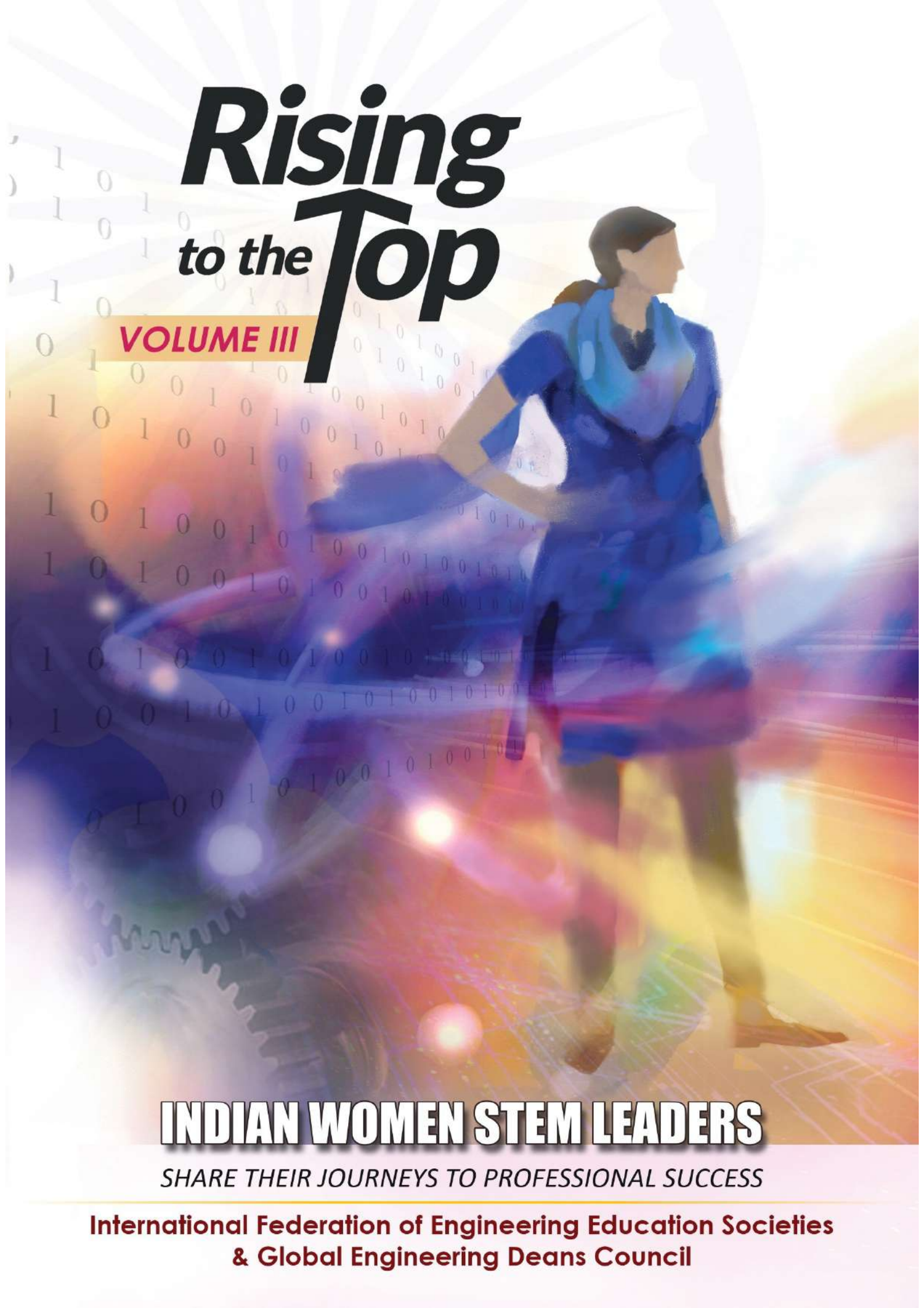




Rising to the Top

VOLUME III

INDIAN WOMEN STEM LEADERS

SHARE THEIR JOURNEYS TO PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

**International Federation of Engineering Education Societies
& Global Engineering Deans Council**

RIISING TO THE TOP

INDIAN WOMEN LEADERS
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PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

Volume III

**INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF
ENGINEERING EDUCATION SOCIETIES
&
GLOBAL ENGINEERING DEANS COUNCIL**



**International Federation of
Engineering Education Societies**



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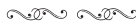
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FORWARD

When people ask me to define what is engineering, I always define it as the art of combining science, math and sociology to create innovative solutions to everyday problems. Engineers have shaped and re-shaped the world in so many different ways. We have seen that as the complexity of the problems increases around the world, success is only achieved through diverse engineering teams with focus and dedication.

Over the past years, we as Arçelik, emphasized the fact that engineering is a genderless profession which can be executed with perfection by females and males alike. I am personally glad to state that we have been globally promoting female engineering role models and I am sure you will be delighted to read the life-changing contributions of these wonderful ladies, that have shaped the engineering landscape of India.

Diversity and inclusion will continue to be one of the fundamental pillars of Arçelik's sustainability efforts and we are committed to actively promoting and nurturing organizational opportunities for all of our global operations.

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MESSAGE FROM COORDINATOR

Dr. Mrs. Sushma Kulkarni

Director

Rajarambapu Institute of Technology, Sangli

I am happy to present this book on the journey of 30 women leaders to the top positions in India. This book focusses on highlighting the challenges faced by Indian women leaders to reach the top and sustain the position.

We have tried to include diversity in terms of geography of India, as each part has its own language, culture and tradition which impacts on the upbringing and the aspirations of a girl child in the family. We have included women leaders from STEM too. Another parameter which we have considered is that they are from different career verticals like Industry, Academia, Research, Politics and Entrepreneurship.

I am happy to announce that the fruit of this effort was hugely satisfying.

After going through the journey of all the authors, I have found some common denominations that ensured their success – determination, passion, perseverance and vision. They all have an undying fighting spirit. And neither of them gave up to any obstacles that was thrown in their way.

There are stories of small-town girls, of girls from very orthodox background, girls from big joint families, also girls born to financial disadvantage. One factor that came out is that almost all of them had extremely supportive parents who believed in them.

*I strongly believe that the way you spent your childhood plays a vital role in shaping a person you are going to be – **Shilpa Kulkarni***

*My advice to the young women would be to take calculated risks but always secure familial support. – **Manjusha Shelke***

Important statistics from a study in India courtesy ZINNOV, shows that if we have 1000 females start their journey, 640 of them attend school, 377 of these girls get to college, 256 attend STEM courses (approx.), 217 of STEM trained women join the tech workforce, 88 quit within 10 years thus leaving 129 in the workforce (approx.). 8 women out of 88 come back as second career women (80 women lost). 26 out of 129 reach senior positions, 2 out of 26 reach the board room. More than that only 14% start-ups in the country are led by women leader.

What should we do about the “Leaky pipeline”? We need to create a Self-sustaining ecosystem platform for women advancement and inclusion.

It's not a pretty picture, and if we wish to change this picture, we need to take special efforts to sow the seeds of leadership in women even as they are little children.

The need of the hour is to identify and block the holes that makes the pipeline leaky –

1. How do we talk to little girls? We teach them the importance of marriage and children, while we teach little boys the importance of money and career. I believe that girls should be taught the importance of career also, and boys should be taught the importance of marriage.
2. We need to teach girls that marriage is a partnership. Everything is not her responsibility. Sharing these responsibilities, outsourcing it or expecting other members of the family to help will not make her any less of a woman.
3. Financial independence of the girl child is a must. It's not a hobby.
4. Kids belong to both the partners. The father is not 'helping' out the mother. They are both doing it together.

Not teaching the lessons of self-independence to girls are the holes in a girl's life and not teaching the importance of family integration to boys are the holes in a boy's life. These holes should be plugged. Boys and girls should be taught the same things. Disparity in the way they are taught to perceive life creates the disbalance. Integration is the way to modern life.

*“It is all about integrating work life with the family life.” - **Manisha Saboo***

*In life, one always come across a junction where one will have to make a choice between “Convenient” and “Right”. Convenient option gives short term gain, but right option gives immense fulfilment” - **Archana Srivastav***

Post marriage in every household in Indian culture it is expected that the women should take care of day today family needs, cooking, taking care of kids, religious and cultural traditions, relatives and guests and everything connected with family. All these responsibilities consume lot of time and energy. Hence to pursue a career along with it is hard-hitting and thus determined effort, multitasking is a basic skill set required.

Another perplexing phase in life of every woman is the challenges after the birth of child and bringing up the child with the societal pressure to give top priority to motherhood. Those who could sustain that phase of life could emerge out later to top positions in their career.

Leaving home for foreign travel for training or any official visit is a great experience for women and have to make special effort to plan for it on the family front.

Journey to the Top is tough and women need to be ready to face the societal challenges and pressures. Courage to work and take risk, belief in your own self and a vision are important component of women leadership. Sometimes Women have to fight against culture, tradition and society to pursue their dreams.

“I strongly believe that gender shouldn't be a deciding factor of leadership skills.” - Mrs Madhu Chitkara

“Throughout my life, I have rebelled against the dogma and allowed myself to live the magical colours of a woman's life. Don't be afraid to spread out your wings, for every step you take, ten more will open up for you!” – Manali Kshirsagar

I have tried to quote a few authors here in an attempt to entice young minds to cop-a-feel about what's inside. There are as many as 30 minds in the following pages whose powerful lives should enlighten you to the fact that there is a reason you are born a woman. It's time to acknowledge that your wings are splashed with beautiful colours and as you soar, the sky is your limit. So, build those wings strong and powerful and splash it with the colours of your choice. But don't forget to fill it with iron and bind it with the confidence that nature has built you with!

Enjoy!





Dr. Hans J. Hoyer

Secretary-General, IFEEES
Executive Secretary, GEDC

PREFACE

I am pleased to express my gratitude and appreciation to Professor Sushma Kulkarni and her team for providing a creative and encouraging leadership to many women engineering leaders in India who contributed as co-authors to our third volume of “Rising to the Top.”

Having had the privilege and opportunity to reside in India and working closely with many colleagues and friends for over several decades, I have been able to gain some understanding as well as a deep appreciation for the culture, values and overall context of this special country. This bond is very special to me and my family. Professionally too, I gained a lot, and the connection still remains.

Professor Kulkarni's effective and highly respected leadership in identifying such a diversity of impressive, creative female engineering leaders in this complex, multi-cultural reality is clearly articulated through the meaningful reflections of our co-authors who not only represent multiple regions and cultures in India but also a diversity of professions and contributions at both personal and professional levels. Their reflections will inspire the young generation of women leaders not only in India but globally and hopefully also open meaningful dialogues, which will increase mutual understanding with men.

I am deeply aware that during the time of publishing this book in 2021, India has been devastatingly affected by the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. I cannot adequately express my respect, admiration, and determination of the Indian society as a whole to confront and cope with the current crisis. The fact that so many women leaders have committed their time and energy during this difficult period to contribute to our volume is simply amazing and merits our deep respect.

Over the past decade it has been a special journey in my own life too. That was about the time I started working with inspiring, intelligent, and dedicated women engineering leaders. Our aim was to engage and motivate colleagues and friends to write a series of our books – Women in engineering.

Many of our colleagues, regardless of what position they occupy in the engineering profession and regardless of their cultural background, have faced challenges as women. This third volume focusing on India which will be followed shortly by our fourth volume focusing Africa, represents important steps towards

achieving a broader understanding of those challenges and the individual journeys towards rising to the top.

Several years ago, during my residence in East Africa, I had the opportunity to visit Sudan which was war-torn at that time. While traveling in Sudan and the surrounding countries of that region, I gained a personal insight and understanding of the complex political, cultural and historical challenges of Sudan and its neighbors. Numerous years after my visit to Sudan, I had the pleasure to meet Tagwa Musa, an important engineering dean from Sudan, the first and only female engineering dean in Sudan and was pleased to be able to encourage her to join our Global Engineering Deans Council (GEDC), a global organization, that I have the privilege to lead over this past decade.

We engaged in a dialogue and she agreed to share with our global community some of her reflections about the challenges she has faced as a leader in this little-understood but special African country. She responded positively to my request to write a thoughtful article, which we published in our IFEEES, GEDC Global Engineer Bulletin. She inspired me by her vision, commitment, courage and capacity to deal with a variety of obstacles and it made us feel that more people should have a window on the experience of women around the world in the field of engineering....

As a result, I reached out to many of my close colleagues and friends around the world including Professor Kulkarni and asked them if they would also be willing to share their personal journey as a female engineering leader in their respective countries. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and more than 30 leaders from every continent agreed to share their personal and professional experiences by writing a chapter for our first volume of “Rising to the Top.”

I felt inspired, humbled and grateful for the thoughtfulness demonstrated by each and every contributor; and I learned subsequently that many readers deeply appreciated the fact that these engineering leaders so openly shared with the world their individual journeys---no matter how difficult the journey has been.

Given the positive global responses to our first edition, I engaged a key global leader residing in Australia, Marlene Kanga, to work closely with me in the second edition of our book. Thanks to her leadership and deep connections with many leaders globally, she was able to identify and encourage a significant number of co-authors for our second volume.

I am confident that we were able to reach our goal in writing our first two volumes and thereby inspiring a whole new generation of female engineering leaders. Given the thoughtful responses, reflections and appreciation expressed by both -- women and men -- we felt inspired to also reach out more specifically to individual global regions such as India and Africa, each of which represent very diverse realities and cultures.

I also learned that our first two volumes also triggered many men in the profession globally and in engineering education to seriously reflect on how they can be more effective, engaged and thoughtful in terms of supporting women in their respective leadership roles---regardless of what culture they live in.

It is my hope and expectation that there will indeed be more opportunities for all our colleagues—women and men---to talk openly and frankly about their own journeys, despite having very different backgrounds. After all, the many commonalities shared by deeply committed leaders are a powerful way to make a real difference in this complex, changing global environment. I feel honored and fortunate to be able to accompany, support and learn from so many colleagues and friends on this important journey. We hope that you enjoy reading these stories of women leaders, and that they inspire your own journeys.





Devasmita Dey

Editor

MESSAGE FROM EDITOR

Thirty strong women leaders of this country and as many stories to tell. I read them all and was awestruck by what they have achieved, despite all the conditions that dictated their lives in their given timeline. They crossed boundaries at a time when crossing even the threshold of the house was forbidden. They challenged limitations and redefined the Lakshman-Rekha to pave a path. Every time they fell, they stood up on their own two feet and showed to the society that they do have their own two feet to stand on. They don't need yours. These 30 stories are not just individual stories to be read and forgotten, to be held in a pedestal and revered or to be set-aside in a category as 'they-are-different'. They are not different. They are one among us, who dared to cut through the societal dictates of who a woman should be and redrew the silhouette. They blazed it up so others can see the truth and light. They shone like amber and spread their fiery wings in the global sky. They rose like the Phoenix.

The inspiration is not just in what they have achieved, but how did they achieve it. Closed doors had to be banged, centuries of dogma had to be challenged and at every step was a test.

In the coming pages, you will find instances, where even after 20 years as a professional, their performances have still been watched with the gender lens, their commitment weighed and questioned, because they have kids to look after, and acknowledgement and laurels due, more often than not, slip over to the other half. While in the personal front, their dedication to the family, duty as a woman and even their cooking skills brought under scrutiny, questioned, and criticized.

I realize that the fight is still not over. Even today, women are advised to choose a career that will be 'more women friendly'. Words like 'vision', 'ambition', 'aspiration', 'growth' are viewed as negative to womanhood, and 'purpose of life' should always encompass just family and kids.

To all the women readers reading this book, especially those mooning the labels that says 'forbidden-to-women' remember that you can, because they could, and they showed us how. Every story emphasized the fact that each time a woman remembered who she was, she changed the game.



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- ▶ Dr. Alaa K. Ashmawy, President, IFEEES
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- ▶ Mrs. Devasmita Dey Chowdhary
- ▶ Dr. Dipali Mansingrao Kadam
- ▶ Mr. Sagar Pratap Pawar

ABOUT IFEEES

The International Federation of Engineering Education Societies connects engineering education societies around the world to leverage the collective strengths of its members and community to improve engineering education worldwide. IFEEES' network works to enhance global engineering education through collaboration between educational, corporate and other organizations interested in engineering education. Learn more at IFEEES.net.

ABOUT THE GEDC

The Global Engineering Deans Council serves as a global network of engineering deans, industry affiliates, former deans, and other leaders in the field, leveraging the collective strengths of its members for the advancement of engineering education and research. GEDC Regular Members include deans, rectors, or principals of engineering colleges and faculties. The GEDC's goal is to provide a space for leaders of engineering institutions to connect and share the successes and challenges of providing world class engineering education programs in an increasingly interconnected and fast-paced world community. Learn more at GEDCouncil.org



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MY EVOLUTION STORY

MRS. SUDAKSHINA LAHA

Head Industrialization, Automation and Tools Digital Services
Ericsson India Global Services

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” --- Lao Tzu

I was born in a small town named Raiganj in the state of West Bengal in India. Born to a middle-class family, where education and ethical values were the two paramount things in life, right from my childhood we were soaked in the environment of thirst for knowledge, mutual respect, camaraderie and aspiration to do something new in life.

Back in those days (I was born in 1972), even though it was quite commonplace in our country for parents to long for a son, my mother tells me that my father was so happy to be blessed with a daughter that he distributed sweets almost to the whole town after my birth.

My mother, who was a brilliant student, was married off at the age of 18, just when she had finished senior school. She aspired to do post-graduate in Maths, but was influenced to choose “Humanities” as the popular belief was that STEM was not meant for girls. My father was always extremely enthusiastic and supportive of my mother's educational endeavors and I have grown up hearing stories of how my parents made the best out of the opportunities, how she pursued her higher education and made her mark as a respected educationist. These stories were living motivation all around me. During my childhood, I have seen my mother do everything from fixing electrical connection problems at home to handling the bank finances, all while managing a big household in a spic and span manner.

I was indeed fortunate to have a mother like her as an example in my life!! As we talk about initiatives like “He-for-She” in the context of gender diversity and enabling the women today, I would consider my father as the epitome of “He-for-She” at that time. He provided immense encouragement and support for my

mother, my aunts and me to pursue any field we wished - be it engineering (myself) or Law (my aunt), or finally establishing a career outside the house in her forties (my mother). So, despite the times, I grew up amidst a lot of encouragement from both my parents with zero differentiation between my elder brother or other boys when it came to my upbringing.

I grew up in the city of joy, Kolkata, and studied at Bethune Collegiate School. Founded in 1849, it was the first women's school in all of Asia and subsequently grew to become the 1st women's college in India. I had the pride of studying in the school which had such notable alumni like Kadambini Ganguli and Chandramukhi Basu - the first 2 female graduates during British India period - or Begum Khalida Zia who became the 1st female Prime Minister of Bangladesh. My school provided me with an environment rich in traditional values and ethos, all the while teaching me the importance of “perseverance”, “hard work”, “open-mindedness” and being “balanced” - terms thrown around in international schooling today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sudakshina Laha is a technology and business leader in the field of IT & Telecommunications. She has a rich experience of R&D and Services, with the leadership responsibility of large units delivering multi-million-dollar projects in Operators and OEM segment across the globe. She started her career as a Software Developer in Telecom R&D field and now leads major Business Functions in the ICT (IT & Communications) world. She has a collaborative and approachable personality and has a special liking for “fitness”. She always keeps enriching her knowledge through avid reading, exploring different cultures and food. She loves travelling and spends the remaining time in contributing towards social needs and women empowerment through her technical skill set.

Sudakshina has a loving family comprising of her husband, 2 children and her mother who are her pillars of strength and have always been her best buddies!

She won “HerRising awards 2020” at the national level in “Women in Technology” category recently. She was also featured in “Technology grit” article published in “Women Who Code”- Delhi chapter publication. The other interesting turn of events for her has been winning the beauty pageant at all India level, in 40 plus category!

There is this incident that happened when I was in grade 11. My maths teacher, from whom I took private tuitions, was someone whom we feared as much as we loved and respected. It happened so that I made the same mistake twice in his class while solving a calculus problem. He was furious and in front of a bunch of several other students (mostly boys), he told me that the only profession with which I shall end up is perhaps “home-making”, since I cannot focus on maths, while all other boys sitting there would become excellent engineers. While I had a pretty good track record of scoring 99%-100% in maths all along, this comment perhaps brought me out of my comfort zone, and I prepared well for my Engineering entrance exam. In hindsight, my maths teacher, who was also a loving father of 2 girls, possibly sought to do exactly this: motivate me to excel in maths and to pick up a profession which suits my core abilities. On the other hand, being a mother of 2 and running a full household now, I know for sure that “home-making” is in no way an easier task and needs a high level of management skills too! However, what my math's teacher did can be called “situational leadership”, as we say it in management terms, to ensure that I gave my best and to steer me in the right direction.

Being one of the board toppers both in my 10th and 12th board exams and also being in the bracket of 99+ percentile in the Engineering entrance exam, I had the opportunity to take up any course I wanted to for my undergraduate studies. Many of my relatives and well-wishers advised me not to get into engineering and rather pick up any science specialization and pursue a career in Teaching since apparently that will be more “women-friendly”. They were making me 'aware' of the tough track of Engineering which was thought to be a man's world apparently! My father, himself being a civil engineer, however, advised me to simply take up whatever I wished to do and never get bogged down by apprehension of the unknown. So, I went ahead and took admission in one of the best Engineering colleges in my city - and an interesting chapter of my life thus began.

We were only 2 girls and 43 boys in our batch, in our department of Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering. That was perhaps a common scenario about 25 years back. It is heartening to see that the percentage of girls in engineering classes has improved a lot over these 2 decades, which is a major enabler for creating the desired pipeline of women talents in the industry!

The days of Engineering College were fun. Along with a lot of hard work, we also learned to take things easy and enjoy life. The environment in our campus was vibrant, egalitarian and based on meritocracy.

One day, during a workshop, one of our professors asked me – “do you think you are attired properly considering this is an engineering workshop floor?” Those days, most of the girls would wear traditional Indian clothes which proved to be slightly clumsy considering it to be the workshop floor! Unless my professor had nudged me, I wouldn't have taken the lead to think of changing my attire to a more appropriate one which would make me more comfortable at my workplace.

Post my engineering degree, I joined C-DOT (Centre for Development of Telematics) which was a premiere autonomous telecom R&D organization in India. I was in this job for about 4 years, during which I had to move from one city to another within India, and had gotten the first-time exposure of “Technology” at industrial scale. I worked with several mentors, got a promotion in between and also finished my Masters' degree from Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

C-DOT helped me build a strong foundation both as an independent professional as well as a technologist. One of the interesting experiences I had during these years, taught me how unconscious biases pitch in and works as minor deterrents sometimes for women professionals! It also taught me a few steps on how to circumvent such situations. As a very shy person that I was, I could never ask anything from anyone. But I soon learnt that at times, one has to be especially vocal to get one's dues. This one time my batch got the opportunity to attend this very prestigious IEEE conference in a different city. The topic of the conference was around a specific upcoming area of technology, in which I was incidentally doing my project. I was very hopeful to get selected for the conference. But when the list of attendees was shared, to my dismay, I found that my name was not included. Some of my colleagues encouraged me to speak to our department director. I still remember how difficult it was for me back then to muster the courage to do so. But, when I spoke to him, what I learnt was that, the simple reason for which I was not considered, was that the conference would be held in a different city and being a young woman, I might find it difficult to travel. When I expressed my willingness, I was subsequently included. I learned that at times, a little initiative and courage help to remove a lot of barriers. This was also the phase when I had gotten married! My husband, who was my classmate in Engineering and was a colleague in the office, has been another strong force in addition to my parents, to encourage and support me in all my endeavors.

My next job was in Hughes Software Systems (HSS) where I worked for around thirteen long years and had grown in the corporate ladder. HSS was a global multinational company. It was a very interesting journey to work for multiple

customers from different parts of the world and keep learning and contributing in new areas of technology as the Telecom and IT Industry kept evolving over decades. Travelling to different customer locations in various countries and interacting with people from multiple cultures and backgrounds shaped me up further, both as a human being as well as a professional. One of my projects needed me to stay in the desert area near Dubai for almost 6 months where we were working on establishing a mobile communication network based on a Geostationary satellite system. At times we had to work from inside the tents hoisted up in the midst of deserts during the peak summers or stay in the office throughout the night and drive back to the hotel during the wee hours crossing several miles! I have never shied away, and did it all. This attitude has helped me see the opportunities I got for what they were, and so become a stronger and more independent person. During this project, at the end, when the first mobile call through the end-to-end satellite network could happen, through me, the level of excitement and satisfaction which I experienced, along with my colleagues and the team was immense.

Such experiences always gave me the confidence to take up more challenging assignments subsequently.

While sailing through this professional journey, we also had both of our kids born during this phase. At that time, Indian law mandated only 12 weeks of maternity leave. It had been a challenge, at times a little bit heart breaking, and at times a lot of anxiety, to leave the babies in the hands of the nannies! My husband and I were very “hands on” when it came to our children. We have alternately managed our work-related travels as well as ensuring that the kids get full attention from at least one parent at any point of time. Our parents from both sides have also come to our rescue, off and on. We are now the proud parents of a loving daughter who is going to one of the top-ranking universities of the world for her undergraduate studies and a son who is in his school enjoying soccer and science experiments and spends his leisure time in coding for new applications and games. After a long stint of 13 years in Hughes, I had decided to explore new avenues and joined Ericsson Global Services, India in 2013. This marked the start of a new journey, seeing a different corporate culture, learning a lot more on the business and leadership front and having the opportunity to play much more challenging roles at a different scale! Besides the business, organization or technology related challenges, the other interesting aspect is on how to stay longer in the game as a professional and how to really get into the senior leadership level and reach the top

where the percentage of women at the top level has been really low - to get through the so-called “glass ceiling”. This part of my career was marked by a lot of travel, resulting in me being exposed to different cultures, and having my first professional experience where I had actively felt differentiated against, for being a woman.

At the time I was assigned as the Service Delivery and Engagement head for a particular global market and geography part of Ericsson Service Delivery Organization for its network unit. This required me to travel a lot to all the countries in this geography. Interestingly, some of the countries had different rules like dress code or movement restriction for women in general. During one such trip, I was not allowed to enter a particular customer's office premises where an important meeting was planned. Apparently, women were prohibited there as per the local rules of the country! After a lot of waiting, lots of discussions and multiple approval chains, finally I could join the meeting. Still, I was made to sit at a distance from rest of the male colleagues and customers. Even though I was treated very respectfully, it was evidently a discrimination which I had never experienced before. I felt suffocated, nervous and it was somewhat humiliating to be so blatantly treated based on my gender. Looking back to this experience several years down the line now, though, I feel the experience was not all that bad, as it made me stronger and more enriched.

It is very heartening to see lots of focus in creating a diverse and inclusive environment in the corporates nowadays. At the same time, I feel that there is no replacement for hard work, determination, and the attitude of being a go-getter. Sometimes, many younger women colleagues get in touch with me to discuss how to stay in the game or how to rise to the top. This makes me feel very happy seeing so many female colleagues encouraged and passionate about their career! The only thing which I would like to say to all the women out there is not to fixate on gender in the day to day, and not to feel disadvantaged or discouraged in any which way - rather, look at everything as equal and fully focus on work, take up the bigger challenges and stick to a bigger career objective and superlative competency development - perhaps the way any professional would steer their career regardless of their gender.

Overall, it has been a very fulfilling journey for me. I have been able to earn well to fulfill many of my dreams which needs a strong financial backing. The exposure and experience I had, has helped me to become a better person and to provide “quality upbringing” to my children. Having visited so many different

countries, getting to know about so many different cultures and being part of the technology evolution over decades has been exciting indeed and I would love to continue to ride on this exciting wave forever!!

FLIGHT OF AN EAGLE

MRS. JYOTHI JOSHI

Associate Vice President – Quality and Operations
Huawei Technologies India Pvt. Ltd.

“All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them.” - Walt Disney.

When I was in my high school, we visited some of our relatives during summer vacation. At that time, I overheard a conversation between my father and his friends, where they were advising him not to waste money on our education. Rather he should save it for our dowry. They told him that girls are supposed to learn the art of keeping a house and that they are not meant to be engineers. That was the day when I decided I will be an Engineer.

I was born in Secunderbad, and was the youngest among three sisters. My Father was an engineer and worked closely with the public services of India. Being a Government Employee, my father was transferred to various places across the country every five years. Due to this we had to change our house, schools and friends frequently. The changes were painful, especially because we left our friends behind, but this also gave us an opportunity to learn and adapt to new people, new culture and off course, learn new things. At that time, we did not understand, but this exposure made us confident and, in a sense, also build in an inherent boldness within us to be open to challenges and opportunities. Making friends quickly and getting along with various kinds of people came easily to us. Things like 'adjust', 'adapt', 'handle' were not something we had to learn separately. It got weaved in us during our growing years. Also, what helped was that our parents did not try to bring us up differently because we were girls. I don't recall either of our parents giving us any special lectures on the appropriateness of conduct for being born a woman or the quintessential qualities of an Indian women. In fact, the lectures mostly surrounded around being independent, strong, truthful and self-sufficient. While my father was posted in Goa, all three of us did our vital part of education

there. Goa is a beautiful beach state in India and a coveted tourist destination for people in search of some sun and sand, and of course, fish!

So, during that time in India, there were certain policies in place to support girl-child education and such. That helped us a lot in a way that enabled us to take our education to the next level with some ease.

Our father was always an inspiration to us. His sense of righteousness balanced with progressiveness made sure that the sky was our limit. He was a rock-solid character and that made us want to be like him. My mother was the functional backbone to all of us and a personification to what we know as a 'strong-woman'. If today I am a strong woman, it came from her. The value that was instilled in us by both of them is a take-away lesson for a lifetime.

As a little girl, I was not great in studies. In fact, I remember, I scored so poorly in History that the class teacher called upon my elder sister to complain about my bad performance. Also, once I had forgotten the alphabetical order and was sent to a lower class to check and come back. That was crushingly humiliating,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jyothi Joshi is Head of Quality and Operation Dept in Huawei Technologies India Pvt. Ltd., Huawei's largest overseas R&D center focused on developing core cloud platforms and end-to-end solutions for ICT Industry. As QOD Head, Jyothi has complete management responsibility for ensuring high quality of deliverables from India Research center in addition to supporting all Businesses by providing right operational platform.

Jyothi has 25 years of industry experience with almost 20 years in Huawei. Prior to taking this responsibility, Jyothi has played diverse roles in delivery, both in technical and management areas in core network products and solutions.

Jyothi Joshi holds an Engineering Bachelor's Degree in Electronics and Communications from Regional Engineering College (now NIT), Suratkal and Post graduate Diploma in General management from IIMC.

She has been a part of a few Women oriented forums like the WILL (Women in Leadership) and Panel discussion in AnitaB.org Conference .

but also the incident built my resilience in a manner that I learnt to handle failure very well.

Also, there is this experience that instilled in me a strong sense of confidence -- As a teenager I was very fat and faced so many belittling comments on how bad I looked due to my weight. I took it up as a challenge and reduced my weight with rigorous exercise and diet. This is when I realized that one can achieve anything with hard-work and dedication.

Maths and Science have always been my favorite subjects. I enjoyed Maths so much that even while travelling in a bus I would sit and solve math problems. I guess that passion for that subject made engineering easy. Even though it was immense hard work, I did not mind it. In my higher secondary exam, I secured 4th rank in the entire state of Goa. It came as a huge surprise for me and my family because it wasn't something I had planned for. What made me elated was the pride and happiness that I saw on the faces of my parents and sisters. This success puffed me up with the confidence that if I try, I can definitely be successful. Nothing beats hard work and perseverance and I gave it my all.

Securing a rank also made it easy for me to get into a very good University for my Studies in Engineering -- Engineering College in Surathkal for Electronics and Communication. It was the best one among the regional engineering colleges. I remember my parents were in tears with happiness when I secured a seat in that college. It made me think of that incident years back, when my uncles advised my parents against educating a girl child. "Well," I thought, "this eagle has taken flight."

Starting part of my college life was filled with ups and downs. Having been part of such a closely bonded family since my childhood, it was very difficult for me to stay away from home. It took some time to adjust.

Also, initial days in the hostel too was a nightmare. Ragging by seniors was a ritual that was just not funny. I wondered how they got such weird ideas from and more so, how were they enjoyable. It was just not happy times, but surprisingly, after the ritualistic fresher's party, these very seniors warmed up to us like magic and they became very good friends and a solid support system – a home, away from home.

We were a class of 3 girls and 55 boys. All three of us occupied the first bench and stuck together. It felt very isolated. There was a clear separation of girls and boys. We often felt at a disadvantage because we were not included in group studies, projects, friendly trips and discussions. The environment was male-

dominated and prejudices against women trying to make a career was the norm. To make matter worse, I was very shy and an introvert and did not mix well with people. But I did have a few very good girl friends. We had a good time amongst us, but what I actually missed was that the entire gang of boys shared many useful tips and tricks to succeed, specially in the subjects I had chosen. The seniors shared with them tips about how to face an interview, what to watch out for, what to focus on etc. So, unlike the boys, my preparation for Campus recruitment was poor. I struggled, but finally got selected through one Telecommunication company.

The job was good. What I really enjoyed was understanding how we make phone calls across networks, cities, countries, and security of equipment. Along with my mother and my sister, we moved to Bangalore. My father was working in another city.

The best part of this company was that it was a public sector, with huge infrastructure. My colleagues, who had years of experience, helped me to learn the subject well.

Travelling to various parts of India to support various customers was part of my job. Meeting customers and understanding what they need was a big learning and most importantly, the concept of 'customer first' was drilled into my professional psyche. Another important thing I understood was that we need to constantly keep learning or else survival becomes difficult. Keeping oneself updated with the latest technology was paramount to stay in the game.

Women in my field back then was minimal and undervalued. We had to constantly prove our capability and voice our opinions to be heard. Networking was difficult as we were not considered at par with the men in the field. With liberation many private companies set up offices in India. I finally switched to a German Multinational company which had newly setup their telecom related teams in India.

I had some wonderful things to learn in terms of the in-depth detailing and planning they do for any product development and delivery. They are true experts in their field. In MNCs the number of women were definitely higher but none really at a senior leadership position. This was not just in India. The scenario was same even in the headquarters. But through the last decade I have seen many women leaders making it to the top and also a lot of drive for inclusiveness. Its heartening to see this crack happening in the proverbial glass ceiling.

In this company I had the opportunity to travel to France and Germany. I had spent a year there and learnt a lot technically from them. Travelling across countries

gave me a sense of independence and self-confidence. Language was a barrier, but I managed well. After about 4 years in the organization, the particular business division closed. Remaining in this domain, meant I would have to change organization.

Coincidentally Huawei had set up a new facility aiming to build an R&D team in India in the area of Telecommunications. Some of my known colleagues referred me there and I was instantly recruited. This was a Chinese company and of course language was a big barrier then. But honestly, in the last 20 years the drive that I have seen in my Chinese colleagues to learn English is amazing. Now to communicate with them is not difficult at all.

I joined Huawei as a Developer and now have grown to handle some of the most important position in business or Organization operation. It has been 20 years now in this organization and I think I am the senior most women employee here. The core value driven as part of this organization have got ingrained in me -- like customer centricity, dedication, perseverance. I have faced multiple interesting project challenges, but the passion in me continues to drive me to overcome these challenges.

I never said 'no' to any responsibility that came my way, be it in core technical or management or even support departments. I feel we can always have a different perspective to learn.

I feel very fortunate to be a part of the Telecommunication industry. For me, the times and industry could not have been more perfect. I feel I have been a part in the making of history – Telecommunication which has transformed from fixed land lines to mobile and which has almost become everything for us - from entertainment to our wallet.

I have seen the change happening. I have been a part of this great phenomenon.

The feeling is amazing!

It is very challenging to be a part of a fast-growing company that has a strong vision to grow. Things are so fast paced that it takes a lot of dedication and perseverance to cope up and handle the work. But at the same time, it gives me immense satisfaction to work with some of the best minds and the latest technology.

The support from my husband, my in-laws, and most importantly my son has also been instrumental. They have made my journey easy throughout. They faced so many problems in my absence, but at no point did they ever ask me to

change my goals. They have been my support system and driven me to perform better in the face of all my challenges. Anyone can be strong willed and determined to work, but the path is made so easy with a loving family who are there to back you up.

In the end, I would like to conclude by saying that all dreams come true. I come from a society that believes in pushing girls two steps back then pulling them one step forward, and yet I dared to dream and made my dream come true. Was it easy? Not always, but it never is. If you have the passion to dream, then have the courage to work towards it.

FROM THIS SIDE TO THE OTHER

MRS. MANISHA SABOO

Delivery Head, AVP, IVS Center Head
Infosys

"There are no constraints in the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect." - Ronald Reagan

Born in a small sleepy town in Maharashtra, the first school I attended was a Government Boys School! Intrigued?? Well, that's what happens when you are raised with three elder brothers and you happen to follow them like a tail everywhere, including their school.

So that was my first school, and the last school I attended few years back was Stanford Graduate School of Business, one of the most prestigious school in the globe. Lot's in between, and a long journey of hard-work, will-power and determination. In those rusty days of Government Boy's school, it would have been hard to predict for anyone that I could come so far, but that's what happens when dreams take wings. Today I am the Associate Vice President in Infosys and Delivery Head. I am also the DC Head of Hyderabad Pocharam campus which is one of the largest IT campuses in the world, set up on 450 acres and has 28,000 engineers.

It was an interesting journey, but it wasn't easy.

When I look back, I realize I was blessed to be born in a family which did not differentiate between son and daughter, stories of which we hear so often. My father was an engineer and very supportive in anything I decided to venture into -- be it my choice of career or a funky haircut. Mom on the other hand was a strict disciplinarian who would do the balancing act.

Growing up with three brothers meant playing all sorts of sports that boys usually play -- marbles, kabaddi, cricket, gilli-danda. Dolls and kitchen-set were not on agenda. I was just one in the gang of boys. I never considered myself different because I'm a girl. I think this shaped my mind forever.

I had normal upbringing in a protective environment, in known community, without any gender discrimination. Now I realize what I considered “normal” and “routine” was a big privilege. Not every girl in India has the privilege to claim that. In fact, after I was married, I realized that my in-laws, though quite progressive in nature, still had some deep roots in the orthodox conduct of females in the house. Initially I had to wear saris and cover my head in and around the house, and maintain such 'daughter-in-law' appropriate decorum. I had to slowly shift from sari with pallu on the head to normal sari, to salwar-kameez and finally to trousers and shirts. I was not trying to tickle anybody's sensitivity, but this sartorial change was necessary to move around freely and attain the image that went with my professional territory. I made the transformation slow and was pleased that there were no such objections. I could handle this sensitive matter aesthetically probably because I was lucky to have the unswerving support from my family and friends during my growing up years who never pressurized me with any expectations and predetermined dos and don'ts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Manisha Saboo is an Associate Vice President and Delivery Head at Infosys. She is responsible for delivery of software testing projects (portfolio of ~300 MUSD) for Financial Services clients of Infosys across Europe, Asia and Oceania. She has successfully implemented, distributed agile and has spearheaded dev-test-ops adoption by large organizations. Her focus on the industry vertical and geographies helps her create customized service offerings like 'Assurance of operational resilience for banks', 'Open banking testing for finance industry in Australia and Europe', 'Legacy modernization', as well as digital assurance solutions for newer technologies like AI, Big Data, RPA, Mobility, IoT, Cloud, and Virtualization.

Manisha is also the Head of Infosys campus in Pocharam, Hyderabad. Her role involves managing all aspects for growing business in the campus. This includes enhancing client experience, employee right skilling, employee engagement, CSR, improving operational efficiency, managing relationship with industry, academia and government etc.

Her papers are published in prestigious conferences worldwide. She was invited to Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad to speak about Digital Transformation. She was speaker in prestigious IIIT Hyderabad Foundation month Distinguished Lectures series. Telangana Government has honoured Manisha with "Women Achiever Award" for leadership in corporate world.

I was decent in studies but not a topper. When I would score good marks, my brothers would tease me saying that 'Manisha studies because she wants to skip house hold work'. That was so mean of them, but the worse thing is that they were not wrong.

After my 12th standard I got admission in medical and engineering both. In those days we could appear for Math and Biology both and decide the stream post +2. I was underage for medical, which meant I had to wait for one year to start taking Medicine classes. I joined engineering instead as a stop gap. I thought I will switch the following year, but did not because I started enjoying the subject. It was probably not a big surprise because almost everyone in my family were engineers, so it did sound like a befitting choice. Also, Visveswaraya Regional College of Engineering (now VNIT), Nagpur was a prestigious institution with high teaching standards and all modern amenities needed for students, which made it even more of an appropriate decision. The best part of college life was time spent in the hostel. I made good friends and being with students from all over India helped me accept diversity more easily.

After completion of engineering, I did MBA because that was the only way to postpone talks of marriage for which I was not ready at 20. But, after completing MBA there was no worldly reason to delay marriage. In India, marriage of a daughter hangs like a cow-bell in the parent's neck. You can take it off only when the job is done. As per the usual custom, I had to have an “arranged marriage”, meaning my parents had to find the right man to marry me off.

It wasn't easy to find a suitable match.

I was considered too qualified for the normal crowd and also because I made it clear that I will work after marriage. The general expectation here is that, the girl will quit job post marriage. Some 'liberal' suitors and their families would extend the courtesy to post childbirth.

Well, I wasn't willing to expect either.

The scenario 30 years back was that a working wife meant a sign of weak financial status of the family and inability of the husband to support family expenses. So, many “suitable” boys were “not suitable” for me.

I think the most important thing I did in my life was to not get married in haste.

I was not influenced by talks of other girls and boys of my age in my community about getting married. I was not impressed by girls deciding to marry off in rich families.

I was not looking for a rich guy.

I was looking for the right guy.

I was looking for someone who could understand me, supports my aspirations and treats me as equal. In India, family plays an important role and I had to be sure that I marry into an unorthodox family which will support a working woman.

In Sanjay I found that person. He comes from a family of professionals. My grandmother-in-law was my pillar of strength. She took care of me, my family and my home when I was away for work. My father-in-law not just “allowed” me to work, he encouraged me to make the most of my education without getting bogged down by societal prejudices. Sanjay treats me as equal and respects my profession. If there was one thing which made me who I am today, it is marrying the right person from a right family. I could focus on work peacefully without worrying about the usual household chores and community pressure. After marriage I stayed in a joint family where 4 generations were staying under one roof, supporting each other to flourish and be happy. My daughters grew up in safe environment with other children at home overseen by grandparents, uncles and aunts. While staying in a joint family meant managing relationships to avoid friction, it also meant I had the freedom to work without feeling guilty of leaving children alone or with a maid at home when I stepped out for work.

In early 90s there were very few job opportunities in Hyderabad for women engineers so I decided to start my own business. I started a computer training institute and later ventured into distribution of computer peripherals. After few years, Sanjay also joined in. This set up gave us the flexible hours needed when our daughters were born. However, by end of century i.e. 2000, IT industry picked up in Hyderabad. Around that time, my children started going to school and I started exploring the expanding boom in the industry. So many varied profiles and opportunities made me want to take up a job in IT. I was also inquisitive of the swanky lifestyle offered by the IT corporates.

It was not an easy decision to make the move. I was settled in my business for almost 13 years now and did not have right skill set to take up an IT job. Also “job” per say was looked down by my society – “Why do you want to work for someone else when you can work for yourself”. However, undeterred by these challenges, I took up short-term courses to upgrade my skills and started looking out for jobs.

My initial period in job was extremely tough. Learning the ways of the corporate world, handling people and now, I also had a boss! I experienced many

ups and downs, but it only made me strong, confident and resourceful. In my core job too, the learning experience was immense. I worked and learned and learned and worked and never expected any special treatment or exemptions for being a woman, neither did I face any discrimination for being one. May be because I never considered myself a “woman” at work. I was just another employee trying to give my best to the task at hand. I think growing up with 3 brothers also helped me mingle with men easily and treat them as equals.

My success mantra is: When at work forget that I'm a woman. When at home never forget that I'm a woman.

I think it is important to have harmony at home to be able to give the best at work. However, for peaceful and cordial environment at home it is not essential that I immerse myself in household chores to please everyone and end up tired, feeling like a sacrificial goat and in the process make everyone unhappy. Here are few things which I practice to manage life at home:

A. Don't try to be super woman: I don't have to be the best in everything and every role I play. I don't fret about being a perfect mother, wife, daughter-in-law etc. It is okay to be not perfect. It is okay to say “I cannot do it”. It is okay to request help from family, community, and hire help.

In fact, I employ help for everything that can be outsourced so that I can give my best to the remaining. Like, it's important for me to spend quality time with my daughters, keep an eye on the health of the elderly in the family and charter a future path for the kids in the house rather than spend valuable time cooking. Cooking can be outsourced. I'm sure we can earn more than the minimum wages which we pay to hired help.

B. It is my prime responsibility to be happy myself first : Let me share a simple theory that I follow.

1st hypothesis : I can only give what I have.

2nd hypothesis : If I do not have it, I cannot give it.

So, if I am unhappy, I'll spread unhappiness. Not advisable.

C. Managing relationships is critical to my success : It is difficult to be happy and content just by yourself, by being selfish. But, as a working woman where do I find time for maintaining relationships? I can barely find time for my family. Here are few things I do on this front:

a. I make it a point to meet relatives on festivals. It works out beautifully.

b. Once in a while I send simple gifts to elderly relatives. They love it and the positive vibes spread fast.

c. Living in big family means attending n-numbers of big fat weddings. Weddings are time consuming affair. And time is one thing I'm stingy about. So, I attend any one of the many rituals involved in a wedding and avoid attending all the five days. It helps me to keep connected and also saves time.

D. Don't bother about work life balance : Go for work life INTEGRATION. It is virtually impossible to have air tight segregation of office work and household responsibilities. So, live in the moment. Maintain one life, one calendar. In my office MS-Outlook I block time for my personal work too. For example: Every evening 1 hour “Me time” for exercise is blocked. Friday evening is blocked for hangout with husband. Once a year vacation with family, that's usually our wedding anniversary week.

Once broken down into pieces, it's manageable.

Moving on to experience at work let me also share few take away from managing profession & building career:

My career has been full of twists and turns. But persistence and grit made the difference. I lost my job when the company I worked for got merged, I lost my job again when there was a sudden close down of my company which employed me, rendering me unemployed for 6 months. My promotion got delayed by many years and it looked like end of road, besides other fallouts big and small. I faced tough situations in career. But I took challenging periods as darkness before dawn and kept inching forward one day at a time. The important thing is I never gave up.

Here are few things which helped me find alternate paths, be resilient and grow.

- A. Spread your work beyond the current role, build connects with people beyond your immediate work colleagues, managers, superiors. These contacts help you if you face tough situation in your current role. The best way to build this connect is to volunteer for work which involves people beyond your role.
- B. Be the first one to raise hand when extra work needs to be done. Extra work means extra opportunity. If you have heard “opportunity is dressed in overalls” take my word for it -- it is true. I love to go beyond my work and take up additional responsibilities. I think I have grown in my career because of this trait.
- C. Get Mentors: Mentors have played a major role in shaping my personality. They may not have the time to hand hold me, but I learn so much just by working with them, observing their thought process and their management methodology.

If I have to say just one thing which is important for success at home and at

work, I would say: **Dream Big**. Have gigantic dreams. Make a dream board. It will help you remain focused on what you truly desire and will motivate you to work one step at a time towards your seemingly impossible dreams. Twenty years back I dreamt of working in large corporates, traveling abroad for business, being invited as a speaker at events and experience the MNC life.

Today these things have become a part of my life.

When you dream big, your thoughts are steeped in abundance rather than lack. Whatever you dream, you should own it and be proud of it. Yes, there will be barriers to break and walls to bring down. I had my share. It was like crossing over cultural time frame, when I slowly moved from sari and pallu to trousers and shirts, and many things in between. You too will have yours, and my advice will be to do, whatever you have to do, with love and respect.

It will work.

In my experience, I have seen that capability and commitment will never be questioned just because you are women. I feel that Corporate world treats women equally with pay and opportunities. It depends on us -- how smart, capable and eager we are to grow as a good professional. Don't let social dogma chain you. Have courage to dream big and conviction to slog for making dreams a reality.

I did.

You can too!!

AN ACCIDENTAL ENTREPRENEUR

DR. MADHU CHITKARA

Pro-Chancellor
Chitkara University

Curiosity is my teacher - Dr. Madhu Chitkara

I was born in 1956, and my parents were Central Government employees in New Delhi, Capital of India. Delhi of the sixties was quite different. It was a blend of the urban and the rural and was a composed city.

My younger brother and I spent our childhood in Delhi. I vividly remember the neem trees that lined our lane. Their flowers were creamy in colour and inconspicuous, yet their scent filled the air in the summers.

That is a very beautiful memory of my childhood.

Hi! I am Madhu Chitkara and I have been instrumental in creating more than 64 relevant industry-linked programs in the fields of Engineering, Management, Architecture, Art & Design, Nursing, Healthcare, Education, Mass Communication, Hospitality, Pharmacy & Marine Engineering at Graduate, Postgraduate and Doctorate level. At present, I am Pro Chancellor of Chitkara University, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. I am also the Chairperson of Chitkara International Schools, Chandigarh & Panchkula.

Today, between the two campuses of Chitkara Universities in two states, there are about 15,000 students, 900 faculty members and more than 1,500 support staff. I am also proud to share that Chitkara University is the only University in the World that has women at most of the Leading Posts and 67% of the work force at all levels are women.

When I look back, I remember that though my brother was younger to me, abiding by the Indian Patriarchal society, he was considered superior and also the preferred one. My father Mr. Jagdish Chander never differentiated between us, but mother was a little biased. Not that she did not love me or care for me, but he was

given more preference.

My mother Mrs Dharam is a very pious and god-fearing lady. She instilled in us ethical and moral values, honesty, diligence, and hard work and most importantly discipline. Probably that's the reason why I had always been responsible and able to manage my time.

While I was studying, my parents were least interested in whatever I was doing. In my world, education wasn't important for a girl child. But I wanted to become a Doctor. Unfortunately, due to the then prevailing environment of limited accessibility and financial constraints of the family, I could not realise my dream. But that didn't stop me.

I was always very good in Maths, and took up undergraduate programme with mathematics as majors in Maitreyi College New Delhi. I got my bachelor's degree in 1975 and then Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) soon after. For my exceptional contribution as a teacher, I was honoured with State Award for Teachers as a 'Teacher of Outstanding Merit,' in 1987.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Madhu Chitkara is the Pro Chancellor of Chitkara University, India. She is listed amongst “India's finest and fiercest academicians”. Under her dynamic patronage, in just 18 years, Chitkara University has become one of the most prestigious private university in India and ranked in the top 25 in the nation.

She has more than 30 accolades to her credits in the form of awards at State and Central Government level. She is the recipient of “Lifetime Achievement Gold Medal Award” in 2004. Her case study on Entrepreneurship is published by Washington School of Business in 2013 and she was adjudged as Winner of Women Entrepreneur Award in South Asia. She was recognized as a Visionary eduLEADER of India by former Late President, His Excellency Sri Pranab Mukherjee during the ReTHINK INDIA 5th Estate Summit 2017. BRICS International Forum and International Federation of Indo-Russian Youth Clubs jointly honoured her with the 'Award of Honour for International Digital Leaders' during the program 'Vision for Future - 2019.

Around that time, I got married. My husband was my classmate in B.Ed, Dr. Ashok K Chitkara. He had been and still is my biggest supporter.

I completed M.Sc. (Mathematics), M.Ed. and later Ph.D. by working on a topic related to Education. Having armed myself with these degrees, I was soon employed by a college as a lecturer. But, the entrepreneur inside me was imploring to take on bigger challenges in life. By then, we were blessed with two kids. My Son Mohit and daughter Mansi. Motherhood was the best thing that happened to me and filled me with a different kind of joy and happiness.

Around this time my husband and I started Chitkara Institute of Competitions to prepare students for various competitive examinations. My husband possessed tremendous intellectual capital to teach and I had the entrepreneurial skills to match. Indian laws require that only a registered Trust or a Society can establish a formal educational institution. My primary observation then was that education in India had been reduced to just rote learning, and I wanted to bring about a paradigm shift that could make an impact.

Together, in 1998, we co-founded Chitkara Educational Trust.

At that time, India was still a very conservative society where women entrepreneurs had not yet made their mark. So, proving my credentials to the bureaucracy and the financial institutions was a nightmare. Moreover, I had to deal with semi-literate workforce of the construction industry.

Then we took a big leap. My children had still not completed their education when my husband and I took a calculated risk and resigned from our respective jobs to establish Chitkara Institute of Engineering and Technology (CIET) and it was affiliated to Punjab Technical University. It was a full-time job and without any extended family support, I had to muster all my skills to arrive at a work-life balance. I realised that it was not easy, and for a woman, it was probably twice as hard. But it was my love for teaching that kept me going.

My husband decided to take on the advisory role and left the complete task of running the affairs of the Trust to me as its General Secretary. I realized that if 20th century was the century of manufacturing and services, then 21st century would be of life sciences. Thus, new programs dealing with life sciences were on my wish list and I was also clear that Study of humanities would form an integral part of engineering curriculum in my citadel of learning.

All my life, I had been concentrating on teaching alone. I had no knowledge of the complex web of rules and regulations woven by education regulatory

agencies at the central and state government levels which were very archaic. I had to deal with officials of land revenue department, building by-laws, environment and pollution control and numerous labour laws which was a very daunting and uphill task. Over and above, being a female, it was more difficult – resistance was huge.

It was a very hard time for me and there were times when I felt that I was losing it. Thankfully I never learnt to put my weapons down. I wanted that my educational institutions should be known for quality education. Thus, hiring of good faculty, drawing up the curricula for different courses and equipping the laboratories were major challenges. Being a mathematician, I was not familiar with the nuances of other disciplines and it was a herculean task to get that done.

My parents had taught me one thing very clearly - "Take responsibility. Don't say - The project didn't get finished because my colleague didn't do his part; say, 'The project didn't get finished because I didn't set up a team in which my colleague wanted to do his part.' When you take full responsibility, you are empowered to achieve." And I achieved.

As an ethical practice I ensured at the very inception that all admissions to CIET were based strictly on merit. We, The Trust, in the very beginning surrendered Management Quota Seats, which was exemplary in the field of education. I did it to ensure equity and meritocracy.

In 2003, I started with Chitkara College of Education for Women which became immensely popular and my success emboldened me to launch Chitkara School of Planning and Architecture in 2004. Looking back, I think 2004 was particularly eventful -- my son got married to Niyati, now my confidante and friend, and I visited Cambridge & Oxford University, London. I came back with the mindset of making Chitkara and India shine globally.

In the same year, Chitkara International School commenced its operations. The first thing I did was to take full responsibility of the education of the children of our employees. They are given preference for admission of their wards in our school.

Chitkara School of Pharmacy and Chitkara School of Hospitality (CSH) came up in 2005. While my husband was concentrating on CIC, I was busy setting up and running the higher educational institutions.

Very soon, Chitkara metamorphosed from a family name to a Brand name.

I credit my leadership success to my flexibility and willingness to adapt to new situations. "Things are always changing. Part of being successful is being

comfortable not knowing what's going to happen."

In 2005, I was glad to have Ritesh as my son-in-law who is more of a son and a friend. In the course of time, my family has proved to be my strongest critics and support system. With my growth as an astute leader, I was also growing in my personal stature as I became a grandmother in 2006. Today I am blessed to have four grandchildren. At the end of the day, we all dine together at the same table and believe you me.... It's Bliss! I guess that would be my true definition of success and fulfilment.

My colossal endeavours marked the dawn of a new era in 2006 with Chitkara's First International tie-up of a Joint Program in Information Technology & Hospitality Management in collaboration with the George Brown College, Canada.

Year 2008 was a major milestone in my life. CIET was ranked amongst the top 50 engineering institutions. But being a perfectionist, I was not satisfied, because all my educational institutions were affiliated to different universities and I had no control over the curriculum design, academic innovations, and pedagogy.

How does one begin to conceive a new university!! The nagging thought was giving me insomnia. In 2008, my team and I of educators travelled to The United States of America and visited hundreds of the best universities to see what they do best. It was then that I understood and prioritized building an institution with a collaborative global model.

I came back and in the same year, established Chitkara University in Himachal Pradesh. With the University, I got the autonomy to adopt means to provide quality education. Soon I established Chitkara School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Chitkara Business School and Chitkara School of Healthcare Sciences.

I am the first in my family and that too a woman, to take up education as a profession, initially as an employee, and later as an entrepreneur. Adulation and acknowledgement poured in. My penchant for excellence resulted in Chitkara Institute of Engineering and Technology being amongst the two higher education institutes in India to be selected for the HP Innovations in Education Grant 2009 worth USD 170,000.

In 2010, I was able to set up Chitkara University, Punjab. It was no mean achievement to rise from a school teacher to create two Universities. I honoured all my employees in year 2010 during Samman Samahroh (Honouring Ceremony) for their unflinching support and set a benchmark for others to emulate.

In year 2013, based on having a flair of highly exceptional acumen of being an entrepreneur, I was honoured with South East Asia Award by Washington School of Business. I was the only Winner in South East Asia and only Indian who was felicitated with this award.

I call myself an 'Accidental Entrepreneur' because so much was not planned. Amongst other things, communication is said to be a woman's strongest skill and mine too - Whether communicating with corporate world, employees, co-workers, or partners, an open communication stream allows for clarity. In just 18 years, our vision has given birth to one of the most prestigious University in India, ranked in the top 25 in the nation.

I strongly believed in Innovation, Incubation & Interdisciplinary Commitment. Entrepreneurship is the only attribute that stays with a person for whole life. Research pedagogy gives depth to the education system, while entrepreneurship gives breadth. Today Chitkara University is on the cutting edge of innovation in higher education. We stand as the premier Incubation Centre in India with Chitkara Centre for Entrepreneurship Education & Development (CEED) providing a foundation for 100 plus start-ups, and boasting more than 350 patents under the aegis of our robust Chitkara University Research & Innovation Network (CURIN).

I am a nature lover. I find it divine. My love for a clean and green environment, and making our life at campuses environment-friendly, helped Chitkara University attain a position amongst top 3 cleanest Universities of India in the Swachhta Ranking 2017 by the Govt. of India, MHRD.

Nothing succeeds like success. I was recognized as a Visionary edu-leader of India by the former Lt. President, Sri Pranab Mukherjee during the Rethink INDIA Fifth Estate Summit 2017. It had invited India's finest and fiercest academicians across the board to enlighten the nation more about their Openness, Imagination, Persistence & Conviction in their emergence as a visionary Edu LEADER of India.

Even as I felt fulfilment in my life there was that little something that I still wanted to do. I had this desire to do something for those who were not very privileged. I spearheaded philanthropic initiatives in five villages in Punjab and two in HP. I prevailed upon the heads of my institutions to adopt villages. Villagers, mainly women, are given training to pursue vocations that could provide livelihood to them. Care is taken to ensure that the products manufactured by them find use in the educational institutions. The items produced by these cottage industry level

enterprises are purchased by Chitkara people thus relieving the villagers of the burden of marketing their produce. University also provides health awareness programs, in addition to extending health facilities to these villages.

A computer centre has also been established in one of the adopted villages in order to create awareness among the residents about latest technology.

For a couple of years now, we started something called the Global Week. It was yet another philanthropic initiative. Guest faculty from across the world are at Chitkara for one week. Global Week is a unique opportunity to create one-on-one mentorships for students, thus enabling the students to connect in meaningful collaboration with experts in a multitude of disciplines.

Many joint patents have resulted from such partnerships, and Erasmus funding for studying abroad opportunities has been awarded from Europe as well. Deeply rooted in providing a quality education that promotes the best possible in their students, faculty and community, Chitkara University has built its foundation on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. BRICS International Forum and International Federation of Indo-Russian Youth Clubs, jointly honoured me with the 'Award of Honour for International Digital Leaders' during the program 'Vision For Future- 2019.'

I have always mentored my team to look for opportunities in challenges. While we were caught unaware in the pandemic situation, our resilient setup came to our rescue. I was in regular communication with my leadership team and our robust technological setup made us sail through these challenging times. I am glad, that we had the efficacy to move completely online in a very short time.

Among its many accomplishments, Chitkara University boasts receiving the 2020 E-Learning Excellence for Academic Digitisation (E-LEAD) Certification for its readiness and excellence in online education, finishing 3rd for "Technological Innovation of the Year" for the prestigious Times Higher Education Asia Awards 2020.

Before I end, an advice to Women across the world - Don't shrink from risk. And tune out those critics and cynics. History rarely yields to one person, but think, and never forget, what happens when it does. That one person can be you. Rules of the game are going to change. Make sure you are the one changing the game. Become creators of the future.

LIVING AN INSPIRED LIFE

MRS. SUPRIYA SULE

Member of Parliament
Government of India

*"You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman;
you educate an entire generation." -Brigham Young*

Gender equality has always been the core of my work and I have been consistently grafting fundamentals of gender equality with my socio-political work.

In my early days of social work, I heard the news of a woman from Maharashtra's Beed district who died after a prenatal sex determination test. Already a mother of three daughters, she had to undergo a sex determination test for the foetus. It turned out to be a female that she had in her womb. So, she had to abort it because her husband wouldn't allow another female child to be born in his home again. She died in the process. When the incident became public, the husband was arrested, but sadly the three daughters became orphans. This distressing news and few other instances made me think gravely about women and gender equality. This was the initial phase of 'Umed' Abhiyan – an organisation that works towards the upliftment of such women in distress and brings hope to disadvantaged women in general— 'Umed' means 'hope'. Those three girls are presently learning in Vidya Pratishthan at Baramati. They are doing fine.

People often point out that I am inclined to social care rather than politics. I simply answer them that I believe in the principle laid by great politician Yashwant Rao Chavan, -- 80 percent social work, plus 20 percent politics. My father had also followed the same principle. My dream is to make a society that firmly adheres to the principle of gender equality. I am working on that. Been born to some privileges, I have always been acutely aware of the different kinds of under-privileges that people are born into. Way back, before Umed, I worked for visually impaired people with the conscious to make some contribution toward the society. I

was pushed by none to undertake any of the social services project that I took on. But I think I have inherited the collective thoughts of my grandmother, mother, and father whose work have always inspired me to work for society and people.

I was born into a family where gender equality is just not a term but totally absorbed in our family tradition. I am very much influenced by the thoughtfulness of my both grandmothers. Both have always welcomed new age thinking. Their thought school was totally reasonable and balanced. They believed in making decisions by verifying facts, they always told me that men and women are all equal and that I will have to prove it to the rest of the world by being an example to all those women who believe that equality is not for them. My father follows the same thought process, inherited from his mother, (my grandmother), late.Smt. Sharadabae Pawar. We all are believers of SatyaShodhak ideology. We are firm followers of equality honouring thoughts of Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Mahatma Jyotirao Fule, Rajarshee Shahu Maharaj, and Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. We all siblings were taught and nurtured with the same thoughts

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mrs. Supriya Sule is a Member of Parliament elected to the 15th, 16th and 17th Lok Sabha from Baramati Lok Sabha Constituency. She has been among the top-performing MPs. She is awarded the Sansad Ratna Award for Six Consecutive Times, Sansad Maharatna Award, Shrestha Sansad Award and Parliamentarians Award for Childrens by UNICEF

Mrs. Supriya Sule is the working president of Yashwantrao Chavan Pratisthan, Mumbai which works on social empowerment and issues while focusing on individuals with disabilities and widows of the farmers who have committed suicide.

In 2012, She started the Yuvati Wing of the Nationalist Congress Party to bring young girls into the Political Arena.

She initiated the 'Two Wheels of Hope' Project under which more than 25,000 Cycles were distributed to School going Girls and Asha Workers of Baramati Lok Sabha Constituency. On 26th October 2018 through this program about 4840 hearing aids were fitted in 8 hours to individuals which was recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records. For Senior citizens, she has provided supporting aids to over 25,000 individuals through various government schemes.

She is also a strong supporter of the LGBTQIA+ Rights. Due to her persuasion Government of Maharashtra has formulated State Transgender Welfare Board that gives voice to the Members of the LGBTQIA+.

process. Our family gave the same nurturing to sons and daughters. Everyone was equally loved and cared for. We were treated as equals. Neither of us received any special treatments for just being born under a certain gender. Opportunities given to us were also equal. The attitude is like a genetic inheritance and remains true for our daughters and daughters-in-law too. It is reflected through generations.

I was born to my parents during the peak of the trend when almost every couple and their families believed in having a son to keep their family name alive. Fortunately, my parents thought process was more radical and they chose not to have any more kids after me, even though I was born a girl child. They actually lived their thoughts about equal opportunities to girls and freedom to women. They spoke about it in public meetings and applied the same for their own family too. They never gave me different treatment just because I was their girl child or neither had they over-pampered me. We all boys and girls were raised in the same manner.

I was brought up in a cosmopolitan metro city like Mumbai, which provides everyone with equal opportunities to live. One needs a confident and facile attitude while making public appearances and Mumbai gave it to me. My school also nourished me well. My father stood up in the queue of parents in my school even when he was the chief minister. He never made hype of security. During that period, I travelled in local trains and buses. It was a normal routine for me. Even today I do the same. It is because, despite the fact that my father was the Chief Minister and he was always surrounded by important and famous personalities, my mother never let that privileged status influence our family life. It was her way of keeping us grounded and always be in touch with the street reality. We grew up learning that what he was doing was just his job and that his designations & responsibilities, made him receive the elaborate treatment because of the chair he held.

I was given total freedom to choose my path. My parents never burdened me with their expectations. I learned the ways to develop an independent identity by observing my parents' behaviour and listening to their thought process. I pursued B.Sc in Microbiology from Jaihind College, Mumbai. What I learned from that was to respect life in all its form. In a very weird way, the learning had a profound effect on me, that helped me see life as just a piece of life cutting through social, political or financial status. It was good. During that time, I talked about it all the time with my mother.

The way I was nurtured and raised by my family shows why I have tuned chords with gender equality. My upbringing has that root note that made me so inclined towards gender equality. Quite a few times I have been asked about my

thoughts on a girl or a woman's stand for her gender. In response, I have an unwavering answer that if you are a woman, you must learn about your rights to say 'No'. You should learn to use your rights appropriately. You cannot be a 'yes-man' to everyone around you. A woman has every right to refuse those things that are invading her basic rights as a woman. She can refuse and revolt against every unfair treatment that comes towards her from the place of gender inequality. There are thousands of girls who have been forced to stop their education for various reasons. Women, who are caged in the house because it is believed that her place is in the kitchen and inside the house. Many academically bright girls have dropped academics because they need to get married. Many highly educated, ambitious girls have forcibly unseen their career and dreams after marriage & further responsibilities because they never learned to wear their rights. More than individual suffering, it's a setback to the society and community where she belongs. The society loses a percent of development by not letting her work or educate. If 50 percent of the population is women, then we are denying 50 percent of the population to work towards the upliftment of the society. I wonder how we will ever progress by working with half the strength or compete with the fast-progressing world at large.

Half of our oppressed population is deprived of their basic rights to excel in life. A true awakening of a woman's spirit will come through her financial independence. I need women to understand that and work towards it. It's only through financial independence that she will get her voice and stand for her rights to equality. And this is exactly why I think every girl and woman should firmly say 'No' to what is forbidding her freedom. Their 'no' can stop their emotional, social, and physical exploitation.

A woman should soak up the whole system of gender equality. Once she knows that she has all the rights as her male counterpart, she will find her way to succeed. My wish is that no girl or woman should be a victim to this extremely prejudiced system of gender inequality.

I realized the importance of gender equality right away from my school and college days. Fortunately, my classmates and friends too believed in the concept. We all are in contact till date. We share our joys and sorrows. I have many memories from my college days. This was the period when I started working for visually impaired people. I still support the organization. I also volunteered with the NGOs working for nomads and tribes. Those days are still special to me as it was my socially connecting and learning period. Most importantly, that was the period

when I actually worked along the principle of gender equality and got sensitised about the particular issue. Born and brought up in a gender-neutral environment, I had no notion that the practice was as huge as a monster sitting in the bedroom. I was aghast by the situation and knew instantly that I had to do something about it. Today, I try to tell all those women out there who are victim of this gender difference treatment is that it does not matter if you are a woman or man. No one can stop you from being successful and live your life in your own terms if you have a strong will towards your goal.

People also ask me that whether as a woman politician I had received any different treatment than my counterpart male politicians. I answered them that if one believes in his/her own abilities and work hard to achieve their dreams with well-planned efforts, success is all theirs. I too follow the same thinking, so the difference in male or female politicians never bothered me. The second very important thing is that I am elected as MP from my Baramati Lok Sabha constituency. I represent the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency in parliament. My voters have believed in me and have chosen me as their representative. Male, female, and even transgender too voted for me so I am representing all of them. I enter the parliament session as a representative of the Baramati constituency, and not as a male or female. In Parliaments the code of conduct is not different for male and female politicians. I am given the same rights under the constitution which every other parliament member has, so that I can work accordingly. I can present problems of my people in parliament and I can take part in discussions. Constitution makers have clearly mentioned the principle of gender equality. We need to follow it through our behaviour.

Women too should take the lead to preserve their rights. They should have the ambition to excel in their respective field believing strongly in their own abilities. When people trust us, it becomes a huge responsibility. The constant realization of our responsibilities inspires us to do better work. This I speak from experience. As an MP in Lok Sabha, when I meet people, I find that they share their problems with me and expect me to do something about it. Their hope and expectations inspire me to work hard each and every day. It's a huge responsibility but the joy of being able to help people, to see happiness in their eyes and to make that little difference is immense. My Baramati Lok Sabha constituency is my family. I care for them just like we take care of our own families.

Late Smt. Sushama Swaraj and West Bengal's chief minister Mamata Banerjee has inspired me hugely in my parliamentary days. Sushamaji was an

impeccable speaker, and a fierce leader. She proved herself in the world of politics through her supreme devotion to work. I have closely observed her vigour that made the ruling party leaders speechless with her ultimate questions when she was an opposition leader in the Lok Sabha. Her speeches were well-studied. Though she was in the opposition party, she had given her prime participation in making the democracy of parliament more potent. Chief Minister of West Bengal- Mamata Banerjee has also impressed me very much. She is also a fiery leader. She had single-handedly succeeded with the mandate and proved her leadership. She had worked intensely for the people of West Bengal and still is doing the same. Apart from this, she has always taken the lead to support the secular stand. I truly believe both these women politicians have supremely excelled through their work. Both these leaders always supported the rule of gender equality which has added more shine to their political persona.

We recently celebrated 25 years of policies shaped by Sharad Pawar Saheb for the betterment of women. Today we can see that women leaders have a strong presence in the political field too. It is a reflection of the success of Pawar Saheb's women's welfare policies. Every state in this nation chose to follow these policies. Women leaders are working wonderfully in the local self-government institutions too, and we must not forget that it became possible only because of women's welfare policies introduced by honourable Sharad Pawar Saheb and Maharashtra state. We are constantly making amendments in women related policies on a national level. I do believe that we have come a long way and at the same time I also believe that a lot more still needs to be done.

It is very promising that our women representatives are showing excellence in different fields on a global level. I believe in the near future we will have a major step ahead when we will try to amplify the supremacy of the gender equality code by giving a positive nod to the women's reservation bill.

FOR I HAVE DREAMS TOO

MRS. PAMELA TIKKU

Chief Business Officer

International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT)

“Control your destiny or someone else will.”- Jack Welch

When I was offered this opportunity to share my story, I was very glad. I know there are women and history out there that insists on deciding what women can do or cannot do. My journey as a woman in engineering was not very dramatic or heroic. The only thing I did was to never give up and decide for myself. My life is my vehicle and I take my seat behind the steering wheel.

My journey started with a lot of rejections from big powerful names that had the potential to derail me from my dreams. When I was in my final year of graduation for engineering, organizations that came for campus recruitment rejected me because ‘I am a woman.’ They had a ‘no-female’ policy for jobs. We had Reliance Petrochemical and Bharat Petroleum come over too. While Bharat Petroleum did not allow me to even sit for the interview, Reliance Petrochemical rejected me citing security issue, as I am a woman. I started wondering if studying engineering was the best thing that I did. My heart sank and demotivation was huge. I went back to Jammu and joined an engineering college there as a part-time faculty.

I was born in a Hindu family in Kashmir. We lived in a joint family. My grandfather was the head of the family. He was a businessman by profession and had five sons. My father was the eldest.

My father decided to step away from the family business and pursued an education in mechanical engineering. One of my uncles studied electrical engineering and other one did his M.Sc in Electronics who later went into the teaching profession. I remember squatting beside my father and uncles while they repaired household goods. I would enthusiastically run and fetch them with the

tools that they required. My maternal grandfather was a civil engineer and my mother's side of family also had a lot of people in similar fields. I was raised in an environment where engineering was a common profession.

When I was 10, my father transferred to work on a hydel power project. There was a small township for the project located on a hill. We would visit several project sites and he would explain to me how tunnels are constructed, how the dams are made and what are the different components in a hydel power project. These were very formative years for me. I used to get fascinated seeing large construction sites and machines.

When I was 14, we relocated to Jammu. I was given admission to a very good school that had wonderful sports facility as well as good academic curriculum. My parents highly encouraged me to perform my best academically as well as participate in all kind of sports. I participated in all kinds of sports.

Through entrance examination I got admission in an Engineering College in Jaipur and was allocated to the Mechanical Engineering branch. That was good. I

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Graduate in Mechanical Engineering from NIT, Jaipur, Pamela Tikku has been working in the Automotive Sector since 1992. She started her career with Rico Auto Industries and later joined Honda Sael Cars India Limited and looked after vendor development and component development activities. She joined Society of Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) in 1999 and looked after various technical and policy issues related to the automotive sector in India.

In 2006 she joined NATRiP and was involved in the planning and procurement of facilities for testing and R&D for NATRiP centers. She has taken active role in finalizing the supplier, benchmarking the facilities with global facilities.

In 2010 she took charge of the Powertrain Department of ICAT, one of the leading homologation centers in the country in addition to the equipment planning and procurement activities under NATRiP.

In 2016 her role was enhanced to Chief Business Officer looking after business development and planning for ICAT.

She is active member of regulation formulation process for India for automotive industry and has been representing India at WP.29.

She is an active Board member of SAE India and SAEINDIA NIS section and has held various positions in the executive committees. She was also awarded by SAE Foundation in 2017.

liked mechanical over electrical as I could never relate to non-visible flow of electrons and mechanical engineering was all about the physical touch and feel of the machines.

This marked my entry into a male-dominated field where I was the only girl in a batch of 80 students. This was way back in 1986.

There were not a lot of girls in engineering back in the day and mechanical was a field where you would find even lesser number of women.

I was both privileged and un-privileged at the same time. My privilege was that I was allotted two seats in my class for all the four years and the challenge was to charter my path in all areas alone. In the labs, in workshops or class projects, I never had a buddy. I was considered more of a hassle for my classmates.

I remember my welding workshop in my second year of engineering. Welding is a tough skill to acquire and is considered hazardous. During the class, small little groups were formed for a job to be done. Only I was left alone. The common problem was that the welding rod usually got stuck to the sample and while in the groups the guys helped each other out to unstick the samples, I had to do it alone. It wasn't easy. I was very upset and I went to our welding instructor for suggestion. When he saw I was in trouble, he came with me and taught me how to weld. He also told me that later in my life I will probably not need to weld but I should learn the skill. This challenge I faced in all other workshops like smithy workshop, foundry and carpentry. The upside was, it made me very self-sufficient and independent. If I have to get something done, I do it myself. I am never dependent on anyone.

In a class where I was the only female, I would find my colleagues cracking jokes or having fun but the moment I would enter there would be a dead silence. I was never made part of the gang. So, that made my tenure a lonely one.

Soon after engineering, I got married, and moved to Delhi with my husband who is a civil engineer by profession. This is where I started a real job hunt.

I had always dreamt of working with an automobile organization and during the late 1980s there were lot of companies setting shop in India, especially in and around Delhi. I approached many automobile organizations for a possible job opening but was turned down instantly as they had a no female policy in their organization, particularly in the engineering sector. The only jobs women were given were secretarial or receptionist jobs. It was very disappointing.

One of my husband's friend helped me land my first job in the corporate world, an automotive component industry supplying OEM components. This job

was given to me with the condition that I had to get a feel of all the operations involved in the manufacturing of the product. This meant I had to undergo training in all the departments of the manufacturing unit which was about 50 kms away from where I lived. I was the only woman travelling in a bus with very senior officials, every day for a month. This training was extremely challenging as I had to work on die-casting machines and other CNC machines, but it also enabled me to have human interface with the people working in different departments of the factory.

I am thankful to my first boss, Mr Arvind Kapur, who encouraged me and provided me with a very open environment to express my thoughts and review the projects. I sat in a room with 25 of my very senior colleagues from different departments who had work experiences ranging from 10-25 years. I was just a trainee engineer then. Initially people were not very friendly. For all these years, they never had a woman amidst them. They probably did not trust me or trust me being an engineer. It took me sometime to prove myself but I learnt the trick of the trade fast.

Being young, I was a fast learner.

Computers had at that time not penetrated our office. It was limited to finance department only for accounting software. I convinced my organization the need for computers in the office and how it will facilitate faster and efficient work. I was given a free hand for computerization. I was also given the responsibility of training the staff. I conducted training after office hours and although there was some reluctance by staff to stay back one hour after office, they understood the need and cooperated.

Besides the computerization of my department, my core job involved interacting with the various vendor development departments of a Japanese OEM like, Maruti Suzuki. Women, in such roles were not a common sight and it was not easy at all, especially when I got stared at, while walking in the hallways. However, I developed some good friendships, over a period of time, maintained professionalism and things worked out just fine.

My second job landed me in a Japanese MNC, Honda. They had just begun manufacturing cars in India. Again, as luck would hold, I was the only woman working with over 50 male colleagues, in the vendor department, who had joined Honda from various organizations. Although I was inducted in vendor development department and that was my core strength, I was not given main stream vendor development assignment. I was asked to develop policies for the

department which had to take care of Indian operations and integration with Japanese parent organization policies. I had to quickly adapt to a very diverse organizational culture. I worked seamlessly with the Japanese even though I did not know the Japanese language. This finesse of mine was appreciated by my Japanese Director and recognizing my potential gave me my first overseas visit and training opportunity in Japan.

My visit to Japan in 1998 was like a fairy tale, right from flying international, to landing on the Kansai Airport, to visiting Suzuka, a racing track in Japan. I enjoyed every aspect of that trip. My Japanese colleagues also ensured that my first overseas visit became a very memorable one. During my visit, I was quite surprised to find that in a developed country like Japan, women were still not getting into main stream jobs. I found women working in secretarial positions in malls and restaurants which led me to believe that culturally, even Japan was as discriminatory towards women as other alleged nations. Things seem to have now changed a bit. Not drastically, only a bit.

A couple of years later I joined the automotive industry association SIAM (Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers) which was comparatively a smaller set-up, but gave me an incredible opportunity to interact with Government officials for policies and regulations related to the automotive industry.

SIAM gave me the opportunity to interact with the industry leaders. This job also entailed a lot of travel, both domestic as well as international. There was a time when I had to travel 3-4 days a week. My kids were very young then. So, what I did was make one day journey – leave home at 5 am and be back by 11pm. My husband and I had to schedule our frequent travels to ensure one of us was at home, for the kids. It was crazy.

In 2006, I moved to a Government of India project called NATRIP, for setting up automotive test facilities in India. I was again a lone woman among many men in the organization but the opportunity was a good one. I could feel that there was more bias against women in this set-up. People were unnecessarily authoritative and bullying in nature towards women. I had to fight back.

My tenure in this organization had its own challenges as it was a Government supported project. The organization had diverse mix of people both from Government and private sector. People from government had different work culture which was authoritative and hierarchical in nature. Here, speaking or putting your point of view was considered insubordination. While I come from the background of private sector where the organization functions horizontally. There

is no limitation of expressing your views irrespective of your hierarchy. This assimilation and amalgamation of cultures took some time to streamline.

In 2010, I was offered with the opportunity of working in ICAT, one of the testing centers, as a lab head. I had never handled any lab operations earlier and so felt I was being closely observed. I had to win the confidence of my peers and subordinates and learn the trade. I would say that I have been fortunate to work with a great team who not only made me succeed but also became a high performing team. Since the time I have been with my current organization, we have actively tried to recruit a lot of women in our organization. However, vehicle testing is still one such department which refuses to take women on board. I tried my best but I was not successful in that endeavor of mine.

I have seen many female engineers start their careers with enthusiasm and sincerity but they have to constantly keep proving themselves to their male counter-parts even today.

More than 50 percent of these women are forced to leave their jobs after marriage or child birth. This happens due to two reasons – one, that home and child care is considered only a female domain responsibility and second, due to lack of support structure like good day care facilities for children.

While inclusiveness is discussed a lot, the will to enable inclusiveness is lacking. Government, municipalities and organizations need to understand that enabling infrastructure for women is vital in increasing employment for women. Organizations should aim to develop and maintain a strong gender-neutral environment.

The Indian society needs to evolve in order to understand the role of women not only for raising families but also to run families. As mothers it is our responsibility to inculcate such values in our sons and daughters.

It is very important to acknowledge that dreams and aspirations in women are no different from men. We keep hearing that the perception about women has changed over a period of time but has it really changed? Well, not to the extent it is projected. Even while I was working and earning, it was expected that there was no compromise on the responsibilities of running the household which included cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children. I was also expected to fulfill all other social responsibilities. But the same was not expected from my husband even though his office was just 15 minutes away, while I had to travel for one and a half hours one-way from my office to home. I was not allowed to hire a domestic help to ease the burden. But this is very much how a typical middle class household

functions in India.

I would like to conclude by saying that, as the society develops, the role of women in the society becomes evident and the society will strive to create a conducive environment. But this change will not happen overnight. At this point economic independence for women is very important. It will fortify their position in the society and prove their potential. In cities we can see these changes taking place at a faster pace but not so much in towns and villages. The pace there is quite negligible. This can change by imparting education and raising awareness among the future generations from a very young age. While the role of women in families is un-contested, their role in the development of society and hence country needs to be emphasized and established.

DRIVING CHANGE IN THE DESIRED DIRECTION

MRS. NEELIMA SURYADEVARA

Managing Trustee
Gayathri Educational and Cultural Trust

If I want to see change, I will have to make the changes myself.

I met a young girl a decade ago by the name of Latha. She was the daughter of a watchman who works in a housing-apartment in front of my house. Due to poor financial condition of her parents, her father wanted her to quit school and get work. They wanted her to start contributing to the financial needs of the family. When I spoke to her mother, she told me that sending a girl child to school anyways was a waste of time and money. I could not fail to notice that Latha was a smart and intelligent girl and when I spoke to her, I learned that she really wanted to keep going to school. I counselled her parents for hours and hours till they agreed to let Latha continue her education. I also arranged some financial help for the girl's education as well as for the family. The school she went to had few schooling hours that enabled her to run to the tailoring shop post school, where she earned little money and picked up some skills as well. With time she learned enough tailoring to earn good money to contribute to her family and simultaneously she finished her intermediate course too. Latha's confidence in learning and earning made me realise that lack of support to girls and women make them live in ignorance and darkness. When it came to a crunch, the society is still willing to push back the girl child over the boy child. Being an educated and empowered woman myself, I feel it's my responsibility to support and encourage such women as best as I can. While some good work is being done in that direction, I can never shed the belief that I too have to plug in every now and then to contribute to the desired direction of a dream society.

I was born in a small village named Marrigudem located on the banks of the river Godavari in the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh. At that time, I did not know

that being treated as equal and being allowed to live with dignity is a privilege that I was born into. I had educated parents who worked as teachers in government schools. I was brought up with a mindset that doing well in academics and pursuing higher education was a precursor to make my dreams a reality. I had a blissful childhood, playing a lot of outdoor and endemic games like hopscotch, and “Chor-Police”. Most of the time I had to be plucked out from atop a banyan tree where I would be found lodged with my friends enjoying a fleshy mango or a berry, or being dusted off sands which I had gotten all over me during building sandcastles and playing on the riverbank.

But education was always given a priority. As long as we topped in our academics, we were good to go.

My natural ability to solve mathematical and logical problems with ease since my childhood has made me take up engineering. When the time came for me to get a job, my family advised me to choose a career in academia rather than as an engineer in the public or private sector companies. They believed that it would be

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Smt. Neelima Suryadevara has completed her B.Tech in Electrical and Electronics Engineering from Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University and M.Tech in Electronic Power Systems from Osmania University. After completing her under-graduation she has joined in the electrical department of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh Government known as APTRANSCO as an Assistant engineer. For two decades, she worked studiously going the extra mile and took voluntary retirement as a Divisional engineer. After that, she took up the role as a Secretary and Correspondent in her family-run Anurag Group of Institutions and with her complete focus and commitment on the institution she made that institution reach the standards of university and in less than a decade it has now become Anurag University.

Smt. Neelima was part of Student Federation of India (SFI), a student wing of Communist Party of Indian (Marxist) and had taken a crucial job of raising the awareness about the prevailing social injustices among her peers and the general public.

She believes that there are no secretes to success, it is only the result of preparation, commitment and hard work.

more gender appropriate. But I was of the mind-set that engineers build the nation by contributing their knowledge in various domains and can solve many societal problems by making human life easier. In the due course, I had joined in Electrical and Electronics Engineering course at Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University. I realized that my class had the highest number of girl students when compared to the other majors and batches in the university.

Though I cannot recollect facing any kind of discrimination for being a woman, at times we girls felt that it wasn't easy being a girl student in STEM. Transportation was a problem to begin with and lack of separate hostels added many challenges. Despite being treated equally without any gender bias, at some corner of my mind, I felt that women may not have the same opportunities or the freedom to choose their careers after graduation equally as men. The present generation is very fortunate, as they have the freedom to choose their careers, because a lot of women are standing up and talking about feminism, women's rights, and also the 'unconscious gender-biases' in society.

During my engineering course, I was actively involved in student politics and was able to work with varied groups of people to raise the voice against social stigmas, especially for girl students and other student-related issues. My strong vocal power, self-determination, and self-confidence got me the label of being headstrong.

My life took a turning point when I met Mr. Rajeshwar Reddy who was working for the Student Federation of India (SFI), the youth wing of the Communist Party of India {CPI(M)}. He was pursuing his doctoral program in Physics and was actively involved in student politics at Osmania University. Since our ideologies were common, we had an opportunity to work together against prevailing social injustice. Dowry was one such injustice for which we had worked tirelessly to create awareness. The idea that women had to pay money to get married, we could not get our heads wrapped around. For those reasons and many more, we met frequently and I understood that I could gel with him very well. Eventually, I had fallen in love and got married to him after my graduation.

I got an opportunity to work in APTRANSCO (a state government organization) right after my graduation. Despite my family's advice to take up a job in academia, I was firm in my decision to take up a job as an engineer in the APTRANSCO.

During my tenure as a Divisional Engineer in the Electrical substation, I had to check all the materials in the stores. The materials had to be used before the expiry

date. I used to dispatch all the materials as per their expiry date, making sure the costly materials got used in time. The aim was to avoid wastage. I also regularly checked the dumped materials in stores for maintenance purpose. Transformers, circuit breakers and panels were regularly serviced to provide uninterrupted power. During such work, many a times I would come across circuit breaker machineries that were kept aside stating that they are no more in usable condition. I would recheck them, a task I took upon myself on my own volition. Often, I found that most of those expensive machines could be put back in use with minor repairs and servicing, and I made sure that it was done. I sometimes think that this intricate thinking, the ability to make damaged things work, is a fundamental weave of a woman's mind-set. Anyways, I was appreciated by my boss and other colleagues for my curiosity and commitment. It was a kind of initiative that I took and I got acknowledged and appreciated for it.

It was a huge morale booster.

Having said that, working in the field for a woman is not as easy as it is for men. The working conditions in the field are not women-friendly. There are no proper facilities like toilets, security, and transportation to the remote locations for the women work-force. And to top it all, complaining about such things attracted criticism and sarcasm. They liked to imply that this was our way of avoiding workload. I had not faced outright discrimination from any of my peers, colleagues, or even from my higher officials but the gender-bias in day-to-day work in the organization was very much prevalent.

While assigning jobs, prejudices about a female employee was common and more often than not, the important or coveted assignment went to a male counter-part. Female employees were often told that the particular job was very critical and they will not be able to handle it because of family commitment. I did not have any personal experience in being discriminated because of my caste, religion, or the language I speak, yet few policy decisions in the organization were taken with gender consciousness.

I also had to quickly learn that at times I might have to be a little submissive and let go of a few things. If we did not, we were tagged as 'stubborn and tough with big voice', by our male superiors and peer group.

My exposure as a working woman has helped me understand many things in society from a different perspective. It has given me a scope and an opportunity to solve the day-to-day challenges effectively at both, workplaces and home.

Family has always been my priority. I was cautious with work assignments

and maintained a work-life balance. When my children were toddlers, I took up only those tasks which I could complete without disturbing my family time. I was honest and sincere towards the works assigned to me and I am very particular about my work ethics. My tight schedule at work and at home spared little time for me to attend family get-together, marriages, religious ceremonies and such, for which I have been often judged, but I am fortunate that my parents, in-laws, and in particular my husband were very supportive and are still supporting till today.

I have raised both my sons very consciously. My children understand my priorities and goals. They acknowledge my capability, my skill and encourage me in all my endeavour. They say they understood a lot about a woman's struggle in this world through me and are sensitive to the cause. It's a proud moment. I also take pride that my life had become an example for my sons to understand that women can be very capable administrators, entrepreneurs and they can do justice to any role in the corporate world or the academia despite all the prejudices, conscious and unconscious biases. Despite my busy schedules in my role as the CEO of Anurag Group, my family always stands by me as my strength.

As a woman administrator, my challenge was to understand the capabilities and associated problems of the women working in my institution. I try to bring them to the page where they understand that their career too is very important and that they do not have to be apologetic for being career minded, or for the time and energy they spend at work.

It's a work of their mind space.

I actively motivate them to learn new things required to perform in their respective jobs by encouraging them to get trained. When I find them struggling to perform in a particular role, I try and fit them in other roles based on their skills and capabilities but I had never tried to remove any employee. I find that many women are not being able to give hundred percent at work because their mind is always preoccupied on the home-front. The responsibility of the entire house and family is on her shoulder and her attention is always divided. I however do not find this preoccupation with the male counter-parts. My counselling majorly focusses on this part of their thought process. They have to accept the working woman in themselves first. All else will follow. It usually does.

I find that lot many women look up to me and consider me as a role model and a source of inspiration. I realise that it's a commitment that I have to live up to. As an institutional leader, I believed that the quality of work-life is the most important component that the employers must concentrate on more, which

includes job satisfaction, where an employee feels valued, rewarded, motivated, and empowered, apart from job security, career advancement, work pattern and work-life balance. With the increase of women employees in my organization, I have felt that there is a need to improve facilities like maternity leaves, and later we had added a crèche to take care of the toddlers of the employees and also a counselling centre to help employees have a better life at both home and work place. There is a yoga-hall in the premise to help employees relax and rejuvenate. Since my personal experience with work-place transportation was not that great, I made sure that we have a vigilant in transportation and other facilities. We even accommodated flexible work hours for the employees as and when needed. I have been encouraging all the staff and faculty to attend workshops, conferences, training programs, and career development programs to enhance their skills and abilities to keep progressing in their jobs.

Women empowerment was given a number one priority and throughout the year we organized many specialized programs to raise awareness for the same among my women faculty, staff, and girl students. A convergence of activities started falling in their place resulting in teamwork through their involvement which has made the institutional atmosphere more conducive. My uncompromising attitude has initially attracted some difference of opinions from many of my senior colleagues but together as a team, we have been successful in reaching the institutional goals to a greater extent.

I feel empowered and satisfied in my role as a woman administrator. I had never compromised in decision making and ensured that women were assigned with crucial roles and made them equally valuable. I encourage my seniors and peers to judge assets in their merit and not their gender.

I feel what matters to everyone is job satisfaction which in turn gives confidence and recognition. Money and status anyway will play a major role in all of our lives, but what stands above all is the self-satisfaction that we get through our selfless service to society.

“Whatever you do, be different...

..... and if you are different,
you will stand out.”

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL AND MISSION-DRIVEN COMPANY

MRS. ASHVINI DANIGOND

Founder & CEO

Manorama Infosolutions Pvt Ltd (MIPL)

'Mission is about people, not projects.' -**Todd Engstrom**

At Manorama Infosolutions, we let our success do the talking. These are nothing less than milestones achieved in the past 19 years. My company Manorama Infosolutions manages the support of 1,000 hospitals across South-East Asia, the Middle East and Africa whose operations run on Manorama's Hospital Information Management Systems (HIMS). We have implemented Lifeline Enterprise HIMS for the public sector project for Coal India Limited Hospitals. We have successfully delivered three Smart City Projects for Dahod and Vadodara in Gujarat and Bhubaneswar, Odisha in India. We are in the next level of talks in implementing more such Smart City projects in India and abroad. In recent times, Manorama Infosolutions has been awarded a prestigious country automation project from the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Republic of Seychelles. There is a similar project being initiated in Bhutan as well.

Our Health Insurance Solutions help in the smooth processing of administering Health insurance and processing claims for a large population across Africa and the Middle East. During the surge of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-21, Manorama's Communicable Disease Management Solutions (CDMS) has helped government officials, health authorities and administrators gather real-time information to monitor the situation in a particular area. Telemedicine solution has helped several hospitals and countless people through the lockdown, by enabling patients to remotely connect with doctors and have their diagnosis done.

Hailing from Kolhapur city in Maharashtra, India, it gives me immense pleasure to be able to share my success story that underlines my achievements in big, bold and blue.

As they say, patience and perseverance pay in the long run. The initial years had been quite challenging, no doubt, but the pleasure doubles today when I realise how I have been able to carve a niche in the healthcare industry. And the happiness probably triples, with the realization that I have not only made a success at it but have successfully taken it pan-continental.

In 2017, I was invited as a keynote speaker and got an opportunity to share insights with the august audience at the India-UK Technology Summit in London where I was felicitated by Mr. Virendra Sharma, Member of Parliament, UK. Then I also got an opportunity to be interviewed along with N R Narayana Murthy, the legendary co-founder and retired chairman of the Indian tech giant Infosys.

In a way, I have made my country proud!

Being an entrepreneur is simultaneously challenging and exhilarating, but make no mistake, it is rarely easy. Every day throws up new challenges and there is also learning along the way. Also, there is a need to adopt a go-getter attitude to face any eventuality. There is a perspective to view everything with an open mind to

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ms. Ashvini Danigond is the Founder & Managing Director of Manorama Infosolutions Pvt. Limited. She has executed the operations and steered the business since the Company Inception in 2002. She has traveled the world over, met prospective customers, and worked closely with professionals from different cultures. She is adept at engaging with CXOs of large organizations, bureaucrats, and government officials.

Having donned multiple hats and closely interacted with people who had no prior experience in engaging with CXOs of fortune 100 companies has been continuous learning.

She has received over a dozen awards from national and international bodies like NASSCOM and International Women's Leadership Forum awards.

Ashvini has built a culture of innovation and learning in the organization. These are built around her fundamental belief that without continuous innovation, the organization will stagnate.

Ashvini believes in Team Spirit, she continuously motivates the Employees to work together for creating excellence. There are systems in place for the skill enhancement of every employee. All employees are empowered to take decisions, make calculated choices when faced with ambiguous conditions, and are given a stress-free and transparent work environment.

Ashvini believes in Women First!

address any concern related to business, industry and even the global economy at large.

This Covid-19 pandemic has proved to be a great learning experience in a lot of ways. Some of the clients postponed key businesses, important decisions deferred, and payments due had been held up but this impact was short lived. Like every other business leader, I faced this worldwide crisis with grit, navigated my way with discretion and came out resilient. My entrepreneurial skills have been challenged by an economy that was already slowing down and has been severely affected by the pandemic.

We had to quickly gear up and revamp our infrastructure to provide support for remote work in the pandemic. Employees working from home had to be facilitated and fresh rules and guidelines had to be chalked to align with it. Managing client communications was another challenge that we overcame and robustly supported our clients during the lockdown phase.

Like most companies, we were not prepared for this kind of unprecedented situation. But we quickly adapted and planned for the online/agile implementation, making critical deliveries for large and complex healthcare projects across the globe. This was a huge effort from our teams to sustain our business and support our clients and keep things from falling apart.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was managing the health, wellness and morale of my employees. The company has a strength of 300-plus employees and in a health crisis like this, keeping the frontline workers in prime condition was a responsibility I was not willing to compromise upon. We counselled employees who were psychologically and emotionally affected for being confined at home for a long duration of time, made available testing-kits to those who showed symptoms of the virus and regularly interacted with them to keep the morale of the team high. The pandemic has left behind a general sense of despondency.

We have struggled through and traversed through the pandemic crisis but with our spirit and courage intact. The process of rebuilding has started as we see a silver lining, in fact, a rather fat silver lining insight with a boost in the Information Technology sector. Due to the pandemic, businesses around the world are accelerating their technology and digital initiatives. The criticality of physical location has blurred, and more and more institutes are getting onto the bandwagon. They are making an effort to trust the world of technology and digitisation.

I firmly believe that this new world will hold much more opportunities than in the past. I am not waiting for things to go back to normal. I am accepting this as

the new normal and learning to adapt. This is the time when we need to be bold, innovative and take on challenges hitherto unknown. This is when we need to take the bull by its horns.

It feels like I am again at some exciting starting point, learning new things, stumbling and discovering. Something I did 19 years ago!

I grew up in an idyllic environment, clean and green. I was born and brought up in Kolhapur, and today, I still live and run my business from here. Never forget your roots!

My parents and extended family have been in business in the field of medical education, and my exposure to the sector started at a relatively young age. My family's ties to medical colleges and my experiences with them as a young and impressionable child started a passion in me that became a lifelong relationship with the healthcare industry.

I have had a very supportive family that encouraged me to think progressively. Though there was plenty of advice given on sartorial appropriation, what kind of deference should be shown to elders and other general bits of grandma's advice, nothing earth shattering came my way.

The unyielding support from my parents was instrumental in developing my personality. It is important to remember that come what may, our parents are the most important people in our lives. They will always be there through thick and thin.

Today as I look back and reflect, I would like to advise young girls that they should never give up on their dreams and should never let the opinions of others influence them.

Thus began my journey – the creation of an IT company that addresses the needs of the healthcare ecosystem. Right at the planning stage, we were faced with challenges, but we took them as our guiding milestones.

To build a dependable team, I started by visiting engineering colleges in the vicinity of Kolhapur, met with the leadership, recruited and trained the first set of my programmers.

Starting as a woman entrepreneur had its own set of challenges. But then a life without challenge, a life without hardship, a life without purpose, seems pale and pointless.

Then the challenge of self-funding the start-up was also a tough call. There was really no concept of venture funding and banks, and other financial institutions were reluctant lenders. The concept of lending money based on a good business

plan and purchase orders were not good enough to get finances immediately.

Everybody must start somewhere. I finally had an office space set up and a small team of developers. In a year's time, we nailed down the product features, built the architecture and began creating the first version of our Hospital Information Management System.

As we got ready to launch the product, with a lot of painstaking detail, we gave the finishing touches to our sales plan. We had done thorough research, had a fair assessment of the market size and had our first target prospective list ready. So, loaded with confidence we went ahead at full speed.

Now came the next level of challenges. Soon we realised that making a software product was very different from making a software sale.

We quickly realized that marketing skill was seriously lacking in our portfolio, and as we hunted for talent in the local areas. Building a good sales team introduced us to more challenges.

I knew that the time for my personal reinvention had come. If Manorama was to succeed, then I had to become a saleswoman as well! This was a role that I had no experience of and not an iota of idea as to how to even begin. The concept literally scared me initially.

Support and encouragement came from the wonderful man I am married to. In the first few sales calls, he accompanied me. As he watched me fumble and learn, saw my bitter disappointments and ever eluding sales, he comforted and encouraged me.

If making a software product sale today is difficult, in those days, in the early part of the 21st century, it was near impossible. A large majority of prospective customers could not fathom that they had to pay for what they did not physically see. For them, the hardware was what they paid for, and the software was an inconsequential part. Explaining to them that the software application is going to be a key part in running their business was hard and very time consuming. Many times, it would take us several months to educate these types of customers.

There was a small minority of prospects, who were aware of software applications, posed other challenges -- Questions of our knowledge of the domain of hospital operations and processes were thrown at me, even though our product, by then, was mature enough to be deployed. Many times, these were done just to throw me off. I remember meeting a large and nationally reputed hospital management, and trying to convince them, and later winning the deal. Finally, more than two years into our launch, we made our first sale! I remember that day as

if it was yesterday. It was a big order, and the whole team made a huge celebration out of it.

This was the first real validation of Manorama's existence as a viable business. The journey continued.

Five years after our launch, we had built a reputation across the country. Manorama's Lifeline Hospital Information Management Systems was recognized as a market leader.

By this time much had changed in my life - my son was born! The next few years raced by, as I tried to maintain an equilibrium in work-life balance, making quality time for the family while addressing the demands of the business.

We then made our foray into international markets covering Asia and Africa. Soon we had acquired customers across a dozen other countries, and our HIMs is now an international product. We soon expanded our product range by launching solutions for Health & Medical Insurers, and Clinical Decision Support aiding specialty EMRs.

We have delivered some of the best innovations in the Healthcare IT Solutions space and launched multiple new products to address the needs of Smart City, Country Automation Solutions, Telehealth Platforms, Health Insurance, National Health Programs & Pandemic Management solutions.

With presence across India, APAC, Africa and the Middle East, we are now expanding in the Emerging Markets.

We are NASSCOM certified Member, CMMI Level-3 Certified Company, ISO 9001: 2015 certified company. We are proud to be Google Cloud Technology Partner and Microsoft Gold Partner.

We have forged strategic partnerships with Inspira Enterprise India, and Allscripts USA. We are working with big Technology Consulting giants as Consortium Partners or System Integrators (SI) like Tech Mahindra, Honeywell, KPMG, L&T Infotech, and Wipro for implementing Healthcare solutions for Large Healthcare Projects Worldwide. Our Alliances & Partner Ecosystem enables us to create and deliver innovative & flexible solutions for Our Clients across Healthcare & Technology Domains to transform Healthcare enabling us to deliver Large Healthcare & Consulting Projects.

I have always motivated our employees and have built a culture of innovation and learning in the organization. These are built around my fundamental belief that without continuous innovation, the organization will stagnate.

At Manorama, all employees are encouraged to participate in planned activities that are built to stimulate the inherent talent and help them in coming up with innovative ideas and solutions. These activities cover a wide swath of areas including Technology, Functional enhancements and Process improvements. Manorama is leveraging Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Analytics to build significant business differentiators.

Manorama has implemented Asia's largest healthcare implementation for the civic body of Mumbai city, Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) spanning 399 hospitals with 13,000 beds and facilitating 54,000 outpatients' visits every day. Navigating the maze of users, technologists, bureaucrats and delivering a world class, real-time solution that impacted people's lives was an unforgettable journey!

I have been astounding as a woman entrepreneur and tech innovator. I have been an independent thinker, taking up challenging global projects which call for innovative processes, disruptive ways, using emerging tech and creating fool-proof concepts. Our team efforts have been instrumental in the automation and implementation of huge public health projects that are acclaimed for their size, Innovation and impacting positive healthcare outcomes.

By and large, the newer employees are able to seamlessly fit into the Manorama culture. Today, Manorama provides equal opportunities to women employees encouraging gender equality in leadership.

While facing the various challenges, all these have made me a better leader, and a better human. These are the things that will hold me in good stead, as the world's economies reset, and new sets of business opportunities open up.

In the new world that we are in today, we will need to change the way we think, and in some fashion unlearn what we had been doing so well for so many years. In many cases, the way business is conducted will change, and an entrepreneur must learn to adapt. We will have to learn to retain a few things and discard some, even if it has been valuable. Like these days I have accepted that client meets will mostly be virtual and physical travelling will be kept at a minimum.

I look back with utmost pride at what I have achieved as an entrepreneur. I have started a company and run it successfully. I have acquired and implemented complex projects that have helped in shaping the way healthcare is delivered, optimized and improved across states and nations. It is an exhilarating feeling when a successful project goes live. We help not just our customers, but we touch

the lives of people with our technologies.

I would like to conclude by saying that being an entrepreneur is so much more than running a business. It's about making meaningful changes to the society we live in, in a sustainable and responsible manner.

Entrepreneurship is hard, no doubt, but if you remain focused and put in the hard work and keep a positive mindset, then success is not going to elude you for long.

#UNSTOPPABLE SAM

MRS. SAMPADA PACHAURY

Director

Indo Universal Collaboration for Engineering Education (IUCEE)

"I am designed with an unstoppable spirit."

I was born in the beautiful spring month of March in 1973 near the foothills of Himalayas. My father worked a job with the State Govt while my mother managed the house while also completing her Master's degree in Home Science at the Pantnagar University.

I grew up in a very protected environment where my father indulged me to the best of his middle-class income status. He lived a simple life and strongly believed that higher education and financial independence were the only way to end human misery. His message was clear -- women should be financially independent and that they should be given proper education to support themselves and their family under all circumstances.

My father, himself being a man of science and maths encouraged me to excel in the fundamentals of science and also get a good hold on language and literature of Hindi and English.

I was given the best of education in a convent school while my mother instilled basic domestic skills in me. I learnt Kathak. I also played cricket with the boys in my neighbourhood. In school, I ranked among the top 5 students of the class at all times. I was a handyman for my parents who ran outdoor errands as well as managed daily repairs and fixes at home. **My childhood made me believe that everything is an unconditional limitless possibility.**

Growing up...

Back in late 1980's, girls opted a career in teaching so that they could balance house hold duties while also adding to their family income. Somehow teaching was not for me and I couldn't dream of being a doctor because dissecting

the frog didn't fall in my comfort zone. Engineering was the only option and was also my father's unfulfilled dream. Getting admission in Electronics branch was a matter of pride and sign of academic supremacy. I took admission at Aligarh Muslim University.

At college, I was among the 8 girls in a classroom of 50 students simply because engineering was a male-dominated field coupled with the fact that AMU was deeply rooted within conventional social order. That being said, AMU offered a culture, where women are treated gently and with huge respect, thanks to the heritage which was left unpolluted by the western world.

Like any other historic university, AMU offered a beautiful and safe passage to females and was suitably equipped to host students from all sections of the society. During my daily commute to the college, entering the premises of AMU was always a feeling of comfort and safety. I also enjoyed my first taste of freedom when I was gifted a motorised 2-wheeler as my transport. It felt as if I was suddenly promoted to a privileged stature among the crowd.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sampada Pachauri is currently serving as a Director with Indo Universal Collaboration for Engineering Education (IUCEE) Foundation. She plays an active role in the Organizational affairs of IUCEE. She is leading the Student Development Programs at IUCEE to empower engineering students across India with the tools to grow into global professional citizens.

She is a Post Graduate in VLSI Design from IIT Delhi (1996 batch). She was with STMicroelectronics Noida (India), Catania (Sicily), and Agrate (Italy) offices for 14 years working on SRAM design. She served Micron Technology Inc, Pasadena (USA) for 2 years in their Image Sensor Division for Mobile and PC product development.

She started the North India business operations for Sankalp Semiconductors (now HCL Technologies) and multiplied the accounts four-fold.

She joined Electronics Sector Skills Council of India as Vice President - Campus Engagement to lead the technical skill development of engineering students. She understands the issues deep-rooted in the engineering education system that inhibit workforce readiness for global needs. She is passionate about building sustainable reform in the learning processes to bring a long-lasting benefit to engineering students.

She is a voracious reader, a fitness enthusiast, and an amateur long-distance endurance cyclist.

I started getting proposals for marriage as early as my second year into engineering. But thankfully I choose to continue my education. My father hesitated when it was time for me to shift to a hostel at IIT Delhi for my Master's degree. He even considered relocating to Delhi to stretch the safety umbrella. But once he saw the facilities, I think he felt confident enough to leave me there, though he visited weekly to ensure that I was not mis-led by the liberal Delhi culture where young boys and girls went out late nights and partied together!

Post IIT I took up a job in the Industry, but this is as far as I could push the pressure of marriage on me. Funnily, the pressure was more from the immediate family who influenced my mother rather than my parents. *I had earned myself the right to choose a prospective groom.* But by getting me married, my mother was trying to protect me, because she knew the world outside was rough for females. They wanted me to take a flight but they were too scared to let go.

I was placed at STMicroelectronics in their Memory Product Design Group. The company was European and was among the top 5 semiconductor companies of the world in those times. I was hoping to find a multinational and progressive culture at my company. I worked at their India and Italy locations in the early years. The work culture at both sites was hugely different. While the ST offices at Italy valued equality and excellence among their people, the culture in the India site office was a mirror to the typical north Indian misogynistic and patriarchal society. The discrimination towards female employees, even though subtle, was all pervasive.

What does gender equality really mean? How do we define and maintain diversity at workplace?

Does it imply that men and women are measured on the same yard stick of performance and productivity?

A woman raised in a patriarchal setup faces a much wider gap compared to her peers who had the privilege of a modern upbringing. Diversity exists within the industries based on nature of business and commerce, demography, regional culture, field of work, profession, designation, experience and maturity. The differences are thus highly marginalized. On what basis are we trying to equalize the differences?

The understanding of these differences and discrimination missed notice of (mostly male) policy makers. **It has been a century of promise of equality and inclusion without understanding inequality fully well.** What works in Europe, or US, or Japan doesn't apply in India. What worked 20 years ago, doesn't apply

anymore. What works in multinationals doesn't apply in local industries.

Any professional in engineering industry will agree that the first decade in the industry pretty much define the career progression in the coming 2 decades. The real learning begins as we enter the industry and it was no different for me either. However, my first decade of career saw many disruptions and movement across divisions, and countries. Though it disturbed my plans at that time, I later realised that it brought a rare diversity in my work experience. Today, not many people around me can boast of such a vast and versatile exposure.

In my second year of industry, I was blessed with a rare opportunity to work overseas and learn straight from the fabrication and process engineering experts. However, for an unmarried girl from a Brahmin family, this time didn't last long. I was married in 1998 to a suitable boy working in IT industry. It terminated my 6 years long contract at Italy. A gamechanger opportunity lost just like that.

It was a roller coaster ride for me to build new relations at the workplace after returning from Italy and also adjust with the new in-law's family members and spouse from an arranged marriage. This period of time changed the course of my life permanently. It took away the possibility of me being a master of the sciences that I had dreamed of.

In a couple of years, time turned its' tide in my favour again. I moved to USA with my husband and took a job with Micron Technologies Inc where I learned more in half the time than I did in India office. I was happy with myself. I realised how important it is to have an order within the teams. I earned respect for my work and was looking at a long-term career at Micron in Pasadena, CA.

But the other side of the moon was dark. At personal front, I was going through the long ordeal of diagnosis and treatment of infertility which had begun while I was in India and resumed in US. The 3 years of this battle ended in a tragic loss of triplet pregnancy very close to its' maturity. I had traded my Job and my H1 visa to return to India to focus on saving the triplets under care of my family. But I lost everything.

It was the lowest point of my life.

The yin and the yang, came to term as I was eventually blessed with 2 happy healthy normal kids. I quit my career to be a full-time parent. Once again, my husband's work took all of us to USA.

Being never the one to sit idle, I was actively involved in my kids' schools as a volunteer parent helping in multiple events, field trips, extracurricular clubs etc. I also started reading texts on psychology to better my understanding of people,

responses, behaviour patterns and relations. **This self-study and my experience at kids' primary school laid a foundation for what I would do few years later.**

I ended my 6-years long motherhood sabbatical in 2012 when my kids were independent enough to manage themselves. Masamb Esys was the only company that gave me an option to work part time at half salary. This helped me balance my family and work life and the transition to India. The rise was fast and within 2 years I was looking after more than just business development, the north India operations. I became their head of engineering and regulated their talent acquisition, training the new hires, resource allocation, managing the existing workforce etc. This was the first time for me to notice that students of 2010s were not as fundamentally strong as those who graduated 20 years ago.

Two years later, I joined an Indian multinational to broaden their business in the north of India. I joined as the first female leader in the existing leadership team comprising of 14 male members. I brought diversity to their leadership team.

Over the next year, semiconductor market started to show signs of recession. Businesses became cautious with new hires, thus highlighting the skill gaps in younger workforce. I was in the middle of this supply chain line. I could foresee where the next decade was heading, if the talent gaps were not addressed at the source, i.e., the college and academics.

Around the same time in 2015, I handled 4 ICU hospitalizations for my mother and also my mother-in-law. I am the primary caregiver for my mother and I happened to be the only caregiver available at the time for my mother-in-law. The year turned out exhausting as I worked out of ICU attendant lounges and hospital cafeteria. I would rush for a meeting with customers and return back to the hospital to not miss the consulting physician visits as well. I had to make extra effort to ensure that the mothers were well taken care of by the nursing staff amidst the temper tantrums of my old ladies.

I was spread thin. At work, I worked on challenge of keeping staff motivated since businesses were cutting down on resources while at the same time expected more output from those they chose to retain. At home, I was attending to sick senior citizens and 2 kids who were merely 9 and 10 years old, though independent enough.

It was at this time I felt the anguish of being a solo female leader in a matrix of all male peers, who had wives at home taking care of all other fronts for them. **I did not have a wife at home. I was the wife.** There is no labour law or corporate policy written to accommodate a woman leader who is also doubling up at

domestic front with full involvement. For a woman in corporate who is also married and has a family, nothing is personal anymore. Her health, happiness, challenges is a sum total of health, happiness and challenges of all in her family. In a very weird way, it somehow does not apply to the male counterpart.

There is no such thing as work-life balance. It is a myth. One must make a choice at every point and keep moving forward with their choices. **I made a choice to Gig.**

I had been in the influence and company of visionaries who propelled me closer to bridge the gap between industry and academia. I worked on programs that enabled the students and institutions. I worked as a Vice President of Electronics Sector Skill Council of India and established a strong campus engagement program that opened a pathway of skill training for engineering students. It was a program that promised Industry readiness with Global standards. I interacted with thousands of students, and hundreds of faculties pan India.

In the 3rd innings of my career, I had dived deep into the realm of educational transformation for engineering students in India.

Today I am associated with multiple organizations and foundations to strengthen the platform on which the youth will lay the foundation for the nation's technological landscape. I chose to help others fulfil their dreams for a simple reason that I couldn't fulfil mine. And no, this is not my revised dream. Rather, it is a purpose to live.

I have founded my own social enterprise Sharpness Simplified to assist communities to improve the quality of their lives. #ILIVESIMPLY is a key to complex global issues.

I also made a choice to live a life that went beyond motherhood and beyond employment. I amended my parenting style from being just a caretaker to an enabler and eventually an influencer.

I had always been an avid reader since I was a little girl. Once I was hunted down by my worried family, sitting and reading comics in a neighbourhood bookshop for hours. As a young girl, I would also sit by my father during his general social meet with friends. They talked for hours on subjects of spirituality, religion, literature, history and scientific discoveries.

20 years later, I found myself curious to discover more on the same topics and my love for nature and humanity blended well with my new found purpose of mending the dip in the socio-cultural sensibilities of the millennials.

Age was catching up faster than it should. That was perhaps the result of 2

decades of medical interventions, and I found myself unable to indulge in activities I loved, like dancing, playing lawn tennis and long mountain treks. Hormonal imbalances, hypothyroidism, and osteoarthritis are now my lifelong partners. But my relentless zeal to take life head-on, couldn't stop me from starting out new avenues like being a “story-teller Aunt” to the kids in my residential complex. I also took up long distance endurance cycling to stay active, thereby challenging arthritic pains. I have cycled day and nights, crossed cities and Himalayan ranges. Amateur cycling has helped to liberate me from my fictitious mental traps set under several years of conditioning.

Long distance cycling is as much about physical abilities as it is about testing mental resilience and will power. The discipline required to maintain the cycling sport reflects in every other aspect of my life – be it personal or professional.

I am sometimes criticised for my over indulgence in social causes. They say I may have compromised my commitment towards my own family and kids. I stand alone and remind myself each day that every moment I spend away from my kids has to be worthwhile. Sometimes I share stories of my life with them, but mostly I let them feel my presence in their lives, as I wait for them to start their education for career, I want them to be a witness to my unstoppable spirit.

THE FASCINATING JOURNEY OF PALLAVI LIMAYE

DR. PALLAVI LIMAYE-APTE

Director of Scientific Consulting
Sekisui XenoTech

*“Define success on your own terms, achieve it by your own rules,
and build your life you are proud to live” - Anne Sweeney*

Embarking on the Ph.D. journey was a turning point in my life, and really, that's exactly where the story of “The Fascinating Journey of Pallavi Limaye” begins. It was the year 1999. Everything was new! A new country, a new school system, a new beginning, and a new married life! Three weeks in my marriage, I had chosen to do Ph.D. in toxicology, the science that studies adverse effects of chemicals on living systems.

I come from a typical middle class Marathi Brahmin family.

I was born in Pune, a metro city in the state of Maharashtra in India but grew up in several small towns around the state due to my father's transferable job. He was a bank manager and would get deputed to a new place every 4-5 years. Adaptability and acceptability of change that I was unknowingly learning during those early years helped me prepare a great deal to tackle bigger challenges later in life and still come in handy today!

My mother earned her master's degree in education after her marriage and due to our moves, mostly worked as a substitute teacher. Education was vital to their success. It was the only means of personal progress and was highly valued. I treasure the philosophy, championed by my mother, that it doesn't matter what your grades are, how many marks or points you score, or what rank you hold, what matters ultimately is the knowledge you gained!

My parents were insistent on us getting our grade school education in Marathi, our native language, defying the growing trend of English-medium schools. They believed that learning a new language can be managed later but learning in the native language makes a strong educational foundation. Depending

on which town we ended up in, I went to both boutique-style elite schools and also the conventional schools.

I started developing an interest in science from a young age. I chose scientific topics to write essays on for competitions and for debating. This steered me to read more science magazines, made me think out of the box and opened my mind to the amazing world of scientific discoveries. I enjoyed my high school years very much and was the valedictorian of my graduating class.

While the things were looking to be on track for my future, a major setback knocked me off when I appeared for my 12th grade examination. Back in those days in India, this examination single handedly decided your future career path. Somehow, I scored very poorly in this crucially important examination. This setback shattered my dream of pursuing a medical degree. However, looking back now I can say that, in fact, it was a blessing in disguise that led to the path of success. I decided to pursue B.Sc. in basic science with an emphasis on Biology, which was ironically considered a dead end. In those days there was no salvation,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Pallavi B. Limaye, Ph.D., DABT Biosketch Dr. Pallavi Limaye received her Ph.D. from The University of Louisiana at Monroe in USA in toxicology and later conducted her postdoctoral research at University of Pittsburgh and University of Kansas Medical Center in liver pathobiology. Currently, Dr Pallavi is the Director of Scientific Consulting at Sekisui XenoTech in Kansas City, USA. Her areas of expertise are drug-drug interaction and preclinical toxicology. She has over fifteen years of experience in these fields. Pallavi has published several peer-reviewed original research articles and review articles in eminent journals and book chapters pertinent to toxicology and liver biology. She is a visiting lecturer at University of Kansas Medical Center and teaches Industrial Toxicology to masters and Ph.D. students. Currently, she serves on the Scientific Program Committee of the American College of Toxicology and as a vice president for the Central States Regional Chapter of the Society of Toxicology. In the past, Pallavi has served as the Secretary of Association of Scientists of Indian Origin in America and the postdoctoral representative of Allegheny Erie Regional Chapter of SOT. Pallavi lives in Kansas City with her husband and two children.

no success in anything other than a professional degree such as medicine, engineering, pharmacy, architecture, or may be law.

Incidentally, towards the end of my 12th grade, my father was transferred to a small town named Sangli in southwestern Maharashtra and it was time for us to move again. I began my B.Sc. course at the Willingdon College, Sangli. I scored the highest marks in the first year of college and ranked first. Alongside, I had also started working part time as a cultural correspondent for one of the newspapers. I covered the local news about cultural events, interviewed local artists, local businessmen, and so on. This gave me a whole new perspective. I realized that a lot of people face challenges in all walks of life and they rise to those challenges. Perseverance, hard work, and honesty to self are the keys to success.

I was genuinely interested in basic sciences and during my second year of college I started participating in various science clubs. I was actively involved in the local World Wildlife Fund (WWF) club. I volunteered at the Annual convention of the Bird Conservation Society. I came to know several leading scientists and their work through these activities, made new friends, and also met a guy named Udayan Apte! But more about that later.

I continued my academic success during the next two years, ranking first in the final year of B.Sc. in my specialization, Zoology in the college and second in the entire University. I was very fortunate to be trained under exceptional professors. They were very passionate about teaching. Our institute was home to several hundred rare specimens. Hands-on laboratory involvement was also a major part of the curriculum and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was my professors' encouragement that I decided to pursue a master's degree at Shivaji University, Kolhapur, a town an hour or so away, in Cell and Molecular Biology. It was great to meet fellow students interested in advanced biology, professor, many of whom were actively involved in research and an academic environment focused on advancement of science. In two years, I graduated with an M.Sc. in Cell and Molecular Biology with flying colors.

Now what? What do I want to do next? Honestly, I was pretty undecided at this point. Back in those days it was pretty quite natural for my parents to start thinking about my marriage. The subsequent path of my my career would be decided based on which family I get married into. But, destiny had something else planned for me. Remember I mentioned about that guy named Udayan Apte, whom I met during my second year? Well, over next several years we continued to be good friends and by the end of my M.Sc. it was pretty clear to both of us that we would

like to take on the remaining life's journey together. Our choices were clear. Udayan and I both decided to pursue a Ph.D. degree in the United States of America. Together! It was a pretty daunting proposition. I was the first one in my family to take up such a journey. I was the first one in the family to leave India for further education. Things were moving fast. While this was something very new for my family, my parents, in-laws, and my extended family stood firmly behind me. Their unwavering support gave me confidence that I could embark on this new path.

Udayan moved to the US in 1998 to start his Ph.D. I stayed back to finish my GRE and TOEFL examination and while studying also worked at a diagnostic laboratory specialized in using genetic tools to detect congenital disease. We got married the following year 1999 and I started my Ph.D. in Toxicology at the University of Louisiana at Monroe in USA within 3 weeks of marriage.

I did my Ph.D. under the mentorship from one of the most renowned scientists of the era, Dr. Harihara Mehendale. Those few years in the graduate school were no doubt very demanding. We would spend most of our time either studying for a test, reading research papers, or working in the laboratory, doing experiments. However, having Dr. Mehendale as my Ph.D. mentor was the best thing that happened to me. He is the best role model, in science and in personal life, alike. He not only mentored me in research but also instilled many life lessons that I will carry for the rest of my life! During my Ph.D. I investigated the mechanisms of progression of injury initiated by drug overdose such as acetaminophen (or paracetamol). I published several papers in high impact factor journals, which are now highly cited. I also received several awards including the Carl C. Smith Award for the best graduate student researcher by the Society of Toxicology. Upon completion of my Ph.D. in 2004, I joined the laboratory of another world renowned scientist, Dr. George Michalopoulos at the University of Pittsburgh as a postdoctoral fellow.

My time in Pittsburgh was extremely busy. I gave birth to my son and 3 years later to my daughter while working full time as a postdoctoral researcher. Being new parents and an active researcher at the same time was a formidable test. It was only possible because of my husband's support for me, and my support for him. We always considered each other's work equally important. Udayan took over all the household activities, cleaning and majority of cooking, while I took care of our kids. I faced the usual difficulties that a new mother faces. The most difficult was the decision to put my son in a day-care at the age of 4 months. I wrestled with

the thought that I am abandoning my baby for my own career path. However, once we saw the quality of care at the day-care and the happy and healthy growth of our son, all doubts faded away.

I was again able to publish several seminal papers on how different types of cells in the liver can transdifferentiate or change themselves into a different type of cell during liver disease. This work was well received by the liver research community and I was awarded the prestigious Postdoctoral Scholar Fellowship jointly given by the American Liver Foundation and American Association for the Study Diseases. In 2007, my husband secured a faculty position at the Department of Pharmacology, Toxicology and Therapeutics at the University of Kansas Medical Center. By this time, I had decided to pursue a career in industry and interviewed at a contract research organization named Sekisui XenoTech (SXT) in anticipation of our move to Kansas City.

Then things changed again! The year 2008, and a great recession hit the whole country. A hiring freeze was placed at the company where I had interviewed, and I lost the job opportunity. I frantically started applying to every possible opportunity with no luck. Although, another door of opportunity opened up and I assumed a senior researcher position in the laboratory of Dr. Curtis Klaassen, another very well-known toxicologist. I worked on a challenging project, dealing with role of gut microbes in maintaining liver health.

By 2010 things started turning around and I was offered a position as Research Scientist in the Drug Metabolism division at Sekisui XenoTech, the same company where I had interviewed a couple of years before. I was keen on the meticulousness and thoroughness in my job. While working full time I studied for the American Board of Toxicology examination and earned my board certification. With young kids, it was certainly challenging to study and I was proud of myself when I received the result! I would work full 40 to 50 hours a week and have to spend another 12 to 14 hours per week studying. This required careful time management and organization. I prepared a study plan, got in touch with other fellow scientists who were also appearing for the examination and formed a study group. This helped me to stay focused on the preparation and meeting deadlines.

After about two and half years at SXT, I embarked on another journey and took up a study director position in a preclinical toxicology contract research company called Xenometrics, LLC. Being a study director in toxicology can be stressful because most of the studies are run under regulations and you bear the ultimate responsibility of the study conduct. Vigilance, quick but thought-through

decisions, attention to detail, and understanding a bigger picture are essential qualities to be successful as a study director. I also had the opportunity of addressing the regulatory audits by two of the main regulatory agencies, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). After about four years in this position, I decided to move into even more challenging and competitive field of scientific consulting. Today, I serve as the Director of scientific consulting at Sekisui XenoTech, providing support for the external clients as well as internally. All these years, I also participated in professional societies including Society of Toxicology and American College of Toxicology, initially as a student and now as a career professional, serving on executive committees, organizing continuing education courses, etc. I wrote several research articles, book chapters, and contributed to the teaching as a visiting faculty.

My professional journey has been interesting and not something I had anticipated during my undergraduate education. The first turning point came when I decided to move to the United States for Ph.D. in toxicology. Toxicology is a vast interdisciplinary science with a multibillion dollar dedicated industry. Choosing to pursue doctoral studies in toxicology was one of the best decisions because I was now specializing in a field which was ubiquitously applicable in almost every consumer industry and there were a lot of job opportunities. Second turning point was having absolutely outstanding mentors for Ph.D. and postdoctoral work. I trained with the best people in the fields of toxicology and pathology, which provided me not only amazing training but also long pedigree. The third important factor was being flexible and open to change. This meant that I was able to convert every new challenge into an opportunity for personal and professional growth.

Through my journey so far, one thing is clear to me that ultimately it is you who is the creator of your own success. Being true to yourself and accountable is important. My Ph.D. mentor Dr. Mehendale used to tell us that if you don't even attempt it is guaranteed that you won't get it, but if you do attempt then there is at least 50% chance of success. It is so true for everything you do! Taking that extra step, showing up and making an attempt is what is ultimately needed. Off course, there will be hard work, but you owe it to yourself and no one else!

WHEN COURAGE MEETS OPPORTUNITY

Dr. Prachi Gharpure

Director

Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studiess (NMIMS) Indore Campus

“Opportunity dances with those already on the dance floor.” - H. Jackson Brown Jr.

If I look back at my education and subsequent academic career, I realise that it was not so much about a planned strategy, but more about what I did with the opportunities when they were offered to me at various junctures.

I was born and raised in a very family-oriented environment. The locality where we lived in, in Indore -- now known as the cleanest city of India, too was a very close-knit unit, with lovely friends and helpful neighbours. The fact that I lived in a joint family had a lot of impact on my personality. Ours was a huge family with 2 grandmothers, 3 grandfathers, 4 uncles and 2 aunties. I grew up with a deep sense of contentment and confidence as there was always someone to guide me in all the areas that I struggled with during the growing years of my life. From language to expression; from artistic view towards Rangoli making to debating, I had someone as an expert right at home.

My parents were like the lighthouse to us kids. I am yet to see a couple with a more positive outlook towards life than them.

My father, a lawyer and mother, a homemaker were parents not only for us -- and believe me, we were a handful of five siblings -- but also for all our cousins in the large joint family that we all lived in. They managed to give all of us their unconditional love.

We were all treated equally and were allowed equal freedom of thoughts and expressions. Unlike the kids of this generation, we played a lot of outdoor games. All through the evening we ran around the entire stretch of our colony getting our clothes dirty and playing the then local games.

We are 5 siblings and our parents encouraged all of us to join professional courses. As a result, each of us sisters are professionals. I took up engineering, while my two younger sisters are doctor and microbiologist.

I was an above average student and a keen learner. I selected STEM in my higher secondary because the other option was Biology and I wasn't very keen on it. But when it came to engineering, that just happened. I was always a sharp student, and if I look back, I can see that putting in the hard-work came more easily to me than my peers. I think that saw me to my destination – I never sought to replace hard-work with anything else. I believe each of us are born with some kind of skill or uniqueness. What we do with it is the differentiating factor between success and failure. I have always chosen to put in the hard-work. Engineering happened because some of my friends took admission and I followed them. At this juncture also there was no fixed goal or a high ambition but what was definitely there was a keen competitive spirit and the inherent nature to give my 100 % once a path is chosen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Prachi Gharpure is presently the Director of NMIMS (Deemed University) Indore Campus. Before joining NMIMS, she was associated with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Sardar Patel Institute of Technology, Mumbai as Principal.

Besides holding a Doctoral degree in Computer Engineering, she has over 35 years of experience in teaching and academic administration. Dr. Prachi's awards and achievements include - Higher Education Forum Award for Contribution to Information Technology in 2018. She was Chairman of BOS (Computer) at Mumbai University. Her area of research are E-Learning and Software Engineering.

She taught several courses with innovative practices in teaching learning like Computer programming, Object Oriented Analysis and Design, and Software Engineering. She is Currently guiding 05 Ph.D. Students from Mumbai University.

I entered college in 1978 and in our first two years we were 13 girls in a batch of 210 which was a great leap from just 1 or 2 in our senior batches. But by the third year, wherein we were selected for Electronics engineering, only four of us got selected. At that time, the choice to become an electronics engineer had very little to do with any future thought. It was more of a matter of pride to get selected for that coveted branch.

Life in college was bitter sweet. We were looked after very well by our faculty but at the same time there were some fellow students who were prejudiced about the very concept of 'women-in-engineering.' They spoke to us in a belittling and condescending tone. When any of us took up some leadership position or expressed our opinions bluntly, it was never well received. One incident that had a long-term impact on me was during my second year a group of students in our college decided to boycott the semester end examination due to some very trivial and non-academic issue. I, along with a small group of students motivated others against such a stand and we appeared for our examination. This clearly did not go down well and in the subsequent semesters I faced public humiliation a number of times. The humiliation mostly came in the form of 'no-brainer' women's tone and that we have no business doing engineering. This incident kind of prepared me for what I will face in my professional world once I am out of the campus.

Immediately after my engineering I went to Holland (The Netherlands) to be with my husband who was posted in Philips headquarters for a period of one and a half years. Yes, that is another story. I got married to Uday at a very young age of 20 something. Both me and Uday were very young when we got married and actually grew up together. He was not just a husband, but proved to be my best friend. So yes, Holland it was in 1983. I got an internship in Philips and that's where I learned about programming for the first time. I was given an assignment to convert an existing unstructured program in Fortran to a structured program in Pascal. I thoroughly enjoyed the work, the office, and the cycle rides to the office every day. It was all very beautiful. That experience taught me how to be a professional at work.

After coming back from Holland, we settled in Mumbai. I soon got a job in the prestigious Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's engineering college as faculty. As I look back, I realise what a great leap of faith Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan had taken in hiring a fresher as faculty.

I had no experience of teaching and was handling final year engineering students. Those students were younger to me by just a year. But here again, my

sincerity and the ability to put in the hard-work worked. In 1985 it was not mandatory to have a Ph.D or even a PG degree to become faculty. So here I was, just with my BE degree, as a faculty. I was well aware of the responsibility that I had taken over. It was not just a subject that I was teaching, it was their life, their career. So, along with my job, I quickly completed my post-graduation and took up my doctoral. I wanted to continuously upgrade my education and enrich myself with the subject knowledge.

I can say that I could not have completed my post-graduation and doctoral degree subsequently without the unflinching and encouraging support from my husband and daughter.

I remember we used to have weekend classes during my PG program and also had to do summer projects for 8-week duration. Our daughter was just a year old then. The baby-sitting arrangement that we could find was only for 5 days a week. That too, they did not come during the peak summer season. So, from looking after our daughter single handed to taking care of the house was managed by my husband. Actually, in India lack of family support becomes a major reason for shunting career growth of a woman professional. My story would have been very different if my husband did not support me during that crucial period.

I realised very early in my days as a professional that there were male colleagues with very different outlook towards female colleagues. I have worked with very senior faculty colleagues during my early years as a junior most teacher in the department. Some of them treated me almost as their daughter and gave all their support; some treated me as their junior and taught me the professional discipline; some, however, felt that as a woman my priority should be home first and always made it a point to say so, and that they did not feel it was very appropriate of me to leave the confines of my home when I had such a little daughter to take care of. Eventually as I became the principal of the college, I again had colleagues, this time my juniors with multiple outlooks. This time some of them openly resented the fact that they were reporting to a woman; some however admired the abilities and skill-set which had allowed me to hold that position. Women colleagues however were always supportive. So yes, in short, one cannot generalise this issue.

I think engineering/STEM and other allied fields are no more unorthodox, at-least in Indian context. There is very active support from the government as well. We have 30% quota for girls for admission to engineering. But what is still challenging is the mind-set. Not only does the society have an obtuse view about

this matter, even the girl child is still apprehensive and somewhat holds back when it comes to taking a front seat. We still see less girls as team leaders in student group projects. Very few female hands go up when asked to volunteer as a lead.

Post degree the initial years are hectic for a woman engineer but still very manageable. The real challenge starts when, as an engineer, you start climbing the leadership ladder, because in all probability, at that time the family responsibilities are also on ascent. What is seen is, at this juncture most women take a step back and opt for a less demanding role and the industry loses out on a very diverse kind of leadership.

I remember I too faced this dilemma. When my daughter was in her 10th and 12th grade, which are the school passing examinations, I was extremely busy with my College as by then I was at a senior position in the department. These 10th and 12th grades are very important milestones in a student's life. However, thanks to strong family support and my daughter's absolute independent nature I could spend long hours at college and carry forward the responsibilities with complete commitment. But I have seen around me that many have to take a back seat in the absence of such support at crucial times in their career. My suggestion for such a time to all the career path women engineers is that we do not have to try to be superwoman. What will help is prioritizing the important tasks ahead and let someone else complete the low priority ones for you. In other words – outsource the apple pie.

When you choose to be a professional, what is it that matters the most? Job satisfaction, money, recognition, yes, all of them matter, but to me, the most satisfying thing in an academic career is when a student returns after many years and reminds you of mentoring given by you or a seemingly trivial intervention done by you which changed the course of his life for the better. These are the moments when I am absolutely certain about my choice of career.

I am glad that beautiful opportunities, both in my personal as well as professional life came to me at various junctures of my life, and whenever it did, I did the dance!

A DANCE OF CHOICES & CHANCES - MY LIFE JOURNEY

Dr. Kalpana Gopalan

Additional Chief Secretary

Labour & Janaspadana-Public Grievance Karnataka

"Life is about choices and chances. You make a choice and take a chance"- Kerry Clark

How do I encapsulate a lifetime in a chapter? I searched for a phrase to describe my life ... and it is ... a continuing dance of choices and chances.

Almost as long as I have known, it seems that a combination of fortuitous circumstances, serendipity and conscious efforts have conspired together in my life; to ensure not just that the right thing happened, but that the right thing happened at the right time.

But let's begin at the beginning. I am a daughter of the original Two States marriage, my father a Tamil, my mother a Gujarati. Childhood alternated between schooldays in Madras and holidays in Ahmedabad. I grew up with the responsibility of high expectations; so academic excellence was taken for granted. I was a nerd long before the word was even invented.

As I said, looking back, my life has been a dance where Choice and Chance played starring roles. Two events illustrate this piece of self-reflection. My choice of a higher education, trivial as it may seem to a young woman today, was a life-determining choice. It demonstrates that simple short-neck choices can have long-term consequences that one hardly foresees at the time. I made such a choice, as a naïve and nervous college girl some 30-odd years ago. My parents placed a premium on education, so I had always taken university education for granted. As I was completing my undergraduate degree, an officious uncle decided it was time for me to get married. As respect for elders was also a family trait, my parents deferred to him without protest. But I could not. I was generally an obedient child, so this was one of the rare confrontations with my parents that I remember. I was preparing for my final exams at the time. I used to dart out in the middle of my

studies to insist, “I want to do my MA!” That was the extent of my horizon at the time, an M.A. degree was as far as I could dream. Anyways, it worked, I did get to do my M.A., and then the IAS, and two more masters degrees, and then a Ph.D. That rare instance of stubbornness defined the rest of my life thereafter.

On the other hand, Chance played a role in determining my career path in the IAS. Entering the Indian Administrative Service, India's elite premier civil service, was not a burning ambition. Being good in studies, I naturally drifted into a Ph.D. program. But Serendipity had other plans. I got into the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology Madras. It was an amazing experience. The world of science and technology is pulsating with possibilities. I discovered that only the sky is the limit. What I also saw was that women too were shoulder to shoulder with men. Who said engineering is not for women? I saw first-hand what women were capable of and drew inspiration from there. Each one had their stories of struggle and push-backs, but they were there because they did not give up on their dreams. With them, I too realised that my dream and strength was my social science

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Kalpana Gopalan IAS is a composite public policy professional. A true versatilist, she wears many hats-practitioner, policy-maker, scholar, author, volunteer, and mother. Her 33-year work experience in the Indian Administrative Service spans land administration, energy, handicrafts, urban management, public distribution system, sports, rural development, youth, training, and education. She is now the Additional Chief Secretary, Labour and Public Grievance Redressal, Government of Karnataka.

Dr. Kalpana is recipient of several National and international awards including the Mother Theresa Women Empowerment Award for “outstanding contribution to excellence in leadership. She is a LinkedIn Wonder Woman and Inspirational Leader (2020).

She honed her research skills with a Doctorate and Master's in public policy from IIM Bangalore. A gold medalist and university topper in her undergraduate and master's, she was Visiting Fellow at McGill and Concordia Universities in Canada and EU fellow in the University of Salerno in Italy. She trained in Evidence for Policy Design in the Centre for International Development, Harvard University, E-Governance strategy in the London School of Economics, UK (2017) and Advanced Women's Leadership in the Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago (2019).

interests and not technology. I made a U-turn and attempted the civil service exams. I prepared with my usual diligence and cleared it in my first try, standing fairly high in the merit list.

The IAS was the first major turn in my hitherto simple student life. The job comes with all sorts of challenges and complexities. I got married around the same time, so I had a new life, new place, new job and new husband to adjust to; all simultaneously! Fast forwarding the next two decades, working, bringing up two children, promotions ... life was pretty much full and very busy. IAS officers are situational managers; leadership is neither a choice nor a position but a way of life. Therefore, I picked up quite a bit of multi-sectoral experience along the way. Some positions are more memorable than others; as when UNESCO awarded me for the best literacy program in the country; or when I had the rare opportunity to set up the new district of Udupi.

The next major turn in my life, again unplanned and unforeseen, came when I entered the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore. I came as a Masters student for the public policy program; I came back again as a doctoral student a few years later. Well, I was teased quite a bit for going back to school mid-career and mid-life; one mischievous cousin asked me if I was having a mid-life crisis! But both professionally and personally, the years I spent in IIM Bangalore were among the most rewarding in my life. I loved the intellectual stimulus, and made lasting friendships that I cherish.

Well, all good things come to an end... unless you really work hard to see that they don't! I continue to research in academic institutions of repute; I frequently get invitations to speak in conferences, and I have written three books and quite a few articles. For me, reading, research, writing and speaking, along with fitness and music, help me relax from my work pressures. Sharing the learnings that life, academia and work have given me gives me great joy. It has also brought me accolades that balance the frustrations of a civil service career- I have won over ten awards, besides receiving citations from fifteen universities.

I also volunteer with social organizations. Thirty-two years ago, as a young officer-trainee, I got together with some young doctors in Mysore, all of us believing that we could make a difference. Today I continue to associate with initiatives like the Akshayapatra Foundation, Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement in Mysore, the Centre for Health and Development in Mangalore and the Her initiative in Maharashtra, because I believe our youth can make a difference.

Today, I sit here reflecting, trying to sum up everything that I have been, seen and done, in a few pages. I feel I am so many things: an administrator, scholar, author, wife, volunteer, mother, friend; and now I am about to discover whether when I write and speak, at least some people listen. It has been an incredible journey full of plans and surprises, joy and pain, disappointments and fulfilment. What more do I want from life? Like all of you, I want success, happiness and lots of love. The specifics I leave, of course, to Chances and Choices!

FROM THE BANKS OF GODAVARI

DR. MANJUSHA SHELKE

Principal Scientist
CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory

*"To get through the hardest journey we need to take only one step at a time,
but we must keep on stepping." - Chinese Proverb*

I was at the superstore that day, in a city called Lille, in France, asking for milk and bread in French before heading home for the day. I was standing in the queue, when my thoughts drifted back swiftly to the sepia toned rustic childhood of mine. I was born in a small town called Nanded in the south-eastern part of Maharashtra. Rich with ancient Indian history, Nanded derived its name from 'Nandi-tat', a place situated in the banks of the river Godavari. It is a small cute settlement embedded in the beautiful banks of the river, and standing there, in that superstore, I was wondering if ever, during those days of growing up close-to-the-soil and by-the-river childhood, did it ever occur to me, that one day I will make it so far and so wide.

My father Shri Dajisaheb Pawar Ledgaonkar was a well-read and well-travelled man. He was Masters in Marathi Literature with progressive outlook. He forayed into many ventures from being area manager in Khadi Village industry to founding a Federation of Labour Contracts Society (LCS), District Parbhani as chairman. He was also a member of Jilha Parishad, Parbhani and the founder chairman of Jai Shivrai Nagari Sahakari Bank, Nanded. He was passionate about his farms as well. He had not only encouraged and helped my mother to complete her education after marriage but was also very keen about his daughters being highly educated and independent women. I have inherited my father's progressive, multitasking attitude and a very strong will-power.

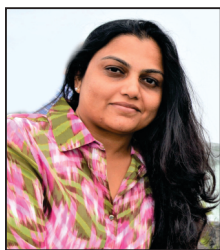
We are five brothers and sisters, and I am the youngest of the five.

My parents had migrated to this city so that they could enrol my eldest sister for her higher education while being able to provide a safe home environment.

Education was the only thing that had any priority in our house. We sisters were not treated differently than our two brothers at home. I don't remember mother ever asking us, girls, to learn cooking, stitching or keeping the house. Instead, she would be particular about me completing my school-homework before going out to play. The over-protectiveness was there to some extent for us girls, keeping in mind the social system and prevalent moral considerations for girls.

When I was young, I loved reading. Noticing that, my father bought Marathi translations of different books of famous foreign authors for me, before he finally realised that I could read English as well!! This hunger for reading, trying to know and understand the world as much as possible, was the seed sown at a very tender age that eventually gave rise to the researcher in me. When I was in school, our teachers used to talk a lot about great Indian scientists like Prof. Jayant Narlikar and Dr. Raghunath Mashelkar. Their stories really encouraged me. The more I heard about them, the more I wanted to be like them. I think the idea of research, or working towards finding something new came to me from these stories.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Manjusha Shelke is a founder & Principal Scientist of CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory, Pune spin-off company 'Rechargion Energy Pvt. Ltd.' She is a materials' chemist and her research activities are focused to develop indigenous solutions for energy storage. Her research group's findings on high efficiency electrode materials for rechargeable batteries and flexible devices for ultracapacitors are prominent examples of blending translational science with societal needs. Her group has published more than 65 research articles, book chapters and obtained 5 patents.

Manjusha has completed her Ph.D. in chemistry from CSIR-Advanced Materials and Processes Research Institute, Bhopal, India. She was sponsored by Embassy of France in India to work as postdoctoral researcher at Institut d'électronique de microélectronique et de nanotechnologie (IEMN), Lille, France in the year 2007-08. She had been awarded a visiting scholarship in chemical sciences for the year 2013 by Indo-US Science & Technology Forum (IUSSTF) and worked at Rice University, Houston, TX, USA. She has been selected as Kavli Fellow by National Academy of Sciences (NAS), USA in 2015 and as a Fellow of Maharashtra Academy of Sciences (MAS) in 2018. Recently, she is selected for SERB's prestigious POWER fellowship award for 2021.

When I was in my 11th grade I was selected for “Vigyan Manch” a prestigious state level Science Camp. That exposure had quite a radical effect on me. I enjoyed the tempo that was there in experiential learning and that, I believe, set my course for the future.

Since my grades were always good, my parents wanted me to pursue medicine. I wasn't too keen on it, but I tried to be an obedient daughter and selected bio group. Back then, in our days, most elite students would pursue either medicine or engineering. No-one ever thought of any off-beat career options as much as they do now. But it so happened that I fell short of a few marks to get admission in government medical schools. Finding a place in government medical schools is a big deal even today. They are fiercely competitive. I scored 93%, but even that was not enough and I refused private schools because they were too expensive. I did not want to burden my parents financially. While most of my female friends went on to join medicine or alternate medicine branches, I decided to pursue graduation in science and today I am so thankful to myself for this decision as well as my family for supporting it.

The chemistry department of our college at Nanded was one of the best and renowned for some of the greatest chemistry teachers like Dr. Kuberkar, Dr. Khodaskar, Dr. Puri, Dr. Gosawi, Dr. Vibhute and more. This encouraged me to choose chemistry as my major subject. I then picked up interest in Chemistry like never before and eventually topped the University with a gold-medal. This motivated me to pursue masters in Chemistry from the same department. The faculty for chemistry was a blessing from heaven. Their dedication, personal interaction with students, keen observation of each student's weakness as well as their strengths and guidance accordingly, had made me fall in love with the subject. I had topped the university again for my masters, and was again awarded with a gold-medal. I was thrilled. Those two years of Masters were some of the best days of my life. I had thoroughly enjoyed the learning process and made some great friends with whom I am still very close.

Then I reached some kinds of cross-road in my life. While my teacher, Prof. Kuberkar insisted me to further pursue PhD in Chemistry and asked me to apply at CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory (CSIR-NCL), Pune, my mother wanted me to get married. I weighed the options. If I enrol for my PhD, I will be stuck for at least 4-5 years. I knew my mother would not be happy about this delay and hence I went back home to Nanded. While my family was busy checking out a suitable groom for me, I decided to enrol for bachelor of education course. Although I was

not very sincere about it, I achieved 3rd position in the University.

One good thing this B. Ed. experience did was it helped me become a confident speaker. These days when I have to stand up and make a presentation or speak in some scientific forum, I am confident.

By the time I had completed B. Ed. I was engaged to my future husband, Vilas, who was a researcher, a senior scientific officer at Physics Department of Barkatullah university, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

We moved to Bhopal after marriage in the year 2000. I eventually joined CSIR-Advanced Materials and Processes Research Institute (CSIR-AMPRI) then called as the Regional Research Laboratory (RRL) for PhD. My supervisor Dr. Sanghi was intelligent, dynamic and a polite person. I was working on developing methods, matrices and microfabricated devices for the detection of carcinogenic aromatic amines. I was happy and content being in the lab. The work was very engaging and time flew. But around that time, my son, Mehul was born.

His birth was a game changer.

Till then I was following a direction and choosing my path. But with him in the picture, the parameters changed, the way I picked and choose things for me changed and the heart interfered in a way I was not used to. After 3 months of maternity leave, I was back in the lab. My mother lived with me till my son became a year old. And then she too left.

Things became very difficult for me from thereon. I was going to the lab leaving my son alone with a nanny. No matter how much I enjoyed being in the lab, it was taking an emotional toll on me. I was on the verge of quitting my PhD. But thankfully, my husband, family and friends stepped in in time to build a strong support system and convinced me to continue. One of our friends voluntarily took charge of my son during daytime and provided him with all the love and care that I wanted for him in my absence. I am thankful to all of them to this very day.

In 2004, I was presented with an opportunity to visit France for a year under Indo-French Research project. But as luck would have it, at the same time, I got a selection letter as Scientist at CSIR-NCL, Pune. I had given interview over there on insistence of my Ph.D. guide but forgot about it. Probably because I did not think I will be selected because even though my interview went very well, in the end the selection committee of around 10 experts (strictly men only) asked me as to how I would manage my toddler when my husband's job is in Bhopal. I wondered then if they would have asked the same question to me if I were a man. But never-the-less, I got selected and decided to stay back in Pune for a more secure and permanent job

in one of the best national research institute.

I gave France a miss.

My experience as a faculty was not at all like what I dreamt of, and soon realised that being a researcher is quite different from being a faculty. In addition, many organizations in India have horrible hierarchy issues, regional biases, and bureaucratic hurdles. I had to acclimatised with all these varying factors. While in the process of juggling all these, I had started interacting with senior faculty members who were into experimental research and also received research funding.

Meanwhile I completed PhD and was selected for postdoctoral fellowship by Embassy of France in India to conduct research in French institute. It was France calling me again, and this time I decided I should go.

Going was not an easy decision. I was leaving my 5 years old son behind. Even though I knew that he would be taken care of very well, it was emotionally very taxing. I realised that for a mother, these kinds of decisions are not easy. Lots of women fall back on their career after becoming a mother. Let's acknowledge that their priorities have changed and refrain from calling them failures.

Lille is a city in France where the CNRS lab was located and, therefore, where I stayed. There, I met some very wonderful people with whom, cutting across borders, oceans and languages, culture and background, we bonded. For me, it was a long way, from the small sleepy town of Nanded to France. My stay there was very pleasant. Working with Prof. Rabah Boukherroub at Institut de électronique microelectronique de nanotechnologie (IEMN), was a wonderful experience.

My research there was more of a material science than chemistry and that has given a certain direction to my scientific future. It narrowed down and concretised what I do now. The change in pace and the differentness that I got exposed to during my time in the lab was a huge growing process for me.

My stay in France had tremendously changed my world-view, I have opened up myself, and realised that each culture is unique and we, the people, are same at heart, no matter which part of the world we belong to. My French friends couldn't fathom the fact that I met my husband only once before our marriage and that too while being surrounded by brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles.

I still cherish those memories.

On the work front, I developed a strong and long sustainable collaboration

with my French host which is still going on even after 13 years. I wanted to continue my stay in France as I was offered extended fellowship by the host. But that is when the then Director of NCL asked me about what kind of research that I am going to do in France which I cannot do in NCL. On his insistence and my willingness, I was transferred to Physical & Materials Chemistry division to carry forward the similar research activity.

This was again a turning point in my career.

I was part of a group working on electrochemical energy systems. But the group got disintegrated when the group leader became head of the other institute. This is when I had struggled to have independent lab space. My contemporary colleague had claimed control over equipment and lab space that we were using together as a group. This was probably my first brush with gender bias. It was taken for granted that I will take instructions from him despite being at same grade. I had refused and put my foot down for lab space. I did not ask for any equipment but lab space was necessary for my professional survival.

My husband was still working at Bhopal university and went to USA for couple of years. Meanwhile I secured more research funding and slowly but steadily built the expertise for materials research specifically for energy storage devices like rechargeable batteries and supercapacitors. It was huge work. My parents and even my siblings would come over to look after my son whenever I had to travel for talks, projects, meetings etc. My parents-in-law too would stay with me on and off.

I was then selected for the Indo-US Science & Technology Forum (IUSSTF) post-doctoral research fellowship for a year. I joined the renowned nanomaterials research group of Prof. Ajayan at Rice University, Houston, in 2013. Prof. Ajayan's group was handling projects with industries from Advanced Energy Consortium (AEC), USA. During this visit, I was exposed to global developments on materials for energy storage. I have successfully implemented this worldview to address issues in energy storage materials in India and established in-house facilities for research on rechargeable batteries at CSIR-NCL. I am working on indigenous technology development since then. Throughout this journey some enthusiastic, smart students joined along for their PhD and contributed as well as benefitted by the co-learning-co-research module. In the process, my students became a significant part of my scientific life and I take personal pride in their achievements. For a person like me, this is a good space to be in – where I am

surrounded by my work and my students. Their fresh mind and fresh thoughts are indeed very refreshing. During this period, I have received several prestigious recognitions as well as an early promotion for outstanding performance.

Now, when I am a mid-career scientist with well-established research group, I am looking forward to take my research to the level of commercialization. With my husband by my side, I am on the verge of incorporating a company based on my research.

I am glad that my efforts toward “Make-in-India clean energy storage” are recognized by Science & Engineering Board of the Department of Science and Technology, Govt. of India and I am selected as one of the 21 SERB-POWER Fellows, 2021 (Promoting Opportunities for Women in Exploratory Research). This program is formulated by SERB to recognize and reward outstanding women researchers and innovators working in Indian academic institutions and R&D laboratories.

I believe, I have reached a point in my career where I have the experience, vision and freedom to influence the changes for women in STEM and it reflects in the number of female students that have pursued or pursuing research under my supervision. I feel girls need to make the change first within themselves. My advice to the young women would be to take calculated risks but always secure familial support. Family keeps you grounded and provides the moral support when you are low. You can break the barriers with dignity. So never expect favours for being a woman. And no matter how hard it seems, never step back – one small step at a time is all it takes!

THE BETTER VERSION OF WOMAN

Dr. Neena Pahuja

Executive Member

National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET)

“There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard-work and learning from failure.” - Colin Powell

A recently published research article in Harvard Business review states that women can handle crisis better than men. They have better engagement levels with their second line and emphasize employee development, even when the times are tough.

Bible says that “women were given one of the greatest privileges in the world, that of moulding and nurturing a living soul”.

Today's women, I believe, is an amalgamation of both the versions – The Harvard version and the Bible version.

I attempt to be one of them.

I was born in Nangal, in Punjab, which is famous for its beautiful engineering marvel -- the Bhakra Nangal hydro plant. Early part of my life was spent in a small township where new hydro-projects were getting constructed. My father was a Mechanical Engineer from Thomson & Thomson, Roorkee (now IIT Roorkee) and was involved in projects that was responsible for the construction of hydro-plants and providing means for irrigation. So, as a small kid, I enjoyed visiting tunnels under construction and was always very happy to wear the safety helmets. I remember, when I was 6-7 years old, my father was posted at Talwara, Punjab for the construction of Pong dam. They had these very tall cranes at the site and I badly wanted an ariel ride in one of them. I really nagged my father to somehow arrange it for me, but off course it was not allowed as per safety guidelines.

Something about screwdrivers, pliers and wires were attractive to me rather than dolls or dresses. From a very young age, I enjoyed setting 'home appliances'

right in the house. Using a tool to open something and then screwing it back together was hugely satisfying. My interest started with correcting an electrical plug or correcting the fuse, which used to blow-up quite frequently in those days. I also enjoyed visiting places like the Bhakra Nangal dam, or some small power plants and such construction sites. I would hop alongside with my father and would awe at the big machineries that would be there in these sites. For me, those visits were like visiting one of the biggest temples of the world.

Those were lovely days.

As I am rampaging through the memories of my childhood, I would like to narrate this very interesting story surrounding my name -- When I was born, I was named Seema by my parents and grandparents. However, when I joined school, I wanted it changed to Neena. Somehow, I always saw myself as Dr. Neena. I also dreamt of becoming a doctor, and when I played with my friends, I called myself Dr. Neena. But once, after seeing a bloody accident, I realised that it was not my cup-of-tea and without a second thought, I sailed my ship to the study of

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Neena Pahuja is Former Director General at Education & Research Network (ERNET), an autonomous society under Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology. Dr. Pahuja brings in experience from business verticals of Education, Healthcare, Telecom, Manufacturing and Service industry with horizontal of Consulting, Digitization, Information Security and Business Transformation. She has been involved in work on Internet of Things with special focus on its applicability in Health, Industries and Agriculture. She also worked on planning & opening of three Centers of Excellence (COE) for Start-ups in IoT & AI with NASSCOM. She has also been supporting initiatives on Industry 4.0/5.0 and Digital Healthcare. She has also contributed to work on Open Interfaces, Standardization & skilling requirements in Smart Cities framework. She also has been working on newer ways of connectivity using Light, Power lines and the TV White Spaces and supporting Smarter Remote Education at School levels and Medical Education.

She is an alumnus of IITD and enjoys supporting start-ups, traveling & spending time with family.

engineering. The thought of becoming an engineer came easy to me probably because my father and my brother are engineers. When the time came for me to eventually enrol, I enrolled myself for BTech in Electrical Engineering. Those days studies in computers just started trending, so I chose most of the courses in area of Computer Science.

I was a “slogger” from the beginning. During my school days itself I decided on the possible institutes from where I would want to pursue my engineering. Since we lived in small towns, there were no concept of formal coaching for admission. When I was in my 10th standard, I would ransack newspapers for sample question papers, make a cutting and solve them in time. I say, I was quite focused back then!!

My father was then transferred to Dharamshala. In those days (1975), there were no girls’ school offering non-medical subjects there in Dharmshala. So, I had to join the college for Pre-university, which was equivalent to 11th standard. And then I took admission to IIT Delhi after my 11th. It was a dream come true!

We had a five years B.Tech program in those days.

My early days in IIT-D were not easy. It is the first time I was staying away from family and that too in a big city like Delhi. In fact, I did not even perform very well in my first two semesters. My friends at IIT and my relatives at Delhi helped me get used to the ways of Delhi. I still remember, my masi(maternal aunt) shuttled with me in a DTC bus couple of times to teach me how to shuttle in DTC buses. But IIT days were fun. I made trusting friends and they are with me till this very day.

When I graduated, my father wanted me to join a government job. He wanted me to go for IAS/IES. But I wasn't interested. Instead, I went ahead and got a job in TCS.

I got married two years later to a wonderful person my parents choose for me. For me, marriage and career were not contradictory, as I always saw women working in my family. My alliance with my husband is like the two of us tuning into a tango. He has supported me through all my career aspirations and stands by me through every thick and thin. Bringing up the kids, their career, future and well-being is something we do together. We share the responsibilities and also have fun together. In fact, with two kids, a job at hand and a family to run, I still went ahead and fulfilled my childhood passion of having a 'Dr' written before my name by finishing my PhD in Computer Science. Yes, I worked hard and stayed up all night after putting the kids to bed, to finish writing my thesis, but through all this, my husband stayed rock solid by my side. My immediate and extended family

members too supported me by taking care of my kids as and when necessary and being there.

When I joined TCS, we were two girls in a batch of 18 who joined Delhi office. I was lucky to get some of the best projects of TCS. In my initial days I went to Pune for a R&D project. TCS had arranged for my travel, safe accommodation and transport. I also had the privilege to meet Mr. F.C. Kohli who visited us in Pune. Since I was the only girl, he specifically asked me if I was comfortable. Just shows the greatness of great leaders in a great organization!! My batchmates too were very supportive of me. There were times we had to stay back for work late night, but they made sure they dropped me to my accommodation before heading to their own.

Virtual presence and Digital technology have completely changed the way we work now. Today, high speed connectivity and laptops ensures that one can do their work from anywhere they want to. In my IIT days, I remember literally living in the computer centre and even the laboratories, day and night to complete my assignments and projects. Now life is much easier, thanks to connected environment. I still remember that in IIT, post dinner, we would go to the computer centre, be in the queue for using the Card Punching Machine or a terminal in later days, and in parallel, sit and complete our assignments in the waiting room. Not that I am complaining, because that was the only place in the institute that had the air-conditioner.

Another advantage of technology today is the accessibility of remote working. Back then, when I started, jobs required frequent and at times long travels to client site, which at times was an issue, especially for women with children. Remote working and remote collaboration tools have made life simpler for us. During my early stage of career, I have seen lots and lots of women quitting their jobs because of frequent travel pressure on the job front while having to manage home and kids in the family front. I feel this technology surge is great. Women should take full advantage of it to bring healthy balance between home and work. However, I also believe that women must undertake some amount of travel in their jobs.

Why?

Because learning at the site is much deeper than what can happen remotely, and also it makes your family, especially the children more independent.

Travel to remote areas, especially villages, have their own challenges. Through the years, I have learned a few rules and safety regulations that I diligently follow, like staying connected and giving my husband regular updates on my

whereabouts, making sure my cell phone has enough juice, etc. This is required. I feel, in a world, where women are marching ahead, personal safety should never be a deterrent to fall behind. Do what is required, but don't stop.

I have enjoyed my professional life. My journey from a software engineer to handling research and improving remote connectivity has been remarkably dynamic. I have always attempted spending 80% of my time in handling management, operations & administration part and 20% of my time in trying to extend the role by doing something new. At times, I was working on 'creating products' to save costs for a repeat implementation, or 'optimizing resources' or 'researching' on new technologies or working on 'new policy' guidelines. From the early part of my career, I also wanted to add something new to my knowledge and I think that made my jobs interesting. There were multiple things I was exploring and being a woman, never came in the way. I worked and my work was given recognition.

Managing career and family was too demanding, especially at the time when kids were small. But once the family understood my professional commitments, it became easier to handle. We always looked for quality time spent together and never missed an opportunity to squeeze in a holiday.

We, in India, are blessed to have the concept of extended families which I think is the biggest blessing for a working woman, especially when the kids are small. I was lucky to have my mother-in-law staying with us. She was more than a mother for my children. Although, I always ensured help at home for her, she, with her love and leadership qualities ensured that my children were safe and taken care off. That is the greatest support any one could ever ask for. It was a win-win arrangement for me. While we were there to handle all her old-age problems and give her company, she proved to be a big positive influence in our kids' lives and the much-needed bridge between the two generations.

Every woman must prove herself in her chosen area of work and excel. Only if she is able to showcase herself as a “brand”, more and more women will try to walk her footsteps. STEM is not the only area. In today's environment, there are so many new avenues that have opened up for women to explore and excel.

As per my experience of working with both genders, I think women are natural multi-tasker. And since they want to prove themselves, they take better initiatives and even display high integrity and honesty. I see industry leaders trusting them with important and time bound assignments when they are showing their excellence. This professional attitude that women are bringing in to the

workplace is also helping to change the environment and perception around them leading to more women getting hired and assigned important and time critical jobs.

I have been lucky to work in areas of my interest. There were some interesting roles that had come my way and I refused, because they required relocation. May be a man in my place would have jumped for those offers. But I couldn't or rather decided that I wouldn't. I do not regret that decision, but I would like to point out that that little difference in the mind-set is still there. I try and do my best wherever I am, and in my professional life I made sure that my commitment and capability was never questioned. I do not think I faced any discrimination during my job tenure, except that I have mostly excused myself from late night office parties and get togethers. I sometimes felt that this was not taken in the right spirit. But I did not let that bother me much, as I believed that as long as I am good at work and deliver, it's all ok.

If you have a dream, never let it go. Spend time with your family and be supportive to your elders in the family. It will provide the right learnings to your children. Try and create a support system around you. Doing it all alone is never a good idea. It will enable you to perform better. Be open to slog. If required, be available 24 X 7 for the job. You have only yourself to create your respect and value in this world!!

THE POWER OF VISION

Mrs. Mayuri Dhavale

Head Strategy & Organisation Capability Building
Windals Precision Pvt. Ltd

“What you see is what you get!!!” - Wysiwug

“What you see is what you get!!!” - Wysiwug

A term, that is so frequently used in the IT industry. The most profound learning experience I could have in the industry that I represent, the manufacturing and engineering industry.

In fact, as a child, if I was told that I would one day be working in a hard-core engineering company, I would have laughed. I struggled with my Maths and Physics throughout my childhood. One would have never imagined that I would spend most of my working years in hard core engineering and manufacturing sector talking and living axles, housings, camshafts, wiring harness and steering wheels amongst many others. Understanding processes such as fabrication, friction, welding, forging, foundry, presses, machining, plastic moulding and assemblies for India's leading Auto Component Manufacturers. **Not something I had Imagined ever.** Today my vocabulary has more engineering terms than regular English. A student of Psychology with a Masters in Communication, my professional life has been like a flowing river. It took its own course and I just flowed with. I eventually spent the past 12 years working with automotive OEM's and auto ancillary companies working on strategy and Organisation capability building.

I was born in Pune to an Air-force family. My father being a Fighter Pilot of the Indian Air-force was posted every few years to remote locations. I got a chance to grow up across some of the most beautiful places in India, spanning across Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.

I spent most of my education years in New Delhi. I studied in Kendra

Vidyalaya throughout my school years keeping in mind the number of transfers. I feel Airforce teaches you and prepares you for life. It made me tough. It taught me to work with different people and different cultures. It also taught me to handle failures, but the most important lesson it taught me is to accept challenges, changes and to lead effectively. I learnt more through observation and experience than I did through textbooks. I learnt to apply myself in every situation. I learnt the dignity of labour and the importance of mutual respect while working in a team. These are some of the things that have been a huge factor in building 'me,' as a professional, while working in my industry which sadly has a minimal woman representation. Owing to my upbringing, I was never uneasy working on a shop floor and sometimes I am the only lady amongst hundreds of men.

At home, while growing up, our parents gave us the freedom to make decisions, but if we went wrong, we were also expected to deal with the repercussions and consequences. I spent most of my childhood climbing trees, collecting berries and playing games. During harsh summers, especially in

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mayuri Dhavale is the Head of Strategy & Organisation Capability Building at Windals Precision Pvt. Ltd (WPPL), A leading axle manufacturing company in India. With its presence in Pune, Nagpur, Bhopal, Rudrapur & Mumbai, WPPL manufactures all types of axles for the leading OEMs in the farm sector, commercial vehicles, construction equipment & trailer industry.

Mayuri specialises in creating organisational strategy for growth and then align them to people strategy to drive performance.

Mayuri holds a Masters degree in Communication from Symbiosis University. She comes with 21 years of experience in Strategic Solutions, Image Management, Brand development and Training and Development. She has worked across industries ranging from IT, ITES, Engineering Services, Manufacturing and Education for developing business strategies and solutions. She has worked for organisations like Dale Carnegie Training®, KPIT Cummins, GE Capital International Services, Neilsoft, Event Management Development Institute and Perfect Relations before starting her own consultancy. Her work has been executed in companies such as Chrysler Automotive India, Precision Camshafts Limited, Windals Precision Private Limited, Coca Cola, Idea Cellular, Behr India, Fujitsu, Syngy, Ventura, Singhgad Institute with whom she has worked across various portfolios in her area of expertise.

Rajasthan, we sisters spent time filling up buckets of water for thirsty cows, dogs and even camels on the road. This compassion for animals came to us from our mother.

My mother belongs to a very progressive family of writers. She was born to Padmabhushan Narayan Sitaram Phadke, one of Maharashtra most respected writers. Her family environment was that filled with debates, discussions, creativity, art and culture and as a parent she passed this on to us. As our father was mostly away on duty, ma was shouldering the parenting part alone. I have seen my mother in many avatars and those have rubbed off into making me the person I am. We grew up watching her being very compassionate towards humans and animals. Our home was always full with various rescues my mom did. The rescues included birds, dogs and even battered women she found on the streets or some neighbours who had been through an abusive episode. Watching her work made me realise that irrespective of the socio- economic strata one belongs to inequality and injustice exists. Education does not necessarily promise good behaviour.

My first cultural shock was when I left my parents' home to come to Pune to pursue Graduation. I had taken admission in a very conservative college called Sir Parshuram Bhau college (S P college in Pune). This was when for the first time I saw a distinct difference in treatment between a girl and a boy. Girls were expected to dress a certain way, wear bindi all the time, talk in a certain manner and not mix too much with the opposite gender or risk getting labelled as 'fast'. Not knowing my mother tongue Marathi did not make things easy. I was often made the butt of people jokes and was called a 'Foreigner.' This was way back in 1992.

Once when I was walking down the stairs, I slipped and fell. It was a bad fall and I screamed a loud “ouch”. A group of boys near the psychology lab, instead of helping me started laughing. As an instant response, I told them that it would be courteous to help instead of laughing. That was it. Every day since then a group of boys would follow me screaming loudly “Ouch” for the entire time I walked. Sometimes for even 30 minutes. It was extremely torturous.

After facing much exclusion and mental stress caused by this extreme level of teasing that one fine day I went home and told my parents that I will not go back. My parents were in MHOW (near Indore) and I told my father that I rather remain uneducated than get treated like this. It had been two years since I had been facing the ragging and it was more than what I could handle. The advice my father gave me back then will always remain with me. He said “Your life has just begun. In life you will always be faced with challenges where people will make things tough for you.

Will you always run away?” “You need to go back, understand what the challenges are, and work towards solving it.” It was not the easiest one year, but I graduated doing well in my exams, made friends and of course learned Marathi, the language I now love. The moment I learnt to accept those around me, I started getting accepted as well.

Today the world is very different, at least in the cities. I see less of the gender biases and interference from the society on ‘how a woman should conduct herself.’ But though, the phenomena are prevalent in the cities, I can see the ripple effect reach the villages of India. I have travelled in the interiors of Maharashtra (India) for some of the social causes I am involved with and even there I see women letting go of their inhibitions and talk freely about their dream, wants and desires. This makes me feel highly encouraged about the future of women in this country. It's a very small representation, but at least the journey has begun.

My job involves working on strategy, organisation capability and shop floor improvements. After completing Post graduation, I worked with multiple organisations in areas of Education and training, PR & IT and Manufacturing. My roles were always in leadership positions. When I look back and analyse what worked for me, I think it's the values I live by. The first being never saying 'No' to any assignment. Even if I don't know something, I'll accept and learn. Also, I am always open to doing something new and taking on responsibilities. I have never let the barricades of a department restrict me, so as a result I have got a lot of exposure to every department, be it Strategy, Marketing, Finance, HR, Production, Quality, Costing and Development. Everything an organisation requires to operate, survive and grow, I have worked on.

Being one of the few women in a highly male-dominated industry, I have never once been treated any less. I feel gender inequality starts when one starts expecting a differential treatment on account of one's gender. For a productivity improvement exercise for Windals Precision (A leading axle manufacturing company), I have spent nights on the shop floor along with the operational team and workers, not once feeling unsafe or threatened. My management didn't once ask me not to do an over nighter because I am a lady and not once did the team question my presence. In-fact it was not even mentioned as a special act because I feel after a point one stops viewing you as a man or a woman. They just notice you for what you bring to the table. When you are operationally strong and committed to your work and willing to walk the talk, people start accepting you and respecting you for who you are irrespective of your age, experience, educational qualification and

gender.

One of the initial challenges I did face was getting the leadership team of the various organisations, which is mostly male-dominated, accept me as their leader.

When change initiatives were being lead and I would call the plant heads for follow up, I was sometimes told that “why don't you come and run the plant yourself” or “Mayuri ji all this looks good in your presentation, but you don't know shop floor realities so don't interfere.” Mostly what they did was just not support me with data and try and keep me out of critical mails and meetings.

At work, I have refrained from using the word 'Boss' because I do not believe in a boss and a subordinate culture, and also stayed away from having a work-cabin despite my role giving me the privilege. I have however demanded the freedom to make decisions, permission to take some hard steps and the space to be able to disagree and express my opinions. I have very early in life accepted that everyone will not like me, and it's ok. In many recessions and the recent pandemic, we have had to make some very tough decisions and being in my role I have had to take them, implement them and communicate them. I feel due to my leadership style of open and transparent communication and the intent of the organisation, we have received support from the teams and we have been able to tide through these extremely tough times.

I wish I could say that my experience represents a larger base of women, however I do realise that I don't. I have seen that when I attend supplier meets of leading OEMs where owners and leadership of Tier 1 suppliers are invited, amongst a group of 500 + professionals, I can barely see a headcount of women to maximum 15 (most representing OEMs, a few from the owner family and one- or two-women representing leadership). It hit me the most when I was a part of the Michigan Ross Leadership Program organised by one of the leading Automotive Giants in the country. There were 30 participants (VP & CEO) and I had the good fortune of being a part of this august training. I was a sole woman representative in both the participant and faculty of Michigan Ross School of Business. The same experience I faced when I was part of multiple forums organised by various industry bodies. The representation of women in the industry at leadership level is almost negligible.

I have been traveling to the interiors of Maharashtra as a part of #Pad Squad, a people movement, working towards the menstrual health and hygiene of women. A movement which was formed during the Pandemic and which I am a Co-founder of. The disparity in men and women is alarming to say the least. 120 kms away from

Pune which is known as the Oxford of the east and boasts of maximum women literacy, are villages where women still have to sit outside their homes while menstruating and are not allowed to cook or touch things, least they make it impure. Even at some places education is not available and most girls drop out post fifth standard because more hands are needed to help at home for basic chores such as cooking, cleaning and farming.

When I started visiting these villages, I realised that things were not very different even in the modern cities. The same qualities of speaking my mind, voicing myself, taking the lead in making decisions and driving the team to perform that have helped me grow to a leadership position at work, has been detrimental for me in my personal life. In my personal life, I am still yet to see that level of equality and freedom. This is despite being a part of a very progressive society. This is not surprising considering that women's liberation is not a very old concept. It came into being only a few decades ago, post the World War II. When women were needed to be a part of the work force working in factories because the men were needed to be at the war. Even in our own country, till as far as my mother's generation, women were expected to stay at home and look after families while men stepped out to work and provide financially. Men took all the decisions and women gracefully complied even if they did not agree. Likes of Anu Agha, Leela Poonawalla, Mallika Srinivasan being exceptions and thus being so respected in the industry.

Despite the reality, I am hopeful. Today I am a part of Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WICCI) Corporate Social Responsibility Council representing the state of Maharashtra. On this forum I interact with and am privy to many strong women leaders. They are doing immense good work in a diverse area ranging from women mental health, education, livelihood and environment. Work is being done on policy level to make an impactful change. I interact with youngsters of various universities and engineering colleges where I see a more gender-neutral approach coming up strongly.

I truly believe that a person is always a reflection of the company he/she keeps. At work, it is the seniors, leaders, mentors, colleagues and juniors who help you become the person you are. In my life I have had the good fortune to work with Visionaries and Managing Directors of Organisations who have had the hunger to grow and were willing to see me for my capabilities, irrespective of my gender. To them I will always remain indebted and grateful.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS NOT A BED OF ROSES

DR. SHILPA KULKARNI

Founder Secretary

The Matrix Educational Foundation

*“If you are persistent, you will get it.
If you are Consistent, you will keep it.”*

It is observed that our Indian environmental culture and the work- life balance possess many barriers for an woman entrepreneur to reach at top levels. It is extremely necessary for a woman to have strong support system of her husband and in-laws, if she wishes to make a success at it, as it demands high level of commitment of time, work, persistence and consistency, punctuality and responsibility, with no excuses. But just because she has to face many barriers does not mean she is not focused on her goal, or her vision is not clear or that she is unable to handle problems. It is just that being a woman she has a lot of responsibilities of her family too while managing her profession.

Here is how my story reads–

Nestled amongst the lush green trees, and a flowing river on the side, which is encircled by mountainous topography, touching Borivli National Park boundaries lies a very scenic colony named Shri Krishna Nagar in Borivli, Mumbai. As the colony name suggests, it has a temple of lord Krishna on the banks of the river. In this bungalow colony, there resides a Maharashtrian family named 'Powle'. Well, I am the youngest daughter in 'Powle' hierarchy of siblings.

I lived in a joint family with my grandparents, parents, brother, and sister. My grandfather and my father were on high post in the State Bank of India. Both of them were disciplined persons. My grandmother was a religious lady while my mother, during those days had completed her MA in economics, but was a complete house wife. Later in her life, after my father's death she engrossed herself in social activities. My elder brother is a well-known Gynecologist practicing in Mumbai, and my middle sister too is a Doctor and has done her MD in Anesthesia. She has

marked her niche in the field of medicine in Sydney. I am the youngest of the lot who has been a merit rank holder and topper in her college during graduation from Bombay University. I did my MBA in Marketing from Pune University, persuaded Ph.D. in Management on this wonderful topic of “Entrepreneurship”, worked in the corporate field in Mumbai and Pune and then entered the field of education. With strong working experience and guidance from well-experienced institute owners, I started my own Management institute in Pune -- The Matrix Educational Foundation in 2005.

As kids, the importance of education was always stressed upon us by our parents. There was no difference shown between a boy and a girl when it came to education in our family. As kids, we had to follow certain things -- come home on time, eat home-made food, no bunking of any lectures, and no answering back to elders. We also had to say our prayers every evening. So, I still regularly pray, prefer home-made food, and be home on time. These basic values are so engraved in us that it has become a part of our personality. The atmosphere in the house was

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Shilpa Kulkarni is an educationist in the management field ---A topper in her college and merit rank holder in her graduation from Bombay University, backed with MBA in marketing as her specialization and Ph.D on a wonderful topic of “Barriers women entrepreneurs face when they start their business.” Dr. Shilpa Kulkarni heads the prestigious MBA institution The Matrix Educational Foundation since 15 years and has started the institution from scratch.

On her achievement front, her research papers have been published in National and International journals. She is a research guide with Savitribai Phule Pune University. In 2017 Dr. Shilpa received “Times Power Woman Award “by Times of India group. She is a recipient of 'Savitri Gaurav Rashtriya Puraskar' 2019 in the category of women entrepreneurs- (education field) which was conducted by Association of Indian Journalist in Nashik.

She won the “Mrs. Maharashtra Empress of Maharashtra 2nd runner up” title in 2018 and also bagged “Achievers” award in Gold category conducted by Diva Pageants held at Hyatt Pune.

religious and at the same time liberal. Even though my father was strict, he had excellent HR qualities in him. He guided us on things saying that, 'if you go this way, it is wrong, but if you go that way then it can be fruitful. You decide what you want.' Therefore, this helped me to take decisions on my own and be responsible for my own acts. Lot of encouragement for sports, or taking part in different school, and college activities were given. I went trekking with friends, participated in dramatics, and kept good friend circle. I firmly believe that all my leadership qualities were groomed from my happy childhood days where the ambience at home was a fine blend of religious culture and at the same time free thoughts, freedom of speech, and equal importance to high quality education for us. I still remember that my mother used to tell my sister and me, "You should be independent and never be dependent on your husband financially. Therefore, if you pay attention to your studies, you will get good luxuries in your life. You can carve a niche for yourself and can create your own astitva (Your own being)." Her golden words turned true for me and my sister.

Team spirit started developing early amongst us, when we friends used to fight and very soon make up, so that we could play together again. There is a reason for mentioning these events of my life as I strongly believe that the way you spent your childhood, plays a vital role in shaping a person you are going to be.

I remember my grandfather used to keep money changes in a blue bowl, locked inside his cupboard. Coins usually. It was very funny for us. Whenever we grandchildren wanted to buy something, we would run to him pleading him to give us 10 paisa or so to buy peanuts. If Ajoba (grandfather) was in a good mood, he would give us 20 paise. If his mood was bad, then he would first give us a big lecture on the importance of money and then would slowly open the lock and hand over the money. I used to call him 'kanjus Ajoba' (miser grandpa). But now that I earn myself, I know the importance of every penny and how the old generation worked hard to earn what they earned. It isn't easy to build a bungalow in a place like Mumbai. But he did. The process he followed is a life process of values, discipline, and integrity that he handed over to us through generations.

After marriage, my surname became Kulkarni and from Bombay I settled in Pune. The atmosphere at my in-laws was similar to that at my home. Therefore, I was able to adjust very easily there. My first capsule of confidence was primarily my husband. If the husband is supportive, the remaining crowd around too keeps their peace. I was lucky enough to get the required support, and that made my plunge into the entrepreneurial world a little easy.

Establishment of the institute “Matrix”: Starting the Matrix Educational Foundation in Pune from scratch was a phenomenal learning experience. Building the foundation of trust was indeed a very lengthy, and an extremely challenging job for me. Being a lady in a male dominated field was quite a challenge. In my days, even though women did work outside their home perimeter, the number was extremely small and everywhere I went, I was ushered in by unwelcomed curiosity. During the starting days as an entrepreneur, my primary target were 1) establishing the trust 2) registering trust with the charity commissioner 3) constructing the college infrastructure and dealing with the contractors, laborers and architect 4) running often to Delhi for academic course permissions from All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) 5) getting permissions from Gram Panchayat 6) liaising with University, AICTE, Director of Technical Education, 7) visiting Mantralay for granting permission for different course 8) fulfilling all the norms and regulations of higher authority from time to time 9) handling the intellectual assets i.e the, Director, faculties of the institute and the entire non-teaching staff 10) branding, promotions and all the other activities which were needed to be done. These are some of the things that I was required to do, and every step was an obstacle for me to overcome. I was often asked if my husband or any other male member was there in the project to 'oversee' my work. The disapproval and uncertainty were often loud and vocal. Even their non-verbal expression towards me was dismissive. Every day I fought. Every day I was reminded that I belonged to the fairer sex. And yet, every day I resolved to not give up. These days when people call me strong, I smile. It's only me who knows where this strength came from. The collateral profits of my initial fighting days were that it helped me shape my skill-sets in marketing, HR, finance, and administration. It taught me patience – a very powerful tool indeed, Commitment – without which nobody should attempt at entrepreneurship, team spirit, leadership qualities, and risk bearing ability.

Entrepreneurship is not a bed of roses: If you want to start any venture, it is important to have two strong pillars within you, which have magical powers -- WILL POWER and PASSION. You should have an unwavering determination, and a never quit attitude while facing problems. As an entrepreneur, I believe in factoring faith in myself, especially during rough times. I found that if I stick to the faith factor then the fear-factor is effectively dealt with. This is important, because trust me, to be an entrepreneur is not a bed of roses. I always go through a feeling that I am sitting on a roller coaster ride never knowing on which side of the ride I am going to be tossed over. The changing macro environmental government policies

are immense and hugely challenging. I am tested every day -- financially, technically, legally, emotionally, and mentally by the internal and external micro and macro environmental factors.

This is something that used to happen in early 2000 – I had to acquire GR (Government Resolution) for courses that my institute was offering. I had to visit the Mantralaya which was in Mumbai. Pune-Mumbai is 150 kms which is three and a half hours drive. I had to undertake this journey quiet often as lot of follow-ups were needed to get the files forwarded from one department to other. Back then I did everything on my own, which means waking up at the wee hours of the morning to cover the Pune-Mumbai distance and be there at the Mantralaya by 9 am. Not everything was online that time, so actual meetings with authorities were necessary. I remember that the place would be mostly crowded with men. To walk up to the person sitting at the other end of the hall who was responsible for the job to be done, meant elbowing past a bunch of strangers. Often after the whole days wait, it would happen that the authority in charge of my work would not come. Their phone lines were perpetually busy or never picked up. I knew that yet another day is thrown to the bin, as I geared up to do it all over again the very next day. I would be exhausted and demotivated but even then, I remembered to snatch in the learning from the toil – be persistent, build a go-getter attitude, immense patience, and high tolerance level. All these things taught me that I should be so focused with my targets that whatever obstacles comes my way i.e whether it's a rainy day or sunny day, it actually doesn't matter when it comes to getting the things done. My organization's work, always is, and will be my first priority in my professional career.

In my position, my responsibility includes paying continuous attention to the new rules and policies and formulate plans and strategies to implement them effectively. I have to navigate the organization aligning to my organization's vision and mission. I have to maintain positive work culture and good HR relations, thereby maintaining highest work ethics. It is necessary in an organization to have goal congruence of the leader and employees for better productivity, otherwise, the plans and goals are drifted, and the system does not work effectively. This basically means people management. The people here I am talking about are mostly men and their starting point is usually distrust. If the faculty is senior to me by age, they do not like suggestions or strictness enforced by a young female boss. Their male chauvinist behavior comes to the fore. Therefore, I have to get things done from them differently without hurting their egos.

Sometimes it also happens that the student's fees, which are sanctioned to us from the Government does not come in time. This results in the delay of the staff's salary. Lots of counselling and management skills then is required to keep the morale up and the act together in such crunchy times. These are the times when I see faltering trust and jitters in male faculty, especially senior male faculties. They can't believe that a woman can shoulder all these. Gaining their trust at every step and soldiering ahead is a given.

This sudden blow of pandemic has made the entire world collapse. Relating this Corona with educational field, has completely disrupted the institute's academic structure. The entire mode of teaching has gone on-line. The teaching-learning pedagogy has changed completely. Synchronous and asynchronous mode of learning is being implemented and everyone is bearing lot of financial crises. The giant infrastructure of colleges has remained empty without students. But there are electricity bills, salaries of employees, Microsoft lease line, and other continuous ongoing expenditures which my organization has to bear. Maintenance cost of our big institutions are so high that without funds it is becoming extremely difficult to manage. And then there are many students who are unable to pay their fees because of their personal financial crunch. The Government too is finding it difficult to release funds in this crisis situation. Therefore, the tasks at hand are plenty. I believe that if I do not give up in this defeating time and consistently finding ways to maneuver ahead, then it will be a new life-lesson learned, and a unique survival skill gained. I share these thoughts with my staff, faculty and students from time to time and have found that it helps them to keep motivated.

I am hoping that this crisis situation shall pass and the corridors of my institute will one day again buzz with students pumping in their hope, aspirations and adrenaline. Till then, I have to keep my pillars strong and help others, for whom I am responsible, keep theirs.

Motivational factors that kindled the entrepreneurial spirit within me are plenty. If these factors have helped me in my life, I am sure they will help others too. With that hope in my heart, I am inspired to share few of my thoughts here with the readers –

- Being an entrepreneur is being a creator. If you are an entrepreneur, ask yourself – what am I creating?
- To gain more respect for my skills and talents. Recognize your gifts and hone them. Opportunity to be on the ground level of a new exciting business. No matter how high you are placed, know the root work.

- To make money doing what I love, rather than working for someone else. Find your love.
- To align my vision with the team and create goals along similar lines.
- Being an entrepreneur allows me the freedom to do things my style. If you have a style of your own, explore.
- To be limitless.

I strongly believe that if a woman is literate the entire house become literate, the entire nation become literate. Education gives them a vision and progressive way to carve their life and help fight for their own rights. I would like to end here by stating that -- “Entrepreneurship or intrapreneurship proves that leadership in any organization requires action, commitment, patience, and is not just a position to enjoy.”

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

DR. MRUNALINI JADHAV

Principal

Sinhgad Institutes' 'Sou. Venutai Chavan Polytechnic'

"When a Woman's dream take flight, the family's dreams come true..."

My father never bought me toys, but he made sure I went to the best school in town. He also made sure I had all his blessings. My success is also the story of some unconditional love and support of a few wonderful people in my life that I have been blessed with.

My mother and brother Mohit are my strong support system. The most important thing my mother did was believe in me and what I did, instead of bogging me down with age old dogmas and gender biases. My brother always encouraged me in all my endeavor, has always been a good sounding board and took pride in my success.

They stood by me during my tough times.

I was born in early 1970s in Maharashtra, India in a joint family. I was the eldest child in our family and blessed with a younger brother. My father was hardly educated but he knew the importance of education. His only expectation from me was to score first rank in school and I almost always did. I still remember that when I scored 140 marks out of 150 (93%) in my 10th board examination in Mathematics, he was so happy that he gifted me a bicycle. That was the happiest moment of my life.

After my 12th when I went to visit my grandparents for a few days, my maternal grandfather took me to Rajarambapu Institute of Technology which was then recently established and was one of the best private colleges in those days. I don't exactly remember why he took me there, but I remember enjoying every moment of the tour. Engineering was my passion. I loved the ring of it in my ears. I entered the office and inquired about the admission process and as we say 'if you are

passionate about achieving something wholeheartedly you do achieve it', I secured admission in this prestigious Institute in Civil Engineering. All this happened so suddenly that till date I can't make any chronological sense of the string of events. My father was initially against this. He always wanted me to become a doctor. But I was happy, since I always dreamt of becoming an engineer!

I was the only girl in my class out of three girls in the college. It took some time for the situation to sink in and I must confess that initially it felt quite weird. Fortunately, teachers were very supportive and especially there is one name -- Dr. Sushma Kulkarni, who became my huge support system. She was the only female faculty in the Department of Civil Engineering. I had bonded well with her and within a year she became my role model, friend, philosopher and guide.

My initial days in the institute were a little uncomfortable and lonely because I was the only female and back in those days it was a taboo to talk to boys. But things slowly changed and by the end of third year we became good friends. We always stuck together in a big group and had fun. As I was the only girl, they all

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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looked out for me and helped me when needed. This was the time I groomed myself from a small-town shy person to an outgoing, vibrant enthusiast. I participated in a lot of extra- curricular activities and also took part in college elections. I remember that phase of my life and I believe that it helped me a lot in enhancing my personality. I also took part in cultural events like 'Youth festival' and explored one more quality of mine -- that I was a good actor as well! I took part in Drama, and that was a fabulous experience. Four years of engineering changed me totally into a confident and bold person, a person who was now ready to accept any challenges... these four years were the turning point in transforming my personality.

After completing Bachelors of Engineering, I wanted to do Masters but as my family is from a conservative background, they believed that it was time I got married – Arranged marriage. That posed another challenge for my parents. I was a 'qualified engineer', and finding a suitable groom for me who was more educated than me, kind of shrunk the prospective 'groom-pool'. It is mandatory that the groom be more educated than the bride, and earns more than his wife. It cannot be otherwise. They finally chose Dr. Shivajirao Jadhav for me.

Thankfully, in him I found my life partner and a blessing in disguise. Throughout my journey, he has been the rock in my life.

Before my marriage, I was working in B.G. Shirke Pvt Ltd. as a Jr. Engineer and had a very good work experience there. Working on multinational projects with experienced people was a great learning in itself. We had to work till late night to finish work in the given schedule as I was in the estimate and costing department. Before marriage, all things were going on smoothly as I was getting ready food in hand and everything else was taken care of. But after marriage it became difficult to work for 10 to 12 hours a day as I had to take the responsibilities of the family myself.

The challenges were many – Work was 2 hours travel each way, each day, weekends were dedicated to in-laws as they were all alone and kids had to be fed and work at home had to be juggled. I was also expected by all my relatives to be present in all occasions, big or small. So, working in the field had to go and I decided to shift to the academic field. In academics, even though the work was challenging, the hours were contained. Fortunately, I got a job as a Lecturer in Sinhgad Institutes' Sou. Venutai Chavan Polytechnic in 1996 in Civil Engineering Department. There, the male-female colleague ratio was 10:2; we were only 2 females in the department.

The Founder President of Sinhgad Institutes, Prof. M.N. Navale has always

been supportive and a great visionary. Because of his support and motivation, I could complete my post-graduation while doing my job as a lecturer.

Pursuing Masters was not an easy task for me. I had to face the worst patch of my life. My first child was just 10 months old when I was enrolled and unfortunately my project guide was of the kind who did not approve of females in the field of engineering, let alone a mother of a toddler, who, he believed, should be home instead, looking after the baby. He kept pushing me back and demoralizing me at every step. Whenever I went to his cabin to have my work checked by him, he would keep me standing outside for like really long duration and by the end of the day he would just say, 'keep the document and go, I will check later'. He continued doing this. Also, most of the time he would ask me to come to his house if I wanted to discuss problems. Therefore, for any project discussion I had to go to his place which was very difficult for me as I had to face the challenges of managing my time and juggling between the job, ME and the guide. He would also say things like engineering is not for ladies and field work is not for ladies and being so ambitious and ignoring home and kids is not nice for a lady. I should instead stick to simple teaching.

Every encounter with him was unnerving. But, as they say, 'the best things in life come out of worst situations', I was able to present my first research paper in National Conference and was appreciated by experts in the field, and his opinion became immaterial.

In 2008 I was promoted to the Head of the Department. The challenge I faced here was unacceptance, mostly by senior male employees. They questioned my decisions and displayed an active lack of interest, non-cooperating and disinterest. Initially they even denied the work allocated. There were times, I had to complete the work allocated to them in order to meet deadlines.

This attitude threw me off-balance for a while, but I bounced back. I could not let my emotions come in the way.

“Life has no sympathy for your feelings, so feel the feelings that propel you forward and not the ones that hold you back”.

From feeling suppressed and victimized, I started practicing positivity and broad-mindedness to counter the negativity and narrow-mindedness. It worked, and things started smoothening out there-on. I tried to give my best and successfully handled the department for 10 years. In the span of 10 years, I brought in many good things for the department such as external funding, organizing sponsored faculty and student development Programs with external sponsorships. I

also worked on making good Industry-Institute Interaction for the benefit of students, motivating faculties to publish research papers, Alumni interaction, laboratory development with external funding, encouraging faculties for higher education and the list goes on... I never looked back! This tenure of being HOD for 10 years taught me how to manage people and how to bring out the best for the organization in spite of challenges. I believe I emerged as a strong and emotionally balanced professional altogether. Of course, the unflinching support and guidance of our Founder President Prof. M. N. Navale and Founder Secretary Dr. Mrs. Sunanda M. Navale was always there with me.

But this is not the end of the story! A few years back I started work on my Ph.D. Through the years, my interest grew in the field of Environmental Engineering and hence I started work on water quality with the Vice Principal of Sinhgad College of Engineering, Prof. Dr. Kanchan Khare, who is a trusted friend. But, as luck would have it, I again became pregnant, after 10 years. I had to take a break for a year and then get back again. Thankfully, I secured my Ph.D. admission in Symbiosis International University.

The journey of doctoral study was full of new technology, enthusiasm, energy and fun. I was finally awarded with my Ph.D. It was a dream come true. I will always remain indebted to my guide Dr. Kanchan Khare & Co guide Dr. Arundati Warke for guiding & supporting me for the completion of my Ph.D.

I strongly believe that if we live with honesty and integrity, we not only benefit ourselves but Society as a whole.

The post of Principal was offered to me after completing my Ph.D. by the management of Sinhgad Institutes. This was like another dream come true as I was associated with the institute for more than 25 years and now, being the Principal of this institute is truly prestigious for me. I realized, 'Leadership never comes suddenly, it increases with experience'.

Women are versatile and have the ability of multitasking as they have to work on both the fronts. If I have my story of success, I also have my fair share of struggle. Most women in India make their career their second priority. Family becomes the weak point and she sacrifices her career for her family. I have seen women in our field refusing promotions, because it would mean more responsibility which means more hours dedicated to work. They refuse growth and field work which is the backbone of experience if you are an engineer.

Family needs to be supportive. And women need to be ok with it, if the men folks in the family shares the household chores.

As I was born and brought up in a middle-class family, I knew the value of money. I think every woman should try and become financially independent. She should not depend on others. When she is dependent, everyone takes her for granted as if her life is only meant to be a wife, daughter, mother, and mother-in-law and so on. Even though her role changes from time to time, the tag remains -- dependent! I saw my Mother and aunts who worked 24 by 7 in the house, but still were not involved in major family decisions. They wore the dependent tag.

My brother in law's wife is a house wife and we lived in a joint family. When family discussions happened and decisions made, she was always ignored. But I wasn't. It was hurtful – for both of us. If there was any function to be attended or gathering happening, I was preferred over her. She had to stay at home. This has happened the same way for the last 25 years. I tried, but nothing changed.

From all my experiences of life, I would like to say to all women that do not self-pity. Identify your blind spots (emotional, family, spiritual etc.) and work on them. Be confident in whatever you do.

I want to conclude by saying that:

*Dream because dreams come true!
Aspire to create your future independently in spite of adversities,
you will definitely be one step ahead!*

A STUBBORN GIRL'S JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

Mrs. ARCHANA SRIVASTAVA

Head HR

Plants of Vitesco Technologies India

"There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me." - Jane Austen.

The sheer reason of sharing my story is to give confidence and self-belief to all those women who feel they are ordinary and lack that special talent for becoming a successful woman.

I firmly believe that your success can be described or measured by none other than only you. Whether you aspire to be a world-class professional or a successful house-wife -- something which gives meaning and purpose to your life - is SUCCESS for you.

Secondly, if I can climb through the rungs of success, then anyone can - provided she has a road map set for herself. No, I am not being modest, I am being brutally honest to all those readers, who have chosen to read my story.

I was born and brought up in Uttar Pradesh in a middle-class family. For people who are aware of the street culture of the land will concur that being a girl with ambition, grit, perseverance and aspiration for success is not welcomed in that kind of society at large.

But thanks to the progressive nature of my father and his dream of getting his children graduated from Banaras Hindu University, we settled in Varanasi. As luck would have it, both my siblings graduated from BHU. But I chose a different path in life.

The turning point was when at cross roads of my life, I opted for Computer science instead of life science. I attribute that decision of mine to my myopic vision for independence.

In my limited identity of independence, I made an audacious declaration to my father that post my 18th birthday, I would be financially independent and would

approach them only for their blessings and not for money. Not because money was all that I wanted, or that I believed that it was the means to all ends, but because back in those days, my definition for success was to fund my graduation and post-graduation through education loan.

Post my graduation, when I started working as a Software Engineer, it dawned on me that my area of interest was more into managing the people aspect of business. Around that time, my PG was due, so I chose to do it in faculty of Human Resource. Later, when I look back, this proved to be one more turning point of my life. I happily indulged into the fascinating study of the blend of two man-made sciences – an algorithmic approach and understanding of human preferences. It helped me and the organizations that I have worked for, in its growth journey.

Life in UP is different than life in metros. Despite societal restrictions that are imposed on girls, that deprives them from higher education, freedom to choose between marriage and career etc., my father stood by me always and allowed me to do what I wanted to, thus fueling my ambitious streak.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Archana Srivastava is Head HR, Plants of Vitesco Technologies India. She has completed her graduation in Computer Application and Postgraduation in HR.

She is a Progressive, multi-faceted HR Leader with 14 years of experience in mastering complex, multi business, multi management situations. Highly knowledgeable in a wide variety of professional disciplines ranging from Strategic HR to Operational HR. She has provided effective HR leadership to align Human Resources and Industrial Relations to the needs of the business by building organizational capability through innovative ways of Employee Engagement, Competency Assessment and Development and by self-designed leadership programs.

She has conceptualized and executed:

- *Transformational Leadership Module based on book of Marshall Goldsmith: “What got you here will not get you there”*
- *One day workshop on Influencing Skill: Stakeholders management*
- *Designed an inhouse survey “Happiness Index Survey” to gauge the happiness level of employees*

*Her core competence and strengths are Talent Management and Organization Development; Business based HR & IR strategies, HR automation, high execution, drive and adaptability. Her main role in the organization is to **“Partner at all organizational levels to lead the workforce across different businesses with a diverse portfolio, balancing between people and the business to enable progressive growth”***

But reaching anywhere was not easy. It was probably extra difficult for someone like me, who knows about the situations and challenges and yet has the inner drive for going against all odds. In UP, if a girl is travelling alone after sunset, she is bound to face many unpleasant things. It's not just scary for the girl, but even her family is terrified, which results in a lot of restrictions on her.

I generally used to be late, because I had to complete my project works, coaching classes etc. My only advantage was a supportive family, especially my father. He never doubted me and always stood by me. There were many instances when situations would become rather precarious and my mother would be inclined to impose the night restrictions. I would fight back. I remember during one such heated arguments, my father said that “we trust you but we don't trust the world.” Yet nothing changed in me and I continued to face the world and situations as I saw fit, always having a goal in my head. The social knit is such that this kind of 'freedom' given to a girl child is not looked upon kindly and my parents had to withstand a lot of cynicism from well-meaning neighbors and well-wishers. But thankfully, my freedom was never usurped.

I came to Pune, Maharashtra, in 2005 for my post-graduation. Even though Pune is far better than UP, when it comes to girl-safety, things for women are never the same as for men, be it college or corporate.

I still remember when I was doing my post-graduation, in the first semester, I had scored the highest marks and best remarks. I was so happy that I shared my scores with one of my male classmates. His prompt response was that there are perks of being a girl student to Professor Mali. One can certainly score better marks. Professor Mali did have a reputation with girls, but it was pathetic for my fellow classmate to paint me with the same brush. Yes, I scored more than him, and he could not accept that it was because my assignment was better than his. I remember handing over my assignment to him and asking him to get the score validated against his by any professor of his choosing. These sorts of confrontation gave me the image of being arrogant, but I would choose arrogance any day over an intimidated one.

In corporate world too, especially in the manufacturing industry, which is predominantly male dominated, people try finding out the “Other” reasons if a woman is growing fast. In this journey of 14 years, I have come across many, who tried hard to pull me down and made inappropriate comments and offers. But there are some ingrained values instilled in me by my parents and my so-called small-town mentality, that helped me maintain my originality and individuality and

encouraged me to be the better version of myself with every passing day.

My real corporate world journey started with Thermax. I was in my third semester and I had to do a summer internship. Generally, for internship, students work for 2-3 months, they take their certificate and part their ways. Fortunately, I was given a live project to automate Thermax attendance and leave-management system.

That project was Thermax's long pending project and the new EVP HR was not happy with the progress. One evening he called up a project team meet and after lots of argument and counter-argument he handed over the task to me and appointed me as the project manager. He gave me a deadline though, and I assured him by saying that “if I fail, you don't give me my project certificate. And without a project completion certificate, I will not be able to complete my degree.”

I completed the project before time. I was given a preplacement offer. My second assignment too was HR automation. I accepted that project with the condition that I will be given the opportunity to work on core HR topics, specially related to organization and capability building. It was not easy to convince them because these sorts of assignments were generally executed by experienced professional and not someone like me -- “a little young girl in her early twenties who is yet to complete her post-graduation, has no experience of HR and has been hired for HR automation, wants to do OD, is not a rational proposal.” These were the exact words of the then hiring manager. But their need for a team member who has a better understanding of software and my determination (according to them stubbornness) of doing justice to any assignment they give me, had influenced them to accept my condition.

Having dual responsibilities, I had to work tirelessly which certainly gave me immense learning. However, after working for more than 3 years, when I realized that nothing of my interest which fulfils my aspiration, was coming my way, I decided to quit Thermax in 2009. According to many, it was a foolish decision as Global recession of 2009 had hit India, too.

I had to make a choice between continuing in Thermax in a role which was diluted due to structural changes in HR organization, or quit and look for something which fulfils my then goal of leading the complete HR of an organization by the age of 30.

I chose the latter, and had put down my paper without having a job in hand.

Those few months of struggle had again added a few unpleasant chapters in my life's book. Usually, if a young woman who is passionate about her career and

has ambitious plans for the same and prefers an unconventional approach towards life, like I do, then people are led to believe that we are easy prey. My over-zealous attitude towards life, big dreams and a go-getter attitude has more often than not, put me in the 'easy-to-get' bracket. Women that loud is too-much. It's not acceptable. Anything too much in a woman is unacceptable.

When I was looking for new opportunities in the job market, I had received an interview call for HR Manager position in Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, Navi Mumbai. There were supposed to be multiple rounds. But what happened was, in our very first round, which was a one-on-one discussion, interviewer told me that he was extremely impressed with my track record. He would modify my position in such a way that I would get fast growth and better visibility than my other peers who had more than double the experience of mine. He also told me that I will not have to go through any more rounds of interview. He will swing it. "As long as you are willing to work extra hard," he added meaningfully. Next thing I know, he calls me one late night around 9 pm and asks whether I can meet him in Lonavala (a place between Pune & Mumbai). When I asked the urgency of the same, he said I was special. I deserve a special treatment. I was horrified. Yes, I know I am pushy when it comes to my career and probably over enthusiastic, but nothing calls for these kinds of indecent offers. I never called him up and continued my job search until I got the one which was purely on my merit.

Post my stint with Thermax I worked with VA Tech Wabag Ltd for 1 year as Business HR and then I joined Kirloskar Oil Engines LTD as Corporate HR. There, I was primarily responsible for HR Automation, followed by Talent Management and my last assignment in KOEL was Compensation & Benefit Lead.

In year 2013, I came across an offer which helped me achieve my first milestone of leading the complete HR department by the age of 30. In fact, I was 29 when I got an offer of HR head (Corporate) from Kalyani Steels LTD. By then I was pregnant with my son Arya. My husband Rohan and I welcomed him on 26th Jan 2014. Marriage didn't change me much, in terms of my career target, but motherhood changed me to a great extent. My career took the back seat for a while when I decided to spend my 100% time with my little one. I took break from work for 9 months. After 9 months, when I re-started my career, it was very difficult for me to leave my baby home and go to work. However, with support from my mother-in-law and husband, I could restart full-fledged. I joined Continental AG in 2014 heading HR of one of their recently acquired businesses. Within a month of joining Continental, I had to go to Germany for around 10 days. That time my son

was only 9 months and it was a very difficult situation for me. What was even more painful was when close family and friends commented that my career was more important to me than my son.

After a year, I was given additional responsibility for heading HR for another plant in Pune. In 2018, one of the divisions of Continental got carved out and now we are separate company which is known as Vitesco Technologies and I head HR for manufacturing plants in India.

While I am breathing in and summing up my journey, here are a few points that I would want to share –

- 1) If someone as ordinary as I am, can achieve success through sheer stubbornness and struggle then anyone can!!
- 2) In life, one always come across a junction where one will have to make a choice between “Convenient” and “Right”. Convenient option gives short term gain, but right option gives immense fulfilment.
- 3) Be adaptable, listen to your inner voice and live by your own philosophy of life. Mine is: **Be original and strive to be the best version of yourself, because you are unique and special in your own way!**

VIDYUT KANYA

Dr. MADHURI JOSHI

Retired Professor
College of Engineering Pune, India

“Don't give in to your fears. If you do, you won't be able to talk to your heart.” - Paulo Coelho

When GEDC requested me to write a chapter on my life for their latest edition, I was very pleased. I was told that the purpose was to build a lighthouse for the coming generation of women in engineering, and I know there is much to learn from the struggles we as a generation went through if we wanted to have a career, much less, an engineer. What I am writing is not an attempt to gloat about my success but an attempt to narrate the life style of girls who became engineers in the 1970-80 and for next generation to take something from it.

I named my chapter ‘Vidyut Kanya’. Vidyut means electricity – also a synonym for power. Kanya means a girl. I am a power girl and my life stood testimony to that effect. Also, I am a daughter (Kanya) of a well-known Electrical (Vidyut) Engineer, Professor and Ex. Director of technical education Maharashtra state, M.V. Deshpande. My field of engineering studies was Electronics and Telecommunication.

The decade was 1970-80!

Our generation of girls were the first that got any real opportunities to study or have a career. Even though very few in number, the door did start to crack open. But then again, engineering was an absolute no-no. I was lucky to have parents who were visionary enough to motivate me to become an engineer and my sister a doctor. We, as kids, were motivated to study, learn music, musical instruments, drama, and dance. They nurtured us with values and developed our personality. They were and still are our ideals.

Our childhood passed in a free environment. Father was a well-known Electrical Engineer, Professor, Principal and Director of Technical Education.

We sisters were born in Ahmedabad.

I remember this one incidence, when I was about 5 years old, my father asked “will you become my technical heir? Will you become an engineer like me?” I immediately answered, “yes, yes! I would like to be an engineer like you!” At that time, I did not know what engineering meant, but I had immense faith in my father, and wanted to follow his footsteps. My experience is that motivation by parents right from early childhood, their continued support and freedom of thought matters a lot in shaping the future of a child.

I am lucky I got that. Not everyone does.

Our school education was mostly at Government Girls high school Amravati. I remember our father used to click a photo on first day of school every year. It was a matter of great pride for us.

I specially remember Mrs. Wazalwar, my math teacher of the 7th grade. It was some half yearly examination and madam were declaring results. She singled me out -- “where is Madhuri Deshpande?” she said quiet angrily. I stood up and she

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Having received her BE and ME degree in Electronics and Telecommunications from College of Engineering, Pune, Maharashtra, India, in 1976, and 1982, MSc(Tech) by research from University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) with commonwealth scholarship, UK in 1990 and the PhD degree in Electronics and Telecommunication from Pune University, India in 2000, she also has professional qualifications such as senior member of IEEE, Fellow of IET, FIEIE (I) and FIETE(I). This along with 40 years of teaching and industry experience has helped her rise from a lecturer to a Professor. She has worked as Head of E & TC department, Dean Student activities and Dean R & D at College of Engineering Pune.

Her research interests include digital signal processing and image processing and analysis, machine vision and pattern recognition, Biometrics, Image compression etc. She has published more than 160 papers in reputed journals and conferences and 5 books. She is working as a reviewer of Springer, Elsevier and IET journals.

IETE SVC Aiyra award memorial awards 2011 was bestowed upon her owing to her excellence in research and education. She was also felicitated with the Best teacher award 2010-11 by Maharashtra Government.

shouted at me, “where have you gone wrong? 99 out of 100? Where did you leave that one mark?” From that day onwards, I always scored 100% marks in Mathematics.

Our overall personality was developed in our childhood. I remember this incident when some distant relatives had come to visit us. They asked our parents “why are you educating your daughters so much? Some day they are going to get married and move out.” My father replied “So what if I do not have a son, my daughters are my everything.” I still remember those words.

In my 11th standard I scored distinction -- 75% in all subjects including science, languages and 100% in Mathematics and 81% in SSC board examination. This was in 1971 when scoring 60% was tough.

My father was selected as Director of technical education, Maharashtra state, and my parents had to move to Mumbai. So, they decided to shift us to Pune for further education. We had our grandparents living at Pune and we stayed with them.

I got direct admission for Pre degree in Ferguson college after passing my 11th. I still remember the first day in Ferguson college. Those were the days when girls didn't talk to boys freely. I had studied in girls' school and was not at all comfortable in a co-ed scenario. But there I met girls and boys who walked and talked freely together. They wore fashionable and so-called objectionable clothes in college. I slowly got adjusted to the environment. As I was a merit holder, Principal offered me an opportunity to skip one year and directly go for First year B.Sc. I decided to take it up, thus saving one year. It was necessary to pass FY.B.Sc. to get admission to Engineering.

I passed FY with first class and got admission to COEP for Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering course. Relatives and well-wishers were already busy trying to make life difficult for our parents for allowing me to go for engineering. The standard belief was engineering was for boys and I should have nothing to do with it. Thankfully my parents kept all these negativities at bay and encouraged me to go for it.

Girls used to get a choice of course selection. There were no private Engineering colleges in Maharashtra at that time. We were 8 girls out of 60 students in our class, which was a big number in comparison to earlier batches. I remember for our workshops, we had to wear blue boiler suit, that was shirt and trousers! I never wore trousers. I am a totally sari person. Having to wear that habit was a nightmare.

I got the first class. It was rare to get first class, given the fact that many of us did not even score the passing marks.

First year was common for all the branches and from second year onwards we had courses in Electronics and Telecommunication department.

Second year was tough, mostly because there were not many books available even in the market and there were no photo-copy machines available at that time. We had to make notes from book shared by professors and used carbon copies for others.

Final year was full of enthusiasm. Along with other subjects' studies we had project works. We also had elective subjects. I took computer as my elective subject.

At that time, even job opportunities for women-engineers were rare. Also, social pressure on me and my family was getting heavier by the day -- While I wanted to start my own industry, everyone around me wanted me to get into the cast as soon as possible – get married, get kids, have a family, and stay at home. I was working in a company while my parents were searching for a match for me. It soon became clear that the options for getting a qualified daughter married was negligible. I finally quit my job and got into academics.

My father suggested Cusrow Wadia Institute of technology, as it was government aided institute.

So, in 1977, after getting married, I joined as lecturer in Cusrow Wadia Institute of technology. My in-laws were not comfortable with a working daughter-in-law, but after much coaxing, I got permission to work. The condition was that I will first have to finish all the household work, and only then will I be allowed to step out. It's not easy, but I knew that my conviction on myself will be the only differentiating factor. In 1982 I completed my M.E with a new born daughter in my arms and the entire household work surrounding me. There were times when things got very difficult, but I promised myself that I will not give up. During those days, I got into the habit of making a list of each and everything that I will have to do during the day before I go to bed. I wrote down things like 'put handkerchief in the bag', 'buy ginger,' 'fold the laundry' to 'finish the project,' 'check for errors,' and 'start that assignment.' I never went to bed before I had a tick mark in all of them – a practice I follow even today. The only silver lining was my parents and their continued support and motivation.

Computer age was just beginning then. I had not even seen a computer till my Master's degree. So, I was learning it from scratch. I got selected in 4 computer

courses of MHRD. They were each for a month and I completed those at IIT. Taking off for IIT while leaving my daughter behind was not easy, but I did it. The courses were on programming languages, optimization, microprocessor and on data base. Those were very useful for my future career.

Professional societies like IEEE(USA), IET(UK), IE(I), IETE(I) play a very important role in the career of an engineer. I had seen my father, who was a fellow and chairman of these societies, work as a volunteer throughout his life. The university education that a student gets is a broad-based education. The professional societies give a glimpse of current technology in the form of continuous workshops, lectures, conferences and competitions. Thus, it helps to bridge the gap between traditional education and the working world.

My father suggested that I should take up the membership. I had a lot of pulling back from my in-laws because of the extra time that I would now spend on these additional activities. But I had to go on. I not only took the membership, but I successfully raised my competency to become a fellow. I took up the lead as the founder chair of the 'IEEE Women in engineering affinity group' Pune section and also chair of 'IEEE signal processing society' Pune section. People even coined the word 'chairwoman' for me. I motivated students to take membership that would help them in their path. I worked as chairman of IET Pune network from inception to 6 years. I could build professional network of experts in my field. This gave me the opportunity to encourage students to take part in various national and international competitions, write technical papers, and file patents. Some students became CEOs and CTOs, while some Professors at even international universities. Although these sounds like success stories, I would like to share that when it came to the selection of the first chairman of the Pune IEEE, it went to the other person probably because that person was a 'man'. Back then, IEEE was there only in Mumbai, because the number of members were substantial. I used to do day trips from Pune to Mumbai once a month for four years for those meetings, with my 2 years old son and my mother to babysit him. IEEE Mumbai wanted me there at all cost. They not only provided my transportation, they also timed it to my convenience. It was my sole effort that brought IEEE to Pune. The 'man' got in IEEE only when the Pune center was in the startup stage. I believe it was natural for me to expect that the chairman's seat would come to me. But it did not.

A little further down the line, members from my first batch of 'men' student became member and then Chairman, but not me. I find it strange that people

provide all kinds of lip service – “IEEE Pune means M.A Joshi”, “IEEE Pune would not have been possible without her sole effort”, etc etc. But the Chair always goes to the 'man'.

Later on, when the opportunity for the IET Pune network came, I was more forward in my approach for the chairman post and so, with two other women I took up the lead.

I wholeheartedly worked as a volunteer for Professional societies. I used to write at least 3 technical research papers per year. Now I have 160 technical papers published in journals of good repute. I was also invited to present some of those in different countries like USA, Singapore, New Zealand and China. I had organized one international IEEE conference for women engineers and scientists in 2005 and two national conferences of IET.

My technical writing got refined and I was confident about presenting my research among international experts. I wrote a paper on “Digital instruments” in 1979 in the journal of Institution of engineers (India). It was not only selected for publication, but fetched me the “Thomas ward memorial gold medal” for writing best paper. This happened when my daughter was just born and so I could not go to Kolkata to personally receive the award. It was my first gold medal. Thankfully my husband went on my behalf to receive it. Later on I received “SVC Aiya gold medal” “for excellence in research and education” from IETE(India).

As per my father's advice, I applied for commonwealth scholarship in 1988 and got selected among 1000 applicants for research in UK. It was a full scholarship and other allowances for 21 months for me and my family. I was delighted.

However, it was a big decision. My daughter was just 8 then. My in-laws were not very comfortable with my leaving. They finally allowed me to go only with my husband, leaving our daughter back in India. They did not allow me to take her.

We selected Manchester University. It was a great experience to work in an international environment. I was involved in a new field of research -- “Image processing”. After I came back to India in 1990, I joined as an assistant professor in Government College of Engineering Pune (COEP). There I wrote a book on Image processing and 3 other technical books. During that time, my son was born and I had to sit at home for a while. But it was good, because I seized the opportunity to complete my Ph.D.

I was invited to 7-8 countries to give presentations and lectures at various educational institutes. I did that all over India too. I was the Head of Electronics Department, Dean student activities, Dean research and development in COEP.

Volunteering for Professional societies was as if in my blood. I have seen my father do it and now I do it with all my heart. My father, even my co- professors and Principals developed me and I got support from my husband Shri. Arunkumar and both my children. This not only made my career rich, but also, I could teach and develop my own children and my students.

In short, let me summarise the principles of life which I understood:

- Parents are always thinking the best for their children. Have faith in them. Try to keep up to their expectations. Their blessings are always with you.
- Best gurus are your parents, school and college teachers. They build your life with strong ethical base. Your colleagues, friends and students keep you moving in life.
- As soon as you get an opportunity, take it's benefit and go ahead. Keep good ideals before you. Life is not a bed of roses. Thorns will be there. There will always be people distracting you, but keep going. Accept them and try improve further.
- Rather than creating institutions, create good people. Preserve them. The institute will stand tall because of them. What we get, for example education, give it freely to the students. We exist because of society. Hence give back to society wherever and whichever form you can. If anybody can get your guidance and can prosper because of you, then help that person for sure. When they come back to you talking about their success, the satisfaction that you will get cannot be measured by any means.
- Take full interest in all branches of engineering and science, along with all other subjects like dancing, drama, music and different languages. Preserve the nature and innocence in human beings.

THE FREE-SPIRITED REBEL

DR. MANALI KSHIRSAGAR

Principal

Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Technology

“A little rebellion now and then is a good thing.” - Thomas Jefferson

I took Avatar on mama Earth in the chilling month of December in Nagpur, the sub-capital of the State of Maharashtra, India. I come from a modest middle-class family. I was raised by my grandparents, parents and lots of siblings.

My father was a vice principal in a Women's college. He had a very progressive mindset, who was progressive enough to support inter caste and inter religion marriages during the 70s-80s – a time when it was considered almost a crime. My mother was a housewife, who was very adventurous and always open to learning new things.

I am the youngest of the five siblings. We all are very highly educated and definitely, all credit goes to our parents.

I have always been what our generation termed as a 'tom boy', and I am pretty much the same even today! So, my doll-playing days were nicely balanced with robust outdoor games. I also played badminton, gymnastics and chess with proficiency.

During my early days, I wanted to become a doctor. I had a reason for that – my mother's health was constantly a matter of concern and she used to be in and out of hospital for almost 8 out of 12 months in a year. The Govt. Medical College and Hospital, where she would be generally admitted, was within walking distance from our home. Carrying home cooked food etc was my job. It almost became my second home and wanting to be a doctor felt like a natural choice.

I had just cleared my Secondary School examination with Merit. Those days, my father's health was failing and that made my elder brother the decision maker for the family. He was the one who decided that I should not go for 10 +2 but

get admitted to Government Polytechnic in Pune. So, that's what I did, and happily so because I enjoyed my studies.

Post my Diploma, I wanted to pursue my degree, but with my father's failing health and the financial crisis that we were going through, I decided to take up a job instead. But it was my sister who insisted that I need to get a degree.

The question was how?

The responsibility on my elder brother as well as the financial crisis was real. I thought and thought, and then I remembered that in one of the addresses to the seniors, the Chairman of my polytechnic college had once announced that there will be a 50% concession on fees for toppers. And I was a topper! I promptly went and met him and got a signed remark on my application approving the concession. With that in hand, I went ahead and got my admission done for my degree in engineering.

In-the-meantime my father died. My brother married me off as soon as possible so that he can get rid of one of his responsibilities of marrying off a sister

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I am an avid administrator and academician with industry exposure, possessing a rich experience of about 03 decades in the profession. During my long career, I have successfully worked in various job profiles proving my people skills and administrative abilities. Being engineering graduate in Computer Science, I have taught to the class of undergraduate and postgraduate engineering students for last 25 years to the best of my abilities. As a University approved Ph.D. Supervisor, I am guiding several Ph.D. students for last 09 years and have close to 75 publications to my credit.

I am a result oriented professional with an exemplary track record of successfully achieving various accreditation and certification including NBA, NAAC, ISO, CMMI for the organizations I have worked for, 100 % placement to the students of the institution I am heading, strong industry connect for industry internships, student projects, Center of Excellence etc. Strive hard to promote innovation and entrepreneurship through active and vibrant ED Cell, MSME approved Incubation Center.

I possess sound knowledge of autonomy, framing policies, implementation of policy matters and finances. I have constituted various statutory and non-statutory committees, academic regulations, examination manual etc. required in autonomous institutions.

after father. I was then in pre-final year of my engineering.

My father-in-law was kind hearted and supportive, while my mother-in-law was orthodox who was obsessed with thoughts like “what will people say” – if the daughter- in- law is studying engineering, wearing salwar suits and not sarees, going to friend's places for studying and most importantly what if she doesn't conceive within one year of her marriage!!

Conceiving within one year of marriage was crucial, and so I delivered a baby during my final year exam and in between two papers. So, this is what I was doing -- I was attending college, doing household chores, preparing for my finals, was pregnant and somehow, still managed to enjoy everything! It was madness!!

I have always had this attitude of pretending all is good, and any unpleasant situations and incidents are the size of a fly – in short – shrinking a problem to the size that will fit in my fist. This has helped me sail through a lot of troubled waters.

I did my Engineering way back in 1992 when the ratio of boys Vs Girls was 10:1. But it was fun. All the girls from all the departments would huddle together in one single girl's common room for lunch break and enjoy a great bond. While all our classmates treated us with utmost respect, with the faculty, we had mixed experience. Some really treated us well, while some had this arched-eyebrow mind set about girls in Engineering.

When it came to our safety, the college took extra precautions. We were provided with a bus facility where we girls would be picked up and dropped from doorsteps rather than from destined stops. The bus ride was very entertaining since we were like one large family and many budding singers and artists got to the stage to showcase their talent.

While I am talking about my college days, there is this interesting incident that I would like to mention – For our Electronics Workshop we were supposed to prepare a small electronic project and submit. I had designed a small gadget called Pressure Sensitive Resistor, and named it Electronics For You. The gadget was cool and I was super excited. But on the D-day, my faculty refused to take my submission – only mine, and I was the only female in that batch – citing that he did not believe I made it myself. Later on, I came to know that he was one of those men who was strongly against women in engineering and generally had a sick mentality when it came to women. I Honestly wanted to slap him. In fact, I resolved to do so once I completed my degree. But of course, I didn't implement it for obvious reasons.

Now, the interesting part of this saga is that recently, I visited a local engineering college in the capacity of Chairman, Local Enquiry Committee of our University. That very faculty was assigned to me on my rounds to laboratories and other such facilities. He was all folded hands and respectful as he took me around, explaining about the laboratory equipment, the practical conduct in the lab etc – no attitude or arm-twisting method was left in him as he humbly showed me around, fully aware that his job credibility was at stake.

Things have definitely changed for the better for the present generation.

I joined a job after my Engineering in 1992 as a programmer in one of the local engineering colleges. In Nagpur or its vicinity, there were no colleges offering PG courses in my branch. So, I continued as a teacher in the same college where I was first appointed as a programmer.

It was 1997, when I came to know about a university near my city, which offered a part time PG program in my branch. That college never gave admission notification because the management wanted only their university students to first complete PG. But I kept visiting the college periodically to check whether they had started their admission process or not for almost a year. And finally, my efforts paid off. I became the first post graduate teacher among the lot. Then in the year 2005, I enrolled myself in the Ph.D. programme and became the first doctorate. I also completed my MBA in Marketing and Finance in 2013.

I completed all these higher education alongside my job, home and kids.

When I was allotted the first lady Head of Technical Department of my College, I was surprised to see that many male colleagues had an objection and nominated other male candidates, even candidates from other departments, to the Management. As I watched the dance, I realised that it was nothing more than a sheer unacceptance of a female head. Thankfully, I was still made the Head.

There was absolutely no glitch in my performance as a Head and I was allotted the responsibility of Dean for Students Activities. Stakes were high as the portfolio works only if I can gain the trust and support of my students. This portfolio was considered to be “Men's portfolio” as it involved fighting numerous student problems etc. I felt I was closely observed and there were people waiting for me to fail. But when I organised many mega events with huge participation of thousands of students, not only from my college but even outsiders, the success and magnanimity of my events and activities which were done seamlessly without even people getting a chance to come to my rescue for any unpleasant situations, I finally gained the trust and appreciation of majority of my colleagues.

And then there was no looking back. And today I am successfully handling multiple technical units of my group as a CEO and Adviser.

I joined our Group's ITES industry in 2013 in the capacity of Vice President of Academic Matters. This was an additional responsibility. There I had some bad experiences, probably because few men thought that I was a threat to their position. My 30 years as a working woman made me realize that most men are not comfortable around women who are strong, independent and do not look up to a man to survive.

Even though people have prejudices about me, the present generation is less prejudiced, in the sense that my children's friends are pleasantly surprised to know that I am an Engineer and find me “very cool”. Similarly, I have never faced any discrimination from my students. Once you treat them right and bring in the value, they like you. I have always been close to my students and still am.

When it comes to addressing issues at workplace, I have always done it in my “woman” style – being caring and considerate. I believe that's my natural instinct and I think one should never lose their natural instinct. The aesthetics of it carries a long way.

I feel women bring a unique perspective to academic or industry jobs -- like due diligence, sense of commitment, hard work, and responsiveness to the concerns of students and colleagues, successfully accomplishing the assigned task without making any fuss about it (which men generally do) to mention a few.

Even though my work is time consuming, I have learned to balance, work and personal life, though initially it was tough. I never had to give up on my traveling assignments, except for once - I came back from Singapore and then saw that my son had met with an accident. Since he was recovering well, no one informed me. I was supposed to travel to Bangkok in two days. I could not. It broke my heart to see my child in pain and I stayed. The mother in me took over!

As a woman, I was always judged by other women. Me being a working woman sometimes made them feel that I probably neglected my womanly duty. It means, I was not the mother, the wife or the homemaker that I should have been. I was labelled too open-minded, too out-going, too career oriented etc etc. The 'too' in me was scary and unacceptable. Women should be 'small', not 'too'. It jittered them, and many did not mind speaking their mind freely to me. But I was ok with it. My husband and kids were always supportive, and so were my friends and relatives.

I never felt the need to bring modifications in my persona in order to

'survive' in a male-dominated work environment. I believe that it's not the persona that needs modification so much as the attitude. The right attitude is the key to success.

For women in the job, here are a few pointers that I would like to suggest, my crux from my thirty plus years as a professional --

Stop the 'convenient-woman' attitude – means taking advantage of being a woman at one place, say for example when you have to wait longer and finish a task, then off load it sweetly on some male colleague, and have a raised voice when it comes to woman empowerment! I am saying all this, because I have seen it all.

Be utterly professional first, before you cry foul about discrimination.

Don't flaunt about how good you are at your job in spite of being a lady -- You are also an employee like every other employee. That's asking for discrimination.

Don't let the term “Gender Bias” get to your head. It is overrated.

I always take it as a pleasant duty to encourage girls in the attitude of professionalism. There are a few pitfalls in the game that I have learned in my so many years of experience, and I try my best to pass it on.

A weird trend I have noticed is that these days women are busy pulling down other women, rather than men. Men try to be supportive, women judge. These days there are headings and subheadings for judgement, but nothing supportive or productive. The thing women need to understand is that women are not to be empowered by someone else. Women need to empower themselves. Do whatever is required -- compromise, push back, push hard, let go, hold tight – every flavour is required.

These days prejudices are a little less when it comes to employing women. Organisations are becoming women oriented after experiencing the advantages of women employees and particularly the ones in leadership positions. More and more organisations are coming forward in assigning crucial and important roles to women and believe me, they are not wrong, because they are receiving multi fold results.

Post Academics, I see myself as a dreamer, an avid reader and a free-spirited writer. I would also like to spend lots and lots of time with my kids and be a duty-bound wife too -- Yes, I firmly believe that a husband and wife has a set of duties to be fulfilled towards each other. Throughout my life, I have rebelled against the dogma and allowed myself to live the magical colours of a woman's life. Don't be afraid to spread out your wings, for every step you take, ten more will open up for you!

WHEN PURPOSE FINDS IKIGAI

Mrs. RENUKA SRINIVASAN

Brand Sales Director, SIMULIA
Dassault Systemes India

“Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you.” - Oprah Winfrey

Finding something you love to do, your ikigai, is not easy. I'm lucky that I could find that early on and that I've had a chance to work in that space for around twenty-five years now. For me, it is about helping people use technology (specifically simulation) to develop products. Further, in my role and my organization, I get to see how simulation is leveraged across multiple Industries to understand and improve product behavior, which I find very exciting and interesting.

I run the SIMULIA Brand operations in India for Dassault Systemes. As part of this, I interact with companies that design products (like cars, airplanes, cell phones), or with organizations that try to understand behavior of products, nature (soil, for instance) or life (e.g. human heart). While the SIMULIA brand focuses more on engineering simulation using finite element analysis (FEA), many times we combine with other brands within Dassault Systemes to provide a more complete technology or a scientific workflow for our customers. Thus, for an aerospace customer working on composites, we could provide a designer app for defining the composite lay-ups, use FEA simulation to study the behavior under in-services loads, and move into a manufacturing management process as well.

Similar applications exist for several Industries, and I enjoy working with our technical teams to showcase these applications to our customers. I sincerely believe the virtual world helps us to understand the real world better - and helps us gain insight that would not be possible otherwise. After all these years, helping a client understand the power of simulation is still a rewarding experience for me.

I started the operations for SIMULIA (or Abaqus India as it was known back

then) in 1999. My husband and I had gone to the USA for our Masters, worked for a couple of years and decided to return to India, Chennai, where we grew up and where both sets of parents still lived. I had no experience in selling software till then, as my role was on the technical side. But when I reached out to the executive management, they were willing to open an office in India, and we iterated on a business plan, with help from some of my sales colleagues, as I was not even aware of the software prices.

I didn't realize it then, but I was stepping out of my comfort zone. Years later, a mentor would tell me the maxim "Step out of your comfort zone – because the magic may happen there".

For me, starting operations was certainly a completely new experience. Instead of the proverbial garage, I worked from my bedroom for several months until we got the necessary government approvals for foreign investment. I had to work with lawyers and consultants to consider the tax implications, decide on the kind of company we wanted to start and then apply for the government approvals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Renuka SRINIVASAN is currently Brand Sales Director, SIMULIA Dassault Systemes India. In her current role, she is responsible for the SIMULIA business in India. Prior to this, she was Worldwide Services Director for SIMULIA.

Renuka has over twenty years of experience in the simulation business and was instrumental in setting up the SIMULIA business in India. She has worked with customers across a variety of industries including automotive, aerospace and defense, industrial equipment manufacturers, civil engineering, engineering services providers, and among others.

Renuka has a Bachelors in Civil Engineering from BITS, Pilani, and a Masters from Duke University. She joined Hibbitt, Karlsson and Sorensen Inc, and worked with them in USA before returning to India to set up Abaqus India. She was responsible for the pre-sales and post-sales technical activities as well as business development for India.

Later, I needed to understand the financial, tax and cash flow aspects of running a small business. I learnt to seek expert opinion when needed and to tap my network for their advice and experience. From very early on, my managers were clear that I had the freedom to make decisions, and needed only to approach them for guidance when I wanted it. More importantly, they also gave psychological support by maintaining that we would overcome any missteps that may occur. I think this – the freedom to take decisions, and the confidence that your managers will support your decisions – go a long way to help any person and also help organizations respond effectively – and I try to pass this on to my team as well.

At that time, the Abaqus offices in Japan and France were also run by women. So, I didn't see any specific issue within the company because of my gender. In fact, at one stage, our offices in Japan, France, China, and India were all headed by women.

However, for me personally, there were certain mental barriers that I had to overcome – especially related to networking and (to a lesser extent) travel. To promote the software, I needed to network at conferences and to travel. While I enjoyed presenting on our solutions at conferences, I also needed to walk up to people (usually men) I did not know, introduce myself and talk about the company and our technology. As a woman I felt awkward initially. Further, I needed to travel to attend conferences or meet potential clients. In those first two years, there were no cell phones, and I was dependent on the hotel phone to reach my family each evening and inform them that I was ok. I was also not comfortable with staying alone in strange hotels and wouldn't sleep well.

In those days when assisted travel advisors didn't exist, I learnt to get recommendations from friends and customers for the hotels to stay in. For the cities I visited often, Bangalore and Pune, once I found a hotel I liked, I lodged in that same hotel for years – giving me the comfort of a known place and in time, a group of hotel staff that I made acquaintances with.

I think as women, our safety is something we do need to keep in mind, especially while traveling. I always encourage the women in my team to ensure that their cellphones are charged when they are travelling or doing late nights. No organization wants to scrimp on the safety for their employees, but the individual has the responsibility to plan.

I always knew I wanted to be an engineer. No one ever told me I could not be an engineer and most of my family (both my grandfathers, my uncles and my father) were engineers.

While we were a fairly conservative traditional Indian family, my parents never felt that my sister and I could not do something just because we were girls. My father was a strong champion, encouraging us to try different experiences, making us learn a new skill each summer, and encouraging us into competitive swimming. He would dare me to fail in a class test (confusing me as a child), as he felt that it would help me realize that failure was alright, as long as you learnt from it and picked yourself up. My mother was a mix of traditional and modernity, driving a car in the 1970s, while following all the traditional chores, that was expected from women of our mother's generation. He expected us to excel at school and at home, and was a role model in her strength of purpose.

For my undergrad, I went to BITS (Pilani), an engineering school 2000+ km away from home, at a time, when Internet and direct dial long-distance phone calls were not yet common. Communication involved weekly postcards and on rare occasions, a “trunk call” (i.e. operator assisted phone call) to the hostel from our parents.

BITS was a wonderful undergraduate experience. I made my closest friendships there, learnt to live away from home, and got exposed to different cultures and ideas.

We were 3 girls and 60 boys in civil engineering, and I probably interacted with a third of the class. I do recall one of the admission officers commenting because I, a girl, had chosen civil engineering, but I shrugged it off.

In my final year of engineering, I took an elective course in Finite Element Analysis, FEA, and found it really interesting.

Post-graduation, I worked for a year in an engineering consultancy company, learning a lot and getting more exposed to FEA. While I was treated well and given good exposure, there was an underlying thought that the women engineers would quit the job once they got married.

Thanks to my father's urging to look for more exposure, I applied and got into Duke University for my Masters. I did my thesis related to FEA, and then joined Hibbitt, Karlsson and Sorensen, Inc (or HKS, the world-renowned developers of the Abaqus software). HKS would eventually be acquired by Dassault Systemes.

Just 8 months into the job, the company supported me by letting me relocate from Providence, Rhode Island to Fremont, California when I got married. In California, I got more exposed to how FEA is applied in the real world and learnt from senior colleagues on different aspects – both technical and business. I got a

chance to support companies in Aerospace, Lifesciences, civil engineering, and electronics on product development in a wide spectrum of areas like flap deployment, sheet metal buckling, stent deployment, seismic analysis of dams, computer hard disc simulation and many more.

As mentioned earlier, after a few years in California, I moved back to India and started the India operations. I never had any formal training in managing a business. I had to learn this through experience and through the guidance of my management in USA. It would certainly have helped, if there had been a training-course at engineering college level on managing a business. Today, with the start-up culture, I am sure many such training-courses are available at colleges and I would encourage people to attend such a course. You will find it useful later in your career!

Formal training does help and in the initial years of running the company, that was one avenue I did not explore for myself. We did conduct several technical and soft skill trainings for our team. While I participated in the technical training, I would have benefitted from more business strategy and sales trainings. Later, as we became part of a large organization (Dassault Systemes), there were a variety of trainings made available -- technical, managerial, soft skills, etc. -- and I was able to leverage some of these. If you are running a business, I would encourage you to take time to attend a few trainings on areas where you feel you need more exposure. Today, there is a variety of online courses that allow us to upskill in a flexible manner, so there are more options for continuous learning.

One aspect I've not touched upon is managing work and life. Many women have to deal with working with young children and all of us have a time when we need to support our parents with additional care. There is no single way to handle this, and we each need to find the options that suit us. I had a child fairly late in my career, so the business was already established, and I had an experienced team at work who were capable of handling the business. In India, we have the additional advantage of affordable caretakers – whether for helping with babies or with elderly parents. Because of support from my family and a babysitter, I was able to travel and attend to my work even when my child was very young. I am learning, though, that the solutions to childcare have to change as my son grows and his needs evolve. In this, technology is both a boon and a bane. It allows us to be connected when we are away from each other. But unfortunately, it becomes more difficult to restrict our work hours, and especially when we are in international teams where multiple time-zones are at play. I think we need to find out what works

for us, and then plan our hours accordingly.

Looking back at my career, the key points I'd like to highlight to people starting their careers would be

- a) **Mentors:** Various people have guided me through my career and helped broaden my perspective. While it is not easy finding a mentor, especially if you are working by yourself, I would strongly recommend to actively find a mentor. You can gain from their experience and their network. In turn, it is important to mentor others, and you gain as much from these interactions with young colleagues.
- b) **Professional Networking:** Developing a professional network of people in your Industry is important. This helps in understanding some of the business trends, leveraging for career changes or to find talent. If you have the time to be actively involved in a professional association or to assist a student body, then that is even better.
- c) **Build a Team:** Building a strong team is critical to success. Part of being a leader is leveraging the strength of each individual to create a team. As I mentioned earlier, allowing team members to take decisions encourages initiative and also allows us to scale better. Delegation allows the team members to show their abilities while giving you time to focus on some other aspect of the business.
- d) **Think big:** Each individual is different, so I don't know how you set your goals. I thought I had set ambitious goals, but discussions with others helped me stretch on those goals. The experience and perspective of others made me realize there was more scope for expansion than I had realized. This helped the team and me aim higher and to achieve more. Of course, I do think that any stretch has to be reasonable, else it defeats the purpose of motivating us.
- e) **Support structure:** For me, having a support structure was critical for my career (and my sanity, sometimes!) The active support and encouragement of my family, especially my husband, enabled me to take on challenges and new responsibilities. A group of friends from college provide fun, emotional release and, when needed, a chance to share notes on managing careers, work-life balance and other aspects.
- f) **Giving back:** Handling work and personal responsibilities may leave very little time for extra activities. However, whenever it is possible, I think it's important to give back to society. You could do so by guiding younger colleagues, mentoring a student team, donating your skills and time to a charity that may

benefit or through corporate social responsibility. For me, participating in the La Fondation Dassault Systemes (India) is a rewarding experience. It exposes me to some exciting work of young researchers to help increase the exposure of school children to STEM, and to support projects in sustainability, life sciences and education. In time, I hope I'll be able to expand my involvement in some of these areas.

Today, we see many women role models and inspiring women leaders around us. However, each person still needs to deal with their individual challenges, learn the integration of work-life which works for them and make the choices that appeal to them. My only hope and wish are that every woman should take her own decisions of her own life and not leave it to others. I believe each of us is unique, and each of us can change the world for better. I hope you find the path that suits you!

OWNING WOMANHOOD

DR. MADHURI KHAMBETE

Principal

Cummins College of Engineering for Women

"For every step I take, I become a torchbearer for many others to show light and hope."

Working in a leadership position is definitely challenging for a woman. Travel, long hours at work, together with all the hours at home front, people management, gender-bias and gender biased opinion management, social tabu and expectations, cultural aspects – too many parameters at play.

In women, especially of my generation there is a sort of guilt, if they pursue career by compromising even a small bit of family responsibility.

I remember an incident that happened 25 years back -- I was out of town for three days attending a conference. I requested the canteen contractor for home delivery of meals. Those days, these home delivery, and all were not so common. There was no process in place and probably that's why he forgot to do so in the first day. This caused lots of inconvenience to my family, especially my daughter. I remember that this incident disturbed me a lot and I felt guilty for a very long time.

I hope this generation is different. But if there are still women who feels guilty at every little turn of events, then please snap out of it. We do everything we can with love, but we need to remember that we are not super-women. We can't fly.

My father was in Maharashtra Government service. His job was transferrable all over Maharashtra. I was born when he was stationed in Yeotmal. Due to his transferrable job, I attended schools in Yeotmal, Amaravati, Ahmednagar, and Pune. But that was our last stop till I completed my secondary school education and college from Pune. Father of course, had to keep travelling.

I am the youngest of four siblings. I have two elder sisters and an elder brother. Childhood was pure bliss. We played all sort of games with neighbouring children such as throw ball, volleyball etc. I joined sports Club 'Maharashtra

Mandal ' for two years. I was also in school's 'Kabaddi' team and participated in many inter school tournaments. I was interested in many extra-curricular activities. Our parents never really lectured us about girl-appropriate behaviours etc, but counselled us on the merit of education and economic independence. We sisters were perhaps those lucky few who never faced any gender biased discrimination from our parents.

Probably that's why we flourished.

I was fond of exploring different roads and destinations in the city on my bicycle. That was my favourite time pass. I remember once getting lost and coming home way past the deadline. So, those days there were no cell phones and no easily available telephone booths. I couldn't inform home. I still remember the thrashing I got from my parents. I think they were very scared.

Both my parents lost their parents very early in their lives and as a result, had to go through a lot of hardship. It taught them a lot, in terms of how to manage life. They drilled in us the necessity of freedom, self-sufficiency, financial

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Mrs. Madhuri Bhushan Khambete is currently the Principal, Cummins College of Engineering for Women, Pune, which is among the top 200 NIRF ranked colleges. She has 28 years of teaching experience. She has done her Ph.D. from Pune University. Her area of interest includes Computer Vision, Image processing and Robotics. She is a Life member of ISTE and IETE.

She is a Member of Board of Innovation and Incubation, and Member, Board of studies, Electronic Engineering, Savitribai Phule Pune University (2016-2022). She is also the member, Academic Council, Pimpri Chinchawad College Of Engineering, Pune (2020-23)

She is the recipient of:

- *The Special recognition award by IETE (Institution of Electronics and Telecom Engineers) Pune section*
- *Maharshi Karve award of excellence by 'Maharshi Karve Stree Shikshan Sanstha'*
- *Appreciation award from the Institution of Electronics and Electrical Engineers for contribution in IEEE activities*
- *Woman achiever award by 'Accenture'*
- *Cummins India Ltd- 'Cummins excellence Award'*

independence and such.

All of us were expected to do household works, in way of learning, and understand the responsibility. We all brothers and sisters know how to cook, clean and keep a home. My father was very hands-on on household chores and partnered my mother in rearing us. I saw him treat her with a lot of respect, something that was again, not a common practice back then in India – the treating women with some kind of equality. But as I saw it being practiced at home, maybe that's why I could demand it in my life forward too.

In my school days, my nature was sort of rebellious. I did not like doing the conventional stuff and was found playing the whole day. But, despite this, I would manage to score really good marks.

Now, it so happened that all the students who scored good marks would join science stream. Given my inclination to display the 'un-conventional' in me, I decided to join the commerce stream instead. But after two weeks I realized that I did not like commerce. So, I requested my College Principal to change my stream to Science. Fortunately, he accepted my request and I joined Science stream.

There was a big age difference between my three siblings and myself. My eldest sister is 16 years older than me. I was comparatively a 'late-child' for my parents. This 'late-child' thingy was always discussed by my relatives and family friends in terms of how my education, marriage and all would be a huge burden to them at their ripe age. This in turn created an impression on my mind of being a burden to my parents which I did not like. So, I started earning from a very young age -- 18. I completed all my education -- graduation, post-graduation and PhD in engineering while I was working. Even though I later realized that my impression of being a burden was wrong, this created some sort of fighting spirit in me which probably helped me to tackle tough times.

When I got married, my husband's family was a typical joint family. My husband's grandparents were also with us. My mother-in law had passed away before our marriage so the responsibility of managing household work of a joint family, my job and continuing my education further was very challenging. My husband and my father-in-law helped me to manage all these fronts. I feel that if you are firm on whatever you want to do and make it clear to the people around you, they accept it and cooperate in whatever way they can.

My husband is an engineer by profession. He was working in the industry but at the same time was pursuing cost accountancy and law degrees. We both supported each other for continuing our education.

After graduation I entered in teaching profession, accidentally. I took up a teaching assignment for a short period but then realized that I am quiet enjoying this and decided to continue the profession.

Teaching profession is considered lighter than the corporate sector in terms of time engagement. I feel that it is not correct. In engineering, technology changes happen very fast. Accordingly, engineering education curriculum also keeps on changing. As faculty, we too need to keep ourselves updated accordingly. Along with teaching, professors need to handle research and administrative responsibilities. For those, who have taken this profession seriously would know that the work commitment is not lighter than corporate sector. However, stress level may be less. Advantage of teaching profession is that the schedules are structured and last-minute changes are very less. That is, if you are not working at a leadership position. But if you are heading the department or are head of the institute, then the administrative responsibilities make your schedule dynamic and hectic.

In teaching profession percentage of women at entry level and midlevel is higher than men. But very few women are working at leadership positions such as Department Head, Dean, Principal or Vice Chancellor.

This may be due to many reasons. When you are at leadership position, you need to give more time for your work beyond your office hours. Occasionally travelling becomes part of your work profile. For women with family, long hours and travel can be a serious deterrent. Besides this, men do not accept woman boss easily, hence women too hesitate in some cases. Some Management also believe that women can't handle stress.

For any woman, managing work and family is quite challenging. To maintain work life balance, I try to allocate some time to myself as well as my family. I love listening to music which I do, even at late night. I love cooking so I cook special dishes on weekends. I spend good time over dinner with my family members. These things keep me fresh and keep my family ties strong.

As I am working as a head of the Institution, sometimes last minute urgent work, unplanned but important meetings disturb family programs.

I remember one incident, when after lots of planning, considering my calendar; we booked tickets for a family trip. Two days before our trip, I received communication about some important compliance visit. We had to postpone the plan. My family was very upset because of this. I handle all these ups and downs with lots of love and patience, but have never compromised on my professional duties. Sometimes, even when I take a leave, I have to rush to the office just for an

hour or two. My daughter protests really hard on this. I also miss a lot of family gatherings and functions. But these instances are common and I am sure all working women, especially women in leadership positions, will know what I am talking about.

For women who are new to the profession, my advice would be to not give up. Enjoy this tug-of-war, and march ahead. Things will fall in place, as things always do.

I am working in an all-girls engineering college which is managed by a trust that has been working in the field of women education for past 125 years. The founder of the trust, 'Maharshi Karve,' started the trust to provide education to women, specially to widows, in 1896. In those days, women were not allowed to schools. He experienced lots of resistance for his initiative. Despite all sorts of hurdles, he continued his work. He received the highest civilian award of India 'Bharat Ratna' for his dedicated work in the field of women education.

Because of this background there is a high respect for women, particularly in our institute. I never experienced any bias, or I was never denied any opportunity by management for being a woman. Rather, when I became the principal of the college, it became an exemplary moment. There are hardly any lady principals of engineering colleges, especially when engineering is considered as a men dominated field. I feel fortunate about this.

As my college is an all-girls' college, apprehensions are expressed by stakeholders about student's exposure to the outside world and their career options in a male dominated industry. But time has proved these apprehensions wrong. Our girls participate in all sorts of competitions and win prizes and medals. Most of them are successful in their career and have reached to leadership positions.

People always ask me about gender equality and women empowerment.

I think that education for all will be a great leveler and in the coming future we, as a society, will not have to talk about gender discrimination at all. There can be many more productive things to talk about.

I attend many meetings outside my organization where percentage of participating women is extremely low. In such a situation some people do not take women seriously. But without feeling nervous or bad, it is important to participate in such meetings/activities. This creates the necessary visibility and presence.

When I took charge as the Principal, I did face some non-acceptance. Instead of getting bogged down with such display, I formed a team of colleagues who were ready to work with me. Over the period, I noticed that the non-acceptance

quotient reduced.

My observation is that women do not feel free participating in any activity if there are more men than women. But I think if we can just keep aside our gender identity, things become easy. Of course, these things are changing with time. The young generation is bolder and has fewer such inhibitions.

One thing I would like to highlight is that women usually miss out on the networking part because they rush home after work for family and kids. Men feel no such pressure as they happily interact with their colleagues informally over a cup of tea after office hours. Such interactions help them to have a strong network. I would encourage young women to give this informal networking a serious thought. I feel it is very productive.

Most organizations these days are giving importance to gender diversity, but there is a scarcity such women at the top. There is a definite leakage in the pipeline that needs to be addressed.

I believe that women in leadership positions can bring in more understanding about women in the workforce. It is also proved that women can become successful leader without changing attributes of women hood.

I also believe that the more the number of women in the leadership position, the more the acceptance of society as a whole change. If you feel that the number of torchbearers up there is not enough, don't wait for it. Be the one!

MY JOURNEY MY WAY

Ms. REENA DAYAL

Chairperson and Board Member / CEO and Managing Partner
Quantum Ecosystem Technology Council in India / Benzaiten Advisors

“Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow” - Anthony J. D'Angelo

I was Born in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh. It's a small town in the middle of the Bundelkhand region- a place, shaped by the river Betwa and its tributaries and a hub for Hydroelectric power generation.

My father is an Engineer, the first in the family and who went through hardship and yet managed to graduate from IIT Madras. My mother is a housewife. Both were born and brought up in what was then small villages in the district of Unnao in UP. Thanks to my maternal grandfather being a visionary of sorts, my mother had the distinction of being the only woman in her village to have done high school staying in a hostel in the city, something unheard of at that time.

I was put into a convent school, because these schools offered the best English education then. My father was very clear about the fact that the best scientific and educational books around the world at that time were in English and hence his kids needed to know the language just as well as their mother tongue. He would often joke about it and say- Hindi is your mother tongue, think of English as your father tongue.

As I was growing up, he encouraged me to read extensively. I was a voracious reader. In the late seventies, good English books were mostly of British Publications and hence costed a bit. I remember bargaining with my father- refusing to buy that new dress on Diwali and buying several books instead.

I bought books, I read books from the school library, I read books when we were visiting our family friends. Very soon, my thirst for reading encompassed not just stories for children, but biographies, philosophy, and literature. I read whatever I could get my hands on.

Very early in life, I started questioning who I was and why was I here? What was consciousness? Why is it that I could be at one place and experience all that is happening around me, while somebody else on the other side of the world, would be completely oblivious of my experiences, but would be experiencing their own rich environment the same way as I was doing, and this would be true for every single living being on the planet. This question kept me awake. I made theories in my mind and eventually this drove my interest in physics as a subject which attempts to explain everything that happens in the Universe around us.

I read books because they offered me either a glimpse of life as somebody else's experience (if it's a story), or it offered me knowledge about how this world works. When I had to decide if I wanted to study Science or Art in High School, I was suddenly struck with the fact that given the limited human lifespan, the opportunity to learn whatever this world has to offer is so limited. This question of knowledge and lifespan drove me to go deeper into religious texts to understand what life was, from a spiritual context. The Hindu religion believes in multiple re-

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Reena Dayal Yadav is a Leader at Microsoft India. She is the Chair for the IEEE Quantum Special Interest Group in India. She is a Technology and Innovation Management professional. In her 27 years of experience in the Industry she has held various roles and responsibilities in the areas of Innovation, Technology Leadership, Strategy and Management. She has successfully Incubated several new Technology Business Areas and driven programs for harmonious Ecosystem creation in the areas of Storage Networking Technology and now Quantum computing. She is the Ex-Chairperson for SNIA in India.

She is also on the Governing Board and Executive Committee of The Cloud Computing Innovation Council of India and IEEE Senior Member, IEEE Future Directions Quantum Initiative Steering Committee Member and the Chairperson for the SIG Quantum Computing in India. She is an Author – her Book “Innovation Magic” is a guide to creating and managing Innovation Management functions within Organizations. Her report on “Innovation Governance: Board Imperatives” has been published and referred to by many organizations. She has an Engineering degree from IIT Roorkee. She is a Chevening Fellow for Science and Innovation Leadership Program from The Said Business School, University of Oxford.

births. This, and the concept of Karma fascinated me as a child. In all my childhood innocence, I would add a very special line to my daily prayers “Oh God, If I had past lives, please somehow give me the knowledge and all the learning I did in those lives, in my current life.”

My father somehow had great confidence in what I could accomplish. If I told him something was difficult in my studies, he would say “Think about the number of people in this world who have already mastered this, now tell me what is so special about their brain that they can do it and not you. Use your brain. It has much more to offer than you think.” There were many such things he would say that encouraged me towards my goal. I grew up unaware of the fact that the society had different standards for men and women. I was led to believe that I could accomplish anything that I wanted to.

The thinking that I developed as I was growing up defined me as an individual. A technical orientation with interest in physics and with a deep interest in spirituality. It also set the tone for “Independence of Thought” as a significant characteristic of my personality.

After High School, I considered further study and a career in Physics. In the absence of any guidance and very few Institutes doing advanced Physics Research in India, I decided to go for Applied Physics and become an Engineer. I graduated from IIT Roorkee, which was University of Roorkee at that time. My specialization was Electronics and Communications. As I was rejoicing in the fact that I was going to be studying subjects that interested me, I was exposed to facets of society I had been shielded from at my home. The fact that boys and girls are treated differently and opportunities they get too are probably rationed.

The Computer Science and Electronics class of 70 people had just one girl, which was me. When I entered the class, if I were to sit on the first row, the entire row was emptied up for me. But with time, they warmed up to me and I became a part of the class. A couple of months later, another girl joined in. By the time I was in my second year, there were 3 of us in the Electronics and Communications class. I topped the College in my first year. I had the highest marks in a group of around 300+ students.

Soon after, I joined an IT Services company where I was working on Networking Protocols and system software. I had a manager who did not differentiate between men and women at all. He was equally tough with all of us. In fact, he was very clear that in the first two years of our career, we should make the maximum attempt to learn as much as we could. I was part of a project where I

started off by coding on the client side and developing the UX in an archaic set of libraries on Unix called 'curses'. However, very quickly I was moved to the server side working on networking protocols. Then I was asked to own the whole code and then port the same to a variety of flavours of Unix including versions on RISC machines. Within a matter of two years, I was fully owning the product and the deployments etc. I kicked off my career with tremendous learning in a very short period of time. In 1994 I had the opportunity to have a one-on-one discussion with the then CEO of TCS- Mr F.C Kohli. Mr Kohli used to get a pulse of the company by meeting people from all levels within the Organization. He gave me a piece of advice that day which stayed with me through my career - "If you are ever in a situation where your learning has stopped, leave that role or job and do something else. Make sure you continue to learn". Learning was not something easy to ignore in a Career associated with ever evolving technology. I always enjoyed learning. I also enjoyed my work too and it never seemed like a job to me as it did to many people whom I worked with.

It was that time in my life when my parents started pushing me to get married. In India, at that time, arranged marriages were the norm. As groom-options were getting discussed at home, I was surprised to see that the same father who pushed me to aim for the sky as far as my career was concerned, now was asking me to be open about leaving my job if I had to. I was aghast. This did not fit in with my version of reality and after a detailed conversation with him, my father agreed that if I consider my career as a priority, I should only marry someone who would support that.

So be it, there was another problem floating -- People seemed to be sensitive to skin colours. For the first time I became acutely aware of the fact that I had dark skin. On one hand, I was a topper in my studies and doing extremely well in my job, yet when it came to my personal life the whole idea about my marriageability seemed to hang around the fact that I had a dark skin tone. Incidentally this did not seem to be an issue for men, only for women.

It confused me a lot and after several instances of being rejected, and several instances of me rejecting suitors, I started thinking that maybe marriage was not for me. But the social pressure to get married was extremely high and I finally said yes. In hindsight, that's not how things should have been.

When I was expecting my second child, I surrendered one of the responsibilities I was holding in office, and settled for a smaller portfolio to manage the balance in life a bit better. After my son was born, I bounced back really quick

and grew in my career again. I discovered that career is not a straight line towards success. It's important to find a balance, and to do your best in all spheres of life. It's all about taking initiative, being ambitious, to strive to create an impact and giving it your best that sets the tone for success.

I have been a single mother with 2 kids, having separated from my husband for several years now. I have been juggling work and home life.

I take all decisions on my own, both in my work life and home life. This has served to make me take full ownership of whatever I do. In balancing my home priorities with my work, and dealing with stresses while remaining calm, my focus on mindfulness helped me. I evolved as a person as I dealt with difficult situations in home, in society and at work. Through this journey I also shared my experiences, mentored other women, created Leaders by focussing on Compassion and Empathy while building resilience. These aspects of me as a leader helped me work with the concept of Collective Intelligence within Organizations, driving change and Innovation.

So, I dealt with the turmoil that I faced in my personal life and focussed on work, which came easily to me. I would put in effort and get great results. I was considered a technically strong leader who had great Innovative teams. In the year 2000, I was asked to decipher a problem statement which came out of a conversation between one of our Business Leaders in the US and a Customer's Engineering VP. That problem statement landed on my desk. I took one look at it and ran to the Centre Head's office. "Who is working on this exciting stuff?" I asked. "What is it" he asked. "Well, this seems to be an optimized OS, specifically for managing IO and Storage is distributed over the network." That was my first assignment in Storage Networking, and we kicked off work which grew on to become a Multi-Million Dollar recurring business for the company. Storage Networking was a new area and while the Business grew within my Organization, I noticed that the ecosystem in India was not really geared up for the area. I joined the Storage Networking Industry Association as a Director. Then something very wonderful happened. It was my first board meeting and it so happens that the Chair asks for a volunteer Director to own some work related to the Organization structure of SNIA. The reason was linked to the fact that we wanted to make SNIA a self-funded organization and membership fees would never be enough to provide the right kind of cash flow and financial stability that was needed for SNIA to be self-sustaining. Authorizing Education and Certification through Partner companies and doing some niche training through SNIA directly would help us

bring in the right kind of revenues. I hadn't done this before, but I volunteered. I learnt along the way and got this done in a couple of months times through our lawyers. The Chair acknowledged the initiative that I took over many such occasions and while moving out of his position, nominated me for the next Chair. I was unanimously elected as the Chairperson. At that point I also made some decisions which I believe have enabled the long-term viability of that Organization.

Within my organization, Incubating the Storage Networking Business became the first of many similar things. If I look back in my career, I have done more of starting something new and incubating it within the Organization.

I very soon became known as an Intrapreneur within an organization, because of starting new technology-based Business and starting something new and incubating it. All through I have been very active in the External Ecosystem as well, to further the cause of Technology. I then joined a group of people incubating the Cloud Computing Innovation Council of India and became a founding member of the same. In 2014, I was selected for a Chevening fellowship by the Government of UK and went to Oxford University, Said Business School for a course on Science Innovation and Policy. This course helped me understand the Innovation Ecosystem in UK and Europe and the role that the Government plays in fast tracking innovation through a sector or technology-based approach. Later that year I wrote a book called “Innovation Magic -The Science and Art of Innovation Management.” This book gives guidance on how to Create an organization which supports Bottom-Up Innovation, and the kind of culture that supports Innovation.

In 2015 I joined Microsoft. Within over a year in Microsoft I had the opportunity to meet with Satya Nadela, our CEO and present an Innovative project idea that we were working on to him. He asked deeply technical and insight seeking questions about our work. His business acumen and technical detail-oriented questions, made me realize that the ethos of Growth Mindset and continuous learning that he was driving within Microsoft matched very closely with my own quest for learning and creating an impact around me.

In 2018 I had my second tryst with Physics. I decided to start a group that focussed on Quantum computing within my company in India. In order to bolster the Ecosystem, as an IEEE Volunteer, I started a Quantum Special Interest Group, which brought the Academia, Government, and the industry together through workshops. It also is spreading more awareness on the topic of Quantum Computing and conducting training on Quantum Computing on popular Technical

Platforms. I later became a part of the Leadership team of the Global Quantum Initiative of IEEE.

In March 2021 I decided that I had had enough of experience with the Corporate World and being an Intrapreneur. It was time for me to be an entrepreneur. At the same time, I believe that the Quantum Ecosystem in India needs a strong Catalyst. So right now, I am running my own Company called Benzaiten Advisors and am also in the process of setting up a Quantum Tech Council of India, which will work with Academia, Industry and Government to accelerate the Quantum technology Ecosystem in India

So, my journey on working on new areas and incubating them continues...

The principles still remain the same- Continuous Learning. Following my Purpose. Focussing on the results. Focussing on creating impact and Remembering that Life is not always perfect. It's not always fair either. But in the end, it's the passion that we carry in our hearts for our purpose that defines our journey.

WOMAN AT THE WORKPLACE

Mrs. RASHMI URDHWARESHE

Director

Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI)

Integrity is choosing your thoughts and actions based on values rather than personal gains. - Christ Karcher

I was born in the year 1959 in Nagpur in a middle-class family that nurtured education and individual development. Both my parents were university professors -- father in Political Science and mother in Geography. Parents would thus encourage not just studies but also acquiring knowledge in various aspects of life. As a result, all three siblings (myself and 2 brothers) became voracious readers.

I was not an outgoing student but ardently participated in most of the extra-curricular activities. NCC was a favourite activity and I would enjoy those early morning parades, rifle shooting, signal transmission through Morse Code and such. I was always a member of school dramatics and radio skits that our teachers would organize for us. In those days, we were truly fortunate to be a part of the school, which had a nice swimming pool and it was imperative for all of us to learn swimming. In addition, our family excelled and very enthused in Bridge playing, not the club type but more of family play. Three of us picked up the game at early age and developed it in our own ways as we grew up.

Our parents gave me and my brothers equal opportunities. They also were mindful that each one of us had different interest. Although to some extent our parents pushed their views to guide us in overall development as well as academics, we enjoyed full freedom to choose areas of our interest, provided we remained within general boundaries and financial means.

My mother had a career of her own, and having seen the world with keen eyes, was my advisor and guide. She would want me to be an accomplished person, learn to be strong and inculcate good family values. She would also coach me to protect myself against any eventualities. Father was a perfectionist; hard-working

and versatile person and I inherited many traits from him.

I was a bright student in school and enjoyed studying all subjects. In those days, a good academic career meant taking admission in Engineering or Medical stream. Mine was the first batch of 10+2 schooling patterns and as a result, I continued to study maths, science, social studies, and languages until much later. In fact, I had much greater aptitude in languages. Both parents although were from social sciences, they would express that STEM would be a better choice for me.

Normally the score in 12th would decide whether I could opt for medical or engineering. Nagpur had good opportunities in both streams. I had more inclination for medical, but it so happened that I did better in Maths and Physics and hence ended up opting for engineering studies. I was cautioned that the engineering college was not at all friendly for girls and courses themselves did not offer any specific advantage to girls. We had an intense discussion at home and parents pointed it out to me, but did let me go ahead with my choice. One of our relatives was a professor in the engineering college and he assured my parents about my

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mrs. Rashmi Urdhwareshe took over as Director ARAI (Automotive Research Association of India, Pune) on 1st July 2014. Before taking over this CEO position, she has a long career of over 30 years in ARAI, the prestigious R&D and Homologation Institute located in Pune.

Mrs. Urdhwareshe has a distinguished academic career: Having graduated in 1981 from VRCE, Nagpur, she acquired Master's in Electronics Engineering from Government College of Engineering, Pune. Her other professional qualifications include Certified Quality Auditor and Certified Six Sigma Black Belt from ASQ (USA) and

Diploma in Corporate Directorship from World Council for Corporate Governance (WCCG).

Mrs. Urdhwareshe serves as the Chair / Vice Chair of various national/ international bodies like:

- *Chair- Transport Engineering Division Council (TEDC), Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), New Delhi.*
- *Chair- AISC (Automotive Industry Standards Committee), which formulates Safety Standards in India during her tenure as Director-ARAI (Year 2014 to 2020)*
- *Vice Chair of Working Party on Pollution and Energy (GRPE) at the Global Forum under UN-ECE at Geneva during period 2014-2017.*
- *President Designate- SAE India.*

Mrs. Urdhwareshe is Co-author of Book on Total Quality Management.

For her lifetime contributions towards development of Automotive Technology, she is recently honored with Nari Shakti Puraskar 2019, at the hands of Hon'ble President of India.

safety and wellbeing in the otherwise notorious and boisterous institute!

Having opted for the difficult stream, I had made up my mind to put up to all those difficulties, inconveniences and discomfort that lay ahead of me. VRCE (Visvesvaraya Regional College of Engineering) being a regional college, there were boys from all over the country. From that point, there was an inclusivity, except that it was not for girls! Spending those 4 years in a boy's dominated atmosphere was quite an ordeal for me! But that is what made me stronger and tougher to face future challenges later in professional life! For a college, which was grossly deprived of feminine presence, I got a very confusing treatment. On one side, there would be tussle amongst the senior boys to extend help to me and give study books, course material and such. On the other hand, they would make life utterly miserable by staring at us, passing sexist comments, making advances and trying to show us down during studies and classwork. In the hindsight, I see it as a clear manifestation of a deprived and suppressed male dominance.

It so happened that our batch of 1977 had a greater number of girls than any previous batches. We were 8 of us in the total batch of 200 plus. That gave a great comfort and solidarity! We had our own share of fun and girlie bond that continues to enchant us even till date. Those were the days when mixing with boys would invariably be concluded to be a romantic involvement. Boys would be hovering around just for an opportunity to talk, make friendship and girls would be super-cautious and try to stay away! The college was full of notorious boisterous element and I decided to be away from such influences before it got me in any kind of trouble and disgrace.

Boys would look at us like pieces in the museum! It was in college days that I learnt to create a strong invisible Laxman Rekha around me. Boys would generally not dare to do any mischief. One day, they took away my friend's Luna only to find it at an abandoned spot inside campus. During lab sessions, they would open our purses and flip the contents from one purse to other, just for fun! Every day in the class boys would write a girl's name and link it to some obscure boy. It was always a dreadful feeling to enter the class and find obscene text on the blackboard.

In college, my focus got little shifted to dramatics and sports (Bridge). I became an avid bridge player along with my partner (a boy from the same college) won various titles like inter-collegiate championship, Vidarbha Championship and got a seeding for playing in Nationals which were conducted in year 1980 in Nagpur. From a top score in 1st semester, my grades started dropping to somewhere

at middle level!

There was only one occasion in my life, where my father has ever scolded me. It so happened that I could not clear Digital Electronics in the 4th semester! He blamed it on my extracurriculars, and I with this first failure, learnt my lesson quickly. Electronics is the same subject in which I did my Master's degree much later and acquired expertise!

My house was next to the college campus and the hostel boys deliberately chose to pass everyday by my house. In the animosity of the group, they would shout my name and it would be dreadful for me. It became a daily affair and I soon learnt to make my peace. It was much later, about 2-3 years ago, that one of those boys said to me that he is sorry to have given me so much trouble. Now with a growing daughter at home, he understands what I would have gone through!

I remember our 2nd Semester Engineering Drawing Orals. We were required to submit our classwork and the oral exam would be based on that. Like everyone, I submitted mine on the previous day. During the exam time the attendant said that my classwork file is not there in the lot! I panicked and searched but in vain! The examiner came and I was helpless without my file. The internal examiner understood the situation and he eased me out. He knew that I had completed my classwork. The oral exam therefore went quite well without my file and purely based on what I remembered!

It was a quite different time and I thought it is a small price one pays for the big choices that are made. I am sure with the changing times, the attitudes would have undergone transformation, but the depth of struggle would still remain for the girls.

The college had some basic facilities for girls. As in many educational institutes in India, toilets are never maintained well! My house being quite close to the college, I would prefer to rush home during the breaks!

I had chosen Electrical Engineering as the degree course. First few semesters were common for all the branches and we had to undergo practical/ lab sessions in areas like Smithy, Carpentry, Foundry, etc. I as a girl experienced that the instructors would give us more difficult assignments and test our abilities! We of course were tough enough to complete the job work.

In the first semester, I was one of the top scorers and thus settled in college with ease. I had good marks especially highest in Engineering drawing, where I had a dreadful experience during the Oral exam. I thus enjoyed my victory over those nameless troublemakers!

Academics was just one dimension, but the college taught me a lot.

Electrical Engineering was considered in those days, a branch more suitable for girls. It was a general trend that after passing out the girls would find jobs in power-gen units nearby. I had however made up my mind that I would build a career in Research and Technology area, although, which specific sector, I was not sure.

Girls were not taken very seriously when it came to planning careers and placement interviews or even counselling during final year. One of our professors would hate the girls to this extent that he would ignore the 1st row (where all the girls would sit) and walk to second row and then teach to the remaining class! Later, after many years I learnt that his daughter had joined the same college and then wondered whether he would repeat the same behaviour in the class!

In general, the boys would look at us a “good to have” classmates! In project work, fortunately we were teamed up with boys having reasonable behaviours and towards the end of course everyone else also started getting serious about studies, careers, and future.

Immediately on completion of BE (in fact on the next day of my final exams!) I was married. Finding a suitor was an easy matter! College and social circles around us were full of suitors. I remember a small chat with our family friend, Dr. Ratnath Mishra. He jokingly said, in Bihar, his native state, an engineer groom would easily fetch 2 lakh dowry (way back in 1980s) and on that I retorted, if at all I consider marrying into such family, they have to also give my parents a dowry of 2 lakhs!

There came a matter of choosing a partner, who would support my career and have similar family values. Fixing the alliance was quite quick and easy since both families knew each other very well. Hemant, my husband, who was 4 years senior to me, had passed out from the same college, with flying colours. He had taken up a job at Pune and as a consequence, after my marriage, I shifted to Pune to be with my husband and my in-laws.

My new family welcomed me with warm heart and so did the extended family. Everyone treated me with great respect, love, and affection.

At that time, my mother gave me a great advice. She said, I have two major transitions, marriage and shifting to new city- much away from hometown. I should therefore avoid immediately jumping into an 8 to 6 industry type job. She advised me to complete higher studies in continuation. As always, I listened to the advice and took admission in College of Engineering, Pune for M. Tech. program. Going

to academia was never on my radar but acquiring higher skills in Electronics was my desire, which would also help me in securing a job in R&D domain.

Even before completion of MTech. course, I came across the opening for Trainee Engineer in Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI). It fitted my aspiration to join R&D institute, just that it was in automotive domain. At that time, I had no clear idea what opportunities in automotive could exist for an Electronics engineer like me! I tried my luck and got selected after a very rigorous interview.

At work, I became a part of a team consisting of young engineers. We also had a competitive spirit, but quite healthy one. To prove yourself and establish as a subject level expert, it takes tremendous tenacity, commitment, hard work, and compassion. We soon bonded quite well and supported each other quite well, including our managers. We all had very exciting and fulfilling work profiles and barring a few situations, male colleagues developed broader view for my being their colleague and later their boss. I have a vivid memory of my initial annual appraisal. I was 6 months pregnant and my condition did not allow me to partake in strenuous lab and field tests. My immediate supervisor had put adverse remarks in the appraisal form, which I thought was very un-sensitive. I took it up with higher authority and finally the reviewer was required to change his comments to more fact-based conclusion. I was also then given better suited work profile till I resumed normal routine.

My upward progress in the corporate ladder was quite eventful and spectacular. In the otherwise male dominated automotive sector, my emergence initially as an organizational, then national level and later international level expert was very significant. It was purely on account of my acquiring specialized skills in automotive technologies related to vehicular safety, emissions, green fuels, electric mobility and many more. People around me know me as a soft spoken, unassuming lady having iron nerves! During one of the important meetings in New Delhi, Additional Secretary, Government of India mentioned about me that I have a lot of masculine traits when it comes to strongly handling the difficult automotive industry! Ignoring its gender bias, I took it as a compliment!

The job and roles that I was required to handle, always widened my horizon and it involved deep interaction with corporate sector, government ministries, international R&D experts, and fellow R&D institutes for collaborative work. My being a woman just remained incidental and my leadership role gave me my identity truly as a person, who did not see the glass ceiling, leave alone breaking it!

With the growing responsibilities at work, it became increasingly difficult

to devote time to family the way I wished to do. I quickly realized the situation and took some measures at work and at home. With smart working and good management of time, resources, relationships, and such, I was able to sail through the difficult phase. With one child norm, we were content with what came our way. I never entered the rat race of hopping jobs for better pay cheques. My husband also had a similar approach and we collectively were able to spend quality time together. As a woman, I always carried the burden of expectations from family, friends, and relatives. Everyone expected the lady of the house to be perpetually smiling, loving and gracious. No matter how much worked up I was, I did learn to put up a smiling mask and a brave front at home! It was perhaps more to do with my own ego and superwoman syndrome!

We developed many common interests such as instrumental music, fitness, long travels, and such. We also developed common technical expertise (Quality Management) which enabled us to take a joint project of writing a book. Our son followed our footsteps to become an engineer and we as a trio enjoyed long chats on technical subjects, automobiles, love for nature and such. We always gave freedom to our son and are glad that he has emerged to be a fine gentleman, thorough professional and a value-based individual.

I am known to be a perfectionist. Apart from being a lady boss, being a perfectionist poses higher degree of challenges to the colleagues! I soon learnt several good management techniques to offset the inherent shortcomings. It greatly enabled me to build better and stronger teams. My leadership role also got evolved in the course of time and colleagues respected me to a great extent for my expertise, excellent management techniques and above all, my value-based leadership. I became the first person to have risen from ranks to take the topmost position as Director of ARAI. I had the greatest advantage of closely knowing each and every person, every brick of the institute. Accepting me as a leader came therefore naturally.

At every stage of climbing the organizational ladder, I had followed a common approach of honest introspection and getting myself ready for the new role. It involved upskilling, re-skilling and changing the focus to re-align with organizational and national level objectives. Developing a broader vision also enabled me to be more humane and humbled than arrogant and aggressive leader. Inclusivity in thinking and in spirit is what is the crux of my leadership style.

My own experiences and wisdom are what I would like to share with the larger audience. Precisely with that objective I am writing a book titled “Women at Workplace”. It will be published in the next few months by Pearson India Educations Systems Ltd.

I have a great story to tell on women empowerment, which I am reproducing from above mentioned book:

Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, celebrates International Women's Day on 8th March to recognize achievements of women for the nation and recognizes their contributions to the society. On this occasion, Government confers Nari Shakti Puraskars to individuals and institutions in recognition to their service towards the cause of women empowerment, especially vulnerable and marginalized women. These awards are also aimed at providing opportunity to young Indians to understand contributions of women in building of society and nation.

Rightfully so, the tagline of the awards is “Compassion, Ability and Courage”

On 8th March 2020, the total 12 awards were conferred at the hands of Shri Ramnath Kovind, Hon'ble President of India to 15 women for their outstanding contributions towards women empowerment in various sectors. Their life journeys and commitment to work are very inspiring and motivating to all fellow countrymen. I consider myself to be fortunate to be one amongst this distinguished group.

During the interaction with the awardees, Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister, expressed that all these ladies started off in a very humble way with their careers and long, successful journeys. Aspiring for the highest award on women empowerment was not their ambition but their lifelong commitment, dedication and humane service earned them the honours.”

FORGET MECHANICAL

Dr. EKTA SINGLA

Associate Professor
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“It is in your moments of decision that your destination is shaped” - Tony Robbins.

Not sure if I am 'rising to any top', but there is a certain level of satisfaction – the satisfaction of developing strong beliefs, the contentment of carving my own path and the pride of being oneself. Oh wait! Don't let yourself think that I would speak like a priest or would lecture on chanting. This contentment is rather about some of the unusual decisions I could take in my life, that helped me to keep balance in progressing steadily while following my interests too. Today, being the head of the department of Mechanical Engineering, at a premier Indian Institute of Technology, I look back at the turning point!

The eldest daughter of my parents, I had two younger siblings – a sister and a brother. We were born and brought up in the beautiful city of Chandigarh, the capital of northern Indian states of Punjab and Haryana. My brother is ten years younger to me. The gap is quite good and the reason was the same as in many old stories where grandmothers insist on having a grandson even if the parents are contented with having daughters. However, there better be no assumption here that my parents had any special affections towards their son or ignored their daughters. I had no clue about any such discrimination until I interacted with the world outside my family. I had been raised as 'an eldest child', and least had been bothered about a boy or a girl.

My father was a central government employee and my mother has remained a housewife – and the duo have shown one of the best examples of living a simple, honest and dignified life. ‘How character building is an evolutionary process?’ – I learnt from them. Once in my early childhood, my father rode me and my sister to a market on his bicycle and while returning home bought us a packet of groundnuts.

on reaching home, my six-year old sister was curious to show the extra 3-4 groundnuts she got in her hands! She had taken them from the stall without the notice of the vender! My father immediately rode her back to the stall and asked her to say sorry to the person. It was just enough for us to realize how that was an unacceptable practice. It was wonderful to see the proud my father had in his honesty and in his decision of doing right! It was delightful to witness the respect - the vender had in his eyes - for my father. Honesty was never taught to us but our nerves were slowly trained!

With time I had learnt that none of our good practices can be sustained unless those are adapted inside. How Yudhishtira of the Indian epic Mahabharata took a fortnight in learning only three words of 'Always Speak Truth' – surprised me for a long time! I was always wondering if that is practically possible or if this is only a story! Also, if it is only about practicing truth? I soon realized that the way any skill can be mastered through rehearsing it, it takes regular practice to master ethics too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Presently serving as an Associate Professor at Mechanical Engineering Department, IIT Ropar, and has recently completed her tenure as Head of the department. Dr. Ekta Singla is a Recipient of National award from Institute of Engineers, CNRS postdoctoral fellowship from UPMC Paris, National doctoral fellowship during her PhD from IIT Kanpur and Institute Gold medal during Masters program from Thapar University, Patiala. With an experience of more than 15 years in the field of Robotics, her current research interests include Modular Robotics for Industry 4.0, Exoskeleton designs, Robotic assistance in vertical farming and Customized robots for service and maintenance applications. Her contribution is visible through international and industrial collaborations, various journal articles and conference publications in the field of Modular Robotics and Exoskeletons. She has completed four national projects and two are in process as PI. She is also serving as Associate editor at reputed journals and contributing for various societies. She is founder and chair of an interdisciplinary platform, PUNJRobotics (www.punjrobotics.com), to focus on academic, professional and innovation- related activities not only at IIT Ropar but to connect many institutes around.

Equality was another such lesson which I could adapt in due course of time. Here, equality is not just about gender equality, but the equality of any two beings. I remember a small incident of the times when I was in class eighth. Keeping a house-help was not common in those times. To assist my mother, a maid was hired. I don't know how, but I started taking her for granted for any small task, and moreover the feeling of upper class had probably hit me! Once my mother noticed me calling the maid by name and ordering to clean my room first. My mother called me and schooled me that “The lady is hired for help but she has her dignity. You must pay her respect and call her aunty”. I was told that each one of us is in some service, like my father is serving as a government employee, she serves households – the difference lies in workplaces and skill sets. I understood my mistake. That day on, I could never see anyone as unequal or any work small. Equality was learnt for a lifetime!

My focus here is not on the importance of any specific ethical value, but on the art of mastering any. Honesty, integrity, trust, self-motivation, belief in God and what not – we were told about many of these values but only the ones we keep practicing gets mastered by! I use this art even now. By the way, there is another feature which is worth giving attention! During any of such learnings at home and in school education, there was nothing 'women' about it! I mean I remember as absolutely no discrimination till those times. The values were same for all.

Years rolled by and times came for higher education and decision about future profession. Given a chance, I might never had stepped into this situation of selecting science subjects! Many 'aspirants' of engineering and medical streams do not really aspire to be so! What an Indian child would like to be was not a matter of his/her choice but capability, and the later was normally judged by the score in class tenth! The decision of getting into non-medical studies was also the outcome of my so-called good scores. Although I had joined an art-learning academy – my all-time passion – and within a month of learning I received mentor-recommendations for a national exam in design. However, all that was kept aside once the Matric result was announced! I got indulged in the paraphernalia of good scores, society expectations, and parents' efforts in making my future! By the way, there were no complaints, as I could see the efforts of a father in the making of his daughter's career.

Like any other engineering aspirant, I was sitting with my father, judiciously making the priority list of engineering streams which we were interested in – just after acquiring a respectable rank in engineering competitive

exams. Twenty-four years back, with no computers and mobiles, there had not been any Google, Quora, LinkedIn or other such webpages to get information. 'Electronics is at top', 'electrical is good', 'give last priority to civil' and 'just forget Mechanical' – this had been the crux of all the information gathered through our meetings around! Looking at a girl student – aspirant to be an engineer - was just enough to digest. Thinking towards Mechanical or Industrial Engineering was not even in consideration! There will be heavy machines, jerky tools, noisy industries, tough jobs and no-girl environment! Thus, we also struck-off all such choices, and rather thanked the people who gave us such an useful information!

Keeping all the parameters in mind, I finally joined Textile engineering.

Few months later, during my first year of Textile engineering, I was working in an engineering graphics hall and I found a torn piece of paper lying on the floor. It had some complicated sketches drawn on it. I remember the curiosity with which I asked a professor about it, and got to know that it was a Machine-Drawing assignment sheet of second year Mechanical Engineering students. He further explained to me that the subject needed imagination and understanding of all machine components so that we can draw the assembly without actually seeing it! No idea why, but I was extremely glad to listen to all this and I was smiling all through. The idea that assembly drawing probably touched some unknown nerves. At that point of time, I was already the batch's topper and was about to get the chance of upgrading my branch.

There had been vacant seats in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering departments. My parents and my friends were already congratulating me about getting the opportunity to upgrade to an electrical seat so soon – very suitable for girl students.

But even though I was a distinction holder in the course of 'Introduction to Electrical Engineering', I had never relished the circuit diagrams. It was difficult for me to imagine a current and how it moves! On the other side, I could spend long hours in solving the challenges given by the graphics professor. I could relish those challenges as a treat to my neurons. This first year of my stay in common engineering courses had given me a good idea about what I prefer to spend my time upon, and what I can do in this engineering world!

I made a strong choice of taking Mechanical Engineering. To my surprise, my father visited the institute the next morning travelling 300 km to look into my choices! Although he had given me all the flexibility in life, brought me up without any discrimination – but this was the matter of my future. The impact of available

information about 'no career of girls in Mechanical Engineering' was so high that it was getting difficult for him to let me do whatever I preferred to. However, he kept patience and very wisely spoke to some of the Mechanical Engineering professors.

Most impactful and clear opinion had been received from a CAD (Computer Aided Design) professor who told about the upcoming technologies. He could convince my father to let me get into the stream which will be computer oriented soon. At that point I was not thinking about my future. I was involved in the present flow. The question about future just struck me and that when I did my first 'risk-taking' decision of my life. I decided to shift stream to mechanical.

Throughout my three years - as a single girl student in a class of 65 boys and the only girl in all four batches - I had faced many ups and down, but in totality, relished the sense of my decision.

How one reacts to situations is how one builds oneself.

I got another tedious situation while completing the bachelor's studies. Amidst the globalization period in late nineties, the multinational firms have brought a boon for job-seekers in IT sector. Almost everyone was in the race of switching the professional path and adapting a quick career in software! Well, it is absolutely fine to adapt the environment but probably not at the cost of our own interests. I had the question of forgetting Mechanical again. What about my planned learnings in Graphics or Robotics! I tried to ignore the fear of no job and stuck to the planned path. Joined Master's program in CAD/CAM and Robotics, topped the batch, gained a prestigious Gold Medal and more than all that, I was in cloud nine to bag a faculty position in a reputed college at an age of 23.

No achievement is a settlement, and no milestone is a destination! We live a journey and face the next juncture. I got married soon after getting my job and felt well settled. Wait! There was something bothering me in my mind! My interest to do my PhD in Robotics had taken a significant magnitude by the time. I could not find any good opportunity except some well-known professors at IITs. Both me and my husband had been in similar streams and were working in two separate colleges. None of us could get any suitable opportunity of long study leave. At this juncture we decided to take another major decision – we left the jobs!

Leaving a regular job at Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology was discussed for years in the college! I never planned to set an example but somehow it lead to that. Our decision was quick but firm. Joined PhD at IIT Kanpur, salaries were reduced, living was in separate hostels and efforts required were enormous.

Initial one year we were under huge peer pressure. We felt insecure quite a number of times. Will we be able to complete the programs? Should we quit and go back to jobs? However, probably by that time my nerves had got the habit of keeping to any decision and sticking to the path, and that helped us not to quit but pursue the plans.

Soon we were blessed with a baby girl, and thus stepped into another level of work-home balance. My PhD advisor had always believed in my efforts and had always acknowledged my sincerity. That encouraged me throughout and I could finish my doctorate without any compromise in work. That and my husband's strong support helped me sail through.

I then pursued my Postdoc at Paris while managing my daughter alone there. Once I came back I joined an IIT of my choice while leaving available better job at far-off places! Taking decisions which were trade-offs between professional progresses and my interests was getting easier for me with time. Compromises are there in any path, it better be our choice to select one.

Today, I am a professor in Robotics and head of the largest department of Mechanical Engineering in a premier Indian Institute of Technology. A job I never even dreamt of, while carving my path! I tried to keep my learnings intact – may it be to extend honest opinions, establishing equality, strengthening belief in others or to possess positive attitude. The clarity helped me to refuse a Dean's position offered to me because I received maximum votes for a specially designed 'only women' position! I find no significance of holding a reserved position which is created to uplift and empower women! I could never appreciate such a reservation for a place where you already find available inspired women. Within a span of one year from that incident, I was selected to serve as the head of the department. For that milestone, I would always be admiring my colleagues and administration who hadn't referred any gender reservation, but believed in my working abilities to manage!

I have relished the entire long journey of twenty-five years of making decisions on how I prefer to carve my identity. I loved the increase in confidence and strength in me after taking and living each decision – resulting into a success or a failure!

Decisions on not blindly following career-switch, decision on leaving a regular job for higher studies, decision of working internationally with a child, decision on sticking to my ways of working and the list is long! Transformed from the-only-girl-student who was disliked by few class-mates to a colleague who was

voted maximum for being the head of an all-men department! It all started from that first strong decision of selecting the branch of my liking and it all could be carried forward due to the ethical strengths. I wish to thank that professor with all the regards for 'not' advising me to – Forget Mechanical!

WHEN I GAVE MY 100%

Mrs. BRINDALA MALLAPPA

Co-founder

President & COO of IonIdea Inc.

“Give 100% to everything you do and never give up.” - Mark Mills

If one was a science student in the seventies and eighties there were only two career options available – engineering or medicine. I come from a family filled with doctors. My father was the only engineer.

The turning point for me was reading Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. Reading that book made me want to become an engineer so that I could solve real problems in this world and improve the lives of many.

When I opted for engineering, there was no Computer Science available, so I selected Electronics. We learned the hardware side of things and a little bit of software.

After finishing my Bachelors from India, I went to the US to do my Master's in Computer Engineering. In the US, there was more of a focus on software programming. In mid-eighties the whole world of computers was just opening up. It was the time when Microsoft did not yet have a good operating system and the true programmers either worked on mainframes or Unix/VMS based SUN workstations. Laptops were not available and this was before cell phones and smart phones came along.

The amazing thing was that, I had a front seat for the Technology Revolution, followed by the Information Revolution. In just 10-15 years, telecommunications, VLSI design etc. made huge leaps. Today even a vegetable vendor has a decent smart phone which is more powerful than the initial series of PCs that came out in the US. The first PC we bought for our home use was a PS2 Model 50 which had one wait state. Imagine!! I am sure most of you don't know what a 'wait-state' is in a processor and your smart phones are more powerful than

any PC we had at that time.

My first job was of a programmer with a telecom company that had started the first Public Data Network in the world – Telenet. That made me a Telecom Engineer. It was an amazing experience, working with hardware, firmware and application software.

After doing that for a while, my husband and I started our own company and worked with many of the telecom companies in the US. I was still programming and the best times that I have had were debugging a difficult issue in the lab late in the night.

I am often asked what made us start our own company. When you are working for someone else, you are working for a fixed salary. Somehow it was demotivating for me. I wanted my earnings to match the hard-work and time that I put in. Those days, I was full of ideas and the happening technological boom opened vistas that promised to stretch far and wide. I felt I wanted to stretch my wings my way. It was not easy, but it was my calling.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brindala is the Co-founder, President & COO of IonIdea Inc., incorporated in Fairfax County, Virginia, United States in 1991. IonIdea is 30 years old Global IT Solutions & Services company having its IT delivery centres in USA, India, APAC and Europe regions. Brindala has grown the company to 2000 people, that is a preferred IT Partner for several fortune 500 companies, especially in the Telecom Sector, with decades of longstanding relationship. She has established and grown IonEducation solutions products division that is focused on Outcome Based Education, Competency Based Education, OBE enabled Learning Management System, Digitisation of Valuation System, End-to-end Student Lifecycle Solution, Accreditation Readiness Solutions etc. for the Quality of Higher Education in India and overseas.

Brindala has done her Bachelor of Engineering in Electronics & Communication from UVCE Bangalore University and her MS in Computer Engineering from Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla, Missouri. She heads IonIdea's Global Software Delivery, Operations and Finance.

As the company started to grow, my responsibilities became more and more administrative. I missed the days when I was hands on. Most of my time was spent in solving problems that other folks were facing so that their work was delivered on time. It was mostly managing finances, schedules, clients, vendors and a lot of people management. It seemed like I was in meetings all day long.

We were one of the first companies from the US to set up an offshore recruiting infrastructure. This was to support our work in the US. We were very US centric. The Indian operations started to grow and more work started to get downloaded to India. The talent available in India was very good but the best wanted to leave the country. That trend has thankfully changed dramatically over the years. I now see that they have great opportunities right here and life is equally satisfying in India.

We tried many senior executives to head the India operations. They would stay for 3-4 years, build their resume and leave. Finally, I got selected to run the Indian operations. I interviewed and hired 3-4 Senior Vice Presidents to run the company. It was quite a revelation when I discovered that I had very few women as options available for those positions. One VP honestly told me that he had never worked for a woman and I would be his first woman boss. The first senior woman executive to be hired was in HR. I then hired a woman for our US finance. Back then, it was difficult to find women with the diverse experience needed at the senior positions. It was common practice for women to give up promotions and new opportunities as they put their families and husband's career ahead of theirs.

Back then, my children were still in middle school when I started heading the India operation. I remember, I used to fly every 15-20 days back and forth to be able to spend time with my kids. As a mother I wanted to be there for all their main events. So, I spent a lot of time flying. Women, especially working women who start focusing a lot on their career, feel very guilty about their children. They feel that they are neglecting them. I too had my share of guilty feelings even though I knew it was a matter of psychological orientation. I would spend all the time that I could with my kids, knowing that I will probably have to sit all night finishing my work when the family has gone to bed. In an endeavor to compensate, I had too many of those stretched days and sleepless nights. I remember, when they were little and I would be out of town, I would call my husband and remind him to pick them up from school. Men tend to completely focus on whatever they are doing and forget about the rest. They cannot multitask. My daughter would tell me that she would often be the last one to be picked up from school after a program ended.

As she got older, she would get upset if I took office calls when she was with me in the car. She wanted my undivided attention. So, I learned to avoid office calls when I was driving her back and forth from school. Looking back, I am glad she insisted on that, as we had some great uninterrupted conversations.

When my daughter was in high school, I knew she would be leaving home for college soon. So, I stopped working for a couple of years. I wanted to spend time with her as this would be my last chance before the bird flew out of my nest. Once the kids went off to college, the importance of my physical location became immaterial. They were grown up, busy and independent. So, I moved base to India and took over the operations. The difference was, I was now based in India and visiting the US. Which means I was now India centric. It made a big difference in management.

Back then when I visited India every 15-20 days, and hold meetings, everyone would agree to do what was decided, however nothing would get done. It was quite challenging and frustrating for me. But when the folks saw that I bought a car, rented an apartment and was finally here to stay, then the whole game changed.

I too had to learn a few things, like how to manage them as an Indian boss and not a MNC boss. Tuning into the Indian way was a big learning-unlearning-relearning process for me. I realized that in India the relationship between upper management and others is fraught with mistrust. It seems, Indians take a while to start trusting anyone. So, I had to work hard in the beginning to build a solid team that trusted me and one that I could also trust. This is quite different from the US. There, most relationships begin with trust and breaks up if there is a breach of trust. In India it begins with mistrust, then slowly the trust is built. Indians are also willing to forgive a small breach of trust, which is not so easy in the US.

Handling Indian men and their big egos was also something I had to learn. I realized that they take offence very easily. While they are ok at being criticized or challenged by their superiors, they are completely shut down for feedbacks or suggestions from peers, juniors and women.

We have quite a few women now in the company as things in India have changed a lot. As a leader for so many years now, I have experienced that with women, an inflated ego is not the dominant issue as much as they suffer from insecurity. So, there is this one genre of complaint that I would frequently hear from women across board is that some great idea was her idea but some male counterpart took the credit for it. Women need to lean in and speak up in meetings, or else someone else is going to take credit for the work. There will always be that other

someone.

One more lesson learned was that we Indians work well with structure. A well-defined reporting system works better. If they feel they are not being carefully monitored they tend to underperform. Culturally, there are many differences in the way Americans operate and the way Indians operate. These were some of the challenges I faced when teams had to work with overseas clients -- Indians do not like to be the bearer of bad news and they also do not like to openly disagree with someone if that someone is in a position of authority. I think we are inwardly averse to conflict of any kind. This becomes a big problem in project delivery. In any delivery system, there will be hiccups, issues, small and big problems. The important thing is that we should be able to explain such situations to the client in a timely manner and resolve them to the best of our ability. Clients look for transparency, responsibility and problem resolution. They also know that things will go wrong, however, it is how we respond that matters most. An orientation to this mind-set was something I had to work really hard at. This was the area I spent a lot of time working our senior management, managers and team leads. Also, I found out that as Indians, we have a huge problem saying 'no'. 'No' is as good a word as 'Yes'. It is better to say 'No' when you cannot do something rather than say 'Yes' and not do it. When assigned additional work, folks would remain silent and not object. I had to repeatedly explain to them that that is the time to speak up and say 'I have a full load, and something has to give'. That silence is taken as acceptance and that is where the problems begin. The Manager or customer is expecting the work to be delivered, only to be told, when it is due, that it has not been done.

Understanding and managing people's expectations is what is needed by senior management. This is a 360 degrees affair. One must understand the customer's needs, the engineer's needs, the financial needs, the administrative staff's needs, the supplier's needs etc. In addition to this, it is essential to understand all the dependencies and ensure that we have addressed them. It is simple project management, but the biggest challenge is that we are dealing with human beings and their varied behavioral patterns. There are always some surprises along the way. People management is an art and not a science.

In India the boss plays a maternal or a paternal role based on the gender. If an employee is not happy at home, the unhappiness flows through to the workplace and his performance suffers. As an employer, I found it was necessary to be more involved in the personal lives of a lot of my employees. In the beginning, it was uncomfortable for me because this kind of personal touch is not the norm in the US.

In US there is a very clear demarcation between work and personal lives.

But with time things settled well and I found that after working for a while with my team I had made myself redundant. The good old saying – empower with oversight worked beautifully. The team trusted me and I trusted the team. Everything was working well but life has a way of giving a few googlies along the way. I went for a routine cardiac checkup and the cardiologist said it may be a good idea to do an angiogram. Voila! – they found 2 blocks and I had to get a stent. It was preemptive, caught before an attack, so all was good. That made me rethink my priorities in life. I decided to hand over all the operations to others and am now only responsible for global finance and human resources. I wanted to have free time to pursue some other interests after having run operations for almost 25 years. Often, I am asked whether I faced challenges because I was a woman.

In the US I could see there was a glass ceiling for women. All the company directors of publicly traded companies were mostly men. A lot of the top executives were mostly men. There were women engineers and we were treated at par with the men, however we were a smaller number. To be honest, I never did face external challenges. We started our own company fairly early in our career and when you are the boss, things are a bit different. The challenges I faced were those that I put on myself. I was my harshest critic. I was a control freak and everything had to be just right, so I did everything!

If there is one message, I would like to give other women engineers and entrepreneurs, is go easy on yourself. You don't have to be Superwoman, Supermom, Super wife, Super-CXO. It is ok if the house is a bit untidy when the kids are young and there is a dog at home.

Go easy on yourself.

Take some time off and make sure that you are in good health -- both physically and mentally. We burn the candle on both ends and don't realize that this is damaging us permanently.

On the work front I have a few things to say too before I wrap up this beautiful journey of mine down the memory lane. As women, we and our mothers and grandmothers have worked extremely hard to get us to this place. We owe them all a huge debt of gratitude. Let us do everything we can to the best of our ability to repay that debt – whether it is cooking, child rearing or being an entrepreneur. Give whatever you do your 100% and learn to relax and take care of yourself in the same way too.

COURAGE. PASSION. INTENTION

Dr. MANASWINI RATH

Technology Strategist

Honeywell

"Leaders are made by the situations they are involved in. Every time you rise to the occasion, the leader in you becomes stronger." - Madeleine Albright

It was my first job. I was working in a supervisory role with the Indian Railways. One fine day, I was just wrapping up in the evening to leave for home, when a worker, 6 feet tall and muscular came to my desk and put a knife in front of me. He asked me to book him for extra work every day. I was already doing it in round robin to provide equal privilege to everyone. But he wanted an exclusive arrangement for himself. He was a "Gunda". He even threatened that he would hunt me down outside the office and kill me. I was then in my early twenties and it was my first job, that too in a profession where there were no women and definitely no women boss. And I was their female boss! I don't know how I did it, but I just stood firm and told him, 'Let's go outside right away. You can kill me right now.' My heart was pounding all the while, but I did not show it on my face. Seeing me taking a strong stand, he became submissive and changed his tone. This was my greatest lesson -- inner fear makes women weak. If you just face it with a fight back attitude, the situation turns in your favor. I have lived these moments and turned many such hostile situations into favorable ones.

But, as they say, Rome was not built in a day, and neither was I.

My parents and siblings nurtured me every step of the way to mold the strong woman in me. They would often say – Don't behave like a girl. I guess what they meant was that they did not want me to become the stereotype girl that most girls were groomed to be, back in those days.

I used to participate in debate and dance programs outside school hours. The venues for these events were far from my home. All events were done in the late evening after school hours. Whenever I asked my father or brother to drop me, they

would say “Do not behave like a girl. Be independent and manage yourself by bicycle. All the boys are coming on their bicycles. Why can't you do the same.” Once I had a big fall while playing and got hurt badly. I was crying for too long, and my father again nudged me up saying “You are strong, just move on”. This mindset has made me strong and fearless.

I was given the freedom to do anything of my choice – study, debate, dance, sing or choose my friends as long as I excelled in all my endeavors. And I did. I was a star girl and won every competition in school and in the community. The habit of excellence has been the core implant in my life which has helped me achieve big things in life, including getting into IIT. Not too many girls in our times could manage that, and it gave me a sense of great achievement.

Back then my family was facing certain financial crisis and so I decided to join Indian railways very early in my career to support my family financially. That was one interesting phase of my life -- my first job in Indian railways. I qualified for an all-India level examination and got selected for a supervisor role. In the history

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a professional I lead the world's largest Autonomous Driving team developing Level 2 to Level 5 software for Autonomous Driving. I lead more than 2000 engineers based in India, US, EU, Japan, Korea & China. I have created solutions for world class solutions to all car makers. I am also a certified counselor and healer and have healed more than 1000 individuals for their physical, psychological, and environmental problems. I have published 3 books on self-improvement and self-evolution

through shift in consciousness.

With over 25 years of experience in the safety industry, with organizations like Honeywell, General Motors, Infosys, Indian Railways, Central Research Lab (BEL) I have 22+ patent applications & 60+ publications in technical journals & conferences.

I have received the “Woman Technical Leader of India” Award in 2018 and the “Women Leader of the year” in September 2019 and is the ‘1” Indian lady on the ISO board’ defining ISO 26262 standards. I was also a member in SAE System Engineering Forum

I have a Ph.D. in Metaphysics from University of Metaphysics, Sedona, USA, MBA in Engineering Management from Coventry University, UK and masters from IIT Kharagpur

of Indian Railways, they have never considered woman for this role, probably because no woman ever qualified in the examination. The environment was not at all women-friendly and somewhat hostile. The workers did not know how to behave with a woman. There was no hostel facility for women and we had to temporarily stay in the men's hostel till other arrangements were made. There were no ladies' room in the workshop too. They finally cleared up one of the gent's toilet for us and handed us a lock-and-key. Still, the place was so open that we did not feel comfortable to use it. It all seems like a nightmare now. After 26 years, if I look at the same workshop, it is extremely favorable now for ladies. Back then, as I was the only female, everyone stared at me like I was an alien. My first day at workplace attracted lots of laughter and embarrassing comments. The crowd was so crude that they did not even try to conceal their rude reactions. Even though it was nerve wracking, I thought it was quite understandable because they have never seen a female boss. When I walked into the canteen for food, people would gang up a little away from me to gawk and laugh and whisper amongst themselves. "See, a lady boss. She will manage us". The brazen manner in which they conducted themselves felt threatening and I wanted to quit every single day.

But I did not.

And that's when I learned a very important lesson in life – quitting can never be a solution. This situation made me rock solid to face any adverse situation in my life. I later on went ahead and did a very good job and earned a lot of respect from these very workers.

After a few years, I realized I need to do higher studies and get into a mainstream engineering job. I left my job with the railways and did my higher studies. I then got into a Central Research Laboratory and worked as a scientist. Later I joined Honeywell to pursue my career as Architect and Subject Matter Expert. I then decided to do my MBA from the UK and PhD from the USA. All of these have elevated my knowledge and experience and brought me immense growth in the personal and professional front. When I look back and analyze those situations, I realize that every time I made a decision on my own and not under social pressure, I have taken the right decision.

Engineering leadership is very male driven, and I am always in the minority. I have always been a single woman in a gang of boys. This has been a unique scenario for me for a very long time. I was one among few girls in college and specifically was the only girl in my department. In my work life, I grew very fast as a leader and into executive management. I hardly find any women as my peers.

Fortunately, I have always been supported by my male colleagues and they have never made me feel different because of my gender. I have been travelling across the world alone since the last 15 years. I travel alone and that too, most of the time, I reach my destination past midnight. Once I landed in Detroit, USA late at night and went to the hotel where I was booked. Now, they have this policy of informing for late night check in. I could not do that as I was in flight throughout. When I reached the hotel, the front desk executive was totally unaccommodating and even misbehaved with me. He simply informed me that my booking was cancelled, and that I need to make my own arrangement. It was 2 AM in the morning and no taxi was available. Suddenly one Chinese person, who overheard our conversation, came forward and offered me a drive to a nearby hotel. He also stayed till I checked in and then said his goodbye. I realize that if you have faith and not lose confidence, things work out favorably. As women we are hard-wired to panic in any kind of crisis situation. But if we don't panic, we can handle any situation.

Other events in my life that made me further strong were my travels to foreign lands. Travelling alone really has a way of toughening you up. This one time I was on a day trip to Poland from Paris. On the way back, there was a heavy snowstorm. So, the flight got delayed in the first leg and I could not catch the flight from Vienna to Paris. They gave me a ticket for the next morning. So, I had to find a hotel room for the night and no one spoke English. Quite eerily, the airport too was pretty deserted. It took me 3-4 hours before I could convince them to get me a room. That day felt like harassment, but now I am prepared for all such situations.

I believe what makes me sail through is that I live with the highest quest to learn. Learn formally and learn from life every second. While I take every opportunity to learn from every event in my life, I also make all attempts to do formal education continuously. After my integrated master's in engineering, I joined a job in MNCs. While working as an engineer I went through several certification courses that enhanced my skills further. I then stepped into a technical management role, and finally did an MBA from the UK so that I formally get trained in management.

Along with my profession of engineering, I was also pursuing a lot of activities in occult science and quantum physics. I have done certifications in international courses on energy healing, hypnotherapy and much more. I then enrolled myself with the University of Metaphysics, Sedona in the USA. Since this was a new subject, I had to do graduation and masters in Metaphysics before getting qualified for Ph.D. I did that and finally, I did my Ph.D. in Metaphysics

from the same institute. I created a new modality and a meditation technique to heal our own self as part of my master's thesis. For my PhD thesis, I created a new Therapeutic Technique to change one's DNA by programming the 48 strands of DNA. This technique is the first of its kind that helps people change their reality of life.

As a senior executive, I am responsible for creating, establishing, and executing large businesses. For this role, I must travel abroad very frequently. For the last 15 years and more I have been travelling to various places in the USA, Europe, Japan, Korea, China almost 20 times a year. I have faced different situations in different countries – culturally and socially. The most difficult one was to get vegetarian food in earlier years. When I asked for a vegetarian burger, I was given a beef burger with vegetables in it. But now, the situation is much better. In fact, there are vegetarian restaurants all across. Another funny incident I remember was in China back in 2008 or early 2009 -- I was staying in a service apartment outside of Shanghai. People in that small city do not speak English at all. They call India as 'Indu' in their local language. So, I needed a kitchen knife to cut vegetables, and I asked these two young people in the front office. It was a series of dumb charades act. I acted like I was cutting veggies. It did not work. They were staring at me with blank faces. After a series of hit-and-miss, I tried acting like I needed something to chop off my head and then the guy understood. He then brought me a butcher's knife. I had to manage cutting with that for the next seven days until I found time and bought one. So finally, I asked a Chinese friend to write down a few regularly used Chinese words and phrases.

Nowadays, language conversion apps help a lot.

These situations that I have faced would put fear in any person's heart. But I did not give in to fear. Be aware of the fear residing within. I would like to say that “fear is a self-created disease”. I have never put the thoughts of fear or anxiety in my mind and hence it never bothered me. I always attract good situations in my life and have experienced that I always get more than positive responses that I have imagined. I have now made tons of good friends across the world and enjoy meeting them when I travel.

I believe that I am a fearless and inspirational leader, and I practice inspirational leadership.

There are various leadership styles. If we go back in history the leadership style was mostly authoritative where kings and landlords were the leaders and life was governed by them. Later, the leadership style became delegatory leadership

where leaders delegate activities to others and get things done. Then came collaborative leadership style where collaborations with subordinates and peers were practiced. It led to motivational leadership where few leaders motivate others to follow their style by being role models. I have been labeled as a motivational leader in all the organizations that I worked for, as they get inspired by my style and get motivated. Today I consciously practice an inspirational leadership style which encourages leaders to be empathetic and be a contributor to individual lives. As a leader, we directly and indirectly play a big role in the lives of individuals we touch. Instead of words, if we contribute the role of a coach in their life to help them grow in their own way, we would be a better leader.

I am very focused on achieving results. I put all my hard work in achieving the extraordinary. I believe in being infinite as the limit to stretch and achieve something beyond our comfort zone. Human mind can learn anything if we use it to its full potential. The first thing needed is for every individual to believe that they can.

I believe I am a contributor towards life. I always try to do things that would bring goodness to my life as well as other's lives. Be it education, extracurricular activities, my writings, or my profession, I always seek value. What is it that I am bringing in? What little difference is that I am making? These self-seeking questions have become a pillar of my life now for a very long time. I search for purpose and probably because of this, I have been leading a very happy, peaceful, and successful life. Clarity towards who you are and what you want in life is the greatest attribute that provides happiness in life. My life is a reflection of who I am and what I believe.

RISE OF THE PHOENIX

Dr. MANASWINI RATH

Director

Pimpri Chinchwad College of Engineering

*"I am a phoenix bird. Even if the past has burnt me, I can still rise from the ashes. - **Damarnadh**"*

The first step is to admit that there is a problem. The story I wish to share today is not aimed against a set of people, my country or society. It only wishes to challenge the thinking process, which was once, and still is in some parts of the world, a fully accepted norm.

I was born into an average Indian working-class family who went through an all-important realization: Education is necessary for survival, no matter what your gender.

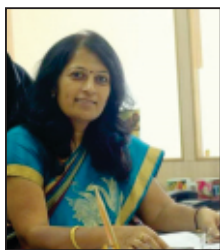
As the eldest of two daughters and one God-send son, I was groomed to be the perfect Sanskari (Cultured) role model of a girl - quiet, sincere, studious, obeyed every order without question, respected elders, and embodied the sacrificial mind-set as per the checklist of an 'Ideal-Indian-Woman'. I was taught from a very young age that my future husband knew what was best for me, that my family was only my family for a time being till I got married and that my in-law's family will be my real family in the future. I needed to learn to please my in-laws by providing household services like cooking, cleaning, dusting, and washing. After I got married, some of it came naturally to me, while others were just expected. It seemed like I grew up, but nothing changed. I remember that as a little girl there was this teacher who carried a huge stick with him and beat the small kids on their little palms. The aim or let's say the purpose was good - the students should learn. But the fear of the teacher made me stammer from the age of 4 or 5. It has reduced now but still exists. But I learned to live under pressure and expectation from a very young age.

So, anyways, going back to my education, after my 12th, like most other

students who are at the crossroads, I too was confused. My parents wanted me to become a doctor. They believed that it provided financial stability, societal respect and increased my probability of marrying a doctor. As obedient as I was nurtured to be, I took efforts in that direction and got into one of the best colleges for medical studies in India. But on the side, without their knowledge, I had also applied for engineering and was accepted in COEP, the best in engineering at that time. The two roads diverged, and Robert Frost was my guide. I collected all the strength I had and told my parents that I am going to pursue civil engineering instead. It created a lot of confusion in their minds as they did not understand the concept of “interest” in a career. For them career meant respect and money. 'Interest' was not factored. They also believed that engineering was not a career suited for a woman, and the civil branch was beyond me. But I was fascinated by the creation process seen in civil engineering and was determined to pursue it. So, I disagreed consistently enough for my parents to give in to my decision.

Bachelor of Engineering education began, and I moved to the city of my

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Janhavi Inamdar has worked in various capacities as HOD, Vice Principal, Principal and Director and has unique experience of international collaborations.

In 2005, she was selected for designing the syllabus for the international masters program in "Sustainable Built Environment" which was under the Asia Link Program of European Union. She visited Aalborg University, Denmark. Brunel University, UK and Hunan University, China, were the partners in the project.

She was instrumental in sending around 11 to 15 faculty members every year for their PhD program in Aalborg University, Denmark, Europe. Ph.D. program has continued since then with addition of various universities like Technical University of Sofia, Bulgaria, Europe, and Aarhus University, Herning, Denmark, Europe, and National Technological University, Ukraine. Also, the Masters program in University of Arkansas, Little rock, USA started in 2018. From the year 2014, she started working for a unique program called "UG fellowship ". It is a summer internship program of 45 days in 11 international universities in the USA, UK, Europe, Russia and Ukraine.

Now in Pimpri Chinchwad Education Trust, she has joined as Director, International Relations and started developing collaborations with many renowned universities abroad for Dual/Joint degree programs.

dreams -- Pune. Pune was one of the best considered cities for education, modern lifestyle, and freedom.

The first evening, as I reached my allotted hostel; a bunch of boys, drunk with undeserved entitlement, sat around the gate of the girls' hostel, and started hooting and passing leud comments as I walked by. This was unexpected in my modern dream city, but I was used to this and had an effective way to deal with it -- ignore, look down on the road and walk straight ahead. In a few minutes, I reached my hostel and had forgotten the horror I felt. My roommate, Pranali was waiting for me with a can of beer in her hand. She was born and brought up in this city and was someone I considered ultra-modern. She was also the kindest and the smartest person I met during my time at COEP. The next evening, on our way back from class, we came across those rowdy boys again. I told her about the eve-teasing and before they or I knew what was happening, she shot them down with words and a little threat. They went running and never looked back. I was scared by the exchange, but it made me feel powerful. From the city I come from, such behavior of boys were accepted as 'boys-being-boys' and girls were taught to watch out. It took me some time to adjust to the new environment, but I am thankful for the experiences that paved my future.

Even though I was passionate about Civil Engineering, it was not a piece of cake. We were only 5 women in a class of 60. At that time, girls were not supposed to talk to boys. If you sit with a boy or spoke to boys, you were judged to be 'easy'. That's what I was told and that's what I believed. But now, I had to sit in a class with 55 boys. It was unnerving. But Pranali helped me open and break my barriers. She never pressured me into anything but just looking at her being fierce, unafraid of judgement and as the purest human being I had met; I started to question my mental models. Skip to a year later, we had a great mix of boys and girls in our friend's circle. We loved to hang out, go trekking or to the boat club, and helped each other in coursework. I started to enjoy the small rebellious moments and breaking of the societal expectations.

The coursework went smoothly. I felt proud of my achievements and was positive about my decision to pursue my dreams. With my newfound confidence, I soon started applying for on-field practical trainings. But every company I applied to, they rejected me by saying that the on-site laborers will not listen to a woman. One day I went for an interview that I got through my friends' contact. I reached the office address and wasn't surprised to find that the interviewer had only agreed to interview me because my friend failed to mention that I was a woman. To entertain

me, as I had travelled all the way, he sat down and asked me some questions. He questioned my choice to do civil engineering and said, "Why would you steal a college seat from a capable man who needs to earn for his family?". I looked confused. He said, "You will take care of the house. Why get a degree when you are going to cook anyway?". I went home that day, completely devastated, and cried my heart out.

The next day I got a job as a teacher.

I was unsure at first because of my stammering problem, but soon realized that I was good at it. Around this time, I decided to use my knowledge for the betterment of my students. I wanted to make education and the workplace better for anyone and everyone who wants to work.

Over the next few years, I settled and started enjoying my career to the fullest and married my best friend and colleague. It was a rebellious inter-caste marriage that took place with a small ceremony in Pune (For those unfamiliar with the Indian tradition of arranged marriage, it is a situation where the parents and elders in the family decide everything about the marriage of their children including who they marry. Choosing your husband was frowned upon). I moved in with his family and all the 'obedience towards in-laws' training I received as a young girl felt like it wasn't enough. In my childhood, I was taught to be a good housewife and also a good bread earner. Unfortunately, my husband was only told to be a breadwinner. He was trained to not do any work inside the house. Everything was handed to him always, either by his mother or sisters. He was very supportive of my career but believed that I should manage both work and home completely by myself.

Soon new responsibilities were added to this job. We were blessed with a lovely baby boy, and I was selected for a master's degree. The toughest period of my life started. I needed to balance my career, master's education, household chores, the duty of a daughter-in-law, a wife and now, a mother. I started my masters in COEP when my child was 4 months old. My mother-in-law helped to take care of my son but kept pestering me about my choice to work and study further. I thought it was because she felt that I wouldn't be able to manage time for my child. But after a few years I understood the real reason when an opportunity came to me for my Ph.D. whereas my husband had not received any response to the same. This time she was extremely vocal against me getting a Ph.D.. She said that women should not get more education than men. An educated financially independent woman, especially if she earns more than the man, would retaliate to her husband's

domination and then the marriage would fail. This was what was taught to her and what she believed. I started working on my Ph.D. after my husband submitted his work.

The next few years went smoothly. I visited Aalborg University Denmark to work on the Asia Link Program of European Union and was introduced to the Project Based Learning concept. I knew this was the most important missing link for the Indian education systems and I decided to pursue it. I did a training on PBL at Aalborg University and the efforts of making PBL a common way of education in India started.

I am instrumental in sending around 11 to 15 faculty members every year for their Ph.D. program in Aalborg University, Denmark, Europe. Ph.D. program has continued since then with addition of various universities like Technical University of Sofia, Bulgaria, Europe, and Aarhus University, Herning campus, Denmark, Europe, and National Technological University, Ukraine. Also, the master's program in University of Arkansas, Little rock, USA started in 2018.

From the year 2014, I started working for a unique program called "UG fellowship". It is a summer internship program of 45 days in 11 international universities in the USA, UK, Europe, Russia, and Ukraine. Hence my collateral benefit was that I got to experience the world and the whole of India. It made me a confident solo traveler, both nationally and internationally.

Lots of lovely experiences and stories to tell. But the most encouraging, inspiring, and stimulating story is the story of my life. From being rejected at various platforms for being a woman, to providing opportunities of real-time project experience to students all over India, I finally knew I made it.

LEARN. GROW. CHANGE. REPEAT

Ms. Hardevi Vazirani

Head of Corporate Development & Strategy
Schaeffler India Limited

“Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you.” – John C. Maxwell

As I reflect on my experiences, I am glad for the choices that I made, to walk on the path that led me to where I am today.

Believe it or not, I never set out to be a successful career woman.

All I did was,

- Practice ‘can do attitude’ – an uncompromising effort at everything I did.
- Remain ‘down to earth’ – an awareness of personal humility to overshadow the air of success.

I am a ‘work in progress’ and will remain so, as there is so much to learn and so much to adapt to. Even today, at the age of 52, I am learning swimming to overcome my Aquaphobia.

Growing in the 70s, in the Western part of India in a city, now called Vadodara, I was the second of three siblings. I have an elder sister and a younger brother. Environment around the society might have been discretionary and subjective for a girl child, but luckily, my parents did not think that way. Even today, I remember, a rich north Indian family in my neighborhood where the daughters were sent to an average vernacular school for Girls while the sons attended a grade-A Co-ed English Convent School. The practice was prevalent. So that way we were blessed! Our parents provided for all three of us, equally, the best that they could afford. I think that was the differentiating factor. I believe that the quality of our early life shapes our future to a great extent.

My father was a Public Relations Officer in Post office, a well-respected person across hierarchies, known for his philanthropy and social engagements. My

mother, who chose to be a home maker, had a Bachelor's degree in Home Science and served in Gujarat Electricity Board until I was born. Ours was a comfortable middle-class Indian family. Throughout the year, our parents celebrated good academic results of their three children, we enjoyed happy Sundays (yes, back then, weekend concept had not evolved) and did yearly vacations, alternatively to Delhi and Mumbai where my uncles and aunts lived. But as fate would have it, at age 14, when I started my milestone year of academics (matriculation), my father passed away. My mother decided to resume her career to provide for the family of four now. Fortunately, we were surrounded by a very supportive extended family from maternal as well as paternal side. Now that I reflect on my early years as a teenager, I learned my first lessons of life -- Personal humility from my father and Resilience from my mother. I went on to complete Bachelor of Commerce from The Maharaja Sayajirao University in Vadodara followed by a Diploma in Computer Studies, National Computing Centre, UK and then a Diploma in Business Management. Through this entire journey of my early life and academics,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



After successful stints in different functional roles in Information Technology, Finance and Strategy in Schaeffler India and Schaeffler China for 28 years, I assumed current role as Head of Corporate Development and Strategy, Asia Pacific, headquartered out of Schaeffler Singapore. Schaeffler develops and manufactures precision products for everything that moves – in machines, equipment, and vehicles as well as in aviation and aerospace applications – with its INA, LuK, and FAG

brands.

I started as a System analyst in Schaeffler's FAG Maneja plant located in city of Vadodara in Gujarat. After eight years in IT, went on to fast track progression to resume expat position of Director, Finance in Asia Pacific, headquartered in Shanghai and subsequently Vice President, Finance in Schaeffler India. After fourteen years in Finance, opted for a change to Strategy & Business Development role to lead a Post-Merger Integration of Schaeffler's entities in India. And now I am in a role of Corporate Development and Strategy for Asia Pacific, headquartered in Singapore. This journey has simply been remarkable and fulfilling.

I cannot recall a single instance of discomfort or different treatment as a girl child. The funny thing is that my brother teases me even now, that he was a victim of discrimination

In 1989, I started my career as a trainer in a mid-size IT training institute. Almost every six months, I changed jobs as IT knowledge was in demand back then and supply of trained IT professionals scarce.

In September 1992, over a cup of tea, a friend – to whom I am eternally indebted -- said he has got calls for two job interviews at the same time. He suggested I should apply for one which was his second priority. I agreed. I attended the interview and got selected, all in a week's time. This was a German company called FAG Bearings India Limited (now Schaeffler India Limited), a Mechanical Engineering company producing automotive components. My real corporate career started in FAG's IT function as a Systems Specialist for automating Finance processes. I completed 28 years in the organization in September 2020 as I hold the position of Head of Strategy and Regional development of Asia Pacific.

It feels good as I pen down my journey and reflect on the fact that as a woman, I surely faced intentional as well as unintentional biases at workplace. But certain ground principles that I followed for myself, made me not only survive the odds but to excel. I remember, during my early days my boss would always ask whether I have plans to get married in the same city, whenever we had this yearly individual performance review and development dialogue. His argument was that he did not want to waste a promotion on someone who might be a potential attrition risk. And because I am a woman, I was considered to be the obvious risk factor. The other recent incident shared by a friend was that, she got a lower increment, as she was on a six-months maternity leave even though she attended to most of the work from home during her leave period.

Her maternity leave was counted, her commitment ignored.

Such stories are not uncommon, but, for me, the ratio of supporters has always outweighed negative critics. I think that's the thing that counts. From time to time, I came across inspirational leaders and mentors, attended certification programs of repute at INSEAD and at IIM. I also participated in global coaching sessions in Schaeffler to sharpen my skills and knowledge. My focus was more on keeping positive attitude, accepting challenges in new roles, learning and growing. Whether it is a man or a woman, there are traits and habits which are considered as 'X-factors' in an individual that steer up a person's career. As I look back, there are few learnings that I would like to share that helped me to become a better person at

work and in life.

1. Leadership means making a difference irrespective of title

In nineties, corporates had a different setup of IT infrastructure. Employees did not have an assigned desktop or laptop. Most employees were even averse to using one, as user-friendly Microsoft applications were not there then. But to put it in a positive note, it was easy to make a difference, by encouraging functional teams to use desktop instead of manual sales, purchasing and accounting registers and teaching them how to use basic software like Lotus and Foxbase. With a bit of an extra effort and involvement, I was leading, even though I was an entry level specialist who was doing more than what her position description asked for - Inspiring people to learn computers, allowing them to make mistakes and supporting them to perform by adapting to new technology.

My Message : A good leader is the one who constantly strives to make a difference – with title or without title.

2. Be versatile and adapt to change

In the last two decades, I have personally observed and witnessed the unprecedented pace of “disruptive changes”. I have learned that every wave of change brings a pressure to adapt. I consider myself to be a “Versatile” leader as I was able to cope up with competing priorities in different roles which came along my way and mostly out of my comfort zone. I could develop a wider range of skills and develop a global network of colleagues with different expertise and competence.

It is always difficult to step out of a conditioned environment of security (comfort zone). Moving to Finance function was a big step that I took in 1998 after serving 10 years in the IT field. My passion of analytics, numbers and understanding of business needs, lead me to Asia Pacific regional role in Shanghai as a Director of Finance for Industrial business unit and subsequently as a Vice President, Finance, Schaeffler India. I have never set functional boundaries as I lead several CSR projects, complex Post Merger Integration projects, and Integration of IT systems. After twenty years in Finance, in 2018, I was offered a role in Corporate development and Strategy function. By now, adapting to change was in my DNA. As I sit to write this article, holding a position of Head of Strategy and Regional development in Schaeffler's Singapore office, I pause to think that there can be at least one more functional role that I can play, before retirement.

My Message: Success is always and surely outside comfort zone. So be versatile and adapt.

3. Empathy towards all stakeholders

This is a topic, where I had to build my capacity over period. Experience is the best teacher. I found myself unlearning outdated management practices and adapting to new ones. I made my mistakes along the line and developed this trait of being empathic towards “all” stakeholders.

As a good leader, it is very important “to be a good listener” and “understand stakeholder perspective without being judgmental”. I had to work on this skill as this was an area of development in my behavioral assessment in early days of being a manager. I would interrupt or cutoff a colleague if he was taking too long to make a point. Or, I would monopolize a conversation and not allow an opinion from a colleague. As a participant, in one of management program for Asian colleagues, I learned about low-context and high-context cultures, and that as a leader, it is important to understand that communication methods vary individual to individual and a true altruistic leader would be empathetic and a good listener across differences.

- Step - 1. Being a good listener.
- Step - 2. To learn how to balance your mind and heart.

Taking decisions objectively and not subjectively based on emotions is a skill that needs to be honed as one climbs up the ladder of leadership. I handled CSR projects for five years and I had to learn to select a project objectively, considering sustainable contribution to the society. The lesson of balancing my mind and heart here was necessary because I had a tendency to become emotional when I saw a rundown hostel in a village for school girls from tribal areas or when I visited school for differently abled children. I realized that a balanced mind can achieve much more than an emotionally driven one.

My Message: Each one of us want to be heard and our perspectives being acknowledged (not necessarily agreed upon). Being attentive and active listener takes you to greater heights as a leader.

4. There is always a solution

In recent past, I have observed that a lot is talked about VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity). The regulatory framework also introduces Risk Management, Compliance Management and Internal controls for better

governance. Somehow, terms like “Risk” are always given a negative connotation. But “Risk” just means an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, has a positive or negative effect. Negative effect is threat and positive effect is opportunity. As I climbed corporate ladder, I learned to orient my energy towards finding solutions by confronting and literally writing down pros and cons of alternatives. One good thing that I learned in my decades of service is that there are always mentors and other such people around that can be reached out to for help. Reaching out for help is not a show of weakness or incompetence. Rather it displays your willingness to learn and be flexible and open-mindedness.

My Message: In face of a complex situation, dig a bit deeper to reach the root of the issue. Chalk out alternatives and reach out for help if required. Afterall, there are many intelligent people in the world than we might know of.

I have spent the greater part of my life with the same organization but in distinctly different functions and in different states and countries. I have been inspired by internal and external leaders as well as by some finest authors. All that matters, after learning so much, is how much of it the individual imbibes as a habit. I believe it is fortunate to be a woman as we are naturally gifted with inbuilt virtues like responding and adapting to change, being methodical and calmer under pressure. In recent times, so much is being done about gender diversity at workplace. In Schaeffler too, we are putting in efforts in this concerned direction. Interestingly, I too personally experience that women are not given equal opportunities and members of committees, vouching for gender diversity, are victim of implicit bias. There is this interesting incident, that I remember at this point. The Executive management, which included me, were visiting a shortlisted property for setting up a new Corporate office. An international brokerage firm was engaged for this real estate search. When we reached the office, a senior broker received us and he shook hands and greeted all the gentlemen of the Executive management team, except me. He then turned towards me and asked me if I was here to take down notes. The implicit bias is so deep rooted that a woman accompanying executive management automatically meant that she would be a secretary.

In my opinion, we should not attempt to eliminate those biases – but rather to prevent these biases from influencing decisions that affect men’s and women’s careers. A simple day-to-day example of implicit bias is when we say the word “nurse”, we always picture a woman and when we say “plumber”, we picture a man. Since this is a silver bullet, the way to achieve meaningful gender diversity is

not to focus on advancing women but to assure that everyone has an equal opportunity to move up—and this means eliminating the possibility of gender bias from affecting that opportunity. In this regard, my learnings as a successful career woman are as follows:

1. Never to play a victim card – Every woman must believe in her inner strength to withstand any pressure without the title of being “feminist”.
2. Women should learn to claim “me time” as it is motivational and also allows her to care better for her loved ones in the long run – so stop feeling selfish when you take some time off for self-care activities. This battery needs charging.
3. Sky is the limit – We can be what we want to be – It calls for a deeper commitment and greater efforts. And it is possible. We should not limit ourselves to specific jobs. I see women on the shop-floor in big engineering plants and it feels good that they have chosen to break the glass ceiling.

I must admit that it requires conscious and consistent efforts to overcome gender bias. I have done it in the past, and in some ways, I still do it. I see that in recruitment process, in project assignment and in so many routine decisions, we tend to be victim of implicit bias. I believe that it will take at least one generation to bring about this cultural change that’s been pivotal in this gender-bias. But the wheels are slowly but surely turning in the right direction.

My life has been a cocktail of balanced portions of learning and unlearning. It’s been fine mix of having fun as well as soul searching, extending a smile and a greeting even on a not-so-good day, and believing in myself and trusting people around me. And my mantra will remain – Learn. Grow. Change. Repeat.

JOURNEY TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP

Dr. DIVYA NALLA

Director

Nalla Malla Reddy Engineering College

“You're not obligated to win. You're obligated to keep trying to do the best you can every day.”

Engineering Education in the current times in India, especially in our state of Telangana is accessible to many students from varied social and financial backgrounds. But this increase in access to the education has resulted in compromised quality. The growth of engineering institutions did not match the number of teachers available to teach in these institutions initially. But now, even though there are more teachers available with the required degrees and qualifications, the quality of students graduating is still questionable. This scenario is prevalent throughout India which I know will improve with efforts of concerned people, I being one of them.

I have always acknowledged that leadership of these institutes play a crucial role in such conditions. The improvement in the quality of Engineering Education is possible with efficient leadership.

I am the Director of Nalla Malla Reddy Engineering College (NMREC) in Hyderabad, Telangana. Prior to this, I worked as the Principal of the same college. I am also a part of Nalla Malla Reddy Education Society that runs the college. As the vision of our institute is “To provide high quality technical education and train graduates, who are uniquely valuable to the society, industry, higher education and research”, my efforts have been aligned towards ensuring quality in the education imparted.

I pursued research in Computer Science and it was my interest in technology, responsibility towards the society, and commitment to the vision of the institute which lead me to what I could do to my institute.

I became principal of the college at the age of 37. It was a circumstantial

requirement. Prior to this, I was the Vice Principal for 2 years in the same college and so was familiar with the administrative duties. But I soon realized that administering an established organization is different from establishing a department. I had to throw myself in to the challenges. Under my leadership, the institute obtained accreditations, autonomy, and international collaborations.

I realized that the character frame-work that was built in me since childhood had a lot to do with how I managed to upgrade the institute and obtain the laurels.

I had spent my childhood in a supportive environment for my personal growth and development. My father saw that my siblings and I were not disturbed during our study time.

It is from him that we learnt that we need to think about and contribute our knowledge to the society we live in. Looking back, I understand that the environment in our house made us what we are. Prejudices about gender, careers, financial status or social status, all these never mattered. Even now, I find it difficult to digest when I see people with these prejudices. Making a career just for earning

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Divya Nalla is currently working as the Director of Nalla Malla Reddy Engineering College. Prior to this, she worked as faculty and the Principal of the same college. She has done her masters in Mathematics from Osmania University, M. Phil. and Ph.D. in Computer Science from University of Hyderabad. She has done her post doctoral research in the field of Information Security from the School of Information Systems of Singapore Management University..

She was presented with Institutional Leadership award by Indo Universal Collaboration for Engineering Education (IUCEE). She is also the recipient of Women in Education Award presented under Dewang Mehta National Education Awards by IPE.

Her research specialisation is Cryptography & Information Security. She presented papers on Engineering education in international conferences on Education, and also served as reviewer and chaired sessions in these conferences.

Outcome based education through faculty training and designing of teaching learning processes has been successfully implemented by her in the institute. Taking Engineering Education Research to implementation in the classroom, and experimenting with methods to improve quality in engineering education are the areas she works on in addition to administration.

was never even a thought for us even when my friends used to think about their future careers to earn a fortune!! My family never opposed us on decisions I made about my career. My mother gives critical but fair reviews on our decisions though. In fact, my father understood that my strength was logical thinking and mathematics and hence seeded the idea that studying mathematics would be good for me.

Later on, getting into technology through research was my idea. I never knew that girls chose one career over other based on their gender!!

Though I was not an introvert in my high school, I was not fully confident on stage. I was outgoing and made many friends wherever I was in school or even after entering college, but did not have the courage to stand up and speak when I needed to. When I was in my 11th standard, I once volunteered to sing on stage with encouragement from my friends. The song was about having courage, and I was shivering. The irony of it, made me introspect, but the fear still persisted. While doing my graduation in Electronics, I took up a project in college which bagged the first prize. When my friend who presented the project got appreciated instead of me, I knew I had to overcome my fear and should stand up and talk or else lose the opportunities coming my way.

I did my Bachelor's degree in an all-women's college. In post-graduation, I entered the university campus where boys outnumbered girls. Me and my group of friends happened to be the most outgoing and active group in the department. The much-needed courage in me was built up during this period. The sports facilities in the campus were revived and students of the college started utilizing them with our initiative. During this period, I was privileged to meet some of the best teachers who inspired me to choose teaching over other careers.

It was during my PhD days that I became more independent in exploring new avenues and learning. I worked as a faculty in a new program started by the state government which followed the principle of learning by doing. This was the first time I was exposed to such methodology, and found it very interesting.

As I was the only researcher in the department choosing cryptography as the field of study, I had independently explored the possibility of collaboration with researchers from other institutes. Collaborating with other researchers and interacting with outside world enhanced my independent thinking and also helped in building up my confidence. Even though I did not have any fellow doctoral students in the department to have research discussions, the Head of our department at that time, the faculty of the department and the non-teaching staff

were very supportive and were a strong emotional support. My guide especially pushed me in becoming more independent. This is a life skill that girls need to learn at a young age. This, 'being-independent' skill helped me sail through during my early days of administration, when I took over as the Principal of the college. As a Principal, there were many decisions to be taken. But once I became the Principal, it became my duty to explore and find solutions to problems by myself. Little could I realize where I left my stage fear at this point in life.

My vision to provide quality education was the driving force that made me implement academic and administrative reforms in my institute. One of my colleagues and friend who, at that time, was the Director of Faculty Development Center, and I would have endless discussions on new plans and scopes. She trained the faculty in outcome-based education. Later on, I got introduced to IUCEE (Indo Universal Collaboration for Engineering Education) which helped us improve our teaching-learning process.

Once I was fully convinced about outcomes and their importance in teaching engineering, we started training our faculty, which started with making them frame meaningful and doable outcomes. This was in 2010, even before I became the Principal of the college. In the beginning, my decisions were influenced by experienced people around me with traditional mindset. But after a while I understood that I need to be stronger in decision making. The push-backs at various steps, and doubts about my capabilities, may not be fully because I was not as experienced. Being a woman also may have had an influence. But strong in my convictions, I still went ahead, and found that I could convince even highly experienced people with my ideas. My uncompromising attitude saw to it that my ideas were eventually implemented practically at ground level.

What I discovered during the process was that any kind of reform in academics was first opposed. Opposition was not during discussions or decision-making period, but during implementation. When a faculty member was not convinced about an idea, they simply did not implement that. In an academic institution it is the teacher who needs to implement academic reforms for quality improvement. Training the faculty and making them understand the significance of quality in teaching is an important task. Understanding this, the teachers were provided regular training sessions. Training the faculty was step one. Implementation, that's stage two, was the most important part. We made it mandatory for teachers to prepare learning outcomes for each course they imparted and ensured their quality by measurable review and feedback. It was a huge task

and took a long time to get everyone participate.

We started a Quality Assurance Cell consisting of subject experts with immense experience in teaching and research but are not allowed to teach any more as they have crossed the permissible age limit as per the regulatory authorities. This is one problem with our policies. We lose out on these experts' expertise with such regulations.

Having observed the students and the faculty for more than 15 years, the quality seems to be coming down year by year. The students are not even able to put their ideas in writing. This is the basic tenet of education which they are supposed to have received. But this is the situation even with the faculty applicants. We hence tried implementing a Language Improvement program for every student of the institute. The program involves improving the students' writing skills. The faculty of the institute were also assessed and weaker ones were trained and improved in the language component.

This was initiated by the founder and Secretary of Nalla Malla Reddy Education Society Sri Nalla Malla Reddy who is a role model for many, with his commitment and dedication for building a knowledgeable society.

Development of an institute requires a 360-degree effort. Faculty, students, and processes all need to be concentrated on at the same time. Setting up efficient teaching learning processes, improving student outcomes, encouraging and obtaining research outputs, collaborations, industry associations, competing for rankings, and improving the outreach of the institute, each of these need to be concentrated by an academic administrator. Missing out on any will make the institute lose out in the current race. Reforms in processes ensure implementation according to my experience. With this philosophy in mind, I am trying to improve the existing processes.

Every day is a challenge as well as a learning experience for me.

Being an administrator of an institution, there is a requirement of building leadership who will take our ideas further. I understood that simply giving directions does not help when we want to build leaders. Building leaders requires that the leaders be convinced of the ideas and implement those with full conviction. I could successfully do that. Some people generally have apprehensions in following the ideas of women, even though they are at the leadership level. There have been situations where my colleagues were biased, and not supportive of me. There, a little bit more effort is required to overcome the dogma. I try and ensure that whoever works with me learns something beyond what they already know. I

too learn from each of them every day. It's a two-way process. This learning makes my coworkers satisfied and get inspired. At any place, there will be people who tend to take undue advantage of situations. But to be an efficient leader, one needs to understand the capabilities of each of their team players and thoroughly utilize their strengths. My approach is to focus on the planned outcomes utilizing the strengths of the team.

I understand that the aim of this book is to encourage women across the world to enter into the forbidden world of STEM. So, I must take this opportunity to highlight my little contribution in this matter. Women in India still have it hard when it comes to higher education, especially engineering. During my student life, I heard lots of such personal struggles by fellow students. So, when I took the reign as an administrator of this institute, I have brought the matter to the forefront. My efforts are always to narrow the hiatus between the genders – both, for student as well as faculty. Today, in our college, the average strength of girl students is about 40 percent and women faculty strength are about 38 percent. I am confident that 50-50 representation is not a distant dream!

A few years back our affiliating university had introduced the course 'Gender Sensitization'. As I never came across any gender bias situation in my family or career, I thought that the concept is now old fashioned. But the overwhelming biased mindset of the students shocked me. The boys in the class were very apprehensive about the idea of girls being treated equally, or getting their rights at home!! This was really an eye opener for me. I realized that even though the colleges maintain an unbiased environment, it is their upbringing at home that has created these biases. We, in our institute are trying to educate the young men on gender biases through our women protection cell. These youngsters can create a huge difference once they start treading the world.

Whenever I come across a lady staff having a dilemma of choosing between family and work, I try and counsel. My general observation is that women at work are more committed and sincere in their work when compared to their male peers of the same age group. But biases do exist. Women need to prove themselves before being looked up to in most situations. But solutions also do exist. I don't take it as a problem. I believe it's a challenge to excellence.

Success of an organization depends on the visionary leadership. Having a clear vision with proper planning and execution ensures this success. This aspect is true at all times regardless of the gender of the leadership. Women may sometimes face obstacles in reaching the top. But once a leader, nothing can stop them from

leading their organization to success. A word to all the women out there – Do not underestimate your capabilities - there's much you can do -- you can do wonders!

MOVING FORWARD BY GIVING BACK

MS. MALAVIKA SAGAR

Chief Human Resources Officer
TE Connectivity

Growing up in a middle-class section of Mumbai, I learned at an early age that whatever profession I chose, it needed to be one that drove impact for others.

Experience is my favorite teacher, but my parents and family were a close second. Both of my parents worked hard and were exceptional role models for my sister and me. My father rose through the ranks to become a C-Suite executive in the advertising industry. A proud girl dad, he encouraged us to compete with our male peers—there was nothing the boys could do that his girls could not do. Unlike many households in India, I always knew a working mother. After taking over a mid-sized business that distributed Austrian machine parts from my grandfather, my mom grew the business to be the top distributor in India. Looking back, she was a supermom; she was everywhere. She still works, probably more than she should.

Values ruled my environment growing up. A staunch work ethic, education, and fairness were prolific themes in my family. Even my grandmother received an education as a young girl and spoke English, which was unusual for women in India in her day. I guess you can say that equality is part of my DNA.

I learned the importance of high standards from my grandfather. He was a leader for the whole family who exceeded the expectations that others had set for him. For example, he moved to the big city with \$5 in his pocket and eventually set up a business with an Austrian company at a time when very few people travelled from India. He led and coached people, earning respect from the community because of what he did for others. Because I had working parents, I spent a lot of time with him. He believed in me, and he always encouraged me to do better. I never wanted to let him down.

As a child, I gladly traded barbies for bicycles, compared scars with my friends, and was not afraid to bend—if not break—the rules. I remember asking for a motorcycle as a teen, but I ended up with a scooter. In a particularly rebellious act, I stole my male cousin's motorcycle just to get the experience of riding at a higher speed. That was perhaps one of the only ways my parents differentiated between girls and boys, as they made clear their concern for my safety in the aftermath of my devious jaunt.

Otherwise, many of the stereotypes and traditions of who and what I should be were perpetuated by the society around me—not my family. Globally, but especially in India, the fight to earn a seat at the table is much harder for women and there are still preconceived notions about their roles in society. There is tremendous pressure for women to excel in every facet of life, from caregiving to managing a career, rather than allowing them to define their own success.

I am lucky that the experiences and influences of my upbringing emphasized the importance of choosing work with impact and dedicating my

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Malavika Sagar is chief human resources officer at TE Connectivity, a global industrial technology leader, dedicated to creating a safer, sustainable, productive, and connected future. She is responsible for leading the company's people strategies to support customers in various industries, including transportation, industrial applications, energy, data communications, and the home. Her team attracts and retains talent through succession planning, organizational design, employee engagement, leadership development, and compensation. She is skilled in high performance coaching, building succession readiness, and leading cultural transformations.

During the global pandemic, Malavika ensured essential employees were safe and engaged while the company continued to meet customer commitments. She introduced a child and elder care benefit plan and implemented 16-week parental leave and the "Ease Back to Work" program. Malavika values inclusion and diversity, encouraging open discussions about race and inequality in the workplace. She has made critical improvements by including females in talent succession pipelines for the senior leadership roles.

Malavika graduated from Rutgers University with a masters degree in human resource management. She supports the progress of girls born into lower-income families by sponsoring their education and is a member of Chief, a private network aimed at driving and keeping more women in positions of power.

career to changing the world around us to make it better. This is the ethos that led me to explore the technology industry, since it is one of the most powerful places someone can make a difference.

I first began exploring technology as a science major in college in India. I was fascinated to learn how things work and how minor changes can lead to rapid evolution, such as the advancements we have seen in mobile phones in both form and function.

When it came time for university, I wanted to explore other disciplines, and I chose Marketing as my major. I decided to challenge myself to pursue aspirations to work in advertising on Madison Avenue. As I watched my oldest male cousin go off to the U.S., I thought “if he can do it, so can I.” He inspired me, and I was determined not to be left behind because of my gender. I recognized a need to create the same opportunities for myself, and I was fortunate to have support from parents coupled with a strong competitive instinct to excel.

At the age of 18, I headed off to Rutgers University in U.S. This decision brought me a new set of challenges, living in a new country and assimilating to a new culture. I had to figure out how to fit in, and I often reflect on this time as one of tremendous discovery of my authentic self, adapting to my unfamiliar environment. It took a while, but over time, I developed a small group of friends who became close. I started to enjoy learning about other people's experiences and cultural references. I learned the delicate art of balancing who I am and fitting in to the world around me, a lesson that continues to serve me well in both work and life.

After college, my Madison Avenue plans proved to be too difficult to achieve because of visa constraints. Instead of letting this setback derail me, I decided to pivot into a career in human resources (HR) and concentrated my graduate studies in the field. I was attracted to HR because, at the time, it was an under-served area of the business, and I believed it was an area that held tremendous opportunity to make an impact. A behind-the-scenes function, I saw the opportunity to bring it to the forefront and place people, arguably any company's greatest competitive advantage, at the heart of business strategy.

Applying the lessons about choices and tradeoffs that I learned in university, I found myself being more selective about the companies where I applied for internships. I entered the tech industry by securing an internship with a large telecom company, and it converted into a full-time job. Through my twenties, I honed my HR acumen and capabilities by learning about every piece of the function, cycling through different roles, and voraciously consuming work

experiences that would make me more well-rounded.

At the time, the telecom industry was in a downcycle, and our business was constantly challenged from a cost and resource perspective. Once again, I had a choice: I could either complain about these circumstances or seize them for what they were—moments of truth that led me to take risks and get out of my comfort zone. In my eight years with the company, I worked in talent management; HR partner positions; HR operations; mergers, acquisitions, and integrations; and lived internationally.

As a young professional, also I realized my family had given me tremendous opportunities in a society that could be restrictive to women. With the commitment I had made to my education and career, it was important for me to do something worthwhile on a personal level.

This realization coincided with a time in my life when people in my social circles were telling me to focus more on my personal life. They would say, 'There's plenty of time for work. Why not get married and settle down?' Culturally there was a lot of pressure to start a family, but my priorities were clear in that I wanted to be firmly established in my career and achieve a certain level of financial independence.

First, I was determined to build a foundation and set up a home for my younger sister to join me in the U.S. I am proud to say that she is currently making life-changing discoveries, working in New York as a neuroscientist in cancer research.

My next goal was to make an even bigger impact through my work. I knew the best way to do so was through a leadership position. I was fortunate to have many mentors who believed in me, encouraged me to eradicate self-doubt, and pushed me forward. I stepped into my first global leadership role at 29. Looking in from the outside, people may have assumed that I had achieved the pinnacle of success, but my internal narrative was quite different. I felt as though I needed to prove that I had earned my seat at the table. It was a constant exercise in building trust with my colleagues and showing my peers that I was there to add value.

I was also one of the only women on the leadership team, which also came with its own set of challenges. Though well-intentioned, I can remember one male colleague joking with me that “the team will be better behaved with you here.” It was an interesting epiphany, as I found myself wondering what the team would do was not there.

It was around this time in my professional journey that I also became a wife

and mother and faced significant external pressure to focus more on my home life. It was a struggle to balance the trifecta of work, family, and self-care. Striving for perfection in each area, I realized the difficulty of excelling in three out of three of those areas every time. At best, I would get two out of three. I leaned into my experience of making choices and tradeoffs and learned that it was important to take care of myself so that I could be good at the other aspects of life. Of course, I was judged by others, but I realized I was never going to make everyone happy. Part of my personal growth during this time was prioritizing what was important to me and choosing where to focus my energy.

In the corporate world, I think women can be more heavily evaluated on our choices. We need to be highly conscious we look and dress, from the way we style our hair to the shoes on our feet. To be honest, I found that sometimes women were the harshest critics of their female counterparts. Realizing this has only motivated me to be more of an advocate and extend myself to other women, committing to lifting each other up.

More than 10 years later, we have made significant progress on the role of women in the workplace. There is greater emphasis on people mentoring and advocating for other women, and I am happy to see it. However, I still contend with microinequities of being a female leader in the male-dominated business world. For example, our company policy requires the most senior leader to pay the bill at a company event. When I am out to dinner with my team, the server usually presents the check to a male colleague instead of me. Even though the check rarely comes to me, I am always the one who ends up paying it. There is still room for us as a society to challenge our unconscious biases.

From my vantage point, the next generation in our workforce can make even more ground on changing biases. The templates of the last 20-30 years are changing, and the rising workforce is more accustomed to seeing women in leadership. For real change to occur, we need to focus on the small details, the micro-inequities, and show-up as true allies for all co-workers. We need to be more mindful in word and deed. For example, we can stop calling a female colleague 'aggressive,' 'pushy,' 'quiet,' and, instead, use words like 'assertive,' 'persuasive,' and 'thoughtful.' We can address the flexibility we need, like not scheduling calls during school drop off or at dinner time, which will be a benefit for all parents.

It is these little things that I see holding us back. This is where I believe women leaders can offer a different dimension of awareness and empathy and bring a more holistic view of the individual—work, life, family—to the workplace.

That is one of the things I like best about my current role as chief human resources officer at TE Connectivity. This position gives me the opportunity to influence hiring goals, such as our commitment to diversity and ensuring we accomplish our goal of 30% women in senior leadership roles by 2026. I get to support collaborations with third-party partners, like GirlUp, which provides STEM education opportunities for women and girls. My team and I have created policies like return-to-work programs that help women transition back to work after maternity leave. I am also empowered to make investments in our existing employees, especially our engineers who are women, through leadership development and career pathing that is necessary to continue sustained progress. As a leader, I get to have a hand in all these advancements and take seriously my responsibility for creating an environment of safety and wellbeing so that everyone at the company can do their best work.

I believe a rewarding career journey is shaped by different perspectives and benefits from help along the way. Sometimes we need support from others, and sometimes we need to extend a helping hand. Sponsors are critically important guides on the career path, and the need for sponsorship can look different over time. I benefitted from family members, managers, mentors, and co-workers who pushed me to do hard things and use my life to make an impact. As I find myself on the executive team at TE, I want to lift others by encouraging them to choose wisely, think big, and fulfill their potential. For those who are starting their careers, particularly in STEM, I guide them to get as many diverse lateral experiences as possible through internships and early-career roles to try things out before chasing vertical promotions.

We all need to prove ourselves, but the challenge may be especially hard for underrepresented groups who need to work harder for the privilege others can take for granted. It is important to have a mindset of progress and drive the results that matter. It is equally important for leaders like me to support and guide this progress. That is the best way that I can see how we can collectively make things better for the people who follow behind us.

Even though I have worked in large corporations, I believe it is important for leaders to think like entrepreneurs by evaluating choices and tradeoffs against the impact they can have on other people's lives. Thinking like an owner requires a balance between progress, profits, people, and the responsibility to do the right thing. Growing up, I saw this with my own mother. I learned from her that leadership means deciding where to place your time and resources and forces you

to think differently, whether you work for self or a company.

I now find myself taking the same approach with my own daughter. At 10 years old, she is growing up in a very different world than I did. However, it is important to me to instill in her timeless principles of focus, choices, and tradeoffs. For example, she has been asking for a dog, so we talk about the responsibility and financial commitment that comes with caring for a pet. It is important to me that she understands the balance of time, money, responsibility, and impact of decisions like these and how she will draw on these lessons over the course of her life.

As important as it is for me as a leader to inspire and support others, it always makes me feel special when someone sends encouragement my way. I recently received a message from a colleague early in her career at TE, where she recognized me for being bold and inspirational. It is in these moments that I feel the unexpected benefits of my hard work and sacrifices and feel proud of the impact I have been able to create so far. For now, this note is tucked away, but I will be sure to reference it as my journey continues for there is still much more to do.

JOURNEYS FROM ACROSS THE INDIAN CONTINENT

While engineering is often seen as a male-dominated field, more women than ever are pursuing engineering careers and the gender gap is shrinking globally. Engineers are changemakers who play a critical role in solving the great challenges facing humanity – and its role will be even more important in the coming decades. For innovations to continue to evolve, it is necessary to balance gender representations in the field and ensure engineering advancements include all members of the society.

Rising To The Top provides an intimate and inspiring look into the experiences that have shaped the lives and career of women engineering leaders from around the country. We have the honour to have representation from the crown of Kashmir to down south Bangalore, and from West Bengal to Odisha. Different cultural layering gave different twist to each one of their lives and they have yet managed to rise to the top. By openly sharing their personal journeys in these pages, the author hopes not only to inspire the next generation of engineering leaders, but also provide valuable insight into the challenges facing women engineers all across and the opportunities that are theirs for the taking.

Rising To The Top underlines the fact that women engineering leaders are not only essential for the advancement of the society, but they are here to stay!