



THE **Levelling** TOWARDS AN UNGENDERED WORLD

1st Edition / 6 – 7 March, 2021

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Introduction

The Ananta Centre organized “The Levelling: Moving towards an Ungendered World” on the 6th and 7th March, 2021 to mark International Women’s Day.

This series was a celebration of leaders who are actively working everyday towards paving the way for a greater number of women in value - based leadership. The core driver of this initiative was the fact that individual stories of women heroes were not enough, and our political, social and economic structures will only evolve when women and men make conscious efforts to support and encourage more women in leadership roles. There is an urgent need to, at the very least, acknowledge that biases and prejudices do exist against women in the workplace and without that recognition, no successful outcome could be expected. Hence, ‘The Levelling’ cued the process for creating a level- playing field for women through a collective effort including men in the way forward.

The conversations held were anchored on four key values that make up a good society: Liberty: Breaking through Patriarchy, Equality: Storming Male Bastions, Efficiency: Making Meritocracy Work for Women, and Community: Building Your Tribe. The conference was kick started by a fireside chat between Ms. Kiran Pasricha and Mr. Jamshyd Godrej where the latter unequivocally talked about accepting the fact that a certain amount of prejudice does exist regarding women and then actively working towards eliminating it. Further, spread over two days, this series of virtual sessions featured strongly powerful and deeply personal conversations of the women that we already know about and the women that we ought to know about.

The event had a unique format with some new components, for instance, a panel discussion was held with mothers and their daughters to understand what liberty actually means to women across the different generations. Ananta talks which were short monologues given by women leaders who have been working towards a more equal and inclusive society for women and a live performance titled “Re-claiming Brilliance- Mosaic imagery of the Feminine Principle” by Madhu Nataraj, Director, Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography and Natya STEM Dance Kampni were held on the very first day.

This report briefly captures the overview of our unique event while conveying our strongest belief in the possibility of an ungendered world through the voice of some of the most impassioned and profound speakers who are relentlessly working towards making this a reality.

Liberty: Breaking through Patriarchy

ANANTA TALK

What does liberty mean to women? What their experiences have been and all the struggles, challenges and opportunities they received? How did these marvelous women overcome the challenges being faced and what can be done or should be done to make it easier for the generations of women who will follow?

Under this theme, we started with an Ananta Talk by [Shaheena Attarwala](#), Design & Research Manager, Microsoft India which was followed by a panel discussion.

Ms Shaheena shared with us her fight for her dreams on this theme of liberty. Growing up in the slums of Mumbai and studying at Anganwadis, success did



“To make the learning curve for young girls fastpaced, everyone needs to come together as a collective self to push the vulnerable sections of the society forward.”

— Shaheena Attarwala, Design & Research Manager, Microsoft India

not come in her grasp so easily. She resisted an early marriage and pursued education fearlessly despite her familial challenges. Maintaining the vigour and zest to the path of success while withstanding the trials of having to start from scratch when her house burnt down, along with facing religious discrimination is what makes her truly inspiring.

She was introduced to computers and strongly believed that it would be a great leveller for anyone sitting in front of it. That’s when she thought that she’d build a career in technology. However, her grades were extremely low and hence her teacher rejected her computer class application. She did not let this be an impediment in her way of success and after somehow forcing her father to borrow money got herself enrolled into a computer class. She believes that technology is a major enabler and can create immense possibilities for each individual.

One of the pivotal decisions she had to make in her life, in order to bring about change, was leaving her parents’ home. She believes that change is the only constant and one shouldn’t stay married to any concept because that restricts a person’s growth and ability to prosper. Liberty for her is a means to fulfill one’s aspirations. In an ungendered world, the concept of being a man in all its masculinity and a woman in all its femininity is a notion that should cease to exist. One is first required to behave as a human, then comes the aspect of mutual respect and being allies where men can steer the way for women with their existing power and privilege. She noted that fear is definitely one of the things that is her key motivator. She also placed a greater emphasis on the importance of having a growth mindset and not being stagnant in life because it would be as good as not existing.

Supporting and mentoring young girls in order to shape them so that they don’t have to go through the same journey as her has been very vital in her life.

She dreams of a day when thousands of girls are high impacting individuals and can make a dent in society. Despite the recurring doubt in the minds of women because of existing societal attitudes, she underscored the importance of not paying attention to them and continuing to follow one’s beliefs and choices. Sharing her story gives her hope that it might come in handy as a survival guide for other underprivileged and vulnerable girls. Shaheena sees her success in the lives that she is able to change through her work. She is bullish about the fact that the coming decades will be decades that women and young girls will define. Summing up, Shaheena quoted Kaifi Aazmi’s Poem “Aurat” which calls on all women to break free from the shackles of patriarchy and march ahead with fervour despite their fears.

PANEL DISCUSSION

In this special session, mothers and their daughters came together to talk about what liberty means to them and how one must have the right and freedom to choose the path they want to pursue.

It was extremely enthralling as women from all generations were present together in a high powered discussion. The panel consisted of [Anu Aga](#), Former Chairperson, Thermax Limited with her daughter [Meher Pudumjee](#), Chairperson, Thermax Limited; [Reshma Anand](#), CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation with her mother [Usha Anand](#), Educationist; [Shriti Pandey](#), Founder, Strawcture with her mother [Purvi Narain Pandey](#). This session was moderated by [James Abraham](#), Founder & Director, SolarArise.

The mothers spoke about how liberty as a concept did exist in their families however there were not too many options at that time and not enough freedom presented to them to live a life they saw fit. It was dictated by personal biases of the parents onto their sons and daughters, and basically majority of its meaning came from patriarchal and general societal norms.

In the past, there were strict notions of what a woman must do, which was basically to mostly settle down and have children. Education was provided to them but the push to build a real career ceased to exist. By the next generation, there were many choices but still the limitations on freedom to make those

choices persisted. It was done more subtly. You could choose from the pool of options that were deemed appropriate for girls and women in general.

Today, no woman should feel the guilt of being attached to a privilege of being in a household where they are treated equally because indeed it’s a basic right of liberty and not in fact a privilege at all. One should not experience any guilt in demanding education for the fear of not doing well. The role of a community plays a big part. Earlier women were by themselves and were isolated in their journeys. Therefore, everyone in a society must collaborate with one another to ensure that no women’s liberty is restricted.



“You often don’t have choices of what you’ve to do but whether to make the best of it and give your best is your choice.”

— Anu Aga, Former Chairperson, Thermax Limited



Equality: Storming Male Bastions

ANANTA TALK

This segment explored how leaders are creating a pathway of equal opportunities. How they are leading the way and providing women with the tools to thrive in their choice of purpose and vocation, without succumbing to established stereotypes. Their own personal journeys along with the stories of the women they work with would be the central focus while exploring this theme.

We started with an Ananta talk by [Radhika Piramal](#), Executive Vice-Chairperson, VIP Industries followed by a panel discussion on this theme of equality.

Ms Radhika initiated her talk by noting the importance of equality and what that means to her. In her opinion equality for women means the equality of power shared by men and women. Power is agency



“You often don’t have choices of what you’ve to do but whether to make the best of it and give your best is your choice.”

— [Radhika Piramal](#), Executive Vice-Chairperson, VIP Industries

and money. She shares her personal story which brings to light her business ambition which she has been heading for over a decade.

She is bewildered by the incredulous expressions on peoples faces when she tells people that she looks after all the functions of the business. The reason why people are so amused is because seeing women leaders is very unusual for them. Although many daughters are entering the family businesses, many fathers without sons prefer to sell their businesses or invite their son in laws to run the show. After graduating from Oxford and doing her MBA from Harvard she became the Managing Director of India’s largest luggage company.

Coming from a comparatively liberal Indian family she still had to push the liberalism of her family to their limits in order to come out as a lesbian at the tender age of 17 and was told that it is most likely just a phase. She highlights that it is extremely crucial for men to share power with women and that men don’t need to shoulder all the burden of looking after their families alone, anymore than women have to look after the kids alone. Equality frees all kinds of people from gender expectations. She clarified that she speaks about her father often because it specifically deals with the current theme where he has always held the key to the bastion of power i.e. the castle over the hill.

Over the years, she has dealt with numerous stereotypes related to women, for instance, when a woman’s identity is often devalued by the use of designations like Miss, Ms & Mrs as per their marital status while for men it remains the same. She recognises the privilege she has had growing up but believes there are so many who do not have that same privilege but still are success stories. In light of this she referred to the book ‘Wonder Girls’ by Varsha Adusumilli and recommended it to everyone. Lastly she put forward

that one has to be strong to win power and that it’s not just going to be handed to any individual. One must demand, persuade, and motivate the men in their life to become allies and share their powers as a result.

PANEL DISCUSSION

The discussion was initiated with the theme of exploring the depth of primary difficulties that women on the panel had faced while storming the male bastions. How the work in services has been created around men was pointed out. So the first step would be the acknowledgement and acceptance of this unfortunate reality. Many of the supervisors automatically assume that women in the workforce will not be able to survive the gruelling atmosphere. It has been noted that men’s eccentricities are generally accepted but when it comes to women, they have to take up extra work and make an additional effort to be seen as professional and focussed.

The speakers for this session were [Chetna Gala Sinha](#), Founder and Chair, Mann Deshi Bank; [Anuradha Das Mathur](#), Founding Dean of The Vedica Scholars; [Charu Sinha](#), IG, CRPF, Srinagar and moderated by [Manoj Kumar](#), Founding CEO, Naandi Foundation.

Chetna spoke about breaking into a man’s world and what it took to change the perceptions about women taking charge at her workplace. She explained how it took everyone by surprise knowing that the village women have been working at the Treasury and how they never lost a single penny. She underscored the fact that we should not enforce men’s solutions to problems on women. She noted that equality was not about being equal to men but a world which has equal opportunities for all possible genders. Dissolving femininity at the cost of equality for women will not be considered true equality. Role- Modelling of people is extremely necessary so that the younger generations can see the different pursuits and choices that women have been making.

The ideal world would be where men feel comfortable inhabiting home just like women have been all this while. Women are definitely leading but there is a need for this to be physically manifested in a larger sense. For example, in property papers, women should be visible. With technology, it has become

easier to create visibility where data can be collected about where women are working and how they are balancing their lives. Meanwhile, it is also important to gather that men have not escaped the results of societal conditioning. For instance, men in services who stay away from their home for decades become extremely estranged from their families which creates a ripple effect in the interpersonal problems. There is an urgency to have women in the services which can create larger acceptability. Rather than taking a top- down approach, we need to adopt a bottoms- up approach. There is definitely data available in various fields which indicate the gender constraints and therefore, methods to eliminate them should be adopted accordingly and must be given a priority. Sweating for hard work and sweating for playing are the steps to create magic and it is the time to give that extra time and space to women to make that happen.

“Men are able to accept the eccentricities of men, it’s difficult for them to accept those of women.”

— [Charu Sinha](#), IG, CRPF, Srinagar



Efficiency: Making Meritocracy Work for Women

ANANTA TALK

Gender bias is often implicit and subtle, making it difficult for women to achieve the same level of success. This segment brought together leaders to explore their journeys and how they are promoting meritocracy as a tool to create a level playing field. Under this segment we first had an Ananta talk by **Faye D'Souza**, Independent Journalist followed by a panel discussion.

Ms Faye had been in television journalism for sixteen years, but lately, she has moved to independent journalism on the internet. She spoke about how even in the 21st century, we have to push for meritocracy for women in the workplace. She outlined how women



“When it comes to the idea of creating a meritocracy I do not believe we can separate home from work. If we don’t provide women in the workplaces adequate child care, assistance for family, flexible hours, we aren’t creating a true meritocracy.”

— Faye D'Souza, Independent Journalist

have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. For instance, a UN research that said that the free birth control which is usually given to women by the primary healthcare centres was unavailable during the lockdown, so around 20 million families in India who could have benefitted from it, did not, and therefore, would lead to a spike in unwanted pregnancies in the country. Consequently, women might be pushed towards unsafe abortions or are abandoned, and girls often have to drop out of school to look after children.

Also, the education system has failed since the pandemic became rampant. Education was beyond reach for millions of girls who did not have access to devices and the internet. Additionally, even though girls had been outperforming boys in 10th and 12th grade for seven years straight and the enrollment of young girls went up from 39% to 41% in 2014 but ironically, the percentage of women in the workforce has taken a plunge as it came down from 34% to 27% in the same year. She also shed light on how Indian women’s participation in the labour force was the lowest among the BRICS nations and shares the range of Bahrain, Malaysia and Somalia that still seem to be doing better than India.

Another set of data revealed that the number of women who were laid off from work was higher than men. There were two main reasons behind it coming from established stereotypes that are, one, a woman’s salary is second to the man’s and two, women are seen as less serious about their jobs since their prime duty is to serve at home.

The main reasons for women dropping out of the workforce basically comprises family pressure and child welfare. She is doing the job outside while juggling chores at home and is still made to compete with a man who is just doing his job at work. Apart from that certain qualities like being maternal, soft, non-aggressive, unambitious, etc are naturally linked with

women while men are seen as the go-getters. Further, there is an implicit bias towards women who become mothers and suddenly they absolutely lose any value at all as competitors. But what people don’t realise is that they are doing double the amount of work than men. So how does one define merit in such a case for women? How do we compare men and women with such vast differences in the amount of work? How do we draw a level playing field?

Since there is such a huge pay gap and care work is so expensive, women’s work is the first to get disqualified while men continue to do their jobs. Women in India take leaves to help their children prepare for essential exams or to attend PTA meetings for their children. Even the most successful women during the pandemic had to wake up early to clean, cook food and do all the housework, while making sure their kids attend online classes and managing their own jobs. Summing up, Ms Faye reiterated that meritocracy cannot be defined by “separating home from work.” There is a need to provide adequate childcare, flexible hours, etc. to help them adjust to their different requirements, and until that is done, any competition will be and is unfair.

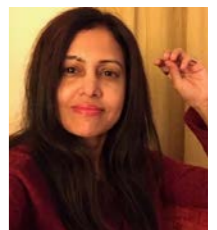
PANEL DISCUSSION

It has been seen that society holds a much higher and tougher standard for women in terms of success and there is a higher degree of scrutiny attached to it. There is always more than usual criticism associated with the mistakes women make. This ultimately makes people reluctant in recognising women’s contribution. It is important that we do not blindly follow the rules set by men. There is a need to take ownership which will make one more powerful and confident. Making conscious efforts to remove the unconscious biases which exist in the society is extremely pivotal and become aware of the inherent prejudices surrounding us.

This plenary session had **Anu Meena**, Founder, Agro-wave, Gurgaon Rural; **Vinati Kastia Kilambi**, Senior Partner, AZB & Partners; **Suparna Singh**, Former CEO, NDTV as speakers it was moderated by **Govindraj Ethiraj**, Founder, IndiaSpend and BoomLive.

The key takeaway is that the dialogues with men needs to proliferate. Additionally, they also need to

be the face of feminism to act as a bridge between both genders. The session significantly outlined the journey of speakers in bringing and promoting meritocracy as a tool to create a level playing field and explained through their powerful experiences as to how they have attempted to create efficient systems towards the upliftment of women in general.



“We still hold women to a much tougher standard than men. When women do in fact accomplish something, as a society we remain conditioned to begrudgingly give them some amount of recognition and are not forthcoming in recognising their contribution.”

— Suparna Singh, Former CEO, NDTV

Community: Building Your Tribe

ANANTA TALK

This segment brings together leaders who have achieved success but realise that it is important to create a community which can extend support and act as a safe space for those women who lack opportunities or self-belief that they can achieve what these leaders have. Under this theme, we started with an Ananta Talk by **Sairee Chahal**, Founder, Sheroes followed by a riveting panel discussion.

Sairee kickstarted her talk by speaking about her childhood in Muzaffarnagar, and there existed a huge mobility gap for even the well- educated women. During the pandemic, she noted that for such women out there, technology became the biggest bridge for them to have access to the outside world. For example, a woman in rural Odisha who was able to access the lectures of an IIM professor. She spoke about how



“Entire Experience of the internet for women is sub-optimal and there is a long way to go before it becomes equal in a real way.”

— Sairee Chahal, Founder, Sheroes

having a mobile phone provides a woman with such a leverage that any jewellery won't provide. One of the fastest ways to close the digital divide between the genders was via access to the internet and tech devices and by bringing social commerce online. Thanks to the web, information is now available on healthcare, contraception, menstruation, etc. that women have generally felt uncomfortable talking about and has helped and empowered them in myriad ways.

Further, women who have access to this digital world, have not shirked away from utilising it, be it, for their artistic creations, buying and selling goods, etc. And ultimately, they have used these platforms for upskilling, learning and growing in terms of vocational skills that they can use for their economic and overall empowerment. Hence, providing mobile phones is the best way to lift women from their gruesome circumstances and that it can make a world of difference in their lives.

The problem of how these internet spaces and devices have been made by men for men. As per the statistics, men make up almost 70-80 percent of the Internet users online in India. While women are harassed and/or often apprehensive of the judgment around being online and how the internet could be an unsafe and unhappy place for women. Therefore, the experience of the women is generally suboptimal and that is something SHEROES has been working on to change things for the better. There does exist a genuine fear of violation of privacy when it comes to women being online and, thus, it is crucial to deal with these multifaceted challenges in a comprehensive way to trigger change. It needs to be understood that to create an ungendered world, stereotypes should be done away with. The burden of patriarchy is borne by both genders and in the future, it seems like this gap will narrow with time and it will become a major mainstream topic. It is very evident now, she noted, that amongst Fortune 500 companies, almost 50 per-

cent of board members are women. The action point is that we must make small changes everyday and take initiatives to ultimately make a difference.

PANEL DISCUSSION

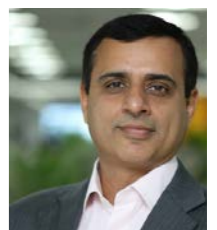
In this special session the speakers mentioned that more often than not women are met with disbelief at all levels, especially when they are trying to achieve something ambitious. But at the end of the day, it comes down to the trust that should and must exist between genders and within genders. The emphasis must be on having a clear roadmap to achieve one's goals. When one has a clear vision and clarity on what it is that one wants to accomplish, other people will recognise it and come together to support them.

The panel consisted of **Sumita Ghose**, Founder and Managing Director, Rangсутra Crafts India Limited; **Roopa Purshothaman**, Chief Economist and Head of Policy Advocacy, Tata Sons Limited; **Radhika Bharam**, Joint Vice Chairperson, The Shri Ram Schools and Founder, KARM Fellowship for Young Indian Women. This session was moderated by Mr **Sameer Walia**, Chief Executive, Ripples of Hope.

Communities play a crucial role in creating ecosystems that work for girls and women. They are extremely powerful tools and spaces within which people can be vulnerable, be themselves and be inspired by the stories of the past, present and the future. It is seen that education can play a limited role in doing away with the prejudices and restrictions for young girls. The main requirements are that of awareness and affirmation.

Thus, to enable young girls to fulfill their potential,

there is an urgency for grassroots change in the mindsets of parents and the communities around them. Speakers simultaneously noted that dreaming big is attractive and something which keeps us on our toes but what is equally important are the small baby steps that one needs to take in order to accomplish them. That is how one truly shows their grit and character regardless of their gender. Therefore, we should come up with solutions for the people who we are working with to be able to transform their lives and the communities they are going back to ultimately.



Re-claiming Brilliance: Mosaic imagery of the Feminine Principle



A live dance performance by **Madhu Nataraj**, Director, Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography and Natya STEM Dance Kampni was also held at the end of the first day.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS



James Abraham

Founder and Director, Solarise

James is the founder and director of SolarArise, which develops, owns and operates solar-power plants in India. James has over 30 years of experience as a management leader in various roles in Canada, South East Asia, and India. He started his career with Bell Canada, developing advanced services for emerging technologies. He joined BCG in Toronto in 1994 and has worked in industries as diverse as paper, appliances, automotive, and oil & gas. In 1998, he moved to India to open and lead the Delhi office. After a decade, in 2009, he took on the leadership of SunBorne Energy, a technology R&D and solar-EPC Player in India. In 2014 he co-founded SolarArise which owns and operates utility-scale solar plants in India. James earned a B.A.Sc. (Electrical Engineering) from the University of Waterloo, an MBA (Palmer Scholar) from The Wharton School and an MA (International Relations) from Johns Hopkins University. James is on various Industry advisory bodies and councils; is a board member on L&T Water and Smart World, Vistaar Financial Services, Smart Power India, International Justice Mission. He is a Fellow of Class 3 of Ananta Aspen Centre's Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship, Senior Moderator and a member of Aspen Global Leadership Network and a trustee on the Board of the Ananta Center.



Anu Aga

Former chairperson, Thermax Ltd.
Daughter: Mehar Pudumjee

Ms. Anu Aga retired as the Thermax Chairperson in 2004 and from the Thermax Board in 2018. She is focusing on social causes and is closely associated with the Thermax Foundation. She is keenly involved with NGOs – 'Akanksha' and 'Teach for India', which promote education for the underprivileged. She writes extensively and gives talks about corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, role of women, education and secularism.



Meher Pudumjee

Chairperson, Thermax Limited

Ms. Meher Pudumjee is the Chairperson of Thermax Ltd, a company focused on providing sustainable energy and environment solutions. A postgraduate in Chemical Engineering from the Imperial College of Science & Technology, London, Meher joined Thermax as a trainee engineer in August 1990. Thereafter, she along with her husband Pheroze played a role in turning around a small subsidiary of the company in the UK.

After her return to India in 1996, she was appointed on the Board of Directors and worked closely in the finance function of Thermax. She was also involved with overseeing a Joint Venture Company focused on drinking water, as well as the Air Pollution Control businesses of the company. In the years 1999 to 2001, she played an active role in the turnaround of Thermax.

Meher took over as Chairperson in 2004, after the retirement of Mrs. Anu Aga. She represented India at the Asian Business Women's Conference in Osaka in 2006. The World Economic Forum in 2008 selected her as a Young Global Leader for her professional accomplishment, commitment to society and potential to contribute to shaping the future of the world. She was selected CEO of the Year 2009 by Business Standard.

She served as the Chairperson of Pune Zonal Council of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). When a member of CII's Young Indians, she chaired the National Employability initiative.

Meher is a philanthropist, musician and on the Boards of multiple 'not for profit' organisations- Teach for India, Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation and MC-CIA; she Chairs the Board of Akanksha Foundation and is a member of Social Venture Partners in the city of Pune.

She has two children and enjoys spending time with her family.



Reshma Anand

CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation
Mother: Usha Anand

Reshma Anand is a business school graduate with 20 years of extensive leadership experience in development causes, mission driven nonprofits and social ventures. Reshma started out with a conventional corporate career at Unilever in India in roles including market intelligence, product innovation and brand management. After working and traveling across the breadth of rural India, she transitioned successfully from a fast track corporate career to work on the country's key development challenges through market-based solutions. She is the founder of two social ventures including a specialist advisory firm on sustainable social responsibility and an accelerator for agri and artisanal micro entrepreneurs. She has worked extensively with non-profit organizations and donors on strategy development, program design, impact assessment and leadership development. Reshma has also anchored focused efforts to drive informed philanthropy in India through thought leadership, collective funding platforms and collaborations with government. Reshma is a Fellow of the Second Wave of the Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship, a TED India Fellow and has a bag packed at all times to take a road trip! She is an Economics graduate from the University of Delhi and an MBA from IIM-Bangalore. In her current role, Reshma heads Hindustan Unilever Foundation; a non-profit focused on water conservation and effective community governance.



Usha Anand

Educationist

After a teaching career spanning 27 years, Usha Anand was not quite ready to hang up her boots (or books!). A psychology major, Usha's classroom experiences with young girls prompted her to anchor life skills – when schools did not know what to make of the subject. Her sessions with her students were thought provoking but more importantly – a safe space for them to express their apprehensions and challenges. She recognised the significant role that teachers can play if they have the right set of tools and the sensitivity to deal with young students. Post retirement, Usha's travelled across the country particularly to small town schools to equip

teachers and trainers with life skill tools. She's contributed to textbooks and has co-published books. She continues to be curious about how teachers can help improve the quality of adolescent life and the happiness of young women and men in India.



Shaheena Attarwala

Design & Research Manager,
Microsoft

Shaheena Attarwala works at Microsoft as a Design Leader, where she heads research & design and for Emerging Economies. Born to a poor family in a village in Uttar Pradesh, Shaheena was raised in the slums of Mumbai. She resisted an early marriage and pursued education fearlessly despite family challenges. Life in the slum was hard and exposed her to severest living conditions, gender bias, and sexual harassment but it also fueled her curiosity to learn and to design a different life for herself. The first time Shaheena saw a computer in her school she believed that I could be a great leveler, that anyone who was sitting in front of it would have opportunities. But she was designated to do needlework instead of computers due to poor grades, despite the rejection she dreamt of building a career in the field of technology. She fought and forced her father to borrow money to get her enrolled at a local computer class. She scraped every penny to get her own computer, walked home, skipped lunches, and thereafter there was no looking back. Shaheena quit programming and chose to pursue a career in design because 'design' made her believe that possibilities exist and things can change.

She believes that technology is a huge enabler and an equalizer. Today she mentors girls to fight! To fight when they are held back, be economically independent, and do whatever it takes to acquire education, skills, and careers, this is what's going to be a huge game-changer for young girls who still have to fight and she does not wish upon any girl in her circumstances to have her journey Unless that happens the dream of an egalitarian society is faraway.



Radhika Bharat Ram

Joint Vice-Chairperson, Shri Ram School; Founder KARM Fellowship for Young Indian women

Radhika seamlessly straddles championing different domains in the field of education, crafts and social service where in she strives to make an impact on people's lives. A passionate educationist, she has been instrumental in setting up The Shri Ram Millennium Schools and The Shri Ram Early Years. She is on the board of SRF Foundation, which predominantly works in the area of rural education. A staunch supporter to the cause of inclusion, she serves as the Joint Secretary of The Blind Relief Association, New Delhi and Chairperson, The Indian Blind Sports Association. She believes in working at the grassroot and essays the role of a culture revivalist in the true spirit as the Secretary of Delhi Crafts Council to support the cause of handloom weavers and artisans. An advocate and supporter, she is the trustee of CAPED –Cancer Awareness, Prevention and Early Detection that has been working in the area of awareness creation for women cervical cancer. Since 2014 she has been a jury member of CII Foundation Women Exemplar Program, which recognises women who are transforming rural India. A break from work is well spent indulging in her passion for music and running half marathons. She has been part of 5 NGO fundraisers productions as one of their lead singers.



Sairee Chahal

Founder, CEO, SHEROES
(women-only social platform)

Sairee Chahal is Founder and CEO of SHEROES – the world's largest online ecosystem for women, comprising the SHEROES app, Babygogo, SHECO, SHEROES Money, MARS by SHEROES and Naaree.com. The network has a national and global footprint of 21 million women. Sairee is on the Board of Directors of Paytm Payments Bank and Milaan Foundation, and on the advisory board of US-based initiative Women In Cloud. She has an M. Phil from JNU and a PGDM from IMT Ghaziabad. She is an Aspen Fellow and a Cartier Award Alumni. In a personal capacity, Sairee has mentored hundreds of women entrepreneurs, and continues to do so to help strengthen the women-led entrepreneurship ecosystem.



Faye D'souza

Founder & Editor, Free Media Interactive Pvt. Ltd

An award winning journalist now turned entrepreneur, Faye D'Souza has over 16 years experience in the profession. She has launched and led a national television news channel with 100 employees and is considered one among the most popular news personalities in the country. Faye is now using her social media following of over 2 million across platforms to inform, educate and engage with India's youth. Faye began her career as a reporter in CNBC TV18 where she spent 4 years covering personal finance, consumer rights, economic crime, public policy and housing. She worked in 4 different states (Maharashtra, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka) in her time with the channel and rose within the ranks to become the Chief of Bureau of Bangalore. She was recruited to be part of the launch team of ETNOW when BCCL was making its foray into Business news on television where she served as the Editor of Personal Finance, working for investor education and consumer rights, hosting India's longest running personal finance show for nearly a decade.

Faye then went on to become the founding Editor of Mirror Now, a channel launched to serve the needs of Indian citizens by taking up issues that were core to the quality of life of the average Indian. She strategized the editorial purpose of the channel, designed the manpower structure and led the launch of the channel. As Executive Editor of Mirror Now, she was responsible for the editorial direction, grooming young reporters, the P&L and the success of the channel in popularity and ratings. The channel won several national awards in its first year for its journalistic work. Faye has now founded - Free Media Interactive Pvt Ltd, and is in the process of launching a new brand of news called "Beatroot" that will deliver news to India's young and urban citizens with dignity and without outrage, opinion or activism. Beetroot's mission is to provide India's citizens with news that does waiver in its commitment to the truth without fear or favour. The idea is to use new models of monetization of news content and optimise technology in the production process to keep costs low.



Govindraj Ethiraj

Founder, IndiaSpend & BOOMLive

Govindraj Ethiraj is a television and print journalist who has reported and written on Indian business for over 25 years. He is a media executive and entrepreneur whose public interest journalism ventures are safeguarding the transparency, accuracy, and integrity of news in specific and the internet in general in India and world-wide. Most recently, he founded BOOM (www.boomlive.in), an independent journalism initiative that fights misinformation and explains issues with the larger objective of making the internet safer. He also founded the award-winning IndiaSpend (indiaspend.org), a public interest journalism outfit which use data to write and syndicate stories in areas like health, education, environment and FactChecker (factchecker.in) which monitors media, politicians and other figures for accuracy. BOOM and FactChecker were India's first verified members of the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN), affiliated with Poynter Institute. IndiaSpend is a member of the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN). Previously, he was Founder-Editor in Chief of Bloomberg TV India, a 24-hours business news service launched out of Mumbai in 2008. He continues to anchor seasonal shows in the business, economy and financial markets space, on Indian broadcast television and on digital. Prior to setting up Bloomberg TV, he worked with Business Standard newspaper as Editor (New Media), and before that, Govindraj spent five years with television channel CNBC-TV18 where he actively drove most of the channels' programming growth and expansion. Prior to television, he worked in print in The Economic Times and leading business magazines. Govindraj was named a 2018 McNulty Prize Laureate in recognition for his leadership with BOOM, IndiaSpend, and FactChecker. He is a Fellow of the Inaugural Class of Ananta Aspen's India Leadership Initiative and the Aspen Global Leadership Network, and winner of the 2014 BMW Responsible Leaders Awards.



Sumita Ghose

Founder & Managing Director Rangsutra Crafts India Ltd.

Sumita Ghose is the founder and managing director of Rangsutra, a social enterprise which works for socio economic development in rural India by engaging both: the community and the market. Rangsutra is owned by over two thousand artisans- most of whom are rural women. Rangsutra provides design, marketing, technical and organizational support needed to make crafts and allied rural industries into viable enterprises, so that they provide regular village based employment to rural artisans. Prior to setting up Rangsutra in 2006, Sumita lived and worked in different parts of rural India for many years working with rural communities for social change and economic development. Sumita has a Masters degree in Economics and in Conflict Resolution. She is a Fellow of Class 1 of Ananta Aspen's Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship and a member of Aspen Global Leadership Network. She has been the recipient of several awards, including a Fulbright Fellowship, the latest being the Nari Shakti Puraskar, awarded by the President of India, on 8th March 2016. She is a Yoga practitioner and a certified Yoga teacher. She is a Fellow of Class 1 of Ananta Aspen's Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship and a member of Aspen Global Leadership Network.



Vinati Kastia Kilambi

Senior Partner, AZB & Partners

She is a senior partner at one of India's leading law firms, AZB & Partners and has been working largely in the corporate, M&A and private equity space for over 24 years. She graduated as a lawyer in 1996 from the National Law School of India University. In addition to corporate and transactional work and being actively involved in AZB's internal knowledge management programs, she takes keen interest in various social causes, particularly women and children. She has also taken up several opportunities to provide pro bono assistance to clients in the social sector. She worked closely with Save the Children on their early learning training programs. She is associated with the Ashoka University's YIF Program aimed at picking diverse talent from across the country and training them to become change agents. She supports mentorship programs for YIF

and mentors one or two fellows from YIF every year. She is a Fellow of the WhatTheHex of Ananta Aspen Centre's Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network



Manoj Kumar

CEO, Naandi Foundation

Manoj is the founding CEO of Naandi Foundation—one of India's largest nonprofits impacting over 6 million lives across India. In the last 20 years, Naandi has impacted many of the SDGs through programs like providing nutritious mid day meals to 1.3 million government school going children; safe drinking water to over 600,000 people across India; education support to empower over 400,000 young girls; and working with thousands of farmers to make them profitable and come out of abject poverty.

Manoj is also the co-founder of ARAKU Coffee, a globally-acclaimed premium coffee brand. This venture has helped over 100,000 tribal lives to fight climate change and come out of poverty. The agro ecology model created here and eponymously named Arakunomics was selected recently by the Rockefeller Foundation as one of the Top Ten Visions for Food for 2050.

A Fellow of the World Bank & the Aspen Institute Colorado, USA, Manoj is a laureate of the John P McNulty Prize and was named by The Financial Times London as one of the 25 people to watch out for in India.



Anuradha Das Mathur

Founder & Dean, The Vedica Scholars Programme for Women

Anuradha Das Mathur is Founder and Dean of the Vedica Scholars Programme for Women (since 2015), a women's only unique management and leadership programme with over a 100 Scholars in residence in New Delhi. With pre-eminent women such as Meenakshi Gopinath, Madeleine Albright, Gowri Ishwaran, Vinita Bali, and Poonam Muttreja on its Governing Council, Vedica has emerged as an innovative and high-quality programme creating a more equal and gender-balanced world. Anuradha

is Founder and Director of 9.9 Media, India's leading niche media company. She founded Samarth, one of India's most reputed elder care companies with operations across 100 cities. Anuradha is a Senior Advisor to the Albright Stonebridge Group in India and brings a unique blend of intellectual insight and intuition to her work, leveraging her research and advocacy experience and her strong professional relationships with the Indian business community. She is Managing Director of CFO Collective, a boutique media company that serves India's senior finance community. Anuradha spent the first twelve years of her career with the Indian affiliate of the Economist Intelligence Unit, where she led the research and business advisory arm, conceptualised and managed a series of businesses for CFOs and CEOs and worked at the intersection of the policy, business and development sectors. Prior to this, she ran Businessworld, India's most widely-read business magazine. In 2009, Anuradha was selected, along with 25 other women globally, for the prestigious Global Emerging Women Leaders Program, an initiative of the U.S. Department of State and Fortune magazine. In recognition of her work, she was recognised as one of India's '100 Women Achievers,' an initiative launched by the Government of India in 2016. Her passion for improving women's participation in the workforce led to pioneering ventures such as The Foundation for Working Women, a platform where public policy, infrastructure and awareness come together to help women 'live their choice to work'.

Anuradha received a B.A. in Economics from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University and an M.A. in Economics from Trinity College, Cambridge University. She is a Yale Global World Fellow.



Anu Meena

Founder, AGROWAVE

Anu belongs to a small village 'Manoli' in Rajasthan where she completed her schooling from a small Govt. Hindi medium school. She graduated from IIT Delhi in 2016 and worked in an American startup briefly. Passionate about solving the difficulties faced by farmers, she started AGROWAVE in 2017 to solve problems of her grandfather and many farmers. She has been recognized by the media being listed in Forbes 30 under 30 Asia, Top 10 innovator of India by India Today Magazine and

many more. She has been TEDx speaker, Wired Next Generation Japan, conference speaker and speaker in many more events where she inspired many young entrepreneurs through her journey. She has been a mentor in many events and also has been awarded by the ministry of social justice and empowerment.



Madhu Natraj

Director, STEM Dance Kampni Natya Institute Of Kathak & Choreography

Madhu dons many hats with grace and dynamism. Often called an intersectionist, she believes in the cross illumination between various fields and thought processes, fueling her vision to inhabit the public domain through the potent medium of Dance. Inclusivity, education, healing, pedagogy, social issues, empowerment, sustainable development and more form a powerful undercurrent in all her interactions. A graduate of Commerce, Journalism and Choreography, she trained in the classical form of Kathak under the tutelage of her mother, the legendary Guru-Dr Maya Rao and with Guru Chitra Venugopal. She studied Contemporary dance in New York and returned to India with a vision to create a unique company –The STEM (Space. Time.Energy.Movement) Dance Kampni- comprising 3 verticals of training, performance and outreach. 'India Today' chose Madhu as one among India's 50 Young Achievers. She also received the 'Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar' from the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, Government of India, to mention a few of her accolades. Madhu has performed in 36 countries out of the 50 she has traveled to. She anchors herself in Bangalore where she lives with her husband. With over 150 choreographies to her credit, her work is unparalleled in its design and execution. She is a panelist at important design, cultural, philanthropic, corporate and academic organizations. Madhu also heads India's premier dance education centre- The Natya Institute of Kathak & Choreography- founded by Dr Maya Rao and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay (under the aegis of UNESCO). An optimist, certified Yoga instructor, martial arts enthusiast and voracious reader, she is now pursuing a MA in Anthropology. Travel and creativity are her oxygen. She is a fellow of Class 7 of the Ananta Aspen Centre's Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network.



Roopa Purushothaman

Chief Economist and Head of Policy Advocacy Tata Sons Ltd; Founder and Director, Avasara Leadership Institute

Roopa Purushothaman is the chief economist and head of policy advocacy at the Tata Group. She is the co-author of the book Bridgital Nation: Solving Technology's People Problem. Also a co-author of the path-breaking 2003 Goldman Sachs report, Dreaming with BRICS: The Path to 2050, she has contributed to a number of publications on globalization and development. Roopa is the founder of Avasara Leadership Institute. She is a graduate of Yale University and the London School of Economics. Ms. Purushothaman has held leadership positions at Everstone Capital Advisors and Goldman Sachs, where she provided expert advice on demographics, income and consumption patterns, and long-term economic growth. A co-author of the path-breaking Goldman Sachs BRIC report, she has contributed to a number of publications on globalisation and development, as well as writing on the economic potential of enhancing women's workforce participation in India. Currently, as Chief Economist and Head of Policy Advocacy at Tata Sons Pvt. Ltd., she leads a team of economic and policy researchers assessing significant macro-economic, geopolitical, and legislative developments. She also leverages the experience of the Tata Group, one of India's oldest and largest conglomerates, to drive thought leadership on key policy and economic issues. Ms. Purushothaman is a graduate of Yale University and the London School of Economics. She has been named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, She is a Fellow of Class 2 of Ananta Aspen Centre's Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network and has served on the Prime Minister of India's advisory council on urban infrastructure.



Shriti Pandey

Founder & Director, Strawcture Eco, Gorakhpur
Mother: Purvi Narain Pandey

Shriti is the founder of STRAWcture, an organisation founded in 2018 which focuses on solving the housing problem in India by introducing an innovative way of building houses. Her mission is to make living spaces more



accessible, sustainable and affordable for all. They build houses using panels made of agri-residue which is burnt on farms and Light Gauge Steel Framing . Previously she has worked in the USA as a Cost consultant. She moved back to India in 2016 to work for the State Bank of India as a Rural Fellow where she worked with a group of 400 women from rural backgrounds to collectively market their poultry and goat to provide an alternate source of livelihood. Shriti is a Civil Engineer and has studied Construction Management from New York University. She aims to create a world where we consume less and create more by reducing our carbon footprint in everything we do.



Radhika Piralal

Executive Vice Chairperson of VIP Industries Ltd and Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellow

Radhika Piralal is the Executive Vice Chairperson of VIP Industries Ltd., India's #1 Luggage Company. Ms. Piralal has been Executive Vice Chair since April 2017. Prior to this role, Ms. Piralal was the Managing Director of VIP Industries from 2010 – 2017 and she worked in various sales and marketing roles in VIP from 2000 – 2004. Outside of VIP, she worked as a management consultant with Bain & Company in New York from 2006 - 2008. She has a BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Brasenose College, University of Oxford (2000) and an MBA from the Harvard Business School (2006). She is a Fellow of the seventh class of the Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network. Radhika Piralal is India's only openly lesbian business leader and is a prominent speaker on issues of LGBTQ inclusion. She is married and she and her wife divide their time between Mumbai and London.



Chetna Sinha

Founder-Chairperson Mann Deshi Bank and Mann Deshi Foundation

Chetna Gala Sinha is an activist, farmer and banker. She is the recipient of the Nari Shakti Puraskar, India's highest civilian award for women who work in

the area of women's empowerment. She has served as a Co-Chair of the World Economic Forum in Davos (2018), Switzerland and as a Co-Chair of Financial Inclusion at the W20 Summit (2018) in Argentina. Chetna founded the Mann Deshi Foundation in 1996 in Mhaswad, a drought-stricken area of Maharashtra, with the aim of economically and socially empowering rural women. In 1997, she set up the Mann Deshi Mahila Sahakari Bank-India's first bank for and by rural women. Today, the Mann Deshi Bank has 100,000 account holders, has loaned over \$70 million and regularly creates new financial products to support the needs of female Micro-entrepreneurs. In 2006, Chetna founded the first Business Schools for Rural Women and in 2013, she launched a toll-free help line and the first Chambers of Commerce for women micro-entrepreneurs in the country. In 2012, she set up a Community Empowerment Programme for Farmers that supports Water Conservation. It has built 16 check dams and impacted 50,000 people. Mann Deshi Foundation also has a Sports Programme for talented athletes (2012) and a women-owned Community Radio (2008) that reaches over 100,000 listeners. In 2013, Mann Deshi Foundation was awarded the Best Innovation Award by the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. Mann Deshi runs Business Schools, a Community Radio and a Chambers of Commerce for rural women micro entrepreneurs. To date, it has supported more than 600,000 women. Chetna Sinha has received many accolades for her work. She has been awarded the 2005 Jankidevi Bajaj Award for Rural Entrepreneurship, the 2005 Ashoka Changemakers Award, the 2009 Godfrey Phillips Bravery Award, and the 2010 EdelGive Social Innovation Honors. She has won the 2013 Schwab Foundation's Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award, the 2017 Forbes Social Entrepreneurs of the Year Award and was ranked by Fortune India as one of the country's 50 top business women in 2018. She has been instrumental in driving significant policy changes and the Reserve Bank of India, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, and several other national planning and regulatory institutions regularly seek her advice on financial inclusion. She is on several national boards including the National Advisory Panel for Niti-Ayog's Women's Entrepreneurship Cell (since 2018) and the Advisory Committee of the Reserve Bank of India's Financial Inclusion Strategy (2019-2024).



Charu Sinha

Inspector General, Central Reserve Police Force, Srinagar

Charu is currently posted as Inspector General, Central Reserve Police Force, heading Srinagar sector. Previously she was the Inspector General of the Central Reserve Police Force, heading Jammu and Bihar sectors. She is the first woman Inspector General of Police of CRPF to take on the role of commanding sectors for Anti-terrorist and Anti-Naxalite Operations in Srinagar, Jammu and Bihar sectors. Prior to going to CRPF on deputation, she handled different positions in Telangana and the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh.



Suparna Singh

Former CEO, NDTV

Suparna has been with NDTV for over 25 years and has the highest-level experience in all aspects of NDTV functions: editorial in both broadcast TV and internet, revenue and cost management. She has helped NDTV create and run a major new property in NDTV Convergence, which is internationally recognised. It is and has always been a profitable venture (almost unheard of among similar internet news properties). She is a Fellow of Class 4 of Ananta Aspen Centre's Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship and a member of Aspen Global Leadership Network.



Sameer Walia

Founder & Chief Executive, Ripples Hope

Sameer, after calling time on his twenty seven years in entrepreneurship and management consulting, is now employing his strategy and execution knowhow in the development sector. Sameer has always been a keen proponent of effective altruism and set up Ripples of Hope Foundation to further this cause. The Foundation is taking on the herculean task of attempting to better the lot/change the realities of under-privileged adolescent girls, with an initial focus on early marriage. In 2003, Sameer set up The Smart Cube, a data analytics company. In the 17 years since, he spearheaded its growth into a global leader in the analytics space, with offices across the world. Vital to the success of his venture was his management consulting experience in the 1990s—more than a decade with Accenture's strategy consulting practice. He is a contrarian thinker, an avid climber and loves to spend time hiking in the upper reaches of the Himalayas. He has run expeditions down many white-water rivers in India, and is also a zealous long-distance runner. Sameer is married to Ishita Swarup, a serial entrepreneur, and has a thirteen-year-old daughter, Tara. He is a Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellow, member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network, and Trustee of the Ananta Aspen Centre.

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