



August 2008

Women as Trail Blazers

Dreaming, Exploring &
Discovering New Horizons

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Though nowhere at its traditional location, we feel that we need to start off with acknowledging all those who made this magazine a reality. Without their support, we would not have made it this far.

The SWIM and Gravity Teams would like to express their sincere thanks to the following people, for all their encouragement and support:

Dr. Bala V. Balachandran
Prof. S. Sriram
Mr. V. Sankaran
Mr. K. Subaash
Mr. B. N. Jayaprakash
Ms. Pratima Lakshmanan
Ms. Malathi Ramkumar
SWIM and Gravity Teams of JayCeEs (PGPM Class of 2007-2008)
The Champions (PGPM class of 2008-2009)
OPTIMA TEAM

We would also like to thank all the contributors to this edition, without whom this initiative would not have been possible.

From the Editorial Team



Jayendu, George, Agniva, Renjini, Abhijeet, Namratha, Jai, Joy, Gaurav, Rakesh, Soumik

Dear Readers,

As we approach the 61st milestone of our independence, a new year of challenges and opportunities unfolds before us. The previous sixty years have witnessed the Indian Growth phenomenon, underscored by the indefatigable and resurgent spirit of the vibrant Indian populace. In the course, we have triumphed over many an insurmountable peak and decorated our escutcheon with many an accolade. But, the most sparkling gem in this crown is the emergence of the new age Indian woman who has left indelible footprints on the canvas of time and has her loins all girded up to conquer newer horizons.

Welcome to the third edition of SWIM magazine, which captures this very spirit of the Indian woman that has made her a force to reckon with and has paved the way for her trailblazing success.

Indian woman today is enacting a multitude of roles. Be it a highly successful entrepreneur like Kiran Mazumdar Shaw or a social activist like Medha Patkar, who has dedicated her entire life to noble causes, a modern day Cinderella like Aishwarya Rai or the epitome of love, compassion and sainthood, Mother Teresa, a mass leader like Mayawati or a litterateur like Arundhati Roy, Indian Woman has incarnated herself in various avatars and beneath all these variegated forms lies the indomitable spirit of the Indian woman.

This edition of SWIM magazine celebrates the success of Indian women and brings to you valuable insights from real life experiences of *Successful Women in Management*.

Happy Reading!
Team Gravity

We look forward to your comments and feedback at gravity@greatlakes.edu.in

Founder and Honorary Dean's Message



"God created the rose in the likeness of a woman. The rose represents her beauty. The stem represents her strength. The petals are soft as her delicate skin, the fragrance so pure and so sweet. The leaves represent her arms outstretched, always loving and giving. And for perfection - He made her heart of pure gold"

- Danielle Hollister

Well said! A woman is a delightful example of contradictions – delicate yet tough; composed yet undone; delightfully sensitive yet daringly ruthless; headstrong yet heartfelt; All this and so much more, yet so humble and unassuming – that is a woman!

Endowed with such strength of character, one wonders why there are not as many Cleopatras as there are Caesars. The answer is fairly simple. Though courage and strength are an intrinsic part of every woman it is the compassion and love which are more prominent given a woman's natural place in society. It is precisely because of this that we have only one Mother Teresa. Rare displays of her wrath and brutality occur only when she is pushed to her limit and then she becomes unstoppable resting only when her goal is achieved.

We have now progressed to the 21st Century where traditional practices have been replaced by realistic ones. Societies worldwide have changed their outlook towards women and their contributions to societal well-being. Women today have donned different hats and are performing multiple roles; from being a mother, to a wife to a successful career woman, to a tireless member of society; the woman is able to effectively multi-task and efficiently execute all these radically different roles to perfection. And what's more? We are the better for it!

But let us not stop here. Majority of womankind are still ensconced in their belief that a woman is always second best and incapable of leading and excelling. Today's world provides equal opportunity for academic achievement, professional accreditation and demonstration of ability to both men and women. Yet, women need to be motivated and goaded towards realizing their true potential and emerging as super performers.

To help this cause, each year, Great Lakes hosts the SWIM – Successful Women in Management, event which is a platform for women who have excelled in their chosen fields of interest to share their success stories, debate the challenges faced and inspire more women to take on the mantle of leadership. It is our way of recognizing their contributions to society and of inducing many more women to follow their example. It is our belief that having women in positions of responsibility and accountability will enable organizations (and by extension, society) to conduct themselves ethically and adhere to an essential value system. In fact, I am proud to add that Great Lakes has consciously ensured that we have a significant meritocratic representation from the women student community. These are women who have worked hard to break the mould and fight stereotypes and these are women who are leaders of tomorrow.

But this is just a step in the right direction; to empower and equip women with the information, knowledge and skill sets that are essential for their success. The ultimate responsibility vests with the women to make best use of opportunities set their sights on lofty goals and grow from strength to strength. Easier said than done, but as Robert Frost famously put it, '... But I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep'.

Join us in saluting their journey; in applauding their achievements; in encouraging their potential – in short, in celebrating the woman! May your endeavors always meet with the success it truly deserves.

Best wishes
Dr. Bala V Balachandran
Founder & Honorary Dean, Great Lakes Institute of Management
J.L. Kellogg Distinguished Professor of Accounting and Information Systems

SWIM – Message from the Executive Director



Dear All,

World is increasingly witnessing women climbing the organizational ladder and assuming leadership positions. As an institute that pioneered the concept of celebrating successful women in managerial leadership positions, this development is very heartening. We at Great Lakes, very much believe that more women in leadership positions will make organizations humane and ethical.

In today's world, business organizations play a vital role in shaping the future of the society. Though women had succeeded in assuming leadership positions in the political and social context, the success was late in coming as far as business organization is concerned. It has started happening now; Our Business Advisory Council member Ms. Indra Nooyi is a classic example of the same. People like Kiran Mazumdar Shaw of Biocon, Usha Thorat of RBI, Chanda Kochhar of ICICI, Nainalal Kidwai of HSBC, Anu Aga of Thermax are some of the glittering examples of this phenomenon.

I take pleasure in inviting you all to participate in our SWIM related initiatives including the one-day event being planned every year.

I look forward to more celebrations of this kind in future.

With warm regards,

Prof. S. Sriram
Executive Director
Great Lakes Institute of Management

From the SWIM TEAM



S.Maheshwaran, Swathi Duvvuri, Ashish Kaoul, Roshini Nambiar, Pooja Mahadevan, Namratha Gowda, Bharat Bushan, Renjini Mathew, P. Murlidhar Naidu, Avantika Saxena, Supriya Dixit, Soumya Subramanian, Deepti Pullela

It gives us great pleasure to present to you the third edition of the SWIM magazine. SWIM (Successful Women in Management) is a women centric initiative at the Great Lakes Institute of Management which started in 2005. The highlight of this initiative is the one day SWIM event which celebrates the success of women in leadership positions in the corporate and social spheres. It is a platform that brings together women leaders from various walks of life and provides an opportunity for women to draw inspiration from these role models.

Over the past years, the SWIM event has been graced by the presence of eminent women like Ms. Kiran Bedi, Ms. Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, Ms. Mallika Srinivasan and others. This year we are proud to have as our chief guest, Ms. Anu Aga, one of the most respected leaders in the Indian business world.

The SWIM magazine, released every year during the SWIM event, aims to bring together the inspiring stories and views of some of the most successful women in leadership positions in our country. Contributors to the past edition of the SWIM magazine include Ms. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Ms. Chanda Kochhar, Ms. Mary Roy and Ms. Mrinalini Sarabhai among others.

Considering the successful forays of women into hitherto unexplored avenues, the theme for the third edition of the SWIM magazine has been chosen as 'Women as Trailblazers: Dreaming, Exploring and Discovering new Horizons.' In keeping with this theme, the SWIM magazine brings you the views of such trailblazing women like Ms. Kiran Bedi, India's first woman IPS officer and Ms. Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to scale the Mount Everest.

This edition of the magazine is a tribute to the pioneering spirit of women, the spirit that enables her to excel and leave her unique stamp in every noble endeavour.

Happy Reading!
SWIM Team

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Vanquishing the traditional...

By Jayendu and Abhijeet



The Indian social panorama is today replete with examples of illustrious women who have accomplished unparalleled feats in their pursuits and reached the acme of excellence in their chosen professions. They have forayed into diverse areas and have attained statures of such magnitude that they are idolized by innumerable women and men who aspire to be successful. The achievements of these women have been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement for numerous other Indian women who, despite possessing immense potential, have had their roles confined within traditional boundaries, owing to societal norms. The Indian woman is today redefining these rules and treading on the path shown by these torchbearers.

This section is dedicated to two such trailblazers, revered social entrepreneur Ela R Bhatt and noted painter Anjolie Ela Menon.

Ela Bhatt

"I cannot claim to have read or studied Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, nor claim to be his follower or a devotee. It is an atmosphere in which I grew up"

Ela R Bhatt

Talk about grassroot level entrepreneurs and Ela R Bhatt's name invariably comes up. One of the most recognized pioneer in the field of grassroot development models, she has carved the name "Gentle Revolutionary" for herself. A true Gandhian in thinking and practice, she has toiled on since 1972 when she founded the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA). SEWA was conceived to bring poor women together and give them ways to fight for their rights and earn better livings. Three years after SEWA was founded, it had 7,000 members. Today it has a total membership of 700,000 women, making it the largest single primary trade union in India. Bhatt led SEWA to form a cooperative bank in 1974 - with a share capital of \$30,000 - that offered microcredit loans to help women save and become financially independent. Today the SEWA Cooperative Bank has \$1.5 million in working capital and more than 30,000 depositors with a loan return rate of 94 percent. Through years of organization and strategic action, Ela Bhatt developed SEWA from a small, often ignored group into a powerful trade union and bank with allies around the world. During the last three decades, SEWA's efforts to increase the bargaining power, economic opportunities, health security, legal representation, and organizational abilities of Indian women have brought dramatic improvements to hundreds of thousands of lives and influenced similar initiatives around the globe. One of the first to start the micro finance and micro credit

application in India, when the people had not even heard of the term; her achievements are staggering. As an article contributor I am drawn between the urge to write about her or to just quote her. Her organization's working paper titled "My Life My Work" has a preface which summarizes her thoughts on SEWA. Without further ado,



"Some of these efforts have been successful in what they set out to do, some have not. Many have developed different unexpected and offer new directions, with important policy implications. However, each attempt has revealed how women's lives interact with the existing social, economic, and political structure and how these structures react and interact when women attempt to change their lives. It also reveals what happens when there is an attempt from within the structure to reach out to women, the reactions that occurs within their communities, within their families. Perhaps most inspiring has been the growth of the women themselves. We have seen how, given the opportunity, women take leadership roles assume responsibilities for their own organisations and learn the skills necessary to run them."

In her numerous avatars, she has been an activist of the Textile Labour Association, President of SEWA, member of the Rajya Sabha, member of the Planning Commission, and the moving spirit behind "Shram-shakti", report of the Commission on the Self-Employed. Her work has spanned from organizational activity at the grassroots to policy interventions at both national and international levels. The awards and accolades did follow but they were just small milestones dotting an exemplary achievement. But she has laboured on and came up with the magnum opus "We are poor but so many" in 2006, chronologically detailing the rise of SEWA, the exploration of the Gandhian philosophy. It also talks about the struggles and the challenges that ensued and freedom that SEWA has facilitated for women working in the informal economy by presenting several inspirational stories of individual SEWA members.

Ela R Bhatt has today become an institution in her own regard. Guided by Gandhian principles, interlaced with sound economic logic, she has effected far reaching changes in the lives of people living at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid. Her reform initiatives have provided stable source of subsistence to the impoverished, inculcated a sense of self belief in poor women and made them economically self-dependent. Her social entrepreneurship model is a true reflection of Gandhian economic thought which laid down simplicity, non-violence, sanctity of labour and human values as its cornerstones. An agent of poverty alleviation, mass upliftment, social justice and women empowerment, Ela Bhatt, as she is fondly called, is one the few torchbearers of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy in the modern era, carrying his mantle into the new generation and bringing about changes to make our nation the India he dreamt of.

And, as the Mahatma himself said, " If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is man's far superior".

Anjolie Ela Menon



*I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare; my business is to Create.*

William Blake

The above excerpt from Blake's Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion, speaks succinctly about an artist's mind. 'To create' is the verve which drives such beautiful works. In the art of painting; looking for women trailblazers I can think of only two names Amrita-Sher-Gil & Anjolie Ela Menon. The former drawing her inspiration from Italian, French and contemporary Indian styles, painted the famous South Indian trilogy. Considering Amrita-Sher-Gil to be one of her influences Anjolie Ela Menon has achieved the same if not more accomplishments. While studying at École des Beaux-Arts on scholarship she honed her creative brilliance. Her experiences from various places where she has lived and travelled can be derived from her art works, one of them 'Yatra' was picked up by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. She doesn't contain herself on canvas, a well known muralist, she has represented India at several shows. For all she has achieved and yet to, the Government of India awarded her Padmashree in 2000. Over the last 35 years her paintings have gained considerable recognition and have made her one of India's leading contemporary female artists. Her exhibitions have been held in New Delhi, Mumbai, New York, Washington DC, London to name a few. Living and working from New Delhi she is still contributing to the art scene in India. In the year 2007 she was chosen for 'Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) by the French Government. The award is conferred on persons who have distinguished themselves by their creativity in the field of art, culture and literature or for their contribution to the influence of the arts in France and throughout the world. An artist true to her passion, it would be incorrect to presume that arts is the only thing that interests her, she also cooks as a stress relieving technique and is working on a book of her own. In a recent interview she threw some light on the cuisines in the book "Yes, it will have a variety of recipes from all over the world. But then, that's understandable — after all, I have a family that's as diverse as it can possibly be. I mean, I have Bengali and American roots, my husband is a Malayali and my daughters-in-law are Punjabis".. Her collaboration with Kumarmangalam Birla fetched over 1 crore at a charity auction last year. With all these works in making and many more to come, Anjolie Ela Menon is a true pioneer and a real trailblazer in the field of arts. As a testament to this she has been nominated on the board of trustees of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the only visual artist to have been. I am honored, humbled and awed when I look at her paintings, her accomplishments. Writing about her and her achievements I think I have done justice to the theme for this year's SWIM event.

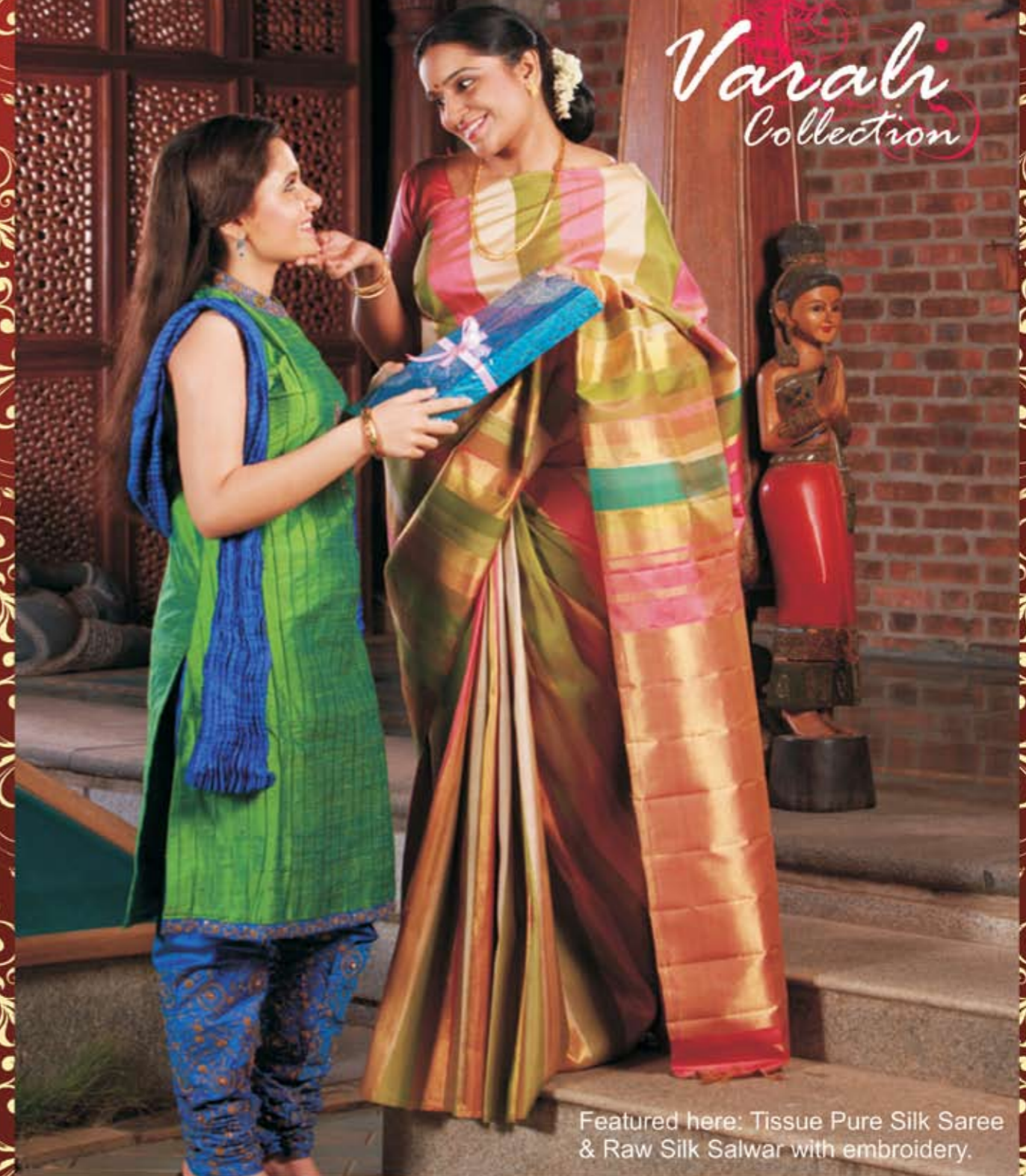
Jayendu & Abhijeet are students of PGPM, class 2009.

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Interview with Bachendri Pal

By Rakesh Jaddu, Jai Agarwal



SWIM: How did you develop the love for mountaineering?

Bachendri Pal: Along with my brothers I had once ventured into the forests, looking for a special kind of a fruit in the jungle. We drifted so far away that we reached the snow line (12000ft) and started playing with the snow. Soon it became dark and out of fear we decided to stay back in the hills. We were scared of the wild animals and made a bonfire out of wood collected in the forest. In these trials and tribulations I learnt about the low air pressure in the mountainous regions and how the resultant dehydration takes a toll on the body.

In the night we heard people whistling, but didn't understand where the sound originated. They were rescue teams sent to search us, but they went without finding us. The next morning we started to descend. Upon reaching we thought our parents would be very happy on our safe return, but as any parent would do, we got scolded for venturing into the mountains without elders.

Thus, a misadventure triggered off my interest in mountaineering. I still remember that experience and draw lessons from it to teach the corporate companies about the various aspects of mountaineering and team building.

SWIM:It is said that nature is the best teacher, what have you learned from it?

Bachendri Pal: Nature is an open book. You learn a lot from it. It is a demanding classroom where you have no option but to perform. You have to utilize your knowledge for leadership, team building and aim orientation. If you don't have this, you cannot scale the peak.

But there has to be a scientific and educational approach. Very often in life we do something without understanding how and why we have done it. Such an approach is useless. The importance of planning is thus evident. The bonds and inter-personal relationships formed are the best take-away from this.

SWIM:You conduct so many workshops for the corporate companies, what in your view should they do to get the best out of their employees?

Bachendri Pal: I can't really advise the corporate companies but I will try to answer your question. All the graduate trainees who come to Tata Steel need to go in for an in-house mountaineering training program. Tata Steel believes that a good team will contribute into building a good department which in turn will contribute to making a good company.

I also conduct programs for other corporate companies. I tell them that problems are an opportunity to test you, difficulties are an opportunity to discover one's potential as an individual and as a part of a team. After scaling a peak, you come back with tremendous satisfaction and self-belief. You discover your potential and understand how to frame a target.

How do you achieve the target? You need a team. Ten people sitting together don't make a team. Trust, understanding, knowing each others' strengths and weaknesses contribute to making a team. Mountaineering is an excellent medium to foster such understanding and relationships.

There is a strong realization that whenever the body gives away the mind must take control. The body shouldn't command the mind, the mind should command the body, because it is the mind that knows the target not the body.

Thus the three development areas are;

- i) Self awareness.
- ii) Awareness about how my actions affect others (being sensitive to other people's needs)
- iii) Reaching full potential.

SWIM:Please tell us how you developed an interest in training corporate companies in mountaineering?

Bachendri Pal: I used to feel very bad when I visited various places in the country and people would question the significance of the learning from mountaineering. I was insulted, because mountaineering entails so much planning. There is in fact no question of chance. It's a do-or-die situation. The results are immediate. When I started, there was a lot of resistance in the village, as there was very little awareness about mountaineering in the village and the country at large. It's a very over-protective environment. Mountaineering looks like a mountain of risk to them. I say, the biggest risk in life is not taking a risk. People who don't take these risks could as well die slipping on a bathroom floor. It's better to take a risk and die climbing the Mt. Everest. It's better being equipped for risk. For a person who learns to take risks, everything is a comfort zone.

SWIM:How did you prepare for your first expedition to the Mt. Everest?

Bachendri Pal: I never thought I would climb mountains. People thought that because I belonged to the hill community, it was no use to go into mountaineering. The first priority was education. I completed my B.Ed. and M.A. The vice-principal of a Nehru school of mountaineering suggested that I should join the mountaineering course.

I got selected for the pre-Everest selection expedition. There was no looking back since then. I was totally focused; every step of mine was taking me to the Everest. There was strong opposition from my mother and the villagers; who would say that it was pointless getting into mountaineering after being so highly educated. It was a lonely struggle. I used to practice with stones in a sack and climb up hills near my house. I would tell my mother that let me do what I want to, let the world say what it would want to.

SWIM:How did you feel when you were on top of the world?

Bachendri Pal: A dream, a target had finally been accomplished; all the while though I was worried for my safe return. It was very difficult climbing the mountain. One false step and I could land either in Tibet or Nepal. I had a statue of Goddess Durga. I prayed to her and kept reciting the Hanuman Chalisa. It is said that 'The harder the journey the closer to God'. That is exactly how I felt. I remembered my parents. But all the while I was focused on my safe return. There was no great enjoyment or feeling of achievement. I never use the word conquer for my scaling of the Mt. Everest. We are too small in comparison with Mother Nature and hence we need to respect her. When you come across the dead bodies you understand this.

SWIM:What was the reaction of the people when you came back from your expedition?

Bachendri Pal: That was the ice-breaker. I led an all women Indo-Nepalese Everest expedition team in 1993. It was my dream to lead such a team to a place where I once stood. It was more significant to me than my first one. There were four ladies from my own village in this expedition. It was a sense of vindication, as they were from the very same village which once talked about why ladies shouldn't undertake such expeditions. The change has always got to come first from you.

This expedition was a grand success. Women always need to struggle a lot more to achieve something in this society.

SWIM:What would be your closing message for the women of India?

Bachendri Pal: Being a woman is not a weakness but strength. We should discover ourselves. There are so many glowing examples in every field. I don't think one particular day needs to be anointed as women's day; every day is a woman's day. Our thought and our attitude is everything for us. We should be self-reliant.

Bachendri Pal, the first Indian lady to climb the Mt. Everest is a naturalist adventurer. She has also lead an all women Indo-Nepalese expedition team to the Mt. Everest in 1993.

SANDWICH GENERATION

by Ameeta Agnihotri



Date: some time in 1985

Place: Bombay (now Mumbai)

It was never the done thing: At least not for women. In my office, I was the only lady on the entire floor who was not a secretary and who rode a bike – a TVS Champ – confidently and comfortably on the mad Mumbai roads. My career was paramount and I was the sort to whom the word 'Impossible' meant I'M POSSIBLE – clichéd though it may sound now, it was the mantra I lived by during those days when I worked on sales promos and events for Parle Beverages – juggling morning college with a career. Sometimes people thought I was the wild untamable sort because I stood my ground and firmly fought my own battles – even against the opposite sex.

At the time, I never imagined I would someday want to give it all up for marriage. But, it was the one condition my husband laid. He said he would bring in the money and I had to look after the family or there would be no marriage. I imagined it was so noble of him, he was so protective, etc, etc, and loved him even more for his male-ness. Happily I chucked it all up. Even learnt to cook.

For a while (12 years), I tended the home, brought up my darling daughters in the best way I knew how, and did things out of the home – hand embroidery classes, quilt making, etc. It was fun while it lasted. I even managed to make my own money on the side. But my mother-in-law, bless her soul, was a woman of substance and a career woman in her time. Well educated and very polished, she took up a job to bring up her four children when her husband passed away at an early age. She kept telling me I would make a great writer and I should keep writing. I secretly agreed. Secretly, because I was afraid to tell her or anybody else that I believed there was nothing I could not do. Besides, I was taught being confident was a 'man' thing. Women needed to be seen and not heard. They had to be demure, eyes lowered, etc.

Date: 8 March 1997

Place: Chennai

Time flew. We moved to Chennai thanks to my husband's job. Both my girls were safely in full time school. House work alone bored me. I always admired women who were content to look after the house, exchange recipes and attend kitty parties. Cooking made me sick. An uncomfortable restlessness crept in everyday around sun set. I began feeling there really was no purpose to my life. I was simply not making a difference outside the house. I could see many women confidently holding their own in a man's world without losing an ounce of their femininity. They balanced the board room and the home with equal panache. I could do it too, I thought. Where was the girl who once declared she wanted to change India? I wondered. The answer was not a very happy one. She was buried under layers of norms. Playing the role of a middle class housewife who had her duties to perform, and none of them was following her dream. None of them included living her life. Just like so many other women of my generation, I lived in fear.

What if I banged really hard and the glass ceiling that kept me down broke? What if it broke, and I emerged through, bleeding yet triumphant only to realize I did not like what was on the other side? Ma-in-law kept telling me to pursue writing. "How?" I dared asking her one day. "I don't know," she shrugged. Like she meant, I recognized your talent, now it's your job to find the job. Hubby said, "Do what you like from home. No job."

Being an Indian woman is hard. Being an educated Indian woman whose soul was restless and seeking is harder. Somehow, I met someone who put me on to someone else who was the woman editor (K. Jayanthi) in a publication – the Indian Express. I still remember the day. I was running around trying to find someone who would type out my article so I could give it to her in the format she wanted. There was no email, and I did not own a computer – it was too expensive. Definitely not meant for a housewife who was a wannabe journalist. Jayanthi not only accepted my article, she also assigned me two more.

It was wonderful new high to see my name attached to three different articles in the same paper. The thirst for more kicked in. And surprisingly, more came. Suddenly it was like a whole new world opened up to me. I found more avenues, found more women who were like me in some way – who all wanted more than a wardrobe filled with clothes they could never repeat to the next party. I found myself able to do all kinds of writing – features, fashion, reporting, technical, management interviews (thanks to my education!) and I found I was very good with research. I could learn, simplify, write and unlearn so that I could move on to the next subject. Ma-in-law was right. I really could write.

Date: June 2005

Place: Chennai

FitnessOne came into my life with a single fitness studio. They needed someone to handle communications. I would get to start my own magazine, the Managing Director, Vivekanand promised.

It was a huge risk for me. It would mean pouring heart and soul into something I only dreamt about. It would mean learning fitness first before I could write about it. What if all my efforts bombed? A million negative thoughts gave me sleepless nights. Heck, it was only 8 pages, I finally reasoned and plunged into a full time career. I got a fancy designation – Director Communications –and every single evening I returned knowing my work was making a difference. I was a one-woman team with a single PR firm reporting to me. A couple of articles appeared in the media every month. Not enough. They were 'reasonable' guys. Always ready with an excuse for not getting us published. Again it was a 'male' thing. They got sacked. I got a woman who understood what the scene was. She is someone I can brainstorm with and is still working with me.

In no time at all FitnessOne had seven studios across Chennai, Coimbatore and Bangalore (we are now touching 50 and have FitnessOne gyms across India). The pressure mounted. We had to be seen more. Different divisions opened (we have seven) and they all needed communications. The website needed revamping. I had no time to miss being a journalist.

Today we have ten people reporting to us on the publicity for FitnessOne's seven divisions, and our team of two – both women – is becoming adept at handling every challenge thrown in our scheme of things, including last minute situations.

Ameeta Agnihotri is the Director of Communications of Fitness One, a Fitness Solution Company. She has been a freelance writer for last 10 years.

The Daughter is the new son.

By Nadia Chauhan Kurup



I was recently reading a book called 'The Culture Code' by Clotilde Rapaille, and I chanced upon a statement that set me thinking. Rapaille describes that in history men were considered to be the sun and women the moon. For the sun shines on its own and the moon shines when the sun's rays reflect on it.

I didn't miss the word 'history'. Nor would anybody with an understanding of today.

Upon further thought, I realized that the difference between the past and the future is going to be the role of the woman.

Women have played a significant part in the history of mankind. Many a war was fought for women. Many a monument was erected for her. And many a life was lost for her. The epic of Mahabharat happened because of Draupadi. Ramayan happened because of Sita. The Taj was built for Mumtaz.

The difference today is that if history's women were the cause of the war, today's women fight the war. They build the monuments, they touch the sky, they earn the bread, they lead businesses, they start the fire. The woman is no longer just the cause or the inspiration. She doesn't want doors to be opened for her. She opens it herself.

Women are built for that. It's just that the oppression over millennia had sowed seeds of self-doubt. Women understand the difference between the colour black and five other shades of black. Women are more complex, so they understand a lot more detail. Women can handle a lot more stress than men can. Women can understand the emotional aspect of things better. Women can bear more pain. Women are more benevolent. Women are more human.

Women are emerging. History is replete with instances where the oppressed have come out stronger. Take the Afro-Americans, for instance. They were slaves, and have now suddenly risen from the ashes to become one of the most powerful clans in the US, especially in Hollywood.

Japan was bombed and destroyed. Only to get up, dust themselves and become the most advanced country in the world.

The oppressed woman has woken up. She won't take things lying down anymore. She has realized her potential and is living up to it. She's taking charge of her life. And everyone else's.

There's one more thing, I'd like to mention here. Men have been taken aback by this shift. But largely haven't resisted it. For somewhere, deep inside, they know, like we do, that equality of gender is the foundation of a strong society. And a happy society.

Nadia Chauhan Kurup, Marketing Head Parle Agro successfully led Frooti rated as India's Most Trusted Fruit Beverage Brand (ET 2007). She is renowned for her pioneering efforts in refreshing India through healthy beverages.

By Kiran Bedi

National Rainbows



Last fortnight I met with three national rainbows, read outstanding women of our country: two in Kuchh (Gujrat) and one in Pune (Maharashtra). All three women are self made, born of strong visionary mothers and fathers (except for Lila Poonawala who lost her father when she was only two), are industrious, strongly generous, sensitive and visionary. I saw them as representative of countless invisible women who are as brave and dedicated. This piece of writing is a salute to them. I call these three women our 'National Rainbows'.

Right now I am writing about only one of the three, Lila Poonawala as I cannot compress their contributions collectively.

First, about Ms Lila Poonawala.

I was invited by Lila, ten years ago for the inaugural merit scholarship award, based on her own hard earned wealth. The very first one to receive the scholarship, out of batch of 10 girls, was a twenty-year-old, Neetu Bhatia. She went on to do India proud by being a student of Franco Modigliani, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences but also assisting him in his work and research papers. She works at Harris Nesbitt, the US Investment banking arm of the Bank of Montreal. Her title is Vice President, Media, Communications & Technology Investment banking.

I had told Lila that I would return for the decade celebration if it happens! We kept the date.

This time, 10 years after, I saw the impact of her visionary spirit. Lila had reached out to more than 300 girls, with nearly 70 of them in prestigious universities in India and around the world. Except for a few like Neetu, majority of the recipients were/are from absolutely marginalized sections of society. The fellowship were/are for a varied subject as could be: computational genomics, radar and landsat thematic mapper images, research in environmental factors for Alzheimer disease, breast cancer, and NASA related technologies, mentioning a select few. These girls are called "Lila Fellows".

This time I was curious and needed to know Lila better. And I learnt about her as follows:

Kiran Bedi, the first woman to join the IPS in 1972, is a Ramon Magsaysay Award winner for her prison reform work done at Tihar Jail - one of world's largest prison complexes, with over 10,000 inmates

The INDO-PAK Partition rendered Lila's family homeless and they had to flee to India from Sindh. Bundled up as a two-year-old, with her mother and siblings, the young toddler found herself in a refuge camp and months later to a modest house in central Pune.

Lila started schooling in a municipal school and later moved to Mount Carmel School. She developed an interest in mathematics and Physics, not to mention interest in extra curricular activities like NCC, Scouts, Hockey, Cricket, Badminton and even gliding.

It was her mother who emphasized to Lila, the importance of Independence. Her interest in science translated into passion for technology. In 1967 Lila became the first women mechanical engineer in Pune. She joined Ruston & Hornsby as a trainee. On the first day of work she met her husband to be, Firoz the strength behind Lila. Ten months later, she moved to Vulcan Laval (a multinational). It was here on the shop floor of this engineering company that her professional journey began in earnest. Times were changing and this was very apparent during the sixties. While working women could be seen in many areas it was still uncommon for a woman to be part of a hardcore engineering company. But nothing dampened Lila's enthusiasm.

She was appointed Exports Manger in 1978. Those days were termed the "License Raj Era" and industries needed license to import. The government would give certain cash incentives on exports. Vulcan Laval needed both, the licenses and the cash incentives. Export procedures were long, cumbersome and required extensive documentations. It would take months to get approval from the bureaucracy. Though frustrating at times, Lila never gave up. She applied her tremendous ability to deal with people and drive a hard bargain, winning customers and taking the modest exports of Vulcan Laval to unprecedented heights. A deal of 280 million with the USSR and the success of the project brought her to the forefront. Here, she got the opportunity to show her managerial skills. This brought her to the notice of the management and she was promoted to GM (exports and marketing). Along the way she did various courses from IIM, the Indian Institute of management (Ahmedabad), Harvard and Stanford University in the USA.

In 1986, she was appointed The Executive VP. This was also the year when she appeared on the cover of the International Business Magazine "Svensk Export". It was the first time a woman from the corporate world in India was featured in international business magazine of repute.

With an excellent track record to back her, she was appointed the Managing Director of Vulcan Laval in 1987. With this appointment, she became the first Indian woman to be appointed MD of a Multinational Company. She also became the first woman in the Alfa Laval group to reach that position. She remained the only woman managing director in the entire group until her retirement. Under her leadership, the company moved from strength to strength.

Lila envisaged the potential and the growth of business in the food sector. Emphasis on research and development was made and in 1993, King Carl Gustaf XVI of Sweden inaugurated a state-of-the-art ALFA Laval Technology Centre in Pune, providing essential R & D Facilities. It was her vision to set up world-class research facilities in India and make India an exporter of world class products.

Lila became a Padmashri in 1989. Another first for a woman from the corporate sector. The King of Sweden and she were conferred the Royal Order of the Polar Star in 2003. It was Lila's earnest desire all along to do something substantial for the girl child. Her dream got an impetus on the 16th of September 1994, on her 50th birthday. Her company wanted to reward her outstanding performance with an expensive gift.

She suggested them to give her cash instead. The company gifted her with a birthday present of 100,000 Swiss Francs. It is with this and her own savings she launched her dream project-Lila Poonawalla Foundation. Today Lila has over 300 worthy and brightest daughters of India spreading all over the world, as "Lila fellows". They all adore their mother-mentor. Never mind if Lila and Feroz do not have biological children, of their own.

A salute to the Lila's of India. Jai Hind.

(Reprinted with permission from the book "Empowering Women as I see")



At Rang De, we have the unique opportunity to encounter hidden talents in some really unusual places. Our work takes us to the developing India and involves interacting with men and women who have gone against all odds to ensure that their family has a good life. The lives and work of some of the women we have met needs to be shared and celebrated - for they are the Real Heroes!

Usha Mankar - I call her the modern day Jhansi Rani. Usha lost her husband years ago and she has two sons. Usha runs a tea shop for a living on one of the pavements in Nagpur. Her clientele usually includes only men - they spend hours at her stall sipping their cuppa and eating her delicious poha (beaten rice tempered with mustard and onions). Usha has immense respect for her business, understands her customers well and also knows how to put them in their place. Usha's sons attend school during the day and help out their mother when schools are closed. Her confidence, body language and her business knowledge are commendable.

Kuppu - in Tamil Nadu runs a petty shop on the highway, a recently set up business for Kuppu who used to work as a daily wage labourer. She needed something to supplement her income and set up this shop just outside her little home. She used to sell candies and snacks when she started off, then bought a coin operated phone and now a second hand refrigerator to store and sell cold drinks.

The extensions to her shop did not happen without analysing the demand. Before setting up her phone, she saw that there was no PCO in the nearby area and she saw an opportunity. When it started to get really hot during summer Kuppu used to sell soft drinks by storing them in ice boxes. She could store only a limited number in this fashion. Kuppu very professionally struck a deal with a soft drink supplier to supply her cold drinks if she bought a refrigerator - and lo! she managed to get one by taking a loan from Rang De.

Usha and Kuppu are only a couple of stories. I can go on forever and talk about Nasreen who stitches bags and dreams of a career in medicine for her daughter, or about Ramla who runs a tailoring centre and trains people from her neighbourhood in one of the most backward slums of Nagpur - the list is endless.

We all dream - some of us have the opportunity to realise our dream while for some others it remains a dream forever. If you want to contribute to making some of these dreams a reality.. log on www.rangde.org.

Smita Ramakrishna, the co-founder of RangDe, has a Masters in Social Work. RangDe is a non-profit microcredit institution that changed the rules of the game by lowering credit interest.

Has the New Age Woman Employee finally Arrived?

By Gangapriya Chakraverti



I am fortunate to be part of an organization that has a female for its global Chief Executive Officer and has two members in its global Executive Council who are women. My boss by my line of business, who is based in Singapore, is a lady and so are two of her peers who lead their respective businesses across the Asia Pacific region. My Country Head is a lady and four out of the five heads of businesses in India have lady bosses. I lead a team which is predominantly women – over 80% - and my company employs more women than men in India. I compete in the market against firms, many of which are led by female bosses. Why am I referring to these statistics?

When I joined a large Indian business house as a management trainee over 15 years ago, I was the only female management trainee in my batch. Contrary to my perception, I did find many women employed in the company, few of them in relatively senior positions. In spite of it, I found myself in a peculiar situation. Colleagues looked at me in admiration, some of them wishing for their daughters what I was experiencing. Workmen were respectful and dared not raise their voices or use abusive language during tough wage negotiations. Supervisors pushed hard to make a point that their decision to hire me was not seen as bad in hindsight. Companies were not prepared for women employees at that time – several of them did not have ladies' restrooms, their travel policies did not take into account the discomfort, safety and security challenges that women employees could face, crèches in worksites were uncommon and most HR policies were built for the male employee.

Well, for one, Corporate India has come a long way. And, what a long way.....

While it is common knowledge that the proportion of women in the Indian corporate world has increased, companies are swearing by the fairer sex who are being attributed with virtues such as loyalty, dedication, perseverance, etc. While the final word on these glorious characteristics of the woman employee is not yet out, women are being lured and enticed into organizations in a multitude of ways. Women are allowed to work from wherever they feel comfortable, permitted to keep flexible working hours, can bring their children to spend hours away from their mommies in five star crèches, granted extended maternity leave and so on and so forth. And, women are lapping it all up and proving their mettle too. The proverbial glass ceiling is shattered every day, and an increasing number of the so-called fairer sex take giant strides in the corporate hierarchy. Organizations, without the bogey of diversity, employ women in large numbers drawing on a talent pool increasingly to help meet the challenges of today's competitive talent market. Today's corporate buzzwords seem to be hovering around women, work and wellness.

Let me make it very clear that my own experience of working with women has been very educative and humbling. It is only in the last few years that I have had the pleasure of working in a woman dominated environment. I have found that women have a strong urge to prove themselves - to themselves, their families, the society and their peers - and this automatically makes them driven. Their ability to multi task never fails to amaze and amuse me. Women flit between their multiple avatars – mother, sister, daughter,

wife, friend, daughter in law, colleague, boss - with great aplomb and they seem to be able to switch roles with an ease that seems to belie the effort that goes into it. Increasingly I find young women have an immense ability to mix work with pleasure without losing sight of their objectives. So, they are at work till late on a report that is due for submission, party until the wee hours of the morn and are back at work the following day, fresh as daisies.

What we have seen over the last few years is a generational shift. Most of my lady co- workers are the first generation of women to step out of their homes and head for an office. They set the trend for generations to come. They walk shoulder to shoulder with their male colleagues and do not let their gender come in their way of making a difference to their own lives, in their organization and within their social circle. How they fare at work will determine what doors will open for the generations that will follow. That is an immense responsibility to bear on their shoulders but I am confident that they will live up to the expectations.

It is not as if employing women is plain fashionable anymore. Companies are quick to realize the contribution women employees are making in the workplace. Women are questioning and even, changing some of work related beliefs and paradigms. Women are making employers rethink several aspects of human resources and work management. By what companies are doing for their women employees, their contribution is definitely being valued.

And, by sheer coincidence, I woke up this morning to the headline - **WOMEN DEFY FALLING CEO SALARIES; NOOYI ON TOP**. The article goes on to say that while CEOs heading America's 500 largest firms have taken a beating on their paychecks for the first time in five years, the 13 female members of this elite club, headed by India-born chief of PepsiCo, Indira Nooyi, have been awarded with a trend-defying hike. And, the contrast was telling – Business magazine, Forbes, that CEOs of the 500 largest companies in the US saw their compensation dwindle by an average 15 percent in 2007, but the 13 female CEOs saw their pay jump by an average 27 percent. Hurrah!

And, then it went on to add that despite the hike, the average salary of female CEOs is still just about half of the overall average. Nooyi, is ranked 139th in terms of CEO pay for the 500 top companies in the US, as per Forbes. And, Nooyi's total compensation was just one - fourteenth that of the highest-paid man on the list. Thumbs down? Certainly.....

So, are we at the threshold of another generational shift?

Gangapriya Chakraverti is the Information Product Solutions Business Leader for Mercer, India. She works in the area of Compensation and Benefits Management, across industries

CANDLES IN THE NIGHT

By Kamala Thiagarajan



“One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar.”

Helen Keller

The incessant battle for gender equality over the ages is ample proof of the fact that women have always had to struggle for every victory, big or small. Whether it was the right to vote, to drive or even manage their lives, it did not come easy. However, the pages of history reveal that in spite of these struggles, women pioneers have added their invaluable contributions to every field of knowledge, ranging from space, scientific research, activism, philanthropy, aviation, medicine, sports, business, politics, and global economy.

In the 1980's when labour unrest was a wide-spread phenomena, my mother-in-law, the Managing Director of Paramount Textile Mills, managed to establish a direct rapport with her labourers, a strategy that immensely strengthened her management position and allowed her industry to flourish for three decades without the need for the middle man. This incident brought home to me how trailblazing is not only about being the first to tread an unusual path; often it is about pioneering an extraordinary solution to everyday problems.

Unsung heroines

When people talk of trailblazing and women in the same breath, it is very likely that they'd be alluding to celebrities who are now household names, such as Indira Gandhi or Kiran Bedi; women who have had the remarkable courage and capability to charter a revolutionary path in an intensely male dominated world. Not all trailblazers however, have achieved national fame and wide-spread recognition. And yet these seemingly ordinary women have had the courage to quietly battle age-old stereotypes, to believe deeply in their convictions. Their commitment to their cause was so great that they found within themselves the ability to overcome impossible odds.

Though you may not be consciously aware of it, the women you meet in day-to-day situations may have had a deep impact on you—the domestic maid who cheerfully works three shifts so that she can put her children in school, thereby eradicating generations of crushing illiteracy and crippling poverty; the NCC cadet who despite a conventional upbringing, joins the national army and is determined to fight for her country; the archetypal women in business, battling a cutthroat industry, making huge strides with her unique vision. The true spirit of trailblazing can even be seen in the immense sacrifices a housewife makes of her career and time in order to nurture her growing family and in the rise of the rural woman from the shackles of oppression and ignorance, to populate pachayats across the country.

These are not just stories of survival, but of women and their extraordinary will, who with perseverance, have chipped away at the obstacles that blocked their paths and threatened to deter them from their goals. These women are everywhere, if only we take a moment to listen to their voices and learn lessons from their struggles and successes.

The changing role of Indian women

In the 1940's, Indian women stood beside their men and on this equal footing, fought for the freedom of the country. Yet, post Independence, they took on a more passive role. Despite this, India was one of the first countries to have a woman prime minister.

As a part of an emerging economy that is playing a greater role in global politics, today, Indian women are yet again perched on the brink of change. No more can we afford to take a passive role. There is a greater need for trailblazers in this new world order as we face dire challenges in almost every sphere including trade and industry, politics and governance, even childcare. To be able to embrace change through innovation and perseverance, to believe in oneself, to face challenges head-on is now the need of the hour.

For women of all fields and nationalities, trailblazing is a process of self-discovery, of becoming self-reliant and unleashing the dormant power within. Like the steady flame of a candle that not only burns bright, but lights so many others on a treacherously dark night, these dynamic women help re-ignite the creative blaze for all those whose lives they touch, while retaining their own unique essence. Their triumph should always be our greatest strength.

Kamala Thiagarajan is the editor of 'Windows and Aisles' the in-flight magazine of Paramount Airways. She is also a freelance journalist with over four hundred articles in print in magazines across the globe

THE BANYAN : Reviving Dreams - Interview with Vandana Gopikumar

By: Namratha Gowda and Jai Agarwal



"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

Martin Luther King Jr. said these words and it reflects the spirit of Social Entrepreneurship. Ms. Vandana Gopikumar took such a leadership at a tender age. The Banyan was seeded in 1993, after Vandana finished her Master's in Medical and Psychiatric Social Work and Vaishnavi dropped out of her MBA course, to join her. They were 22 then. The Banyan started off as a shelter and transit home for homeless women with mental illness who had wandered from their homes across the country and ended up in the streets of Chennai. One of the duo's core beliefs was that such women needed to receive timely treatment and to be rehabilitated in mainstream society. Years later, after reaching out to over 1500 women, and successfully rehabilitating over 700, their beliefs have been vindicated. We had a chance to interact with her and feel immense pride to publish her views about Society and Social Entrepreneurship here.

SWIM: Can you please tell us more about the planting of "The Banyan"? How has the environment changed over 15 years of your experience?

VANDANA: During 1993 The Banyan started off in a little, rented premise with 20 people. We rescued a mentally ill woman wandering across the street. We tried to reach out and do something for her. We wanted to rehabilitate these very niche kinds of people. We did not have a neatly chalked, sustainable plan of action and that, in hindsight, was good for us. We just thought of helping them and decided to dirty our hands trying out the best possible way to do so. We had support from our parents to focus on this work since it was close to impossible to get away from a mainstream career and pursue our passion. It was good that we were young, highly energetic, fool hardy, with anger and some ambition to do something and find a solution. That's how The Banyan began. It wasn't only altruism or compassion but a combination of both. Most importantly, it was a sense of responsiveness. We wanted to do something for them. Over the years it has grown much faster than our expectations. We've upscaled ourselves to reach out to more people

SWIM: Please tell us something more about the model of The Banyan?

VANDANA: There are two types of Social organizations: Charity Organizations and NGOs. Charity Organizations are based on compassion and a strong desire to remove ill practices from society for beautiful reasons.

NGOs have various specializations based on expertise like Activist, Grassroots, Funding, Training and Implementing. Banyan started as a grassroots organization and passed through all the stages of implementing, activist and later as a training organization. The Banyan has performed all roles except as a funding Organization. Banyan has a social entrepreneurship model. There is a combination of all the

skills required in such a Social Sector Organization. Our model is based on good management principles. We feel there is a strong need to show good results in this area. There is a need for good knowledge & sound understanding.

Mentally ill people are referred to The Banyan through credible sources and they undergo medication and other supporting activities here. They are taught vocational skills. Most of the women who undergo treatment here, go back home to resume their world. We get calls from across the country about treatment of such people.

The Banyan is expanding and coming with a comprehensive center. This center will be a licensed medical care provider with a vocational training center inside. The Banyan has always followed a model of collaboration. It has collaborations with Chennai Police & the Department of Health in Tamil Nadu and operates a 24 hour emergency care center with their support. With the help of The Banyan, 42 centers across India are upgrading their standards of care for persons with the mental illness.

SWIM: How has the life been over the years at The Banyan?

VANDANA: We started with a rented building 15 years ago. During these fifteen years, the Banyan has treated 1500 women and rehabilitated some of them. Our first resident, Ram Kumari, from Pratapgarh in Uttar Pradesh, was referred to us by Parrys Police Station. She was found dancing on the streets of Chennai. Ram Kumari had forgotten everything about her past and was suffering from schizophrenia. After successful treatment, she told us that she belonged to Pratapgarh. She wanted to go home. We went to Pratapgarh along with her. After reaching Pratapgarh, we found that there was no report filed at the police station about her gone missing. Ram Kumari also failed to recognize the place she belonged to. We didn't know what to do except that we had to do our best within the circumstances & fulfill our duties.

We decided to return. On the way back to the railway station we met a person, who recognized Ram Kumari. He told us her name and residence. We went to her home. A lot had changed over time. Her husband had passed away. And it was the marriage of her daughter that day. Her kids recognized her immediately. Her family had given up on her and thought her to be dead. It seems like a fine piece of scripted drama now but was the reality that time. Her daughter and family members were ecstatic to have her back! Everything went off so well!

The villagers told us that she was mad and they had taken her to several places like temples, mosques etc to treat her but had given up hopes when they could not. They were amazed to see her current state, a sound, healthy person! That is the point we want to make. There is a mass of people who still believe mental illness cannot be cured. Lot of awareness about the illness still needs to be generated.

SWIM: What is the common perception about Mental Illness as a Social Issue? What challenges were faced by you while creating awareness about mental illness?

VANDANA: Mental health issue can range from milder ones that perhaps are precipitated by stress, environmental factors etc where counseling/ psychotherapy play a key role in the treatment or healing process. When people are affected with slightly more serious forms of ailments (schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder and clinical depression) that alters/ distorts one's perception to reality; pharmacotherapy then plays a key part in treatment as the state is more influenced by clinical factors.

Mental illness can affect anyone belonging to any social strata at any age. These problems are still not taken as seriously by even the most educated people of the society. The reasons could range from chemical imbalances to hereditary. 1% of our population suffers from severe forms of mental illness. 10%-15% of population suffers from milder forms. One in every four is supposed to be suffering from some form of psychiatric disorder. Society doesn't dismiss diabetes as a laugh but treats and controls it, but when it comes to mental illness, people don't take it with the same spirit.

SWIM: We understand women treated and cured by Banyan wish to reunite with their families. Has Banyan been able to empower women to be part of the system and contribute to it?

VANDANA: A group of fifteen women treated at the Banyan have formed a self help group (SHG). They take care of themselves, stay in independent houses and are running a concept of 'Bread and Breakfast,' at Kovalam. They take care of their own needs and pump some money back to the Banyan. It connects them financially as a part of the Banyan after rehabilitation.

These women belong to the various parts of India. They refer Banyan to any human suffering from mental illness. These women convince the residents and her relatives about curing the disease through regular treatment and medicines. They convince the resident that anybody can be ill and an ill person can be cured through regular medication, counseling and support. The people who have been associated with the Banyan send a strong message to the community about the successful treatment of Mental illness.

SWIM: "The Banyan has changed the ground rules of Social Service by setting an example of Self Sustainable Social Entrepreneurship". Please tell us about more about the innovations you brought to make the model sustainable?

VANDANA: Earlier, most people were talking of mental illness as 'about treatment,' only. The focus was more on curing it through institutionalized model. We've changed our approach and focus on de-institutionalized model, on self empowerment, on building insight, focusing on vocational skills that can be learned. Our focus has been on the social and financial independence for our women.

Change in Society: We've been able to influence society by enthusing positive perception to mental illness. Society has slowly begun to accept that a mentally ill person can also be an asset to the Society.

Changes in Self: Self-Confidence of the person increases by the changes in oneself. We've been able to help our people lead normal lives.

We've tried to fill in the gaps in the low socio-economic group's access to care. We look at the Banyan as a Socio-medical model. We've tried to provide the whole spectrum of care in it. We've worked through collaborations. Tackling issues like Mental illness is a combined responsibility of the government, society and organizations like ours'. All stake holders of the society need to work together.

SWIM: Please tell us something more about Management principles applied by you?

VANDANA: We've applied three key elements as the basic principles:-

Good Leadership in the sector, Effective Management and Need for strategies.

We were constantly reviewing our model. It's very important to upscale the model using scientific techniques so that the impact is greater.

We think of mental illness as a multi dimensional issue. There is a relationship between mental illness and general health, human rights, poverty, abuse and other key issues faced by society.

We believe in financial and organizational sustainability of our organization. We, as the founders, are phasing out of the day-to-day management practices but will continue to be in the Board. We believe in transparency across the organization & feel the organization should not begin and end with one person, which usually is the practice in the NGO sector. We believe in upgrading our people constantly and provide them training for 'best practices' from different sectors. We have a strong dependence on human

resource linked sustainability. We provide leadership and skill related training on a continuous basis for human resource development & building second line leadership. These Training programs enable stakeholders to take new roles and progress in their career. There are different departments at the Banyan and the stakeholders can take responsibility of upgrading whichever department they like and so the founder need not be visible everywhere. This way the second line leadership gets ready to take on new roles & responsibilities.

Similarly our financial sustainability is based on good and visible methods of stakeholder's participation, community response and events. Our focus is not merely on raising funds but building a Brand in itself. We strongly believe in right marketing strategy for an organization like ours'. We are bringing in large trusts and government to fund our projects and this way we can phase out while the projects can self-fund and sustain themselves. These strategies we hope will make the Banyan financially sustainable.

SWIM: Tell us something about the relationship between government institutions (hospitals, medical centers) and Banyan?

VANDANA: Both of us have taken lessons from each other. They've already done a lot but they're facing a human resource limitation. The public sector facilities are bureaucratic and a lot depends on who is heading it. This causes variations, sometimes it goes on a high and sometimes on a low. We've exchanged lessons on our DNA. They've taken lessons from us on issues of strategy, management principles, network, increasing transparency levels and other steps. These days collaborations are the best ways to solve problems.

SWIM: How can a person get involved with Banyan?

VANDANA: The development sector strongly needs social entrepreneurs with technical skills, cutting edge practices to speed up the development process. Apart from this a person can volunteer for services like hands on work, marketing, working with research, fund raising or creating awareness for such projects.

Contact Information can be found on the website at www.thebanyan.org

Ms.Vandana Gopikumar, a Master's in Social Work, is the Founder Trustee & Hon. Secretary of The Banyan, an organisation that works with women with mental illness.



Woman – An individual

Woman, knowing herself, her purpose in life and the role she aspires to play, must seek and become aware of the inner truth of her being.

Nature has chosen woman as a medium for creation and has therefore bestowed her with a motherly instinct in which Love, Care, Humility, Harmony, Beauty and grace predominate. These enable her to adjust easily in the various phases and situations in life and also interact better with different types of persons. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" is a very ancient and apt saying and reveals the inherent power of love that a woman possesses. If she becomes conscious of this power within, she can be a dynamic force to reckon with.

Woman – A conscientious worker

From childhood woman is taught to love work. As a small girl she helps her mother and does small jobs for all the members of the family. She thus acquires an organizing capacity, skill in work and human relations. This skill is a great asset to her as she grows up and becomes a wife and a mother.

This skill and accompanying qualities are equally effective when she works in an office, school, factory or field. She can be easily trained to perform various duties. As generally in comparison to man, she has less mental arrogance. She can get along better with others and achieve her task successfully. That is why in the present society, in many jobs, women are preferred to men. Our age old Indian saying "Vasudaiva Kutumbakam" which means, "The whole world is our family" is easier for woman to feel as she is the creatrix.

Woman – Power

Women, owing to their greater capacity for intuitive and emotional empathy can give a better leadership than men. In the field of management there is an increasing recognition of the importance of intuition in decision making and the need for emotional empathy, care and love in human and industrial relation – the natural qualities of women which helps them become the trailblazers. An increasing participation of women in leadership positions in business and industry, especially in the field of Human and Industrial relations can go a long way in enhancing the quality of life of the modern organizational environment.

Devakunjari Natarajan, professor of Chinese (Mandarin) at Great lakes Institute of Management, is passionate about learning and teaching Chinese. Prior to this assignment she was instrumental in helping set up the manufacturing facility of Sundaram Fastners in Zhejiang province in China.



Ok Ok! Let me explain the concept of the title before you, the readers, tear me apart.

The story goes that a duckling is born to a mother duck in a swamp. But since it is very different from the other duckling, it is not treated as part of the flock. It goes through a lot of hardships but by the end of the following winter, it transforms into the most beautiful and majestic white swan at the swamp. Thus the duckling which was shunned by society at large grows up to be the leader showing others the way. But even with all the recognition it does not become conceited since it knows only too well of what it had to go through to achieve what it has and remains as humble as ever, the mark of a true leader.

To me, this story sums up what women in India have been going through and how things are fast changing, for the better. Indian culture has had a long tradition of respecting our women for her contributions in the family setting. We talk of women being the pillar of any family. We talk of educating the women of the family and the rest will follow suit. But we have not been very forthright in accepting and acknowledging her talents as a successful business woman. We have thus far shunned women in the business sphere just as was done to the duckling.

But all this is changing. Of late we have been witness to quite a few women breaking the traditional bondages and taking flight, soaring their way to success. The glass ceiling has developed huge cracks. And this is true not only for familiar and famous business women like Indira Nooyi (PepsiCo) or Indra Subramanyam (Ehrlich Labs) or Kiran Mazumdar Shaw (BioCon) but also likes of Barkha Dutt (Journalist) or Kiran Bedi (IPS) or Bachendri Pal (Adventurer).

This begs the question: Why are we seeing this paradigm shift? Why is there this sudden realisation of the business capabilities of women? Some of it has to do with women being more independent in the new liberalised India. Some has to do with the enhanced educational opportunities available to them. And some can be attributed to freedom and space that the new women have managed to garner. But I believe most of it has to do with the change in general attitude of society towards them. We live in an age where there is a much more liberal outlook towards businesswomen. It is no longer a taboo to be talking about a girl in the family who has made an impact in business unlike the days of yore when they were expected to perform only at home. Infact it is quite the opposite. Parents, husbands and children are all equally proud of the daughter, wife and mother who has reached the pinnacle and fulfilled her career aspirations.

There is yet another reason why we have started to acknowledge these courageous women – their ability to withstand burnout. You see, most of them have family commitments but they manage to juggle between family, relations and work seamlessly. It truly is a monumental task and they seem to be thriving in the challenge. This is precisely why we are awed by their very presence. And it's not like they have to put in extra effort to do all this juggling. It just comes naturally to them, like they are created to have to do all this at the same time. Men, I believe, for the world cannot do more than a couple of things at a time.

Which brings me to the point of humility. Even with all this going on for them, I do not see women being obnoxious about themselves on television or in any other media. We Indians tend to attribute this to our culture and prejudices – that women are meant to be docile beings fit to be a housewife only. But we have evidence of this mindset changing too, of seeing the woman as more than just secretaries and typists. Women now control the boardroom in certain companies. They conceive and execute groundbreaking ideas. And true to their never-say-die spirit, they move on to do much more and better things. Yet, they remain most Indian at heart. Take Indra Nooyi for example. I have not seen her address a gathering in anything other than a sari, she could if she wanted wearing western formals. Yet she chooses to wear saris in the talks she are in. Global Mindset Indian Roots at its very best!

So as a male in the male dominated business scene am I unduly worried about this unprecedented influx? No not really. Honest! The way I see it, they will only increase the diversity that we see around us, they will only make it all the more challenging to do business and they will only enhance the value of human life just by doing what they are created to do.

Looks like the swans are indeed taking over the world, and in the process making it a more beautiful place to be in. Women... They truly deserve a standing ovation!

George Mathew, a student at Great Lakes Institute of Management, was the state award winning college magazine editor in the year 2000. His interests include entrepreneurship and blogging.

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