards
Experience of working with Dr Kalam
Being an employer and not an employee
Message to society
Sense of social responsibility

Activity 2

- a. Now, let's go through the article given below.

Kudumbashree in Aralam: A Story of Transformation

Special Correspondent

At the Aralam Farm in Kannur, a group of tribal women were trained in umbrella making by the Kudumbashree mission.



In just three years, they produced thousands of umbrellas and introduced 21 new varieties to the market. Despite challenges in sourcing quality material, their efforts have generated an annual revenue of 25 lakh rupees. This success

story underscores the determination of these women and highlights the effectiveness of the Kudumbashree model, in adapting traditional skills to meet the demands of the modern market.

The Kudumbashree Mission, a beacon of hope and empowerment, was launched in 1998 by the Government of Kerala. This pioneering project is one of the world's largest networks of women dedicated to the eradication of poverty and the promotion of women's empowerment. Through a process of collective responsibility and participatory development, Kudumbashree has vastly improved the socio-economic status of women, especially among the marginalised. Its recent focus on tribal entrepreneurship is particularly noteworthy.

Kudumbashree's tribal entrepreneurship ventures are powerful examples of innovation that have created self-sustaining communities led by women. This has set a precedent in community-driven development. We need to celebrate their success to remind society of the profound impact of such initiatives.

- What do you think about the headline? Does it capture the message of the article?
 - What does the introductory paragraph tell us?
 - What is the main topic of the article?
 - How does the article conclude?
- b. Srikanth Bolla established an enterprise to create opportunities for the differently-abled. He is now the CEO of a million-dollar company that manufactures eco-friendly, packing materials. Based on your reading of 'Breaking Barriers, I will Fly' prepare an **article** on the achievements of Srikanth Bolla and publish it in your class magazine. You may follow the format given below.

Headline

Brief and crisp, capturing the main idea

Byline

Name or designation of the writer

Introduction

Introduces the topic—provides essential information

Middle/ Body

Highlights causes, effects, merits, demerits

Conclusion

Comparison, opinion, comments, suggestions

Activity 3

You plan to invite Srikanth Bolla as the chief guest for a function at your school on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December). Prepare an **Event Invitation** for the programme, giving the necessary details.

Title

Name of the Institution

Name of the event

Salutation

(Dear / Respected)

Introduction

What – what is the event?

When – date and time of the event

Where - location

Information

Who – Host/ who conducts the event? / Guests of the event

Why – relevance of the event

How - other details of the event

Invitation

(Invitation)

Official Details

(Place)

(Signature)

(Date)

(Name and Designation)