

"A POWERFUL COLLECTION OF INSPIRATIONAL STORIES
OF HOPE AND PERSEVERANCE BY WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP."

Where



"Will & Way"

Meet

PRIYADHARSHNI RAHUL

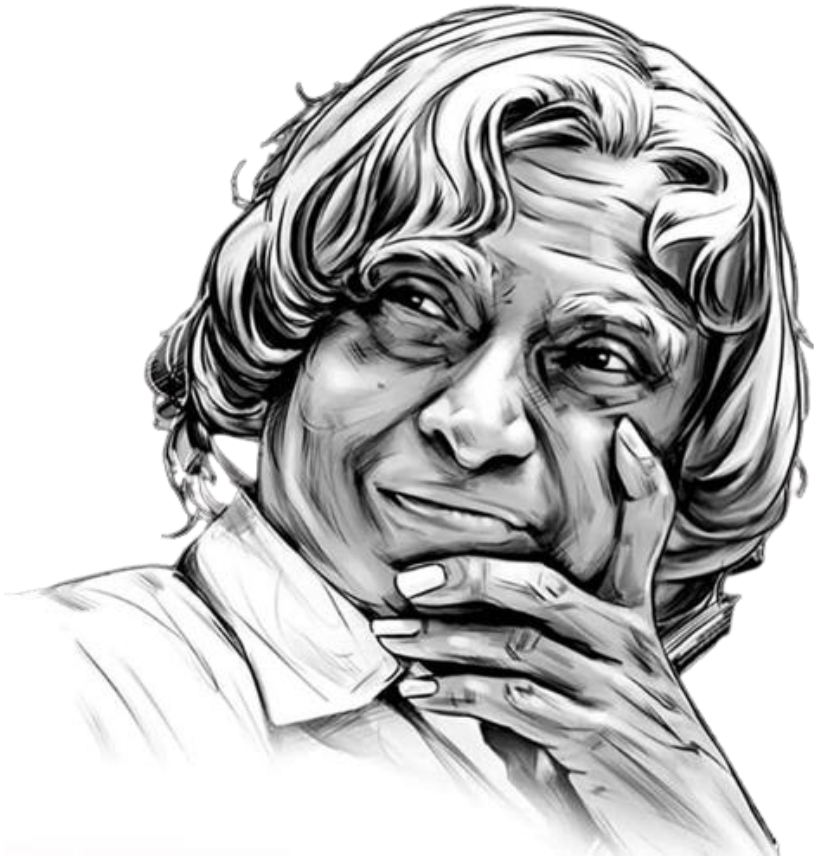
PRIME POINT FOUNDATION | CHENNAI



Maha kavi Bharathiyar's dream in 1908

**பட்டங்கள் ஆள்வதும் சட்டங்கள் செய்வதும்
பாரினில் பெண்கள் நடத்தவந்தோம்;
எட்டு மறிவினில் ஆணுக் கிங்கேபெண்
இளைப்பில்லை காணென்று கும்மியடி!**

**(We women have come to conquer education
and make laws for this world. Clap and rejoice!
No way women are inferior to men in the
attainment of knowledge)**



**Dedicated to our Mentor
Dr APJ Abdul Kalam**

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Preface

At the outset of the 12th Edition of Sansad Ratna Awards, 2022; having 'Women Empowerment' as the theme for the event, we are delighted in releasing an ebook containing stories of challenges, determination and success by 13 women achievers across professions. The term 'Women Empowerment' has seen many dimensions and has evolved in past 100 years. Today the need is more on equal opportunity, gender equality and women leadership acceptance; along with the right mentorship in handling bottleneck situations.

We attempted in raising similar pattern of questions to these women leaders to get their experiences and insights in handling parallel situation in multiple ways. This reading will be a reference book to all women aspiring to grow to their potential yet managing their personal demands as a family woman. This book tries giving you a free wheel conversation with the best of women achievers in the field of politics, banking, education, social service, sports, etc., globally and will truly motivate you in getting your best out. Their experiences will reemphasise that challenges are bound to happen and only those who find optimum solution, reach to the destination they deserve to be.

Never give up – Where 'Will and Way' Meet, success is bound to happen.

For all that I'm venturing today; I thank Shri Prime Point Srinivasan, Founder Chairman of Prime Point Foundation, my father figure, who stands as my driving source and soul in every step of my aspiration. I thank Adv Rahul Shyam Bhandari, my husband and my mother Smt. Lakshmi who are my source of energy and strength. My gratitude to our team members Shri Ramesh Sundaram and Smt. Dipti Kumar for their unconditional support, in bringing this book to you.

Priyadharshni Rahul
(Advocate, Supreme Court) Editor, PreSense

Publisher's Note

On behalf of Prime Point Foundation and eMagazine PreSense, I feel happy and proud to bring out the success stories of 13 women achievers. Mahakavi Bharatiyar a profound believer in women empowerment and equality of women propagated all his life the innate potential and strength of women at the times when women themselves failed to understand and accept.

Way back in 1900s, mocking the conservative approach towards women and demeaning casteism, he had shared his rational revolutionary thoughts through impactful poems. His dream to see women in power, administration and politics is coming true. We see many women across professions, performing better than men with the highest commitment.

When Priyadharshni Rahul, Editor of PreSense, published by Prime Point Foundation, approached me with an idea of compiling experiences of successful women achievers that will be a guide to the rest of the community, I immediately accepted. As a strong supporter of women empowerment and women leadership, I believe in their strengths and potentials. I also endorse sharing knowledge and experiences to the public is the biggest tribute one can give to society. I really appreciate Priyadharshni Rahul for her wonderful compilation.

I am confident that this book will be of great motivation to thousands of women who want to achieve greater heights in life.

K. Srinivasan
(Prime Point Srinivasan)
Founder & Chairman, Prime Point Foundation
Mg. Editor, PreSense

Supriya Sule - Parliamentarian



Supriya Sule, a well-known Indian political leader is the daughter of Sharad Pawar, another senior Indian leader. She was a Member of Parliament in Rajya Sabha between Sep 2006 and May 2009. From 2009, she is a Member of Parliament in Lok Sabha and has served 15th and 16th Lok Sabha. Presently, she is the Member of 17th Lok Sabha representing Nationalist Congress Party elected from Baramati (Maharashtra) Constituency.

She has been campaigning against female feticide for several years. She is one of the outstanding Indian Parliamentarians of 15th, 16th and 17th Lok Sabha. She is also a Sansad Ratna, Sansad Maha Ratna and Sansad Vishisht Ratna Awardee instituted by Prime Point Foundation.

Why did you choose this profession?

Being a representative of people, gives me a great opportunity to serve people and make a difference to their lives and to provide them a better living condition.

Who is your role model and why?

Shri Yashwantrao Chavan and my parents; reason being hard work, visionary and taking success and failure in their stride.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

My family and all the self-help groups I work with.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

Myself being a full-time politician, it constantly provides me with multiple learning opportunities and avenues for personal growth like reading, empathetic listening, meeting people, introspecting my work, life, etc. etc.

Challenges are a part of life - it makes life more interesting. There is no perfect life, grass always appears greener on the other side but no one really knows what any other person goes through. One must have strong core values, focus and keep working towards your cause and do not worry and measure success. You can only control factors within your control like your own behaviour, words, intentions, desires, etc. Many factors like the outcome and end result are not in your control. Always focus on your work and not on the outcome. Never ever give up on what you like to do.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

We women are gifted with multitasking and are good managers. I believe in gender equality. I think every woman is a leader - she works 24x7 and delivers superior results.

How important is family support to one's growth and how did your family support you?

My family is my pillar of strength - they continue to contribute to my growth both professionally and personally.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

No. My male colleagues have been extremely supportive of me and fellow women MPs. I have lived in Mumbai, Pune and Baramati, which are all very cosmopolitan cities, which helped me a lot in my journey

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

Yes absolutely. You can see this reflect in the Parliament itself where important Cabinet portfolios like President of India, Speaker of Lok Sabha are held by women. We also see many women CEOs, bankers, doctors, engineers, home makers, etc. It's amazing



What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

Under the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana, we managed to assist and help many people with physical aids and assisted living devices to senior citizens and differently abled. Actually, we topped the country in implementation, thanks to the team.

What according to you are the pre-requisites for a successful woman?

Hard work, open to new ideas, listen, read, willingness to serve people to best of one's ability, and willingness to stand up for peoples' development and wellbeing.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

Whether it is man or woman, patience should be kept in all up and downs we face in life. Patience teaches us how to overcome the toughest times we face.

We women are gifted with multitasking and are good managers. I believe in gender equality. I think every woman is a leader and she works 24x7, delivers superior results.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

I have always supported women in politics and the NCP Yuvati wing has encouraged young women to join politics. I would like to give them the same advice my father has given me before I entered politics - people are supreme. They are the ones who have voted you to be their representative. So always remember to be humble and give priority to people and their issues.

Always treat people the way you would like to be treated. Respect and listen emphathetically to others, value people and relationships

Keep your mind always open, we all learn from many people everyday

Leadership is about service to all your stake holders

Priyanka Chaturvedi – Parliamentarian



Priyanka Vickram Chaturvedi is a well-known Indian politician serving as Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha from Maharashtra and Deputy Leader of Shiv Sena. Prior to this, she was a member and one of the National Spokespersons of Indian National Congress.

She started her career as a Public Relations, Media and Event Management professional. She has also been a columnist for Tehelka, Daily News and Analysis and Firstpost. As a trustee of two NGOs, she works to promote children's education, women's empowerment and health. She also runs a book review blog which is amongst the top ten weblogs on books in India. She is very active in social media platforms. She has more than one million followers for her Twitter account.

Why did you choose this profession?

I sometimes feel it is the profession that chose me rather than vice versa! However, I chose to actively engage in politics because I saw a deepening distrust between citizens with its government and governance. As I came from a totally nonpolitical background, I felt I could with my own example

be able to motivate people to look at politics as a career so as to be able to raise people's voices, their issues, their concerns and through policy inputs take concrete steps towards the goal of empowering the people of the nation. I started out to make a change, I am hoping that wherever I am, I will be able to be the change maker

As a woman in a male domain, it is tough. I get trolled, character assassinated, targeted many times. However most importantly challenges are in every profession and how you react to them will decide your future in your chosen profession.

Who is your role model and why?

I have no role models, I have tried to, of course, learn from many people during my journey. I have sought inspiration from my immediate family, people I have met and some leaders who have made their mark in the field of politics, sports, armed forces or business. I think naming one or two would be gross injustice to several people who have influenced me in making me who I am.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

My family, they have stood by me through all my highs and my lows. I have been a very private person and it is only with my family that I totally get my courage, strength and motivation from. My children especially have been the biggest source of strength, it is amazing how they adapted to my erratic work hours and the high stress levels. They calm me.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

The challenges were many, however, I worked from a perspective of staying positive and motivated to take it all in. As a woman in a male domain, it is tough. I get trolled, character assassinated, targeted many times. However most importantly challenges are in every profession how you react to them will decide your future in your chosen profession

I have always believed in not fearing a tough journey but at the same time been aware of those forces that will pull you down & make you feel uncertain and inadequate as you walk ahead on your path. Politics is a tough space, it has multiple layers and insecurities



prevailing in the power structure, and how to navigate it is always a process of learning and unlearning. It becomes tougher still when you have fewer women in the space and on decision making tables, so all “rules of the game” come from a male perspective. However, strong faith in self and support from loved ones is the biggest motivation to carry on. When people say I am self-made I beg to differ, I am a people made person and that’s what gives me happiness. My journey has been unconventional- without ...

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

Yes, it is a challenge and I often feel guilty of not being there enough. Sometimes I do feel I could have been a better mother - it becomes overpowering at times. However, I would tell all mothers - it is okay to feel a little overwhelmed with the responsibilities & the guilt can be overpowering. However, your resilience and your contribution towards the family are the most valuable lessons that you are giving to your children. They will always respect you for that.

How important is family support to one's growth and how did your family support you?

Extremely important and for me the core of what I am.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

It is a male dominated patriarchal society by nature, so there is bound to be gender biases. Women's participation in labour work force, politics and policy making is amongst the lowest in the world. We need to overcome that and that can only happen by having inclusive policies. I overcome these biases just like my peers and women across profession struggling every single day to make a difference.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

If they aren't then we might as well prepare them and jolt them out of their slumber! There's a lot that is needed a lot that can be done. It is a shame that we don't have enough women CEOs, Women judges, women in politics despite 75 years of Independence and despite our constitution treating us as equals

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

I hope everything I do makes a difference in the lives of others. Every single step in that direction for me is great and significant

What according to you are the prerequisites for a successful woman?

Being positive.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

Life goes on, keep walking, with head held high.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

Keep working and never give up.

Dr Heena Vijayakumar Gavit – Parliamentarian



Dr Heena Vijayakumar is Second time BJP Member of Parliament, representing Nandurbar (Maharashtra) Lok Sabha Constituency. She is a Post Graduate in Medicine (MD) with graduation in Law. She

won the 2014 Lok Sabha elections when she was a student. She was one of the youngest MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha. She hails from a popular political family in Maharashtra. She is also the Chairperson for the Parliamentary Committee on Women Empowerment. She is one of the top performing Parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha. She is a Sansad Ratna Awardee for the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha.

Why did you choose this profession?

I am born in one of the most interior and tribal areas of the State of Maharashtra i.e. Nandurbar. Being born and brought in a tribal area I felt there are lots of challenges, lots of developmental needs of the area and in my growing years I have seen that the district has been almost all the times in the news for malnutrition, maternal deaths, child deaths and there are lots of issues which need to be addressed as a doctor. If I serve in this area I will be able to serve only in the medical field but if I join politics I will be able to not only solve the health issues but also the other problems and therefore I chose this profession.

Who is your role model and why?

My role model is both my mother and father and the reason is that since my childhood I have seen that whatever work they do, whatever they decide to do, they are perfect in it, they are THE perfectionists. What they had taught me and what I have learned from them is that whatever work we do we must do it perfectly - we must not do it in half measure, we must do it completely - not just for the sake of doing it but in a perfect manner.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

I gain strength and motivation from my father because the way he works and the ways he puts in efforts in each and everything that he does I think is really motivating. So, obviously it's my father who gives me strength and motivation.

What are the challenges you face while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

The challenges that I face while growing professionally was the from the established leadership or the established leaders who will never support those who want to grow. This is what I have experienced and therefore you have to prove yourself that you can do it and it is only after that that you get a place in your profession. So, I tried working hard, I proved myself that YES I can do my work in a perfect manner and I think that is how I overcome the challenge.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge. Your insights to young working mothers?



I feel yes because it is difficult and a tough challenge because when we as women we work. I am not married, so I am not sure if I would be able to give advice to women who are mothers or young working mothers. But I would say that this profession requires a lot of time and lots of commitments. It is not the 9 to 5 job like we have in all other jobs. So, it requires a lot of time and therefore it is sometimes become difficult for women and particularly young working mothers to give time to the family also and therefore I would suggest that out of 7 days we must have 5 working days and at least two days we must commit to the family and only after that we can give time to our family members.

How important is family support in one's growth and how did your family support you?

Yes. family support is very very important in any field wherever we are working. When we have a family support, we have a peaceful mind and when we have a peaceful mind without tension, we can really perform well in whichever field we are in - not just in politics but in any profession that

we take up. My family has always supported me. As a youngster in the age of 26, when I decided to contest in the Lok Sabha Elections, my family supported my idea. My family stood by me. My father was a Minister at that point of time. When I chose to contest from an opposition party and in that adverse situation he stepped

When we have a family support, we have a peaceful mind and when we have a peaceful mind without tension, we can really perform well in whichever field we are in.

down from the Ministry to show confidence in me. I think it was because of my family's support, I am today what I am.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

Yes, I feel there is still a gender bias because this field of politics is particularly male dominated field. With 50% reservation for women in the local bodies, educated girls and educated women are now joining this field. I think slowly the scenario will be changing over in due course. It is too early for me to say that yes it has changed or no it hasn't changed yet. However, I can confidently say that it is on the right path of changing.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

I think yes. The society is prepared to see and accept women as leaders and achievers.

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

I think one achievement that I find very significant in my profession today is the trust and confidence I have gained amongst my constituency as well as amongst my leaders. My constituency people trust me that I am capable of doing any service to them. Even my party leaders talk about me with confidence, when they entrust any work to me. Everybody is confident that "Heena Gavit can do". This is my greatest achievement, to develop trust among my stakeholders.

What according to you are the prerequisites for a successful woman?

I think the prerequisites for the successful women is that they should have confidence in themselves. We must be confident enough that what we are doing is correct and we must be committed to our work. Nobody can do any profession with half commitment and therefore I think full commitment to any work that we do is important and we must be prepared for hard work while doing it. If we really want to be successful we must be ready for whatever challenges that come in our way.

One lesson your experience taught you?

One lesson what my experience has taught me is that as a woman politician when we do something there are greater number of hurdles in front of us, sometimes purposefully. There are people who create hurdles in your path. If we are ready to face the challenges and overcome those challenges, any kind of hurdle cannot stop your achievement. I have learnt that whatever hurdles and challenges you face, you should be ready to face it and overcome them to become successful.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

My advice to women who aspire to be in my place is that you must be ready to accept the challenge. You must be confident enough to face the challenge and you must work hard to overcome whatever problems that come your way. I think only then we can be successful.

* * *

Rehana Ameer – Common Councillor in City of London Corporation



Rehana Ameer is the first Indian born woman to be elected as an Independent Common Councillor in the City of London Corporation’s 950 years of history in March 2017 from Vintry Ward. She is a serial entrepreneur with ventures in Consulting (IT, Engineering, Management) Education and Healthcare. She possesses over 25 years of experience in IT and Management Consulting where she has led, managed and successfully delivered large multimillion-pounds IT and business transformation programmes for multinational companies worldwide.

Why did you choose this profession?

Professionally and personally, I have gained a lot from the City of London and there was this constant urge to give back to the communities around me. Secondly, I wanted to change the perception of Indian Muslim women and hence I stood for election of the Common Council in the City of London Corporation in March 2017, and I won the election against all odds and became the first Indian born woman to be ever elected as a Common Councillor in the City of London’s 950 years history.

Who is your role model and why?

I have several role models at every stage of my life. The woman who sparked an interest in politics was (late) Selvi Dr. J. Jayalalitha, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. She had the gravitas to pull the masses - a true example of undeterred leadership and charisma in the world of politics dominated by men.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

As an immigrant woman from an ethnic minority background in the UK it has not been an easy ride. The drive to think big, take risks and challenges and push myself beyond my comfort zone is what motivates me to think and do things out of the box. As a result of which I have broken several glass ceilings in my corporate, business and political assignments.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

Due to my ethnic background I always had to constantly prove my ability to take up leadership roles in my corporate career. Hence, I equipped myself with the right academic knowledge and skills to make my way up through merit. I networked with the right people, built the right connections and learning from their experiences. I never hesitate or feel shy to ask questions – as I believe that only when you ask you get.



Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

Indeed, it is a tough challenge. Women are biologically wired to multitask, and one should know how to utilize this inborn skill effectively. I believe that all humans be it man or woman have one life and they need to dedicate about half of their time for self-development and work on the things they are passionate about.

How important is family support in one's growth and how did your family support you?

Family support is vital as it's not just a man's job or a woman's job. The world we are in requires shared responsibility and respecting the dreams, vision, and passion of every person in the family eco-system. My husband and children have always valued my dreams and aspirations and they believed in me and have stood by me during the thick and thin moments of my life's journey. They have a shared feeling of celebrating my achievements as their achievement too.

Do you feel gender bias exists at workplace? If yes, how did you handle it?

Yes, sadly it does exist. I have never been afraid to speak up when I see bias. I have a strong control of my emotions and have dealt it with professional maturity and calmness during such situations.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

Women represent 49% of India's population and yes, the society is prepared. Comparatively the number of women taking up leadership roles has been continuously increasing. But still there is lot more to do to have an equal representation across the board.

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

With values of perseverance and resilience I have been able to propel in my corporate career. My achievement in politics is just a start and I believe that there are many more milestones to achieve. One thing I am happy about is that I wanted to change something, and I took the step and moved forward. This is a significant achievement of taking action to achieve a passion of standing for Public Office.

In the words of Shirley Chisholm "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

What according to you are the prerequisites for a successful woman?

Have emotional control, love yourself and never compare yourself with others; nor underestimate your worth, talent, and skills. Everyone is unique and blessed with something, you just must identify your strengths and use them to your benefit.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

You don't have to prove your worth to anyone. From the start till the end, it is only you and the choices you make decide how you want to live this one life to the best of your ability and to leave a legacy for people to remember you and cherish you.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

In the words of Shirley Chisholm "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

Koneru Humpy - International Chess Player



Koneru Humpy is an Indian chess player best known for winning the FIDE Women's rapid chess championship in 2019. In 2002, she became the youngest woman ever to achieve the title of Grandmaster (GM) at the age of 15 years, 1 month, 27 days. In October 2007, Koneru became the second

female player, after Polgár, to exceed the 2600 Elo rating mark, being rated 2606.

Why did you choose this profession?

When I was just around six years old, I saw my father playing chess at home. So, I was first attracted to those pieces -- the white and black colour pieces and that's how I started to sit in front of him and learn the game. Also, during my younger days, he used to teach chess to others. When I saw other kids coming home and play chess, I was also interested in learning. I started taking up slowly.

Who is your role model?

The choice was because of the attraction and seeing my father playing chess. My main role model was Judith Polgar when I was around 10 or 11 years old. That's when I got fascinated with her successes and her way of playing in the men's circuit. That inspired me a lot.

Where do you gain strengths and motivation from?

Definitely from my family, my parents. Both my parents support me a lot irrespective of the result. There is a lot of ups and downs. Even when there is a downfall, they always will give me the positive energy to come back.

And, professionally yes. My father is my trainer. He trained me since from my childhood. He is the only trainer I have. Until 2011, he used to accompany me to all the tournaments around the world. From later on, due to his health issues and personal reasons, he stayed back at home and I started traveling with my mother. But you know even till now, we keep on discussing strategies, what to play, which tournament to focus - we discuss everything related to chess.

What are the challenges you faced while growing in your profession and how did you overcome?

Well, becoming a grandmaster was certainly a huge thing, because during those days we used to have single digit grandmasters in India. We don't have many international tournaments in the country and very few get the opportunities to play in those kinds of events. And I achieved it when I was just 15 years old. But to maintain the standard was very tough for me, for my age, as I used to have a lot of performance related issues. In the tournaments I participated, I would play like a grandmaster with very good performance and all of a sudden, I used to end up in the last place. Those days I had to face a lot of criticism. Some people would say that I don't have the standard to be a grandmaster. I was the only woman in the country having the grandmaster title. Actually, I struggled a lot during 2003, 2004. I think that was a very tough period for me to sustain that level and go further. But slowly after a few losses I started working in different angle. I tried to expand my opening repertoire. Earlier I used to have limited positions of play. But then, I improved on that. I started playing more

endgames. Also, when I used to play, I always used to look for a win even if it is an equal position. I used to push for a win. Sometimes what happens when you press too much it will become worse. I used to lose a lot of games in that manner. So slowly I realised the situation and understood where to end the game.

You are also a mother. And managing the family commitment as a working woman, is it a tough challenge? Your insights for working mother.

Definitely it is a tough task to handle both professional and personal life and to take care of the kids. But I think it is not impossible. We can always try to focus on all those things. Work life balance is important. We do miss something in personal life, definitely for sure. But we have to give up something to achieve something.

How important is family support in a person's growth?

My husband, he supports me a lot. He is into business. He also keeps on traveling to different places for work. We try to make sure our daughter doesn't miss both of us at the same time. We try to adjust our schedule accordingly. Also, it gives a lot of flexibility. Both my parents and mother-in-law live in the same city and close by. So, we are flexible. We leave her with one of them when we travel. That way my husband is very supportive.

Work life balance is important. We do miss something in personal life, definitely for sure. But we have to give up something to achieve something.

Have you started training your daughter? Is another Koneru Humpy in the making?

No, no. She is just four years old. She knows how to place the pieces over the board. I did not train her. I think it is very difficult to make a sportsperson. That is what I feel now. I always keep saying that I cannot take so much pressure and I cannot give so much energy that my parents had given to me.

Do you feel gender bias exists in work? How did you manage it?

Yeah, at certain level, I definitely feel some types of gender bias. There are times when men grandmasters were around, they used to work together and find new ideas and grow as a player. But, when coming to me, it would be very entirely different, they would see me as a competitor in most of the cases. So, I think it is definitely because of the gender barrier and obviously no man would like to be dominated by a woman for sure.

How many grandmasters are there in the country now? Is the game comfortable for women?

Now I think, we have more than 80 men grandmasters and nearing 100. Among women, we have quite a smaller number of grandmasters. The number of players in the women section is quite less. It is a more comfortable game for women. There is no need to be physically tough. Normal physical fitness is fine with mental alertness.



Even after 75 years of independence, is the society prepared to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

Accepting may be. We have improved in that aspect but not a 100%. We are in that direction that they are accepting women as a successful person in whatever field they are. We are accepting political leaders, business women - in every field. Still the percentage is quite low comparatively. I will say that we are growing in that direction.

What is the one achievement that you consider as your greatest and significant in your profession?

Definitely, winning the world rapid championship in 2019. This happened after my comeback to the game after two years break. I have won many women grand prix events and Asian Games gold medal and many tournaments. But this is very special winning the world title that too in the rapid section as I never considered myself as a rapid player. I think, to me that victory remains a special one.

What according to you are pre-requisites for any successful women?

I think it is very important to be mentally tough. I always feel when some sort of negativity or some sort of uncertain things happening around, we lose our mental toughness and go into depression. Whatever happens, we need to have mental balance so that we can come back and hit it.

One lesson that you have learnt out of your experience?

It is important to accept victory and loss as the same. If we win, we should not feel too high or loss means too down. It is important to stay balanced. The results just reflect our performance. It is important to have patience. Whatever happens we should feel that it is for our betterment.

Your advice to women to aspire to be like you?

I always feel that it is important to choose the profession in what they are passionate about. Instead of yielding to the pressure of parents or someone, it is important to take their own decisions, what they are good at and passionate about. If they choose the field they like, they will be motivated to work hard. If they choose what they don't like, they will feel stressed to do that work. I always believe that once we put in the effort, we may not be successful immediately but in the long run success will be on our way.

Avani Lekhara , Paralympic Gold Medalist



Avani Lekhara is an Indian Paralympian and rifle shooter. She won a gold medal in 10m air rifle standing and a bronze medal in 50m rifle 3 positions at Tokyo 2020 Paralympics. Lekhara is currently World No 2 in Women's 10m Air Rifle standing SH1 (World Shooting Para Sport Rankings) and has competed in the 2018 Asian Para Games. She is also the first Indian woman to win multiple medals in a single Paralympic Games. She has been given out of turn appointment as Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF) by the Government of Rajasthan.

Avani has won several Gold Medals in National Shooting Championships between 2016-20 including Winning multiple medals at the World Cups.



She is the first and only Indian female para-athlete to have won a Paralympic Gold Medal, whilst breaking the Paralympic record and equaling the World Record to win the medal. She has been conferred the highest sporting award of India, the Maj. DhyanChand Khel Ratna Award by the President of India, and has also been awarded the IPC Best Female Debut at the Tokyo Paralymp

Why did you choose this profession?

I truly believe that it was shooting that found me and not the other way around. My father really wanted me to take up a sport and that's how I got introduced to shooting.

Who is your role model and why?

My role models are my parents. They have supported me at each step in my journey, been there for me in every way. They are my pillars of strength and they inspire me a lot to give my best in everything I do.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

Very few people have the opportunity to represent the country at the biggest stage. That in itself is a huge motivation for me. Everyone's support also motivates me to go onto the shooting range and win more medals for our country. The love of your family, friends and well-wishers goes a long way to give you the strength and encouragement needed to go and represent India at the global stage.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

Women all across the world are known to be great multitaskers and Indian women are no less. I believe that with efficient time management and

organisation, family commitments can be very well balanced with work. The pandemic was a huge test to working mothers who had to manage household work and their office work due to work from home. Everyone nailed the challenge and proved that working mothers could be efficient homemakers too. My thoughts for all working mothers are that there is a fine line between professional and personal success and that we need to balance both with equal efficiency.

How important is family support to one's growth and how did your family support you?

Family support really goes a long way. If not for my family I would not be where I am today. Their support ever since my accident, to helping me prepare for the Paralympics through the pandemic has been commendable. Without their support I can't imagine my journey.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

Yes, I do believe we're progressing towards a society where we see women in leadership positions more than we have earlier. Women are doing well in all walks of life and all sectors and industries and with equal opportunities we are sure to see many more inspiring women take up roles of high responsibility.

Family support really goes a long way. If not for my family I would not be where I am today. Their support ever since my accident, to helping me prepare for the Paralympics through the pandemic has been commendable.

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

Paralympic Gold medal.

What according to you are the prerequisites for a successful woman?

Dedication, determination, passion and perseverance towards your goals.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

Life consists not in holding good cards, but playing the cards you hold well.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

Keep striving towards your dreams. If you have the fire in you to achieve what you aspire, you will surely reach your goals.



Srimathy Sridhar - Executive Director of a Public Sector Bank

Smt. Srimathy Sridhar, presently the Executive Director of Indian Overseas



Bank, joined Canara Bank as a Probationary Officer in 1986 after a brief stint at Andhra Bank. At Canara Bank, she has handled all important portfolios, including large credit. She was on deputation as Chief Vigilance officer with NABARD, State Bank of India, New India Assurance Co Ltd and Bank of Baroda, before joining as Executive Director of Indian

Overseas Bank.

Why did you choose this profession?

I chose this profession or rather this profession chose me at the age of 22. In early 80's opportunities were limited and a probationary officer in a public sector bank was a coveted job. There was a tough selection process and stiff competition. It was a challenge I wanted to go through. I succeeded in clearing the process, became a PO and here I am today.

Who is your role model and why?

I am a keen observer of people and I admire people from all walks of life around me. An artist, a mother aspiring for better career opportunities, a housewife making amazing dishes for her family, hardworking blue-collar workers, they all inspire me. I am amazed at the diligence; perseverance and the craft people show at the tasks they take up. The love that people show towards what they believe in is their calling and joy they derive from a task well done amazes me. My belief in the human spirit is reinforced when I come across such hardworking people around me. So, the answer isthere is no one single role model for me.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

In general people either believe that glass is half full or empty. I come from a family which always believed that it's important to look at the half empty glass. Family always believed that critiquing helped in preparing members for facing the world and for a career. When I entered my professional life, this upbringing helped me believe in myself, my ability and to assert myself gently when required. My organisation also groomed me to excel in work by setting the bar high. It is from these two-character molding influences that I derive my strength.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

Challenges I faced while growing professionally are not different from those that most women professionals who work full time face. Our family needs us; at the same time our profession demands full focus. I have had to make tough decisions at times in favour of family and sometimes favouring work.

Once I have made decisions, I have never revisited them or regretted them. The other set of challenges I faced was adapting to new climate, new culture and people during the frequent relocations I had during my career, sometimes to accompany my husband in his work and at other times due to my work. I have taken them as opportunities to learn and integrate myself with the city I was placed in. This attitude along with strong family support has helped me overcome challenges.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

It is definitely not a cakewalk to have a work life balance especially for young mothers managing a professional career, that too one like banking. However, it is not impossible either. Young mothers need to be willing to create a support structure and make certain trade-offs to manage work and home fronts. “I can do it all” or “I am a superwoman” should not be the mantra; accept help and support, create a support structure which will enable you to focus on your work, while ensuring home front gets its share of time

The other set of challenges I faced was adapting to new climate, new culture and people during frequent relocations in my career; sometimes to accompany my husband in his work and at other times due to my work.

How important is family support in one’s growth and how did your family support you?

Not everyone who is successful is fortunate enough to have the support from family. Having good family support makes things easier. I was one of the fortunate ones to have complete support from my family. I would like

to mention that my husband has been my moral compass throughout my life while my mother who is now 84 years old has been my anchor, my rock and has ensured things are taken care at the domestic front so I can happily concentrate on my work.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work places? If yes, how did you handle it?

Gender bias is known to exist at the workplace. However, I never faced the brunt of it. I quite frankly had a very comfortable work life. What I did feel and I believe many women professionals face is that we are observed more for any slip ups, we are trusted less, judged more and do not have the luxury of the benefit of doubt. I have taken this in my stride and used it as a challenge to enthuse myself.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

As stated, earlier women are judged more and their personal and professional lives are up for discussion by all and sundry. However I feel that in general our country is progressing, in terms of giving equal place to its women. Times are more accepting, women have more opportunities and when women do succeed, there is genuine appreciation and acceptance all around. So, I believe things are getting better for women achievers and leaders and will only get still better.

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

I do not believe I can pinpoint at one single achievement. Today when I look back at my body of work over the last 35 years, I realise how far I have

come. I feel that this steady climb which required hard work, patience and perseverance is my achievement.

What according to you are the pre-requisites for a successful woman?

In my opinion there are no pre-requisites for success as such. I think it's important to be aware of one's weaknesses and to leverage one's strengths to succeed. This holds true for both the genders.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

My experiences have taught me that even though one might be successful, there are instances when one can experience failure or feel low. I strongly believe in "This Too Shall Pass", so I think if one can have the nerves to let the cloud of low mood pass, one can emerge stronger and be back at what he/she does best.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

I would like to tell young women, to work hard, be ready to face the good, bad, ugly and be strong to leverage your strengths. I am sure you will reach great heights, and even go beyond where I have reached. If I could get here, so can you.

Pankajam Sridevi – Mg. Director of an International Bank



Pankajam Sridevi is presently the Managing Director of Commonwealth Bank of Australia in India. She has over 34 years of experience in different segments ranging from Manufacturing to Information Technology to Banking domains. She is passionate about diversity in work place and keen to get women, persons with disability and LGBT persons in the

work place.

Why did you choose this profession?

I started my career as an Electrical Engineer in Asea Brown Boveri. In the late 90s, when organizations like Wipro and Infosys were growing leaps and bounds, I joined Wipro Technologies with the intent of learning technology and also to earn a little more for a better living.

In 2005, I decided to move with my husband to Mumbai since he shifted his job and I joined Wipro BPO. I learnt about the impact BPOs have on Customers and got enticed by the great opportunity to make a difference in Customer Service. Worked with a lot of youngsters and also learnt about Quality assurance in a Call Centre.

In 2008, I joined an Australian Banking firm in Bengaluru and went on to lead its Institutional Operations and further made it to the top position as Managing Director. Again, it was a fabulous learning experience.

My drive to get to the top position was to fulfill my dream and also motivate other women who are working with me that they can and must aspire to take up bigger roles in organizations. I went on to lead all the Offshored Centres in Bengaluru, Philippines and China.

In 2018, I got a nudge from another large bank in Australia to build the Technology and Operations team in Bengaluru and I joined this Organization to showcase the skills India has in the Banking domain and build another inclusive organization, giving people a chance to build their dream careers. It is also a huge learning opportunity to build an organization from scratch and that has been the biggest motivation for me.

Who is your role model and why?

I have many role models both professionally and personally. There are so many unsung heroes & heroines I have met in my life, right from the help in my house who faced so many hardships in life and managed to come out of it, to my manager a couple of years ago who opened up my wide angle thought lenses before making even the smallest decisions.

However, my true hero personally is my father – he taught me equity – a level playing field for everyone. He taught me confidence and held his hand out to support me anytime – never judged acts of others and was a selfless human being. He also showed his vulnerability as a human being which made him an authentic person.

In the social sector, my hero is Anna Hazare. He was single-handedly able to create ground swell to change the culture of a village and encouraged women to take up professions that they respect and yearn to do in their lives. He was selfless in the pursuit of this change!

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

I gain strength from the love that I have for the job that I am doing and the opportunity that I get to learn new lessons – be it on leadership or technology. All materialistic things wear out but knowledge stays!

My motivation comes from interacting and working closely with my team as a human first and a professional next! I try and eliminate power distance as much as possible.

It's really good to see the people around me grow – in career and personal life and fulfilling their dreams. I firmly believe that leadership is a privilege and a responsibility.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

I started my career in a manufacturing setup which was male dominated. I did face discrimination and unconscious bias throughout my career. But I learnt from it and gained the courage to face it and changed the narrative in my area of influence

For e.g., when I was a trainee engineer, I was asked by my supervisor to keep his office dust free and clean. I took the strength to tell him that I will clean my desk only and he needs to clean his own desk. This needed a lot of courage. I was treated differently after this incident.

I took a change of job from manufacturing to technology. After a couple of months of me joining the technology firm, I was made redundant. This came as a shock to me since job loss was not prevalent in early 2000s. Without losing heart, I spoke to a number of people showcasing what I could do and secured a new job that I did not professionally like at the start – but this job gave success and glory to my career at a later stage. I learnt through this experience that Networking is very critical for a successful career.

In 2007, from technology I joined an organization in the banking domain and got to lead the corporate and institutional business groups. This was a

totally different domain and I was a novice – but my then boss who was a male champion of change encouraged me (nudged) to take the job. It was a huge challenge for me – I learnt from every team member and soon earned their respect in a couple of months. This taught me that it is always good for one to take up ambiguous jobs. It is also important to put the organization’s interest before personal interests.

When I applied for the Managing Director’s job in the bank, I thought that it was just an aspiration. But I got the job and was to lead my peers which was surely a challenge. I walked into office the first day with self-doubt, but I was pleasantly surprised to see that my peers accepted me from day1 of me taking charge. In a very short period of time, I realized that I could add value to every one of them by complementing the skills that they have to the ones that I have to get better outcome for the bank.

Challenges come throughout one’s professional journey – but learning from it, managing it to the best of ability and carrying on with a positive attitude and being human has been my mantra to a successful career.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

In our social environment, the lady of the house is the primary home maker and care giver of the family. There is education identity for women, but no career identity. Hence many a times, managing family commitments and home commitments is a challenge. Women have this “guilt” component in them – when at work feeling guilty about family commitments not done to satisfaction and when at home, feeling guilty that professional commitments are not met with perfection ...

The insights for young working mothers are:

1. Prioritize your work at home and office. It is not possible to become a super woman – super mom, super wife, super daughter, super sister and a super co-worker. Focus on the things that are important to you – and prioritize accordingly. Do not bother about

“what will others say about me” syndrome. What matters is what you think of yourself – self-respect is critical.

2. Find support ecosystem to help delegate work that needs to be done.
3. Learn to say “NO” when you do not want to commit to a work at home or at work. No is a 2 lettered word but a strong sentence.

How important is family support in one’s growth and how did your family support you?

Family support is very critical to the success of any individual. My family played a very important role in helping me progress my career. I got support whenever I needed extra hands to support while my son was growing up.

My spouse always believed that there are 2 careers in our house and he took care of the house when I went for an International assignment for 18 months to Switzerland. This was a turning point in my career and the hardest time of my life since I was alone in a foreign country leaving a 10-year-old at home.

The one thing that I think is important is that women talk about their pride in the job and aspirations in the job to family to make them understand that it is as important as any other aspect of life.

The one thing that I think is important is that women talk about their pride in the job and aspirations in the job to family to make them understand that it is as important as any other aspect of life.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

A workplace is a replica of a community or society – hence gender bias surely exists in the work place like how it exists in the community.

It can be reduced / eliminated if women speak up and call out the bias with courage and the tone from the leadership is about equity.

Organizing women groups in an organization and creating awareness on the biases and forming support groups will help women identify and voice bias faced.

Other interventions like reviewing pay parity, performance review parity and hiring parity helps to close the gap in gender in an organization which will in turn help in eliminating Gender biases.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

As I mentioned earlier, the society does not give a career identity and social equity for women. It's much harder for a woman to grow in career than a man. A woman leader is often referred with words like kind, helpful, good etc. while a man is referred as strong, strategic, Go-getter etc.

The needle has moved a bit here in the last 30 years, but a long way to go. Even today, a woman becoming a CEO of a company is "breaking news" because we are the minority.

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

I was introduced to hiring persons with disability and LGBT persons in 2007. Since then, I spearheaded building inclusivity in the organizations that I worked for. I was able to hire 100+ individuals with disability and 4 LGBTI persons into the organizations. The achievement is that the culture continues even after I left the organization and the culture is getting built in the current organization that I am working.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

Being authentic and integrity of a person is identified and valued by everyone!

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

- Build “irrational aspirations” in your professional life and plan towards it.
- Learn and Learn and be relevant to the current environment.
- Take up ambiguous jobs and make the intent of growth in your career clear to your family and colleagues.
- Let go off things that can be done by others – prioritize on things that you need to do yourself.
- Find time for yourself - be it for reading a book, watching a movie or see a friend.
- Help others to grow and take help from others to grow and learn.

Dr Sudha Seshayyan – Vice Chancellor of Medical University



Dr. Sudha Seshayyan, Vice-Chancellor, The Tamil Nadu Dr MGR Medical University, Chennai has been a medical doctor, a medical teacher and a medical administrator for over 30 years at various levels.

Having been exposed to medical administration quite early in her career, she has been able to successfully scale its heights with relative ease and grit. Sudha has been teaching both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This has given her the advantage of moving with successive generations and has contributed greatly to the understanding of the milieu.

She has authored many books and contributed many papers to journals. She is also a multi-talented personality. She is known for her spiritual lectures across India. She used to deliver series of talks in English and Tamil on various spiritual topics. She has a large number of fans for her talks.

With interests ranging from science to spirituality, she has been a quiz master and has compiled a few quiz books. She has had the privilege of translating former President of India APJ Abdul Kalam's book into Tamil and has also had the honour of getting it released by APJ Abdul Kalam himself.

Why did you choose this profession?

My parents were both doctors; I guess that put in the 'unuttered' choice. There was no specific direction from my parents and no specific request from me, either. But when I chose 'Biology' as my elective subject in school, they silently acknowledged my decision and when there was no textbook in English for my elective subject, and had to translate the curricular material from the vernacular book, they helped in the translation and bought me other books that could help.

Who is your role model and why?

Cannot specifically point to one figure. I have learnt and have attempted to learn & imbibe many things from many of my seniors and elders. Each one of them can be categorized as a 'role model' probably for that particular aspect. With regard to the medical field, I always remember the sayings of my teacher and Chief, Professor N Rangabashyam. As a medical teacher, I try to draw inspiration from my Anatomy Professor, Professor M M Cooper, but improvise on his ways. In my spiritual and literary discourses, I tend to take the comprehensive approach that Professor A S Gnanasambandam would take. And ultimately draw from all these and many more, to consolidate into a holistic approach.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

From prayers. I believe that 'God proposes, and God disposes.' Hence, I am always prepared to accept things in their stride. Spirituality, literature, knowledge and whatever else only add to this.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?



Many. Though my parents were both doctors and did care for my growth and education, I studied in an ordinary, average Government School. It was not the hi-funda kind of school and had only 'lesser than' basic infrastructure or facilities. Though, at no point of time would I crib about my school, I

felt a little strange when I joined the Medical School. Many of my classmates were from elite institutions and I was a little apprehensive that my style, demeanour and use of language may not be up to their levels. Initially this appeared to be a challenge, but in the next few months, I learnt I was not bad and started feeling confident.

Challenges were waiting when I joined service. I was quite young and was considered a 'junior'. Though people were friendly and nice, they looked at me as 'someone who need not be given any assistance'. As I rose up the ladder, I found myself to be surrounded by colleagues who were quite senior by age. Initially there was some hesitation to abide by, obey or even listen to the statements or orders or directives of 'such' a junior; however, by being forthright, respectful, and neutral, I could carry myself with diligence. I spoke to all of them in straight but polite words; I gave all of them their due respect as individuals; I discussed with all of them and asked for opinions. All these brought in their co-operation and goodwill.

Most of the time, the work-table of a lady (higher) official becomes a dumping ground. I too faced this situation quite often. When some information is sought or some work is requested to be completed, the colleagues and subordinates tend to do their part (only their part/ or even part of it), bring it and dump it on the table. Further co-ordination or stream-lining is generally thought to be the 'responsibility' of the lady official. So, at the end of the day, the official finds heaps of material and files lying on her table and has to tie up loose ends, stream-line and put the jig-saw puzzle in place. This probably is something that even a gentleman faces, but is a frequent occurrence at the lady's work-table (especially when ranks superior and is at a higher level and has to get work done from the subordinates). My way of approach is to have all or most of them at the common table over a cup of tea and jointly get into activity. Slowly and gradually, everyone joins the work-band.

Still, there could be some challenges; one learns to face them and overcome them; and mostly, they require being responsive and sensitive.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

Yes. Both can cause a strain on the individual. Cooperation of the family members is a must. My suggestions are:

- Take help from your close family – be it household chores or purchases front or some other work;
- Keep your parents or in-laws or some elders with you; their help and experience would go a long way;
- Don't expect yourself to be a super-woman; one cannot do everything. It's perfectly fine if you do not know certain things. If required, you may learn.

- Don't panic if someone teases you or talks in a condescending tone for something that you do not know or cannot do. Nothing is lost. If your conscience is fine and stable, then no teasing or abuse matters.
- Don't show your irritation from home at the workplace and vice versa. Remember, every colleague of yours has a similar disposition.
- Don't expect your child to be a super-performer. Allow him or her to grow normally.
- If possible, permit some kind of interaction between your colleagues in general, and women colleagues in particular. Ears lent may lead to unnoticed solutions.
- If possible, apprise your men colleagues that a lady colleague may be facing turmoil at home and so may be a little shaky. Request them to understand. In course of time, their sensitivity may even rectify shortcomings at their home front too.

**Don't panic if someone teases you
or talks in a condescending tone
for something that you do not
know or cannot do. Nothing is lost.
If your conscience is fine and
stable, then no teasing or abuse
matters.**

How important is family support in one's growth and how did your family support you?

Extremely important. I thank my parents for the understanding they have shown. My mother had to keep house when I was working 16 to 18 hours a day and sometimes even traveling. No words are sufficient to describe the support that my mother gave me.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

In some places and on some occasions, it does. Personally, I ignore. I don't seek any consideration or help because I am a woman. Women are capable of higher proficiency and focused work. And of course, are emotionally strong too. The best way to dispense gender bias away is to prove that there is no need for discrimination in opportunity, capability and productivity. The woman can and should rise up.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

Yes, definitely.

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

Having been a good medical teacher.

What according to you are the pre-requisites for a successful woman?

Calm mind, 360-degree thinking, sensitivity to the surrounds and balanced style of working.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

That all experiences are lessons.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

Go ahead.

Dr Ameeta Mulla Wattal – School Education Expert



Dr. Ameeta Mulla Wattal, a well-known educationalist at Delhi has served many prestigious Institutions as Principal. Presently, she is the Chairperson and Executive Director Education, Innovations and Training of DLF Foundation Schools and Scholarship programmes. She is also the recipient of the prestigious National Teachers Award 2005 from the hands of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. She is also a member of various

expert committees on various subjects set up by the Government of India. She has conducted many online and offline training programmes for teachers. She has authored many books and published several articles.

Why did you choose this profession?

I was a child of war. My father was martyred and awarded the Mahavir Chakra posthumously. I was deeply influenced by his actions and realized that it is in the minds of men we have to find peace. This understanding can only be brought about in schools, where the foundation of character building, mindsets and attitudes take place. That is why I chose this profession in order to influence young minds.

Who is your role model and why?

My father was my role model. He was a man of deep faith. He accepted religion as a part of his being but he never let it prejudice him. He believed that an understanding of different faiths was important because essentially all of them preached the innate goodness of mankind.

To him heritage was a concept that encapsulated the earth. He believed that there was no text that could automatically sought out ethical dilemmas for us in a world where interpretations were ambiguous and awareness was incomplete.

I remember once being influenced by a religious pamphlet titled 'Soldiers of God', in which there was a line that read, 'make a sacrifice and save a sinner'. I righteously went about putting this into practice. One day my father noticed me refusing something he knew I was particularly fond of, with an expression of pained tragedy. He asked me why and I replied, 'Sacrificing'. He smiled and said, 'Never call you best actions a sacrifice. If one fights for a cause, it is because one is not prepared to live life in a certain way.'

I was introduced to Chaucer, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, made to read the Iliad and Ulysses along with Premchand, Mahadevi Verma and a host of authors across literature.

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam was the first book that I received from him at the age of eight, inscribed with the words. 'To my dear daughter. To thine own self be true and the rest follows as the night follows the day, then thou can't be false to any man.' Six months before his death, on my thirteenth birthday he wrote to me at school, "These are the formative years of your life. Your sole aim should be to imbibe knowledge, develop sensitivity, awareness and curiosity. Let your mind wander in the realm of fantasy and fancy. It will help in developing your imagination and understanding of life, love and laughter. For those who fritter away this precious time, learning is always beyond their grasp.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

If any human being has to aspire and attain his or her goals, they have to have a deep reservoir of inner strength and self-motivation. We live in a very competitive world and are often defined by other people's impressions of us. They arise from biases, subjective opinions, insecurities and views, which may not necessarily be right. Whether we read self-help books, listen to lectures, create meditative spaces or learn from our own failures and successes, all of these become the touch stone of our core strength and motivational needs.

We require deep inner spiritual spaces, belief in the purpose, power and passion that exists within us.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?



The challenge that I faced was of constant movement from one organization to another as a result of my husband's transferrable job. This placed me at every movement back to the entry level, which was both professionally and emotionally exhausting. Having to

work your way up again and often work with mediocrity was very frustrating. It made me a stronger person because change helps in adaptability, creativity and collaboration.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

Women continue to work at multiple levels from managing families to career commitments. They have to transcend innumerable barriers where they feel their presence is needed. The burden that the educated Indian woman carries is not only of coming to terms with her own complexities, but also reaching beyond the sanctuary of her home.

The burden that the educated Indian woman carries is not only of coming to terms with her own complexities, but also reaching beyond the sanctuary of her home.

Women continue to feel a sense of guilt in externalizing their desires and fulfilling their needs.

In the first instance, young mothers should step away from dependance and passivity. All these models create fretters restricting woman's independence, sexuality and selfhood.

How important is family support in one's growth and how did your family support you?

Family support is essential to both men and women because personality evolves throughout the childhood. Hand holding is required particularly at the foundational and adolescence stage, where character, strength, self-esteem and confidence develop.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

The challenges that Indian woman face essentially at the work place is of stereotypical assumptions of their abilities and competencies. Even in schools it can be seen at senior levels. Males are preferred in the teaching of Maths, Science, Physical Education whereas females are taken on for Performing Arts, Humanities and at junior and middle schools.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

As a result of increasing literacy levels among women they are emerging in all sectors like politics, business, medicine, sports, agriculture etc.

There are success stories; female scientist from ISRO led the Chandrayan2 proving that rocket science is not reserved for men. Women were inducted in armed forces in 1992. The Supreme Court supported the government position, on women serving as army commanders. They have taken on roles as fighter pilots, engineers, signalers. However, the issue of women serving in combat roles is still a challenge.

The gender gap report by the world economic forum has shown a decline in overall representation of woman across professions including the Parliament.

Important points to be noted are that women are paid less than men. Only 14% of Indian women are in leadership roles. Despite legislation to protect women and girls, the enforcement of laws does not take place. Women empowerment is very low in rural India, which is inhabited by 70% of women. Infact, crimes against women are growing.

What is your one achievement that you consider the greatest and significant in your profession.

Teaching is not only a profession; it is a mission. It is a lifetime progression because it deals with children and their development. Education for life is a concept that cannot have *one* achievement because learning touches eternity.

What according to you are the pre-requisites for a successful woman?

The celebration of one's identity and belief that sensitivity, intuition, protectiveness and tenderness are not necessarily only female characteristics. Women are also a blend of aggression and competitiveness. Essentially it should be difficult to say which is a man and which a woman after both have boarded the street car of human life.

One lesson your experiences taught you?

Never undermine your strengths and let no one define your happiness.

Krishnasamy Bhavani – Communication Professional



Ms Krishnasamy Bhavani, has held very senior positions in Singapore Government, including that of Director of Public Communication, Press Secretary to Minister of Information, etc. She is one of the experts in Public Relations in South Asia. She was the President of Institute of Public Relations Singapore for 7 years and now she serves as its Advisor.

She runs an initiative to train the professionals on Public Relations, Crisis Communication, etc. She is also a visiting professor to many reputed Institutions on the communication related subjects. She has received several awards for her contribution to the communication domain.

Why did you choose this profession?

I did not choose this career of being a communications professional. I did a degree in business administration which was a very popular degree course at that time in Singapore.

I started in a Finance job in the government sector after my degree in business administration at the University of Singapore. I was very active

after work organizing events and social activities for the government ministry's recreation club.

I was doing well in the Finance job and moved on to head the Finance Department of the Singapore Police Force. After some years in the Finance job, I wanted to do something different and perhaps more exciting. So, I applied to be an Information Officer in the Ministry of Information and the Arts and progressed in this career for 25 years. This was a job that gave me tremendous experience, exposure and satisfaction. I worked in various positions and was posted to key ministries like the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. My work at senior positions involved a great deal of coordination with many government ministries and agencies. In Singapore, we adopt a whole-of-government approach to information and communications management for national issues and national crises.

After 35 years in the public sector, I made the next major switch in my career. I retired early and started a PR training and consultancy business, International PR Training Pte Ltd. This enabled me to work on flexible working hours. I could give more attention to my brother's family after his sudden death and later take care of my mother who suffered a serious illness and depression from the loss of her son. The last ten years have been a challenging time but I survived by being strong and determined to do whatever I can for the family and continue to work in projects and tasks which I enjoy, including travelling to various places such as Myanmar and Cambodia to conduct training programmes.

Who is your role model and why?

I do not have any role model. I never thought about following the steps of any women achiever. I just wanted to do work and activities which I

enjoyed. You must get satisfaction and happiness with what you chose to do in life.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

My parents were good supporters and provided me the strength to do whatever I wanted to do or achieve. My father was proud of my achievements in my education and my first job. My mother gave me all the support during my university days and later on when I was busy with my career.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

There were many challenges I faced as the eldest child in the family. After some years of working in my first job, my father suffered a massive stroke. I took responsibility of running and supporting the family. I had a younger sister and brother. After my younger brother got married, I continued to look after my mother till she passed away at the age of 79. While I took care of her, I think she took greater care of me. She managed everything at home, including helping my brother's family who lived a few doors away from us.

I think I was able to focus on my work because I did not have to worry about housework, cooking or managing family commitments. It allowed me to progress much in my career without the hassles of household chores.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge?

Absolutely. Women have to juggle between family and work commitments. It is expected of women to give more attention to the family. Hence,

working women have to multi-task and draw on their inner strength to manage everything.

How important is family support in one's growth and how did your family support you?

As mentioned earlier, my mother's support was tremendous. She could manage everything at home including Hindu festivals, family celebrations etc. Her dedication and love were wonderful. It gave me the space and time to focus on my career and I could travel frequently.

It is expected of women to give more attention to the family. Hence, working women have to multi-task and draw on their inner strength to manage everything.

Do you feel gender bias exists at workplace? If yes, how did you handle it?

I did not experience gender bias at the workplace. Sometimes, I get offended by certain male chauvinistic behaviour but that's all.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?

Yes, there is certainly more acceptance of women as leaders and achievers now. Women are leading large multi-national corporations and are politicians. There are so many great examples today.

What is your one achievement that you consider the greatest and significant in your profession.

My contribution as the President of the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore for seven years. I managed this position while I was working in senior positions in the public sector.

I served as President of the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore (IPRS) for seven years. I was a Council member of the IPRS since 1996 and became Vice-President in 2000. In 2002, members of the IPRS elected me as President.

I enjoyed my seven years stint as President, IPRS as it offered me the opportunity to strengthen and initiate several programmes to address key areas of professional and business development: Professional Accreditation, Private-Public Sector Relations, Continuous Education, International Networking and relations and the nurture of Young PR professionals in Singapore. My international networking included close liaison and cooperation with many PR associations around the world including India.

It is during this time that I connected with Srinivasan of PreSense and Yogesh Doshi of IABC and we are friends till today. I gave presentations in India, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and other countries.

What according to you are the prerequisites for a successful woman?

- Women must have the ability to multi-task; managing work and family commitments effectively.
- Women must be strong and resilient.
- Women must have high confidence in themselves with a can-do spirit.

One lesson your experiences taught you.....

You have to be strong and resilient. You cannot let difficulties and challenges upset you. Instead, you have to think of options and decide on the best way forward in life. I made some important decisions in my career switches. I am glad to have made them now. It offered new and interesting experiences which I cherish.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

Be strong and independent.

Udaya Tara Nayar – Entertainment Journalist



Udaya Tara Nayar is the senior most entertainment journalist in active film journalism in India. She began her career in 1967 as a trainee reporter in Screen, an Indian Express publication. She rose from the ranks to become the editor of the publication in 1988. With her taking over as the editor of Screen, the Indian Express management ventured to bring out Express Screen in Hindi and Screen Trade Information, a weekly trade journal under her editorship.

She became the first woman journalist editing three entertainment publications with wide circulation within the film industry. The Screen awards became yet another milestone in her career as the first film industry awards judged by its own veterans and, therefore, having more credibility and prestige. In 2000 Udaya Tara quit to turn her attention to her family. That was when Thespian Dilip Kumar chose her to pen the story of his life which he wished to tell his countless admirers. This book was released by Amitabh Bachchan.

Why did you choose the profession?

I had no special reason for choosing journalism. I had a flair for writing and I studied English Literature and French for my graduation. My paternal uncle, Shri S S Pillai, was a much-respected journalist and my father, Shri S Ayyappan Pillai, was educated in England and was an upright government servant – he was the Corporation Commissioner, Trivandrum -- who wrote

and spoke English fluently and lucidly. Both were voracious readers and the house was full of English novels, magazines and newspapers. They encouraged me to write anything I felt like writing.... stories, essays, poems, etc. when I had to find something to do during school vacations.

In fact, when I got into some mischief and my mother complained to my father, the punishment was to memorize a poem. My father would choose from Palgrave's Golden Treasury and recite it when he returned from office in the evening.

My uncle was the Editor of Screen, the weekly film newspaper of the Indian Express group. He liked a humorous piece I wrote describing a personal experience and he showed it to his colleague Mrs D'Souza who edited a section of Sunday Standard, the weekend supplement of Indian Express. To everyone's surprise she published it and paid me Rs. 25. That was the real fillip I would say. I was 14 years old then and she mentioned it below the byline: Udaya Tara Pillai (Aged 14). When I went to the Indian Express office at Sassoon Docks, Colaba, Bombay, to meet her and thank her she was very busy but she patted me on my back saying: "keep writing. You have it in you..." She excused herself and went into a cabin waving to me and saying once again: "keep writing. You can make your uncle proud someday...I have lots to do today my dear...God bless you....".

Who is your role model and why?

My father, mother and my uncle are my role models. I admired my father for his integrity and unflinching adherence to the principles he set for himself; my mother for the equanimity she always displayed in challenging and testing circumstances; my uncle for his unwavering dedication and commitment to his job.

From where do you get your strength and motivation?

I derive my strength from within my own inner self. If I'm convinced that whatever I set out to do is for a good purpose and it is not going to hurt or cause any kind of loss to anyone - be it material or emotional or self-respect - I get all the strength I need from within my mind and conscience to take on a challenge. The minute I get the indication that I am going to create pain and loss of any sort to anyone in my endeavor to attain a goal or grab an opportunity I am completely discouraged and I step back.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

From day one at my work place, I knew I would be facing challenges. I joined the editorial team of Screen as a reporter cum subeditor in 1967. My uncle, Shri S S Pillai, was very categorical about my position in the office. He said I would be on par with all the other probationers in the editorial setup. "Don't come complaining to me if you run into a problem. Solve the issue yourself..." he made himself very clear. When I was introduced to the staff by the Chief Sub I could sense the thoughts running criss cross in the mind of the men who were outwardly very genial and welcoming. It was not because of my being a woman in an all- male setup but because I was the boss's niece. Now I understood why my uncle did not quite favour my joining his team.

I realized that I had to work hard to give the required output not just quantitatively but qualitatively as well. My first major assignment itself was a test of my ability to do justice to a coveted assignment. I was assigned to interview Lata Mangeshkar for a special tribute to her father, Dinanath Mangeshkar, on the occasion of his 25th death anniversary. I was deterred by my seniors who knew her well. All day I received unsolicited advice.

“Lataji is very choosy. She is wary about new reporters. She is comfortable only with senior journalists. Make sure you don't greet her with your 'hi' and 'hello'. Be very polite and respectful..... etc. etc.”

I was scared but determined not to flop and above all not to let my uncle down. When I finally met Lataji she was a splendid surprise. She gave me a hearty welcome and answered all my questions without hesitation, treated me with poha and chai and wished me good luck with my first assignment. The confidence she gave me worked like magic - especially after she read the published article and phoned me to compliment and encourage me.

I knew now that no one can put you down or pull you down if you are competent and dedicated. I understood that just being a flawless writer will not get me anywhere. I had to provide the reader with research-backed substance and information. There was only one way to excel in my job — work hard.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers? How important is family support in one's growth and how did your family support you?

It was not easy managing a home and giving equal importance to professional commitments. I had a doting mother who took care of my daughter till she finished schooling. Whatever I achieved in my career as I moved vertically from one key position to another and earned respect and admiration for my commitment and discipline, I owe to my mother's undemanding cooperation and full support. After my father passed away, she completely devoted her time and energy to be my anchor and inspiration. She was educated and talented and she could have engaged herself in some meaningful activity. But she did not choose to do anything like that. She was proud of me and she wanted to see me attain my full

potential. When I travelled within the country and abroad for weeks together, I was assured that my daughter was safe and happy and all was well on the home front. I was blessed to have her support and care.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

I didn't face any serious gender bias at my work place. When I was appointed editor of Screen some men in the office thought I would not be able to handle the job as I was a mother and wife and for me the family's well-being always topped my priorities. It didn't take long for them to change their assumptions and appreciate the work I was doing with unflagging energy and dedication.

When I was appointed editor of Screen some men in the office thought I would not be able to handle the job as I was a mother and wife and for me the family's well-being always topped my priorities. It didn't take long for them to change their assumptions

What is your one achievement that you consider the greatest and significant in your profession?

There was one achievement that makes me feel good. In 1996 the management of Indian Express appointed Mr Alyque Padamsee as the CEO of Screen with the idea of converting the broadsheet newspaper into a glossy up market film magazine in order to attract nonfilm advertisements. As a newspaper and a non-gossip publication Mr Padamsee saw no great future for Screen especially with the increasing stiff competition from the satellite television channels which scored with an instant live coverage of the eagerly awaited film events.

So, he began to toy with ideas for the makeover. I protested in all sincerity because I could foresee the reaction of the industry to such a drastic change. I politely told him that Screen had the profile of a niche trade publication and it cannot be altered suddenly with no market research and no exchange of thoughts with people who mattered in the industry. I politely told him that Screen had a profile of an industry trade publication and it was considered the "Bible" of the film industry. I pointed out that it was not as simple as repackaging a bath soap with a new fragrance and an attractive wrapper.

Mr Padamsee was confident that he was right. I resigned from the job and I left for my native city Trivandrum to enjoy a long holiday with my family. In 1998 I returned to Mumbai and Mr Vivek Goenka, the chairman of the Indian Express, Mumbai, asked me if I could do something to restore Screen to its former glory. I told him I would have to restore it to its broadsheet format. He gave me a free hand and I successfully relaunched Screen in its popular size. Circulation soared and the revenue began to rise. The day the relaunch happened I felt grateful once again to God for standing by me.

What according to you are the pre-requisites for a successful woman? One lesson your experiences taught you?

I have observed that even in the past, those women who wanted to make a difference and chose to tread the path generally tread by men emerged successful by their sheer willpower and the excellent quality of work they put in. It was and still a matter of choice and determination. If we look at it another way the best chefs are men though traditionally the kitchen and preparation of food is a woman's domain. The best tailors and costume designers, the best makeup artists, the best gynecologists are often men. I have never seen any difference in the excellence and perfection of the work

they do. At the end of the day, it is the experience and competence that comes to the fore not the gender.

In my own field I see with pride both men and women working tirelessly to propel television channels to number one position. And today it is tougher because there are no rules or ethics to worry about. Jo jeeta wohi sikandar. Where does the gender difference come in? I believe that the pre-requisite for success is the same for men and women. Once you enter the fray you are a player irrespective of what your gender is. It is your choice to win with dignity and merit and grace. I personally respect women who have reached the pinnacle of their careers with the backing of high qualifications, relentless hard work and self respect and that special touch of grace that God gives to every woman.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

My experience has taught me to be aware of my strengths and weaknesses and never to be overconfident. Listen to all the advice people give you and make a note of what is good for you. Never insult anyone - not even the one you know has put obstacles in your path to success. Let them feel guilty and learn their own lesson. Don't lose your level headedness when you get the applause you deserve. Give credit to all those who supported you, including the Almighty who wrote it in your destiny. I wonder if today's smart young women need to be advised. They are so efficient and well educated in their specialized work areas that they know exactly what to aspire for and achieve.

Ali Murugesan – Special Educator and Psychologist

Smt. Alli Murugesan (Special Educator and Psychologist by profession) is the



Founder Director of Vasantham School and Home for People with Special Needs, located in Mogappair, Chennai, TN, India. Started in 1989 with six children, Vasantham has empowered thousands of children and adults with special needs and their families. Currently 134 individuals are taking services from Vasantham such as - special education, communication therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, play music and dance therapies, vocational

training by professionals. Students at Vasantham also get opportunities to participate in societal activities with the focus of inclusivity and Vasantham's motto - 'Challenge the Challenges' and making each individual to be as independent as possible. More details about Vasantham can be viewed at www.vasantham.org

Why did you choose this profession?

From young age, I had always wanted to be of some help to people around me. Have seen a few individuals with different disabilities. Overtime I understood that among these range of challenges, the ones with

intellectual / cognitive disabilities need more support throughout their life. Their chances of being independent is very less. So, I started working in a special school and later decided to start one on my own with motto 'Challenge the Challenges' to identify the strengths in their individuals and improve their quality of living.

Who is your role model and why?

Not any one person specifically. But have learnt and keep learning from life. Specifically if I have to say someone – it is my mother, who is always engaged in some work or the other, led an extremely disciplined and independent life, and doing the best for people around her.

Where do you gain strength and motivation from?

I get my energy and maximum inspiration from my own students who are amazing in expressing unconditional love, maintaining discipline, supporting each other and reacting appropriately especially when someone around is feeling low. And also, from people around me.

What are the challenges you faced while growing professionally and how did you overcome them?

Challenges have been a part of everyday life. However, I see challenges as learning opportunities and a test for one's abilities and patience. In the first place, being a woman leader is a challenge.... not for me, but for the society to accept, especially during the initial days of setting up Vasantham, in late 1980s. We started Vasantham in a rented space. Getting a space to start Vasantham was a challenge. Even if owners let out their space, neighbours couldn't accept having a residential centre with predominantly adults with special needs around. There were several temporary challenging instances. However, I strongly believe in staying patient to get the best for our

children, which is our objective. This thought has helped me and entire Vasantham as a team to move ahead with a steady growth.

Is managing family commitments with work a tough challenge? Your insights to young working mothers?

Not really. But can't say no. Depends on how efficiently one balances and gets involved. I stay with my family in the same premises where Vasantham is for one main reason that inmates need medical or therapeutic attention anytime. Quite a few of the inmates may have disturbed sleep, throw tantrums at night or have seizures or need medical attention. Therefore, staying in campus is a mandate. Our kitchen is common. Inmates walk in and out of our home. There is no real demarcation between home and Vasantham. Vasantham is our home.

How important is family support in one's growth and how did your family support you?

My mother (Late. Smt. Visalakshi) was a strong support as she used to stay with us and took care of my daughter who was 3 years old when I started Vasantham. My brother and sisters have always been supportive – currently two of my sisters who are special educators, and two other family members also work at Vasantham. They are available at any time, especially to take care of inmates when I am away to attend a meeting or travel. My daughter who is a speech language therapist by profession also supports in all activities. My husband, son-in-law and now grandchildren who stay in same campus are part of everyday activities at Vasantham. When we do these as a family, it is so much fun.

Do you feel gender bias exists at work place? If yes, how did you handle it?

To an extent yes. Especially when men need to follow instructions from women leaders. But it also depends on how we handle situations and react to things. When the objective of doing the best for individuals with special needs is common among the colleagues, work gets easier.

Is the society prepared (after 75 years of independence) to see and accept women as leaders and achievers?



Definitely things are better than what it was earlier. Women leaders and achievers are definitely acknowledged and respected like men counterparts in most scenarios (May not be all). I personally feel how people accept and react to us, depends on who we are. If we do the right things and speak the right things, family and society will definitely support.

What is your one achievement that you consider as the greatest and significant in your profession?

There is an instance which I wish to record here – One of our former students visited Vasantham couple of years ago. He has been working with a leading technology company for almost a decade. After about 20 minutes of talking, he asked me how much do I earn at Vasantham. I randomly gave a number. He looked puzzled and reacted with an offer at his work place so that I can earn more. There are many other such instances – our students who haven't spoken a word for years, getting onto stage and delivering speeches competing with normal children, also instances where our students react and behave more respectful and with discipline than the 'normal' peers or older people.

What according to you are the pre-requisites for a successful woman?

- Not to fear about doing the right thing.
- Put people first
- Ability to balance work and family
- Ability to identify threats which comes with sugar coating
- Never let anything or anyone affect us
- Be polite, respectful and yet assertive

One lesson your experiences taught you?

Be patient! Good thoughts will always be rewarded with good results. Never lose hope. Solutions to any issue should be decided after considering perspectives from multiple angles.

Your advice to women who aspire to be in your place?

We need to emotionally connect with anything we do and with people we meet. However, should not always be expressive or impulsive about it. Follow your consciences and do things that will benefit someone or the other. Stay happy and contented with what we are blessed with. Work without any expectations.

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**PRIME POINT
Foundation**

Prime Point Foundation, a Non-Profit Trust and NGO was founded in December 1999 by Shri K Srinivasan (popularly known as Prime Point Srinivasan), a former Senior Banker and a Digital Journalist and Communication Professional, to promote leadership and communication skills among the youth. Very eminent persons are associated with the Foundation.

The Foundation has formed 5 initiatives (PreSense, Sansad Ratna Awards, Education Loan Task Force, Digital Journalists Association of India and Next Gen Political Leaders). All these initiatives are managed independently by passionate experts. These initiatives are non-commercial, and focussed on youth.



PreSense: The eMagazine PreSense was started in March 2006 on the suggestion of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam to promote positive journalism. Till February 2022, the Foundation has published 180 editions. This is a digital-only magazine. Dr Abdul Kalam has written the foreword for the Digest of articles up to 100 editions. PreSense publishes the cartoon character Prince, which was launched by Dr Abdul Kalam in 2008. PreSense has published a Digest of select articles published up to 175 editions in eight volumes.

www.primepointfoundation.in | www.corpezine.com

G. Priyadharshni (a) Priyadharshni Rahul, Advocate practicing at the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. She is a graduate in political science and passionate about politics, governance and digital journalism. She has worked with Times group as a Manager and also with an NFP organization under Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. She has exhibited leadership skills right from her school days and received Presidents' Award for Scouts and Guides. As a College student, she led the TN NCC Contingent at the Republic Day parade, Delhi in 2005 and received the Prime Ministers' Award for the same. She was deputed as the Youth Ambassador of India to United Kingdom by the Ministry of Defence, during her cadet days.



She is presently the Trustee Secretary of Prime Point Foundation, President of Sansad Ratna Awards Committee and Founder President of Next Gen Political Leaders. She is also the Editor of the eMagazine PreSense.

She is the recipient of several awards, including 'Dr Abdul Kalam Award of Excellence for Nation Building' in 2020 and 'Visionary of the year Award' by Public Relations Council of India in 2021.