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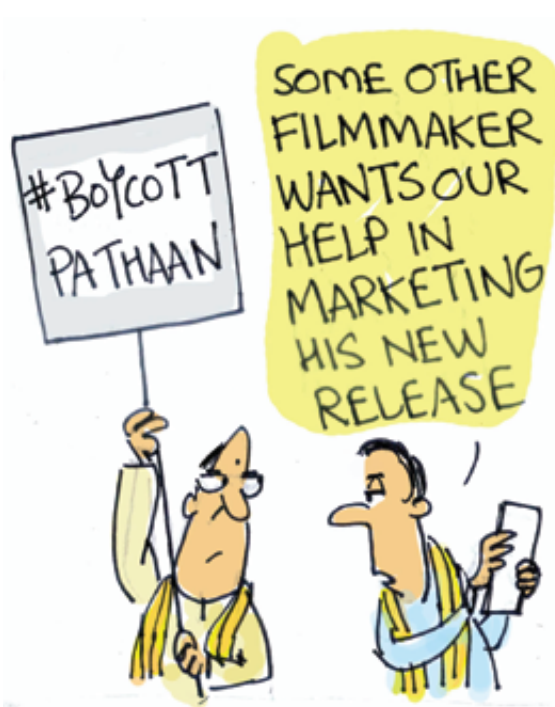
ENTERTAINERS, ACTIVISTS, COMEDIENNES!

Know India Better

MUMBAI'S GETTING FESTIVE,
AND HOW!

Face to Face

MEGHHA A. JHUNJHUNWALA



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Empowering women by education

*Govt, NGOs and individuals are making significant contributions to girls' education in India. Many organisations are working to provide education and life skills training to girls in rural areas, where access to education is limited. They are also working to prevent child marriage and promote gender equality through education, observes **Nandini Rao**.*



The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign has had a positive impact, but there is still much work to be done

Education is an essential tool for empowering women and promoting gender equality in India. Despite the progress made in recent years, there is still a significant gender gap in education in the country, particularly in rural areas and among marginalised communities.

However, the government, NGOs and individuals are working to address this issue and provide more educational opportunities for women.

The Right to Education Act, passed in India in 2009, mandates that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 must have access to free and compulsory education. This has had a positive impact on girls' enrolment in schools, but there are still many challenges to girls' education in the country.

Education, an important tool

Girls are more likely to drop out of school early due to poverty, child marriage, and gender discrimination, and they are often less likely to pursue higher education.

In recent years, the government has launched several initiatives to address the challenges facing girls' education in India. For example, the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Girl, Educate the Girl) campaign was launched in 2015 to raise

awareness about the importance of girls' education and address gender discrimination. The campaign has had a positive impact, but there is still much work to be done.

NGOs and individuals are also making important contributions to girls' education in India. For example, many organisations are working to provide education and life skills training to girls in rural areas, where access to education is limited. They are also working to prevent child marriage and promote gender equality through education.

In addition, there are many inspiring women in India who are working to promote girls' education and empower women through education. Education, therefore, is a powerful tool for empowering women and promoting gender equality in India. India has a rich history of women who have dedicated their lives to the education of others. From trailblazing social reformers to accomplished scholars and administrators, Indian female educators have made a lasting impact on the country's education system and society as a whole.

The role of Savitribai Phule

Savitribai Phule was a social reformer and educationist who lived in India during the 19th century. She was born in 1831 in Naigaon, Maharashtra and was one of the first female



Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and Savitribai Phule – the early social reformers who have made a lasting impact in the field of education

teachers in India. She and her husband, Jyotirao Phule, were pioneers in advocating for women's education and rights in India.

Savitribai Phule recognised that women were marginalised and oppressed in India, and she saw education as a means to empower them and improve their status in society. She believed that education was the key to breaking down caste barriers and ending the oppression of women and lower-caste groups. In 1848, she and Jyotirao opened the first school for girls in Pune, India, which was met with opposition from the upper-caste communities. However, Savitribai persevered and continued to open more schools for girls.

Her efforts to promote women's education went beyond just opening schools. She also wrote and published several books on women's rights and education, including a collection of poems addressing the issue of women's oppression. She worked to break down the cultural norms that prevented women from pursuing education and also raised awareness about the importance of educating women.

Savitribai Phule's contributions to women's education in India were truly ground-breaking and her efforts paved the way for future generations of women in India to receive education. Today, she is remembered as a hero and a symbol of the fight for women's rights and education in India.

Savitribai is widely regarded as one of the country's first feminists. She established several schools for girls and helped to break down the caste and gender barriers that had previously denied women access to education. She passed away in 1897 but her legacy lives on through the countless women in India who have received education and improved their lives as a result of her pioneering efforts.

Sarojini Naidu also an accomplished educator

Sarojini Naidu was an Indian freedom fighter and political leader who was also an accomplished educator. She was one of the first women to study at the University of Cambridge and went on to become a renowned poet and playwright. Naidu's commitment to education was driven by her belief that education was the key to empowering women and she dedicated her life to this cause, despite facing opposition from many quarters.

Naidu established several schools for girls and was a vocal advocate for women's education. She was also involved in the establishment of several universities in India. Her impact on education in India was profound and she continues to inspire female educators who are working to promote education for all.

Indira Gandhi played crucial role

Indira Gandhi was the first female Prime Minister of India and a visionary leader who played a crucial role in the country's education sector. She was an advocate for universal education and was instrumental in the establishment of several schools and colleges across India.

Gandhi was also committed to promoting women's education and was involved in the establishment of several schools for girls, which provided education for girls in rural areas.

Annie Besant was a British social reformer and theosophist who also contributed significantly in promoting education in India. She was born in London in 1847 but in India, she worked for women's rights and Indian independence.

She was deeply committed to promoting education as a means of social and cultural progress. She founded the Central Hindu College in 1898 with Dr Arthur Richardson, a science graduate from England. The college later became the prestigious Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

She also established a number of schools throughout India. The Central Hindu School in Banaras, one of India's largest schools is affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education. Besant dedicated this school to Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya.

Besant a strong advocate for women's education believed that educating women was key to improving the status of women in society and promoting gender equality. Her efforts inspired other social reformers to follow in her footsteps.

In addition to her work in education, Annie Besant was also involved in the Indian independence movement and was a leader of the Indian National Congress. She was a strong voice for India's freedom from British rule and worked to raise awareness about the cause both in India and abroad.

Women like Annie Besant, Savitribai Phule, Sarojini Naidu were among the thousands of strong-willed and visionary women who made a significant impact of India through their works in the fields of education and social reforms. Their efforts uplifted the lives of millions of women, who became independent and socially aware because of education.

Nandini Rao is a media researcher with The History and Heritage Project – A DraftCraft International Initiative to document details, analyse facts and plug lacunae generated by oversight or to further national or foreign agenda in History and Heritage Across India and Beyond Borders.

Controlling the administrative reins

Bisakha Roy asserts that women have been equal to the task when it comes to public administration. Cutting through gender barriers, they have made a difference, changed lives and contributed in nation building. They have been no less firebrand and feisty than their male counterparts. Having to clear tough exams, their jobs come with great responsibilities but they have adapted and how!



IAS officers Tina Dabi, Smita Sabharwal, Sweta Mohanty and few others are setting benchmarks in their respective domains and are inspiring future generations of women in India

Indian women have come a long way in breaking down gender barriers and making their mark in various fields, including the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). The IAS is considered one of the most prestigious and challenging civil services in India and the success of these women in this field is a testament to their determination, hard work and unwavering commitment.

Driven and accomplished women IAS officers in India are setting benchmarks in their respective domains and are inspiring future generations of women.

The first Dalit woman to top civil services exam

Tina Dabi, an alumna of Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi, made history by topping the prestigious Civil Services Examination in 2015, becoming the first Dalit woman to achieve this feat. She had topped the 2015 Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination and that too in the first attempt. She was only 22 years old at the time.

She was allotted the IAS cadre and first posted as Assistant Collector in Ajmer in Rajasthan where she received recognition for her efforts in promoting digital transactions and financial inclusion and implementation of various development projects and welfare schemes.

Dabi was later transferred for other posts where she continued to demonstrate her administrative skills and worked towards the upliftment of the economically and socially marginalised sections of the society. Her efforts in the implementation of various government schemes especially in the field of education have won her widespread recognition and praise.

She was later appointed as the Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) in Bhilwara, Rajasthan and then posted as the CEO-Zilla Parishad of Sri Ganganagar. This was followed by posting as Joint Secretary (Finance – Tax Department) in Jaipur and most recently, in 2022, she took charge as the 65th District Collector and Magistrate of Jaisalmer District of Rajasthan. She originally belongs to Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh.

She has been involved in initiatives related to education, health and women empowerment. In her postings, she has made significant contributions towards improving the living standards of women and children in the state.

Aside from her professional work, Dabi is also known for her active presence on social media, where she uses the platforms to raise awareness about various social and environmental issues. She has a strong following among young people who admire her for her dedication and commitment to public service. Overall, Tina Dabi is a highly regarded IAS officer who has made a significant impact in her short career and continues to inspire young people across India to pursue a career in public service.

First woman IAS working in CMO office

Smita Sabharwal, an IAS officer of the 2001 batch, belonging to Telangana cadre and has served in various capacities in the state of Telangana. Presently, she has been appointed as the Secretary to the Chief Minister of the Government of Telangana and holds additional charge as Secretary, Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Department (Mission Bhagiratha Department).

She is popularly known as 'The People's Officer' for addressing citizen issues by involving people themselves. She is the first lady IAS Officer to be appointed to the Chief Minister's Office. She is known for her hard work, dedication and commitment to public service.

Some of her notable achievements include playing a key role in the implementation of several welfare schemes in Telangana and efforts to improve the state's infrastructure, etc. She has also spearheaded initiatives towards the development of rural areas in Telangana and has worked towards providing basic amenities such as water, electricity and healthcare services. She is also known to use latest technology for betterment of society such as in the implementation of government programmes on field.

Smita was born in a Bengali family in Darjeeling, West Bengal to an Army officer Colonel Pranab Das and Purabi Das. She was an all-India topper in the school ICSE exam. She was only 22 years old when she cleared the Union Public Service Commission exam in 2000, securing All-India-Rank four.

Her first posting was as Sub Collector, Madanapally in Chittoor where she got hands-on experience in Land Revenue Management and District Administration. She also worked in the Rural Development sector as Project Director, DRDA, Kadapa. As Warangal's Municipal Commissioner, Smita introduced 'Fund your City' scheme. As part of this scheme, a large number of public utilities such as traffic junctions, foot-overbridges, bus-stops, parks were created with Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

In 2011, Smita Sabharwal was appointed Karimnagar's District Collector. It was here she put in a lot of efforts in the areas of health and education. It was during her tenure that the Ammalalana scheme was successfully implemented in the

district. This health initiative is for the improvement of institutional deliveries in the public sector. The success of this initiative was so well received that it became a role model for many other similar initiatives – such as high-risk pregnancy management targeting, IMR and MMR in NRHM of Government of India.

In fact, this initiative was also nominated as one of the best initiatives for Prime Minister's award for excellence in public administration. Smita Sabharwal continues to work towards the betterment of the state and its people, and her work has earned her widespread recognition and respect.

Known for work in public administration

Sweta Mohanty is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer who is known for her work in the field of public administration and rural development. She has held several important posts in the government machinery and has been responsible for many fruitful initiatives.

Sweta first cleared the examination in 2007 with 312th rank. It was in her third attempt that she secured the second rank in the All India UPSC examination and grabbed the coveted Indian Administrative Services. She feels the IAS preparation is not just for an exam but a continuous learning process that she thoroughly enjoyed.

Her family is originally from Puri. Sweta was born in Cuttack and raised in Hyderabad. She drew inspiration to give the civil services exam from her father, P K Mohanty who is an Andhra Pradesh cadre IAS officer, currently on deputation to the Centre. She recalls how her father works tirelessly for the development of the state and that's what motivated her to follow his footsteps.

Sweta Mohanty assumed charge as Collector of Hyderabad in February 2020. She was later given additional charge as collector for Medak district in November 2020. Before that, she successfully and efficiently discharged her duties as the District Collector of Wanaparthy for three years. In 2021, she secured a seat for a one-year Masters in Public Administration exam in Harvard University.

The importance of women in public administration cannot be emphasised enough. It's a great opportunity to make a difference, change lives and contribute in nation building. Women administrative officers are firebrand and feisty. The civil service exams of India are one of the toughest exams in the world. The job of a civil servant is coveted and a powerful one but it also comes with a lot of responsibilities but women administrators of India are battling all challenges with a smile and making a mark for themselves.

Bisakha Roy is a researcher with www.thewomansurvivor.com – an initiative of DraftCraft International to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions.

Business leaders with a difference

Vidhi Joshi asserts Indian businesswomen are touching lives of millions of people and continue to break through gender barriers in the world of business. There are many successful women industrialists who have made their mark in various industries by making a positive impact on the country's economy and society.



Vinita Bali



Arundhati Bhattacharya



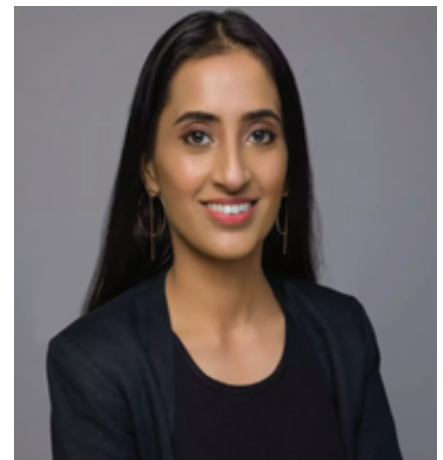
Mallika Srinivasan



Falguni Nayar



Kiran Mazumdar Shaw



Vineeta Singh

Indian women have come a long way in recent years, breaking the glass ceiling in various fields and emerging as successful entrepreneurs and business leaders. Despite facing numerous obstacles and biases, they have proven that they have the skill, determination and resilience to succeed in the world of business.

Despite being traditionally confined to the household, with very few opportunities to venture outside and pursue careers, Indian women have come a long way and made a mark in fields that have always been considered a male domain, such as business and commerce.

Over the past few decades, with more and more

ing the workforce, the scenario has changed. As a result, the number of women-owned businesses in India has increased significantly in recent years, with women starting and running a wide range of businesses, from small-scale enterprises to large multinational corporations.

Changing stereotypes

Indian businesswomen are touching lives of millions of people and continue to break through gender barriers in the world of business. There are many successful women industrialists who have made their mark in various industries by making a positive impact on the country's economy and society.

Billionaire entrepreneur Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Found-

er and Executive Chairman of Biocon, one of India's leading biopharmaceutical companies, is considered one of the pioneers of the biotechnology industry in India and has been instrumental in developing the country's biotechnology sector. She founded Biocon with an initial investment of just ₹ 10,000.

Since its inception, Biocon has grown into a major player in the biotechnology sector, with operations in India and several other countries. The company has a strong focus on research and development, and is known for its innovative and cutting-edge products and services. Under Kiran's leadership, Biocon has established itself as a leader in the Indian biotech industry and has been recognised for its contributions to the country.

A true trailblazer, Kiran's achievements have been recognised by several awards and honors, including the Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian honors, in 1989, and the Padma Bhushan in 2005. In 2014, Kiran received the Othmer Gold Medal for outstanding contributions to the progress of science and chemistry. She also featured in the Financial Times 2011 top 50 women in business list. And, in 2019, she was listed as the 68th most powerful woman in the world by Forbes. These are a few of her many achievements and awards.

Indu Jain who passed in 2021 was the Chairperson of Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd., which owns several media brands in India, including The Times of India and The Economic Times. She was one of India's leading media personalities and was instrumental in shaping the Indian media landscape.

In 2016, Jain was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the government of India. In November 2019, she received the Lifetime Achievement award from the Institute of Company Secretaries of India for translating excellence in corporate governance into reality. She had also received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Indian Congress of Women.

Setting examples

Vinita Bali is a former CEO of Britannia Industries, one of India's leading food companies. She is known for her leadership and innovative approach to business and has been instrumental in transforming Britannia into a globally-recognised brand.

A global business leader, Bali was instrumental in building the Britannia brand and establishing its presence in the Indian market. She worked to create a strong connection between the brand and its customers and to make it a trusted household name.

Bali has received several awards and recognition for her contributions to the Indian food industry and her leadership skills. Some of the notable awards include the Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian awards, and the India Leadership Award for Corporate Excellence.

Former Chairman of the State Bank of India, India's largest public sector bank, Arundhati Bhattacharya is known for her leadership in transforming the bank and for her efforts to promote financial inclusion in India. She is the first woman to be the Chairperson of State Bank of India. She is a true leader and trailblazer in the Indian banking industry.

Under Arundhati's leadership, the State Bank of India transformed into a modern, technology-driven institution that was able to provide innovative financial solutions to its customers. She focused on expanding the bank's reach in rural areas, promoting financial inclusion, and leveraging technology to improve customer services. She also led the bank's efforts to manage the stress in the banking sector and address the issue of non-performing assets. In 2016, she was listed as the 25th most powerful woman in the world by Forbes and she is the only Indian corporate leader listed on Fortune's world's greatest

leaders list, ranked at 26.

Mallika Srinivasan is the Chairman and MD of TAFE (Tractors and Farm Equipment Limited), one of India's leading manufacturers of tractors and agricultural machinery. She is known for her leadership and innovative approach to business and has been instrumental in transforming TAFE into a global player in the agriculture sector.

She has successfully led the company in its growth journey into becoming a company with revenues in excess of ₹10,000 crore. She has received many awards for her exemplary leadership skills. These include the 2011 voting as Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst and Young, Woman Leader of the Year award by Forbes India, recognised by Forbes Asia as one of the Top 50 Asian Power Businesswomen, etc.

Overcoming challenges

One of the key challenges faced by Indian women in business is cultural biases and stereotypes. Despite significant progress in recent years, many people in India still hold the belief that women are not suited for leadership positions and that their primary role is in the home.

This stereotype is reinforced by the media, which often portrays women as passive and submissive, rather than strong and capable. This can make it difficult for women to get the recognition and support they need to succeed in business, and can also lead to a lack of female role models in the business world.

Another major challenge faced by Indian women in business is a lack of access to resources and support. This includes access to capital, education and training and networking opportunities. For example, women are often excluded from traditional sources of financing, such as bank loans, and are forced to rely on personal savings and informal sources of funding. This can make it difficult for them to start and grow their businesses, and can limit their ability to compete in the marketplace.

Despite these challenges, there are a number of initiatives to empower and support Indian women in business. For example, the Indian government has launched a number of schemes and programmes aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and providing support to women-owned businesses. These include the Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme, which provides loans to women entrepreneurs and the Annapurna Scheme, which provides micro-finance support to women-owned enterprises.

In addition to government initiatives, there are also a number of non-profit organisations and private sector initiatives that are working to support and empower Indian women in business. One of the most successful initiatives aimed at supporting Indian women in business is the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which is a trade union for women working in the informal sector.

Vidhi Joshi is a researcher with www.thewomansurvivor.com – an initiative of DraftCraft International to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions.

Helming the legal domain

*Citing illustrious examples, **Kriti Kalra** sketches a healthy picture of women leading from the front in matters relating to judicial reforms. These women have given a substantive account of themselves by fighting for causes; not for populist reasons but to stamp their commitment to serious issues. There is not an area in legal sphere that women haven't left their mark.*



Abha Singh



Justice BV Nagarathna



Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj



Seema Samridhi



Menaka Guruswamy



Arundhati Katju



Kiruba Munusamy



Violet Alva

Women have been at the forefront of judicial reforms in India. And, often for issues that are simply not populist. Women are known to fight for a cause even if it calls for swimming against the tide. Look at Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj whose fight against the misuse of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code – a controversial anti-dowry law – is legendary to say the least.

She travelled across India, screening 'Martyrs of Marriage', her first feature-length documentary, to persuade the authorities to re-write the law. The draconian section 498A was introduced in 1983 after a series of dowry deaths in Delhi and other parts of India. There was a flurry of daily reports of newly-wed brides being torched to death by their husbands and in-laws and the incidents were often passed off as kitchen accidents. Violent protests by female MPs and activists forced Parliament to bring in the law.

Misuse of law

While the law was created with very noble intentions, according to Ms Bhardwaj, it has also taken many lives. Her contention isn't in isolation as the said Section 498A has

acquired the reputation of being the most abused law in the history of Indian jurisprudence, according to her.

Over the years there has been a steady rise in number of divorces in India, disgruntled women emboldened by unscrupulous lawyers regularly misuse the law to harass their husbands and relatives. Why, a judge of the Supreme Court even described its misuse as legal terrorism, warning it was intended to be used as a shield and not as an assassin's weapon, and the National Commission for Women too expressed concerns over its misuse.

It was following the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape which formed India's watershed moment of legal reforms for sexual assault victims that Seema Samridhi's role as an advocate who relentlessly pursued justice for Jyoti Singh for years until the convicts were executed in 2020 came to light. It was Samridhi's very first case since she joined the case as a legal trainee and took charge of it in 2014 when she became a Supreme Court lawyer.

She said in an interview that it's a fight for all women

in the world adding anyone could be Nirbhaya. And, even after the convicts were hanged then, similar cases continue coming to her.

For gender equality

It was the reading down of IPC Section 377 by the Supreme Court in 2018 that catapulted senior SC advocate Menaka Guruswamy with her partner and lawyer Arundhati Katju to the limelight. Guruswamy's efforts exposed the inadequacies of a colonial-era law that forbade consensual same-sex intercourse. The reforms brought members of the LGBTIQ+ community the right to a life of greater dignity than before, following the uproar.

Dalit Rights Activist and a Supreme Court lawyer Kiruba Munusamy, a powerful voice across spaces of law, gender and equality, speaking against discrimination in society. Her pursuit of justice and matters she represents lie at the intersection of gender and caste violence and other human rights violations. The founder of *Legal Initiative for Equality* emphasised on the work that needed to be done: "I have seen many upper-caste liberals who participate in protests or movements which are seen as 'decent'. They also don't know how to pass the mic... I, as a Dalit woman, am not invited to Dalit collectives, but Brahmin women are sitting there. How?"

Former Civil Servant and Bombay High Court lawyer Abha Singh has been a defender of justice for women for years as an inspiring figure across causes that ranged from the #MeToo movement, LGBTQIA+ community, menstrual rights, and cyber-harassment of women. Her book 'Stree – Dasha aur Disha' consolidates these issues into a written legal key on empowering women in India. She says it's never too late to feel within yourself that you want to do something different and want to be different and do something for the society. She believes everyone is a change-maker in her own right.

Power to one and all

Abha Singh has been a part of some of the major celebrity cases as well as social cases in India. When Justice Markandey Katju, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Press Council of India wrote to the governor of Maharashtra asking him to pardon Sanjay Dutt for his involvement in the 1993 bomb blasts, she was the first to bring to the notice of the public that he was exerting undue influence and wrote to the governor rebutting his assertions.

Among Abha's high-profile cases has been Salman Khan hit-and-run case where the Bollywood star was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in 2002. Abha Singh was one of the main people behind the verdict. She had filed a petition alleging the Mumbai police was shielding the actor and delaying investigation in the case.

Her NGO, RannSamar Foundation (named after her father and father-in-law) has adopted a village in Uttar Pradesh to empower girls and women. Here they offer training in computers, vocational skills like tailoring and spoken English courses. They have also organised computer courses in Tally in a Lucknow jail to help convicts join mainstream society and get a job after they complete their sentence.

Through RannSamar, Abha offers free legal assistance advocacy to helpless women and slum dwellers who have been unfairly persecuted by local authorities and builders for land that is rightfully theirs.

And then, there's Justice BV Nagarathna, the daughter of the former Chief Justice of India ES Venkataramiah, who - if appointments take place according to the seniority turn - might become the first female Chief Justice of India in Sep 2027 and India will finally have a woman at the post.

In the farewell speech that she delivered on Aug 27, she had said that if women get access to the right opportunities, they can achieve their dreams. She urged all of them to seek the opportunities and have faith in themselves. On the first day, she shared the bench with Justice L Nageswara Rao and Aniruddha Bose.

Legal luminaries

B V Nagarathna was elevated to the Supreme Court in 2021. She is projected to become the 54th Chief Justice of India on September 25th, 2027 where she will occupy this position for 36 days.

Violet Alva was the first female lawyer to appear before a High Court. The journalist and the first woman to preside over Rajya Sabha, in 1944 Violet Alva started a women's magazine called Indian Women. She was also the first woman to be elected in 1952 to the Standing Committee of the All India Newspaper Editors Conference. Violet Alva was also actively associated with a range of social organisations such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the Business and Professional Women's Association and the International Federation of Women Lawyers.

Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman to practice law in India and the only lawyer to breach the glass ceiling for women in courtrooms across the country. Known for her involvement in many social reform activities, Sorabji played an active role in the Bengal branch of the National Council for Women in India, The Federation of University Women, and the Bengal League of Social Service.

It was in 1907 that she was awarded the Kaiser-I-Hind Gold medal by the Indian government for her extensive social work. Sorabji exerted a major influence on the abolition of Sati and Child marriages and also gave up her practice to work for social reforms entirely in 1929.

Kriti Kalra is an activist and field researcher with www.thewomansurvivor.com – an initiative of DraftCraft International to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions.

A leadership style of their own

The world of women politicians is a much scrutinised one. The unexpected resignation of New Zealand prime minister Jessica Arden reignited the debate on leadership styles of women political leaders. Lina Mathias looks at a few aspects of this sphere.



Indira Gandhi



Jayalalitha Jayaram



Sushma Swaraj



Mayawati



Smriti Irani



Sheila Dixit



Draupadi Murmu



Mamta Banerjee

Perhaps, almost all women, at some time or the other in their lives, have thought a variation of this quote: a woman has to be twice as good as a man to get even half as far as him but fortunately, that is not difficult!

Even in the present times, it is quite common to see them subjected to scrutiny and criticism based only on their gender. Imagine then how women in politics are viewed considering the unpredictability of its rough-and-tumble.

We also see that a few developing countries have had women leaders at the helm of the nation or a state in it. These women, whether it was Indira Gandhi in India or Golda Meir in Israel, were often spoken of as the “only men” in their particular situations. So, even when the woman is perceived as a great leader it has to be so because she is not really “like a typical woman.”

Apart from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh in Asia have had or do have women at the nation's helm. Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar is also a remarkable example. These

women may have come from politically established and powerful families but nevertheless they display qualities that mark them as leaders.

It was Jessica Arden's recent resignation as Prime Minister of New Zealand that sparked a discussion on the different styles of leadership of women and men. She said she had had a burn out and her “tank was no longer full.” Arden has a huge fan following around the world and it does not cover only women. She was also much admired for the way in which she handled the different crises that her country faced during her tenure as PM. She has famously said, “One of the criticisms I've faced over the years is that I'm not aggressive enough or assertive enough, or maybe somehow, because I'm empathetic, it means I'm weak. I totally rebel against that. I refuse to believe that you cannot be both compassionate and strong.”

In an article on the International Leadership Association website in 2020, “Building Forward Better”—Why Women's Leadership Matters, the authors point out that while women comprise only around 8% of political leaders globally, they have

accounted for an estimated 40% of the most successful responses to COVID-19. They go on to quote the New York Times columnist Nick Kristoff's comparative analysis that showed that women-led countries have a six-times lower death rate than those led by male counterparts in similar countries.

The article says that women consult and collaborate with scientists and experts; put people's lives first – which also turns out to be best for the economy in the long run; are transparent, flexible and willing to admit to mistakes and communicate better and encourage values of cooperation and empathy.

Under the lens

The world of women politicians has always been a fascinating one for students of politics, sociology and gender studies and the media in general. It has also been one that is scrutinised by the media closely and sometimes, unfairly. Their appearance and looks in general, come under examination more than their speeches or opinions on important public issues. Most women politicians become aware of this early enough in their careers. Fortunately for them, many of them simply take it in their stride and factor it as an occupational hazard.

I remember an anecdote I read about the late PM of Britain, Margaret Thatcher. It may or may not be an apocryphal one. At an international seminar on terrorism, she was the lone woman among several men. Even though she was scheduled to speak before lunch, the male speakers before her droned on and on and she was listed to speak after the lunch break. When the chair apologised to her, she is reported to have said: "It doesn't matter, gentlemen. Remember, the cock crows loud but it is the hen that lays the eggs." India's Indira Gandhi was also known far and wide for her decisive actions and firmness of purpose.

Female presence

The range of Indian women social reformers, freedom fighters and social activists is too large and varied for me to name them or look at their trajectories—even if one confines oneself to start from the late 19th century. The interested reader who wants to learn about these women—even the ones who are not well known generally—can now avail of many research based books and online articles that delve into their lives and contributions. Starting with social reformers and then with leaders of the independence movement, women were encouraged to come out of their homes and participate publicly in movements and march on the streets in the protests.

However, we are primarily focused here on women politicians and political leaders mainly of the latter part of the 20th century onwards. This field too is very vast and multifaceted to be covered in this one article.

The first woman chief minister (CM) of Uttar Pradesh was Sucheta Kripalani who was considered a strong leader and is also known for her contribution to the freedom movement and in international arbitration. Another woman politician was at the helm of that state in more recent times. Mayawati was CM for four different terms and the first woman Dalit chief minister.

In Tamil Nadu, we had Jayalalitha Jayaram as CM. She was a film star with a huge fan following who became an astute politician. Shiela Dixit was the second woman CM of Delhi but the longest-serving one with a tenure of over 15 years. The first woman CM of Delhi was Sushma Swaraj who went on to become India's union minister of external affairs.

West Bengal has its first woman CM in Mamta Banerjee who has also been India's first woman railway minister. Vasundhara Raje was the first woman CM of Rajasthan and is

the daughter of another well known woman politician Vijaya Raje Scindia. Sonia Gandhi has featured time and again in an international list of 'most powerful women' and has been the longest serving president of the Congress Party.

India got its first woman President Pratibha Patil (she was also Governor of Rajasthan) in 2007 and now we have President Droupadi Murmu who is also the first president to hail from the tribal community. Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Minister Smriti Irani are the prominently known female faces in the cabinet, women parliamentarians include Supriya Sule, Kanimozhi, Mahua Moitra, 28-year old Chandrani Murmu and several others.

Need for much more

In India we have women who have entered the field of politics without having fathers, brothers or male relatives to cushion their entry into a field that is by no means an easy one to survive in. Of course, there are news reports of how in some local governing bodies, women are elected into the reserved posts but their husbands or fathers not only call the shots but even sit in the woman's chair during functions and meetings! It must also be noted here that in 2010, 30 year old Chhavi Rajawat became the youngest sarpanch in India. The highly educated Rajawat gave up a corporate job to take over this post of the Soda gram panchayat in Rajasthan. Her contribution and career is remarkable.

But female participation in legislative and political decision making posts needs to be much more in India.

According to the 2011 Census, India has a female population of 59 crores. Compared to this number the number of women political leaders or even state legislators and parliamentarians is not very encouraging.

Even though we noted that in posts reserved for women in local governing bodies, in several cases it is their male relatives who run the show, research and surveys show that the reservation has conferred benefits in many and powerful ways. Women-related policy concerns and issues find better representation and implementation and these women in turn become role models for the larger society.

However, The Women's Reservation Bill or The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2010, has had a long and convoluted trajectory and whilst most parties are agreed that it must become law, it has remained on the back burner.

While national Parliaments worldwide boast of women holding 26% per cent of the seats, India's current Lok Sabha has 15% women MPs. In the state assemblies, the percentage of seats held by women remains below 15 per cent.

The equal representation of women in legislatures and Parliament will bring with it a unique style of leadership, viewpoints on policies and measures. And surely, that can be beneficial for the country.



Lina Mathias is a senior Mumbai-based journalist and former executive editor, Economic and Political Weekly.

Entertainers, activists, comediennes!

Says **Nandini Rao**: *Women are charting territories that one would have least expected them to. It is a telling commentary on their growth and the strides they have taken to dabble in as diverse as entertainment, activism and even stand-up comedy. What is more, they can understand the people's pulse just as well.*



Maya Krishna Rao

India is scripting the growth story in many spheres and so are its women. The new generation of women icons are exploring uncharted territories and those that were always a man's domain. And, there's no stopping them!

In the Live Entertainment space, a relatively new field is that of stand-up comedy and here, women are trailblazing, that too on their own terms.

A general definition of live entertainment is any activity or act that offers delight, pleasure, enjoyment, relaxation, entertainment or a similar purpose by one or more individuals and amid the physical presence of an audience or patrons in a designated space.

It includes an array of activities such as live music, play, dance, magic show, musical act (including karaoke), theatrical act that also includes stand-up comedy.



Mallika Dua

New spaces

Among these, and more recently, stand-up comedy has been entertaining the Indian audiences. Considered to be a male domain primarily, today in India women are slaying stand-up comedy in a big way.

Stand-up comedy is a comedic performance in front of a live audience where the performer - also known as a comedian, comic or stand-up - addresses the audience directly from the stage.

An act of stand-up comedy can be anything from one-liners to anecdotes from personal life, observations and more, and it could include props, music, ventriloquism, etc.

While women have been entertaining live audience

with comic acts in the West for ages, it's a relatively new domain for women in India. However, slowly and steadily, Indian women are not just venturing into stand-up comedy, they are acing it too.

One of the earliest female stand-up comediennes in India, Aditi Mittal has been active for more than a decade now. She has been rated among the country's top ten stand-up comedians and also ranks among the top 30 Indian women to follow on Twitter who are witty, intelligent and incredibly fun.

In 2009, Aditi was one of the first five Indians who were featured in Local Heroes – an Indians-only stand-up show organised by The Comedy Store in United Kingdom. Aditi performs widely in Mumbai, UK, USA, etc.

Feisty and funny

Indian theatre artist, social activist and stand-up comedienne Maya Krishna Rao has been enthraling her audiences for decades now. The 70-year-old artist is well known for her plays such as Dafa No. 180, Ravanama, Om Swaha and Heads Are Meant for Walking Into. She was born in New York City and moved to India at an early age.

Maya Krishna Rao has a captivating effect on her audience and she is known to be fearless and humorous at the same time. She says she only wants to make people laugh, so she gets on the stage for protest and performs comedy.

Indian stand-up comedian and environmentalist Vasu Primlani was given the Nari Shakti Puraskar by the government of India in 2015 for her work. The President of India confers the annual award on International Women's Day (8 March) at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. It is given by the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the government of India and is the highest civilian honour for women in India.

It is given to individual women or to institutions that work towards the cause of women empowerment. The award was instituted in 1999 under the title of Stree Shakti Puraskar but was renamed and reorganised in 2015. It is awarded in six institutional and two individual categories, which carry a cash prize of 2,00,000 and 1,00,000 rupees, respectively.

Vasu Primlani is a triathlete, rock climber and is also well-known for her international stand-up comedy with shows done all over the world including in USA, Dubai, etc. Her comedy usually focuses on issues of contemporary relevance including environment, women's safety, rape, human rights and diversity issues.

In sync with youth

Stand-up comedy is very often used to raise social issues of the time even used as a vent to protest against authoritarian entities and powers. It also closely follows youth culture, trends and icons. In that context, dating and relationships are hot topics in many stand-up comic acts.

The interplay of romance, dating, relationships offer myriad opportunities to the performer and holds great appeal with the audience as well. The economics of the combination are quite favourable too.

Sometimes derived from their own experiences and personal stories and other times from those of their friends, relatives, etc., dating and relationships are great fodder for comic artists. In this regard, many women comedians in India have gained popularity by talking about dating and love.

Originally from Bengaluru, Ramya Ramapriya often

talks about her dating experience and dating culture in Mumbai, which she calls is similar to the city's local train i.e., fleeting and volatile. A mechanical engineer by education, she entered the comedy circuit in 2017 and there's been no looking back since.

Ramya often talks about her experiences on dating apps such as Tinder and Hinge and says that for her Hinge needs more intellectual input as compared to Tinder and which is why men often fail at the former as they often lack the much-needed communication skills.

From Amethi in Uttar Pradesh, writer, stand-up comic, actor and improviser, Prashasti Singh has successfully incorporated her life and experiences as a girl from a small town into her comic acts. She also loves to talk about her experience of dating in a big city like Mumbai, where she believes romance is dead and casual interaction is in demand.

Feminist and vocal

Many women stand-up comedians in India use comedy as a means to highlight an issue plaguing the contemporary society and to empower the masses, particularly women.

Delhi's Mallika Dua, an actor, writer and comedian has often done that through her comedy acts. She is the daughter of Padma Shri recipient and noted Indian journalist late Vinod Dua. After dabbling into various fields, she finally chose her calling and moved to Mumbai in 2016 to entertain people, full time.

With a few controversies also under her belt, Mallika has continued to entertain and make her audience laugh. Her acts and videos on her YouTube channel are often satirical highlighting the uncomfortable and difficult realities of life, and society in particular.

Mallika has often used her comedy acts to empower women by being vocal about her ideologies and bold thoughts on issues concerning women. She has often spoken about harassment at workplace, sexism, judging, etc. She has also actively slammed body-shaming for women.

Women activists, across the world, have used diverse means to raise issues, mobilise masses and stir change. They have been using social media, visual media, live performances and more to spark conversations about difficulties and harassment they face in their daily lives.

Many comedians, in India and beyond, are using humour to speak up about serious social issues and call for social change. They have been using comedy to increase awareness about issues such as LGBTQI rights, domestic violence, global warming, climate change, discrimination, gender bias, women safety, immigration, etc.

Nandini Rao is a media researcher with The History and Heritage Project – A DraftCraft International Initiative to document details, analyse facts and plug lacunae generated by oversight or to further national or foreign agenda in History and Heritage Across India and Beyond Borders.

Books by women authors

'No Return Address' by 'yours truly' was among the prominent books on display and sale at Kolkata's famed International Book Fair but three other books – by Chitra Banerjee Divakurni, Shoma Chatterji and Moitrayee Bhaduri also cornered the author's attention. A short report.



Author Manjira Majumdar signing off a copy of her book 'No Return Address' at the Kolkata Book Fair

The 46th International Kolkata Book Fair, one of the world's largest book fairs by attendance was back with a bang after two years of a subdued affair. Held over the first two weeks of February, usually, it becomes an extension of a vibrant cultural exchange between the publishers, writers and book lovers.

Personally, this year was a special one for yours truly as my recently launched book 'No Return Address' was part of the fair along with those of many talented women authors. It was a proud moment when I got to sign off a few copies at the prestigious fair.

This year, my picks are three new books in three important areas of interest – partition, cinema and crime, by three well-known women writers. Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's *Independence*, Shoma A. Chatterji's *Satyajit Ray – Frame to Frame* and Moitrayee Bhaduri's *Trinoyini* – the slaughterer of Sonagachi.

Chitra's latest novel, *Independence* is an addition to the list of literature on the partition of India, the uglier side of independence. Her story is set in two Bengal which fills the lacunae of such literature in English from the eastern parts of the country, mainly the voices of the Bengali Hindus. It is divided between the two halved portions of Bengal which saw a division under the British, back in the early 19th century. Even if the destiny of Bengalis became marked, the call of Direct Action Day initiated by Jinnah, led to massive riots between the two communities.

Her story is about three sisters set against this period and who are also women in pursuit of their own identity.

Frame to Frame is another gem from the prolific writer on gender and cinema Shoma A. Chatterji. Naturally the chapter I liked most was films through the gender lens - Mahanagar, in

which we discover the metamorphosis of the sheltered housewife, who is compelled to take up a job of a saleswoman in face of an acute money crunch in her joint family. The mainstreaming of prostitution in *Seemabadha*, *Pratiwandi*, *Ashani Shanket* and *Jana Aranya* are an actual spin-off also from the role of earning money and in staving off poverty.

This apart, the literary liaison in *Charulata*, is all about friendship or even love a woman can experience beyond boundaries; a theme that Russian and French writers have widely explored. As Shoma analyses - women are penalised for no fault of theirs; often, by the whims of men.

Lastly, we have a thriller to relax with after the intense and good writing of these two senior writers. *Trinoyini* The slaughterer of Sonagachi is a spine-chilling story of a woman called Troilokya Devi who was considered to be a dangerous serial killer in and around the Red Light District of Kolkata. The journey from a very poor Brahmin widow to a murderer, with the help of a male accomplice, is nicely mapped. Her account is well documented in police records but she remains a mysterious figure who gave the police a slip many a times till she was ultimately nabbed. Moitrayee Bhaduri has done a good job in getting us riveted to a very interesting part of the city's crime history through her thriller and the sad state of women therein despite the reforms taking place alongside.

Manjira Majumdar is a Kolkata-based independent journalist and researcher. She has also authored several books including a recent anthology of short stories NO RETURN ADDRESS on Partition and Displacement.



Mumbai's getting festive, and how!

Shrugging off the depression brought about by the pandemic, Mumbai got back into its ebullient mode with a spectrum of events that carry the metropolis' signature. From the customary Kala Ghoda to MAMI and, LitFest to art and cultural galas dotting the city's vibrancy was on spectacular display. These are occasions where the sprawling city turns into a melting pot of sorts where all barriers are broken and people emerge as one entity. Manu Shrivastava describes some of these colourful events.



The nine-day Kala Ghoda Arts Festival in Mumbai is an exhibition and celebration of art in many forms

The two-year-COVID-induced hiatus that had Mumbai reeling couldn't keep the city or its people down for long. Swift to bounce back, India's financial capital has flexed its cultural muscle and how!

Life in Mumbai has become vibrant and its buoyance underlined with back-to-back festivals - of Art, Music, Literature, Sports, Theatre, Comedy and You-Name-It. Mumbai is now the official Festival City Of India with events happening throughout the year.

The Kala Ghoda draw

The Kala Ghoda Arts Festival (KGAF), one of the most popular art festivals in Mumbai -- an annual nine-day festival that takes place in February in South Mumbai, arrived in 2023 to mark the 24th edition and featured a range of events such as music performances, dance shows, art exhibitions, street performances, workshops and heritage walks.

Without a doubt one of the most awaited festivals each year, KGAF is an exhibition and celebration of art in many forms. The festival attracts over 1,50,000 people from the city and

beyond. It takes place within the historic Kala Ghoda Art District and is open to all, free of charge. The boundaries of the district spread from Regal Circle at the Southern end to Mumbai University in the northern end and Oval Maidan in the west to Lion Gate in the east.

Blessed with rich architecture and heritage, the art district is home to a blend of Indo-Saracenic, Neo-Gothic and Neo-Classical-styled buildings. The prominent structures include architectural marvels like Mumbai University (erstwhile Bombay University), Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya - CSMVS (erstwhile Prince of Wales Museum), Elphinstone College, David Sassoon Library, Jehangir Art Gallery and the old Army and Navy Building.

Different sections of the Kala Ghoda Art Festival are held at venues spread across the district in Mumbai - the lawns at CSMVS, Cross Maidan at MG Road, Horniman Circle Garden, Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), National Gallery of Modern Art, etc.

The highlights this year included 14 Verticals – Dance (Kathak, Odissi, Folk Dances), Music, Visual Arts, Theatre,



Mumbaikars at the much awaited Kala Ghoda Festival

Literature, Food, Children's Literature & Workshops (Puppet and Storytelling, Origami, Astro-Voyage), Cinema, Heritage Walks, Stand-Up Comedy, Street Art, Urban Design & Architecture; and Visual Arts (The Intellectual Crow, Crypto Automobile, #beyourownhashtag).

Mumbai's filmy obsession

The 17th edition of Mumbai International Film Festival for Documentary, Short Fiction and Animation films (MIFF 2022) was held from 29 May to 4 June 2022 at the Films Division Complex at Peddar Road in Mumbai. Apart from competition and non-competition sections, interactive sessions like workshops, master classes and open forum and B2B sessions were the major highlights of the event.

While feature films generally address the entertainment needs of people, documentaries fill up the information needs of people. In a bid to make MIFF a people's festival, the delegate fee was kept at a modest ₹ 300 while there was no fee for students. The screenings were held in the theatres in Films Division complex in Mumbai.

And then, there's the Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival to be held from 27 October to 5 November 2023 organised by the Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI) aiming to present the best of cinema and foster a larger ecosystem for cinematic voices in South Asia. Every year, handpicked films from across genres are screened at the festival, where each film is carefully selected based on artistic merit, cultural diversity and relevance to contemporary issues.

Using immaculate programming, the festival showcases creative expressions that re-evaluate cinematic conventions and investigate non-narrative forms, including those that are under-represented in mainstream cinema. It's a place for emerging and established cinema talent to showcase their work and network with the best from around the world.

Through a variety of discussions, workshops and expert panels, Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival encourages critical thinking and dialogue with its audience. In addition to bringing the best of cinema from around the world, the festival also conducts a robust year-round programme that acts as a hub for creators, facilitating the exchange of ideas, providing access to



A display at Kala Ghoda fest

labs for skill development and exploring business opportunities in filmmaking.

Love for literature

After a two-year gap imposed by the pandemic, The Mumbai Litfest returned with a 13th edition held from 11 November – 13 November 2022, at its customary location at the

National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) at Nariman Point in Mumbai.

Due to the pandemic, the editions in 2020 and 2021 were held virtually. And, it were the 8.5 million views from the highly successful virtual Litfest edition in 2021 that raised the bar of online audiences' expectations.

Among other events that have become synonymous with



Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav



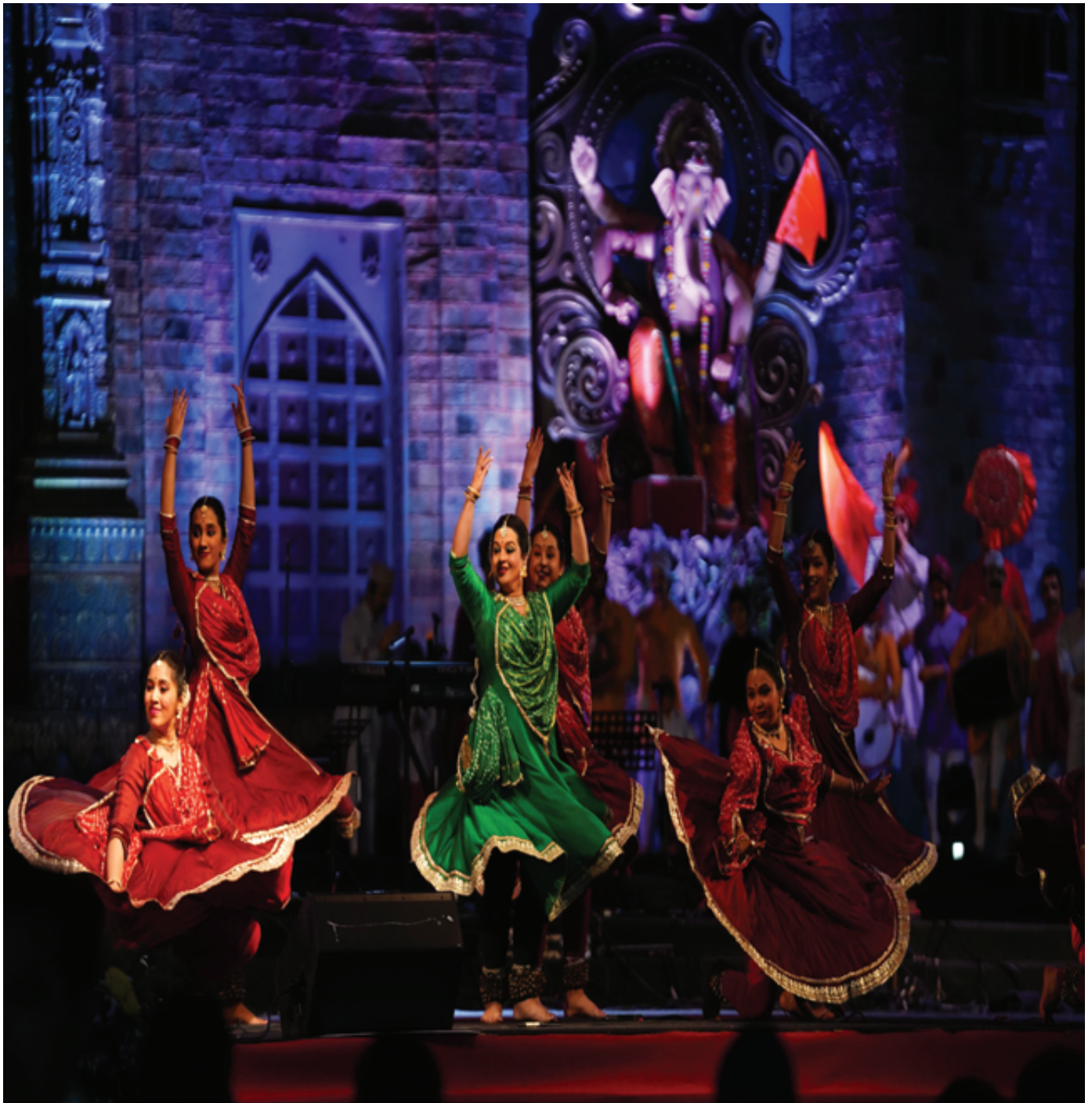
Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav

Mumbai is the Mumbai Marathon 2023 that returned after two years and witnessed tremendous participation. A whopping 50,000-plus participants joined in the Mumbai Marathon — the largest in Asia — at Bandra-Worli Sea Link, in Mumbai on Sunday, 15 January 2023.

For the event, not less than 3,600 police personnel were deployed to ensure the smooth passage of the Mumbai marathoners. It was the first time the event took place after a break of two years due to COVID-19 restrictions. Senior citizens too turned up to participate in large numbers which raised the spirits of the young participants.



Rajabai Tower illuminated for the Mumbai Light Festival



A Kathak dance performance at the cultural festival - Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav 2023

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

The Union Ministry of Culture's Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav 2023 was held in Mumbai from 11th till 19th February 2023 at Azad Maidan. The festival, inaugurated by the-then Governor of Maharashtra Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, aims to promote National Unity and integrity through cultural exchange.

The Mahotsav is organised by the Ministry every year in different states of India and a large number of esteemed artists and spectators gather for the same. In 2019, it was held in Madhya Pradesh and in 2022, in Telangana.

In 2023, for the first time, the cultural festival was hosted in Mumbai. It presented an opportunity to Mumbaikars to experience India's rich and diverse art, culture, craft and cuisine;

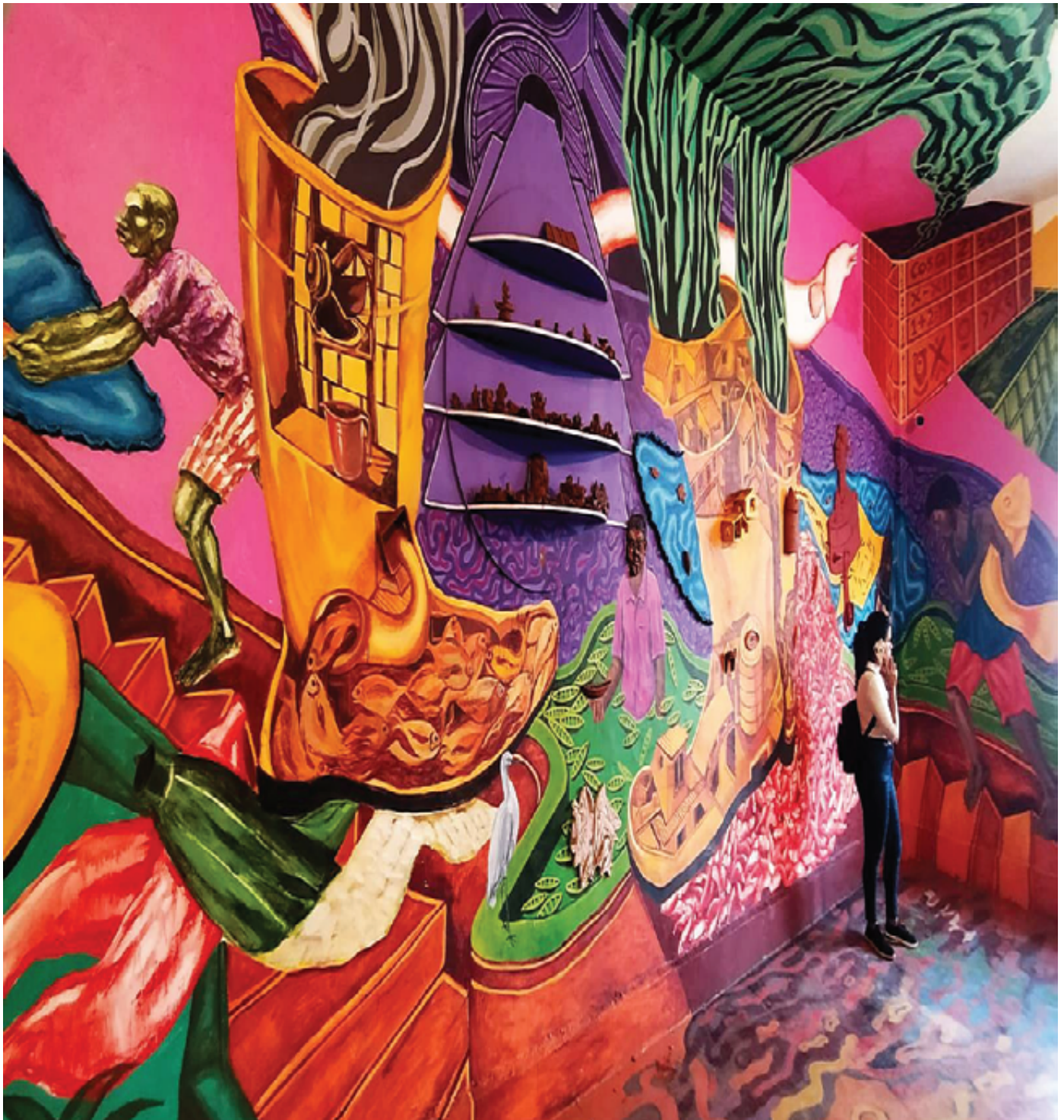
to immerse in the vibrant world of Indian culture and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich heritage.

The initiative is part of the special efforts undertaken by the government to ensure India's rich culture is passed on to the next generation and there is admiration and awareness about indigenous art and culture.

Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav is envisioned to become a world-famous event like the Kumbh Mela, symbolising *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* – despite the numerous diversities in language and cultural expressions, India stays united.

From local to global

The grand Mahotsav hosted more than a thousand artists from across India. These included 150 craftsmen from the seven Zonal Cultural Centres of the Ministry of Culture who showcased



Mumbai Urban Art Festival - Sassoon Docks

their respective state's art and craft. An exhibition space, called 'Angan', housed 70 stalls with exhibition-cum-sale of wares from different states and 25 stalls of Maharashtra State Handloom Department.

Besides the art and handicrafts exhibitions, there were performances of tribal and folk dancers, classical artists, entertainers, martial art practitioners, etc. Captivating performances from 350 folk and tribal artists and 300 local folk artists, in vibrant costumes, were the highlights of the festival. The festival featured a variety of folk dances, Lavani, Kathak, Bharatnatyam, etc.

The Mahotsav was packed with exciting performances by renowned Indian artists such as Mame Khan, Rahul Deshpande, Maitreyee Pahari, Nitin Mukesh, Avinash Chandrachud and more.

At the inauguration ceremony, a Kathak dance performance by Tejaswini Sathe and her troupe and a musical show by Mohit Chauhan - who presented a melodious rendition titled 'Tumse Hi, 25 Saal Ka Surila Safar' that means 'A musical journey of 25 years' - captivated the audience.

Scintillating performances

The cultural festival featured some of the most accomplished Bharatnatyam dancers in the country. A Bharatnatyam performance by Chennai's Kalakshetra Foundation was the highlight of the festival. Renowned musician and composer Saleel Kulkarni performed at the festival as well. Devotional Marathi artist Anand Bhate presented his special Marathi Abhanga - a unique blend of classical and devotional



As part of the Mumbai Urban Art Festival, murals, experiential exhibitions, immersive installations, etc., were seen at key venues across the city

music.

The evenings at the festival lined up performances by artists across India showcasing classical, folk and contemporary art forms. The Nagaland Conservatory of Music Choir conducted by Lipokmar Tzudir performed a series of mesmerising western and folk music.

Then there was a musical tribute to legendary composer R. D. Burman. It was performed by Raj Sodha, Kishor Sodha and Siddharth Entertainers. There were a host of classical Indian and Bollywood music performances that kept the crowds entertained.

Journey of faith

As part of the nine-day Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav at Azad Maidan in Mumbai, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) organised an Exhibition on ‘Pandharpur Vari: A Confluence of Faith and Affection’. It’s an effort to showcase the faith of the Varkaris for their Mauli, as seen during Pandharpur Ashadhi Vari.

One of the biggest pilgrimage sites in Maharashtra, Pandharpur is located on the banks of Chandrabhaga River in Solapur District of Maharashtra. The famous Vithoba / Vitthal temple attracts about a million pilgrims during the annual *yatra* (procession) in the Hindu calendar month of Ashadh (June – July) known as Vari. It is a more than 800 years old tradition. Lord Vitthal is regarded as affectionate Mauli (Mother) by his followers who are known as Varkaris. Varkari in Marathi means one who performs the Vari or one who venerates Vithoba.

The Mumbai Urban Art Festival (MUAF), organised by St+art India Foundation, returned to the city. The three-month long festival commenced on 21 December and concluded on 22 February 2023.

As part of the art festival, landmark murals, experiential exhibitions, immersive installations, etc., were seen at key venues across the city - Mahim East, Bandra, Churchgate Station and Sassoon Docks in Colaba. The idea was to make art accessible to diverse audiences while contributing to urban regeneration and the cultural landscape at large.

MUAF attempts to engage with Mumbai through a long-standing effort of contributing to the contemporary public art heritage. The festival brings together artists and diverse art

practitioners to create interdisciplinary properties - to offer opportunities of rediscovering lesser-known paths and forgotten narratives.

At Sassoon Docks, one of the oldest docks in Mumbai, MUAF presented the Sassoon Dock Art Project. After a successful run in 2017, the art project returned to the docks, in collaboration with Mumbai Port Authority, this time on the special occasion of its 150th anniversary.

The art project showcased permanent outdoor murals at the docks and three indoor experiential exhibitions. Large-scale site-specific installations, new media and light based works immersed the viewers in reflections between the sea and the city. As part of the initiative, a host of workshops, talks, art walks, performances, concerts, dance events, children activities, etc., were held at Sassoon Docks.

This year, participating Indian and foreign artists included Aashti Miller, Aarti Sunder, Ad Minoliti, Daku, Dennis Fabian Peter, Durga Shakti Gawde, Luzinterruptus, Sohrab Hura, Steve Messam, Sumit Roy, Tarini Sethi, Trespassers, Vayed Brothers, and many more.

Across the city

The first part of Sassoon Dock Art Project was *Intuitions. Between the sea and the city* and the exhibition aimed to pose questions about our complex relationship with the environment, more specifically with water and the expanding hypercity. The second part, *Illusions. Between the sea and the city* reflected on some of the complexities of the transactional reality, by proposing alternative, fluid and expansive views.

In Mahim (E) Art District, lying between Mahim Station and Dharavi, features 20 murals by local and international artists, since 2014. This year, three large-scale murals, urban tactical interventions such as edible gardens, multipurpose seating, sport courts, etc., were added. The Bandra Project of the MUAF, two temporary installations, a permanent artwork over the popular Carter Road Skatepark and a tailored walk & talk were held.

Promoting local talent

In a one of its kind initiative, this year at the Sassoon Docks Art Project of the Mumbai Urban Art Festival, a community event was held at Sassoon Docks to celebrate the vibrant communities of the docks and to bring the residents of



the zone together for the festival.

Sassoon Docks is a melting pot of cultures with people from all parts of the country, including Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, etc., performing specific roles at the docks and operating with clockwork precision.

The event provided an opportunity for locals to showcase their culture and talent, who went on participate with great enthusiasm and fervour. Hundreds of people from diverse communities residing in residential pockets thronged the venue to encourage the participants.

Local participants showcased their talent through performances that included ethnic dances representing Banjara, Koli and Maharashtrian cultures, singing, Hip-Hop, Martial Arts and more.



Manu Shrivastava is a journalist and lawyer with DraftCraft International and Co-Convenor of #TheWomanSurvivor, #MeTooAtHome and #MeTooBeyond-Borders initiatives.

Our Last Six Issues

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February 2023	January 2023	December 2022	November 2022	October 2022	September 2022

Meghha A. Jhunhunwala, a MasterChef India finalist, was trained at Le Cordon Bleu, Paris. She has been a professor at Apeejay Institute of Hospitality. Meghha ran her own cafe in south Goa for some years and has now been working with F&B establishments like Indigo Deli. She founded the Hearth & i in 2010 and is known for revolutionising the way people eat and enjoy food at home – her unique food flavours are her hallmark.

Hearth & i is based in Delhi, but is popping up in other cities across the world. Meghha says 'the secret ingredient' in her food is always 'love'. She likes recipes for challenging diets, teaching and customised events.

Meghha speaks to **Tuhina Banerjee** in an informal chat. Excerpts:

How did you get into this profession? Was there a trigger?

I have cooked since the age of five in my kitchen at home. Even though I studied Design, right after school in Central Saint Martins, I spent every day for longer hours in the kitchen, than anywhere else in London. I suppose it was always meant to be cooking and me. Eventually, I dropped out of Design School and I will be forever grateful to my father for encouraging me to study professional culinary and patisserie in Le Cordon Bleu, Paris in 2010.

What type of cuisine do you specialise in? Your favorites?

Even though I am a classically trained Cuisine & Patisserie chef, I enjoy cooking and immersing myself in various global cuisines such as Middle Eastern and Mexican. Some Indian regional cuisines like Bengali and Garhwali.

What do you think are the most important traits of a good chef?

Attention to detail and curiosity.

How do you promote Indian cuisine abroad?

Through immersive workshops and meals.



Meghha A. Jhunhunwala

Your most memorable experience abroad...a moment which you still cherish (read relish)...in context of Indian food.

It has to be Gaylord's in London back in the 1990s. From the authentic flavours to the nostalgia when one entered the space, to the many, many memories I have with my grandads there.

Do you specialise in vegan food? How is vegan food different from vegetarian food?

I wouldn't say specialise, but yes it's a strength. I believe meals should be inclusive -- by that I mean every dietary need must be met, this is where my inspiration and curiosity of vegan food lies. Vegan food uses zero animal products, unlike vegetarian food which can contain animal products like milk or milk-based products.

What tricks do you adopt to make your food a hit?

Meghha: (Smile) the only trick, if I may call it that, is empathy. From honestly sourcing the best ingredients for every dish, to using the best and healthiest fat to cook in, thoughtfully presenting it, just the way I would for myself or my family for everyone, every single time.

How do you mix palatibility with hospitality?

Through thoughtfulness and empathy.

What role does hospitality play in culinary?

The two cannot exist without the other.

What things do you keep in mind while serving food?

Health, flavour, texture, the journey of the produce, presentation and of course, hygiene.

How do you add an element of novelty in your dishes?

By going the extra mile with novel ingredients or unexpected elements.

Is culinary skill inborn or can it be cultivated?

Skill can definitely be cultivated, but the haath ka swaad is inborn.

How do you see the vegan food market in India?

The vegan food market is growing by leaps and bounds now. There is such a drastic visible shift in my community as well.

What are the challenges and the ways to counter them?

In vegan cooking, my initial challenge was removing eggs and milk/milk products from the recipe, but by opening up my mind, and approaching the same ingredients in a different way certainly helped.

As a chef, I don't only cook anymore, but run a business which means- procurement, marketing, sales, logistics, accounts and so much more. Every minute teaches me something new- that's how I overcome any challenges - by being open to evolving daily.

What advice would you give to upcoming chefs?

Somedays are tough, some days are back breaking (literally), but consistency is key.

You can rely on your deep passion and innate love for this art to carry you through, just start where you are.



The writer is a freelancer who specialises in lifestyle and wellness issues.



Influencing their way to success

*Through examples drawn from different spheres, **Anushka Singh** makes out a case that, women, young and old, are ruling the roost and today, in India, women influencers have simply changed how brands are advertising and marketing. The new and exploding vocation has empowered women in more ways than one.*



Women influencers young and old are boasting of amazing brand endorsement deals, lavish lifestyles and more

When the internet was made accessible and available to public, it was one of the most important revolutions of the time. The next revolution came with the arrival of social media that has now completely taken over the real world and permanently changed the dynamics of personal and professional relationships.

With the flooding of social media apps on mobile phones and the astronomical number of users, a new vocation has emerged, that of influencers, social media influencers to be more specific, and they are making the rules of the game now.

Of these, women, young and old, are ruling the roost and today, in India, women influencers have simply changed how brands are advertising and marketing. The new and exploding vocation has empowered women in more ways than one. Many such influencers are celebrities in their own right. Kusha Kapila, Vidya Iyer, Prajakta Koli, Shirley Setia, Jannat Zubair, etc., are extremely popular.

By general definition, an influencer is a person, in a niche field or an industry, who can sway the target audience of

that industry or sector. So, influencers have specialised knowledge about the field or have authority on a specific subject and their long-standing presence in the field increases their value and makes them useful for brands and enterprises looking for credibility and impetus.

As per a survey, 85 per cent of marketers in 2017 utilised influencer marketing and, of these, 92 per cent got the desired results. So, the concept of utilising the influence of or the value of an individual, his reputation, to advertise is influencer marketing.

Social media influencers

In the last decade, the influencers have drastically changed the way consumers use social media and, more importantly, how brands use social media to their benefit.

Influencers hold a lot of power and influence over their followers and the reach of social media has ensured that the numbers come quickly and easily. In 2022, of the total 485 million internet users in India, 402 million used social media

exclusively on mobile devices, 47 million used social media both on mobile and on desktop and 21 million used social media exclusively on desktop.

With thousands and lakhs of followers, young girls and women are boasting of amazing brand endorsement deals, lavish lifestyles and more as social media influencers.

So, fashion influencers like Santoshi Shetty, Komal Pandey, Aashna Shroff, Kritika Khurana, etc. are promoting fashion products, services and apparel lines to their audience. Their endorsements of these products and services have a lot of impact as their followers look up to them, swear by their choices and use them as guide to make their own decisions.

A host of young women who are primarily creating digital content to entertain their followers have become extremely popular. Srishti Dixit, Saloni Chopra, Prajakta Koli, for example, have a dedicated following and their regular posts on a topic of choice has been engaging people in a big way.

Most brands, big and small, are now heavily relying on social media influencers as they are able to influence and mobilise people in big numbers to buy those products and create trends easily to promote the brand products and services.

Creating popular content

One of the most popular social media influencers, Prajakta Koli came to prominence with her YouTube channel MostlySane which was launched in 2015. She is known by her social media handle @MostlySane. She usually makes comedy videos that focus on relatable daily-life situations from the real world.

She was born and raised in Thane in Maharashtra and studied Bachelor of Mass Media from V. G. Vaze College of Arts, Science and Commerce in Mumbai. Her Instagram page is brimming with viral videos and reels that are entertaining and sometimes satirical.

With the popularity of her YouTube channel, there's no looking back for Prajakta. She performed at the YouTube FanFest in Delhi in 2018 and in Mumbai in 2019. She recorded a national TV commercial for WhatsApp also.

Prajakta was part of the Forbes' list of 30 under 30 in February 2019 and in Outlook Business Magazine's list of Women of Worth and Entrepreneur India's list of 35 under 35. In 2020, she was included in the annual Cool list of Grazia India and also featured on the cover of the magazine BW Business-world as part of their Most Influential Women's list.

In January 2022, she was appointed Youth Climate Champion by UNDP India to highlight issues of 'climate action, social justice and global healthcare' and was among a group of six YouTubers picked for the event.

Koli launched her YouTube Originals show Pretty Fit in 2020, where she interviews celebrities like Neha Kakkar, RJ Malishka, Sumukhi Suresh, etc. She has collaborated with mainstream Bollywood actors like Kareena Kapoor, Hrithik Roshan, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Vicky Kaushal, etc.

Starting early

One of the most popular Instagram influencers, Jannat Rahmani started her influencer life very early. She has also acted in television shows and films. The 21-year-old has more than 45 million followers on Instagram. Anushka Sen has 39 million followers while Avneet Kaur, also very popular, has 32 million Instagram followers. Arishfa Khan has 29 million followers on Instagram. All of them are of 21 years of age or younger.

In January 2020, Jannat was taken on as the brand ambassador of UBON - a well-known brand in the tech industry. In 2022, she featured in Forbes 30 Under 30 list in the Media, Marketing and Advertising category.

The young women influencers are creating niche content on fashion, travel, food, health, photography, etc. Still, it's the comic and goofy content that connects the most with audience.

Anantya Anand is one of the youngest kid influencers on Instagram in India with a huge following of 579k. Popularly known as Fries Muncher, she started her social media journey at age six. Megan Rakesh is a 10-year-old kid Instagram influencer, famously known to be the youngest pop superstar. She regularly uploads her songs and videos on Instagram.

Fashion, food and more

Juhi Godambe is one of India's most well-known fashion bloggers. She regularly posts about style and easy-to-copy and easy-to-assemble outfits that are a big hit with the millennials. Another fashion influencer, Santoshi Shetty's sense of style is highly unique and inspiring. She likes to travel to new places carrying with her ultra-modern style and fashion.

Vijayalakshmi Vikram's Instagram account is filled with vegan recipes with a South Indian touch and that are wholesome and nutritious. Her USP is the unique style of presenting these recipes. Another food blogger Kabita Singh is one of the most loved and famous in India. What started as a passion project, her YouTube channel Kabita's Kitchen, soon became a big hit and amassed many followers.

The love for travel can make people do many things... becoming a travel blogger for one. It was Kamyra Buch's wanderlust that made her very famous and gave her a whopping 212K follower base on Instagram. She has been a digital nomad since 2015.

Tanya Khanijow has been travelling solo in India and abroad and creating great travel-related content and helpful travel information for her 257k Instagram and 684k YouTube followers.

Anushka Singh works with DraftCraft International as a Media Researcher and writes mostly on issues affecting the Fourth Estate. She likes reading contrarian literature and analysing sources of news.

Women torchbearers

Of films, fire and feminism

*Tracing the history of women portrayals on the screen, **Alba Silveira** sees a distinct transition with a growing movement of women in the Indian film industry who are challenging established norms and making their mark as talented and visionary filmmakers, producers, actors, even technicians. They have broken through the stereotypes and shunned the beaten path.*



Kalki Koechlin in the film Margarita With A Straw

The Indian film industry is one of the largest and most influential film industries in the world. While the industry has a long and rich history, the role of women in it has often been marginalised and undermined.

However, in recent years, there has been a growing movement of women in the Indian film industry who are challenging these norms and making their mark as talented and visionary filmmakers, producers, actors, even technicians.

The history of women in Indian films can be traced back to the early days of Indian cinema, when women were often cast in lead roles and played important parts in the production of films. However, as the industry grew and evolved, the representation of women on screen became increasingly limited and stereotypical, with women often being portrayed as passive and submissive characters mostly.



Alankrita Shrivastava's films focus on unexplored themes of gender, sexuality and empowerment

Exploring new domains

In the last decade, women filmmakers have been breaking barriers and pushing the boundaries of what is possible in the medium. One of the key ways that women in the Indian film industry are making their mark is by venturing into the new and limitless zone of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar, Zee5, etc.

These platforms have provided a new and innovative way for women to showcase their talents and tell the stories that matter to them, that affect them and millions of women around the world.

Filmmakers like Reema Kagti, Leena Yadav and Alankrita Shrivastava have been instrumental in creating original content for these platforms, exploring themes like women

empowerment, sexuality and the complexities of relationships in a way that is bold, honest and authentic. Zoya Akhtar and Shonali Bose are known for stories showcasing women with fire and grit and their films are perceived as honest, authentic and powerful.

They are breaking down the traditional stereotypes of women in Indian films and creating new and exciting narratives that showcase the diversity and complexity of their own experiences as a woman and that of all kinds of women out there in the world.

Similarly, several women producers in India are helping to create new and exciting films by collaborating with talented filmmakers and writers and fostering a culture of innovation and experimentation. Through their work, these women are helping to shape the future of films and OTT in India and are playing a crucial role in their growth and success.

Actors taking new challenges

Women actors of the Indian film industry are breaking down traditional gender roles and stereotypes by taking on roles that challenge conventional expectations. While Vidya Balan has always experimented and entertained her audience with bold and different roles, some never imagine for women actors in the Indian film industry roles such as in *The Dirty Picture*, *Kahaani*, etc. These films have explored themes like sexuality and empowerment in a bold and honest way.

More recently, women actors with star power like Priyanka Chopra and Deepika Padukone are also diversifying from typical glamorous or arm-candy roles and pushing boundaries of what is possible in the acting world. Priyanka Chopra, for example, has taken on roles in films like *Mary Kom* and *The Sky Is Pink* which showcase the strength and resilience of women and challenge conventional expectations of femininity. Many actresses are working to bring attention to important social and political issues as well.

Leaving a mark

Since the inception of the Indian film industry, there have been many remarkable women who have made a significant impact on Indian cinema. They have come from diverse backgrounds and have worked in different capacities within the film industry, but all have left their mark and have made important contributions to the growth and development of cinema in the country.

Devika Rani Chaudhuri, considered to be one of the first actresses of Indian cinema, was also a film producer and co-founder of the Bombay Talkies studio - which was one of the first successful film production companies in India. A renowned classical dancer and actress, Vyjayanthimala Bali was one of the first female actors in Indian cinema to gain international recognition. She is still remembered as one of the most talented actresses of her generation.

Veteran actress and dancer, Zohra Sehgal was one of the first popular female actors to make a successful transition from the stage to the screen. Sridevi Kapoor, a legendary actress who starred in some of the biggest hits of the 80s and the 90s, was known for her versatile acting abilities.

These, and many others, have played an important role in the growth and development of the Indian film industry. Their contributions have paved the way for future generations of women filmmakers and actors in India. Through their talent, hard work and unwavering commitment to the craft, these women have helped make Indian cinema the rich and diverse industry it is today.

Conscious storytelling

Alankrita Shrivastava is an Indian film director, screenwriter and producer known for her works as an independent filmmaker and for her feminist and socially-conscious storytelling.

Shrivastava's directorial debut was the 2011 film *Turning 30* which was well received by audiences and critics alike. She continued to gain recognition for her work with films like *Lipstick Under My Burkha* which was a commercial and critical success and won several awards and accolades.

The filmmaker strives to tell untold stories – focusing on women's issues and unexplored themes of gender, sexuality and empowerment. Her films have been widely praised for their nuanced and powerful storytelling and for their ability to spark important conversations.

Actor Taapsee Pannu has established herself as a leading performer with several powerful performances under her belt. Her Hindi-film journey began in 2013 with the film *Chashme Baddoor* which was well received by audiences and critics alike.

She continued to gain recognition for her performances in films like *Pink* and other films that highlighted important social issues affecting women today. In her film *Thappad*, for example, she plays the role of a woman who stands up against domestic abuse.

In recent years, Pannu has continued to challenge herself and explore new genres and her work has been widely celebrated. She has starred in several action and thriller films as well, such as *Naam Shabana* and *Badla*. She is very vocal about women issues and gender equality.

Inclusion and representation

Films have historically been a medium for entertainment but time and again, conscious filmmakers have used films to highlight social issues, question authorities and trigger change. Then there are those who make films to bring attention to the under-represented and the marginalised to push for inclusion of all segments of society.

Filmmaker and director Shonali Bose has made several such films like *Amu*, *Margarita with a Straw*, *The Sky is Pink*, etc., which have thought-provoking themes. Throughout her career, Bose has been an advocate for greater representation and inclusivity in the film industry and her work often showcases such stories. Her 2014 production *Margarita with a Straw* starring Kalki Koechlin as a girl with cerebral palsy premiered at 2014 Toronto International Film Festival.

The Sky Is Pink starring Priyanka Chopra, Farhan Akhtar, Zaira Wasim and Rohit Suresh Saraf is based on the true story of Aisha Chaudhary who suffered from severe combined immunodeficiency and pulmonary fibrosis. She continues to be a pioneering voice in Indian cinema.

Alba Silveira is a researcher with The Woman Survivor – a DraftCraft International initiative to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions. She is also a volunteer with DraftCraft International's The Goencho Project that tackles issues of law and policy affecting India's smallest state – Goa.

Women stamp on OTT scene

Gayathri S explains how many talented actresses, who could not get good roles in films or television, are now getting a chance to showcase their talent through OTT platforms. It has changed the role of women as accessories or fillers in films to main characters and strong, sensible roles.



Shefali Shah in Delhi Crime



Made in Heaven directed by Nitya Mehra

The OTT platforms have empowered women like none other. Today, with the exponential increase in the number of OTT platforms and the content on these platforms, the scope of women-centric content, content highlighting women issues, etc., has also improved. Also, many more women are now in positions of power on these OTT platforms.

OTT has filled the vacuum that was created by mainstream cinema and television. There is more scope for creativity and room to experiment which was lacking in any of the previous mediums. OTT has also created room for female characters in main roles, in fact it has given rise to multitude of series and shows that have female characters in majority.

Many talented actresses, who could not get good roles in films or television, are now getting a chance to showcase their

talent through OTT platforms. It has changed the role of women as accessories or fillers in films to main characters and strong, sensible roles.

OTT has also put more women in positions of power and that has encouraged scriptwriting and ideas focusing on women. Now, many characters are specifically written for women, that too of all ages. The shelf-life of women actors has increased because of OTT. In fact, it will be safe to say that there's no shelf-life for women actors anymore. Roles are being written for women of all ages and this has empowered them in a big way.

It's because of OTT that Indian audience is getting a taste of the acting prowess of artists like Shefali Shah, Renuka Shahane, Raveena Tandon, etc. who are portraying roles of

women that are fierce, independent and are the leading ladies of the story. This kind of content that earlier no one would even imagine producing is now being created in big numbers, reaching millions and making profit too.

Transforming preferences

Vice President of Content at Netflix India, Monika Shergill has played a crucial role in bringing a diverse range of content to the platform in India, from local and international productions to documentaries and stand-up comedy.

She is a prominent figure in the Over-The-Top (OTT) industry in India and has made significant contributions to the platform she works for, Netflix, by helping shape the way content is created, produced and consumed in India.

Shergill has been instrumental in commissioning original content for Netflix India, which includes several critically acclaimed and popular series and films. She has also built strong partnerships with local and international production houses, helping to bring high-quality content to the platform.

Under her leadership, Netflix India has continued to grow its user base, and is now one of the leading OTT platforms in the country. Monika is also known for her advocacy of inclusivity and representation in media, and has been instrumental in bringing stories from underrepresented communities to the forefront.

Original and impactful content

Filmmaker and screenwriter based out of Mumbai; Nitya Mehra received unprecedented success when she shifted focus to OTT. She is best known for the Oscar-winning film *Life of Pi* where she worked as the Assistant Director. Born in Amritsar in a Punjabi family, Nitya studied Literature from Delhi University before pursuing Film Production and Direction at New York University.

In 2019, Nitya directed the critically-acclaimed web series *Made In Heaven* on Amazon Prime Video which explored the themes of love, relationships and the Indian wedding industry. It starred Arjun Mathur, Sobhita Dhulipala and Kalki Koechlin. The series was well-received by audiences and critics and helped establish her reputation as a talented and visionary producer in the OTT space.

She also directed one of the stories of the anthology film *Unpaused* – a Hindi-language anthology film consisting of five short segments directed by Raj & DK, Nitya Mehra, Nikkhil Advani, Tannishtha Chatterjee and Avinash Arun. The stories revolved around lives of people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and premiered on 18 December 2020 on Amazon Prime Video.

Mehra feels evolution is a reality and when television came, people on the radio were worried. She believes new things come with evolution and OTT has now given theatres a run for the money. But she insists there is a dedicated space for all formats and enough human beings on the planet to consume everything.

Pioneering change

Director and producer Leena Yadav has been a renowned name in the Indian OTT space. She has created several acclaimed series and films for OTT platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

Fostering a culture of experimentation and innovation in the Indian OTT space, her works have helped push boundaries of what is possible in the medium. She is also known for her advocacy of inclusivity in media and her works are shaping the future of OTT space in India.

Yadav's true-crime docuseries *House of Secrets: Burari Deaths* on Netflix was well received and said to go beyond the police investigation. She was the showrunner and co-director (along with Anubhav Chopra) of the three-part series. The show explores the theories surrounding the demise of 11 members of the same family on 30 June 2018.

The filmmaker is known for the 2018 film *Rajma Chawal* which was her first project for an Over-The-Top (OTT) platform. The film explored the themes of father-son relationships and technology. The film was well-received by audiences and critics and further established Yadav's reputation as a visionary filmmaker in the OTT space.

New opportunities

OTT has opened the floodgates of opportunities for women producers, actors, directors, scriptwriters, editors, etc. It has also created uninterrupted space for content that highlights contemporary social issues and problems.

Delhi Crime, an Indian crime drama series written and directed by Richie Mehta, starred Shefali Shah, Rasika Dugal among others. The first season was set in the aftermath of the brutal 2012 Delhi gang rape that triggered unprecedented change in the country. The series was released on Netflix on 22 March 2019.

Rangita Pritish Nandy, CEO of Pritish Nandy Communications has produced many critically-acclaimed films and web series for OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and ZEE5. Her show, *Four More Shots Please*, is about the lives of four privileged SoBo girls who build their lives as they go, sometimes making mistakes and moving on from them. It celebrates various aspects of womanhood at different stages of life.

Award-winning producer Guneet Monga has worked on numerous successful web series, including the Netflix original series *Sacred Games*. Monga is considered one of the leading producers in India and is known for her ability to bring unique and socially relevant stories to the Indian screen. She continues to produce and support a diverse range of film projects, both in India and internationally.

All these women who are ruling the OTT world have proven, time and again, their creative talents and business astuteness. They are also using every opportunity that comes their way to create and curate content, carefully, that shines a light on the female narrative and on sensitive issues of the contemporary world.

Gayathri S is a researcher with www.thewomansurvivor.com – an initiative of DraftCraft International to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions.

Filming a lost instrument to life

Shoma A. Chatterji speaks to low-profile documentary filmmaker Subha Mullick who went out of the way to revive Harpsichord, a musical instrument lost in time, and once a huge hit with the then Calcuttans, through 'City of Symphonies'. The strains of the lost instrument resonate in myriad forms as the film recreates the magic of a bygone era.



Documentary film maker Subha Das Mullick at the musical instrument dealers Braganza & Co in Kolkata

Met Subha Das Mullick. She is a low-profile documentary filmmaker whose recent interests lie in rediscovering the history and ethnography of forgotten musical instruments that were once very much in demand among the elite of Kolkata. She is a name and face -- with a crop of thick, wavy, white hair, familiar among documentary filmmakers, media and communication students across Kolkata.

A media teacher, she has made over 50 documentary films on a variety of subjects, most of which have been aired on national television. She has also been a professor at iLEAD. Her latest documentary, *City Symphonies*, is about the Harpsichord, a reed musical instrument that looks like a double-decker piano but is lost to time, and its impact on Indian musical

traditions.

Responding to what triggered the film on the Harpsichord, she says: "In my earlier film *Calcutta Sonata* I fleetingly mentioned Hindustani Aairs -- a genre of music born in (then) Calcutta in the late eighteenth century. I was fascinated by how *sahibs* gave their own interpretation to our music and created something might be 'fusion music' in today's terms. To delve deeper into the subject, I started doing more research and came across articles by Katherine Schofield Butler, a scholar of oriental music at King's College, London. Renditions of Hindustani Aairs on the harpsichord by Jane Chapman are also there on the internet. I was intrigued by the proactive role played by women in giving birth to this genre of music. Since Hindustani Aairs were written primarily for the harpsichord, this instrument has

become the central 'character' in the film."

In the late eighteenth century, Calcutta witnessed an efflorescence of musical experimentations. In the White town, *mehsahebs* took keen interest in the music they heard at the nautch parties and transcribed the songs in western staff notation. They played these ghazals and tuppahs on their harpsichords. The new music acquired a new name – Hindustani Air. In the black town, Nidhu Babu composed *tuppahs* in Bengali and the *kobis* locked themselves in battles of musical wit. Keertans and Shyama Sangeet drifted from the temples and rent the evening air. There was music for every ear, every soul. Musicians and music scholars in Kolkata and London bring alive the lost era with soulful renditions and scholarly comments.

Explaining what inspired the intriguing title of the film – *City of Symphonies* which links music to the city of Kolkata, Subha says, "Since my film is named *City of Symphonies*, I thought that these genres of Bengali music should be a part of the film. Hence, I have included a Keertan, a Shyama Sangeet and a Nidhu Babur Tuppah in the film. Personally, I find the lineage of Tuppah very interesting. That is why I have used the Tuppah as the transition device for coming to the Bengali part of the film." The film reveals layer-by-layer, not only the history and mechanics of this lost musical instrument but in so doing, explores unknown areas of Bengali schools of music which are slowly fading away from public knowledge and performance space. We are introduced to many experts and scholars from schools of Western music in UK. Among them is Dr Katherine Butler Schofield, Senior Lecturer in South Asian Music and History at Department of Music, King's College London, Jane Chapman, who has collaborated with ground-breaking composers, artists and dancers working with musicians from the worlds of Indian music, jazz, and the avant-garde. Jane is Professor of Harpsichord at the Royal College of Music.

According to Subha, "Katherine and Jane were very sporting. Jane and Katherine emerge as modern-day *mehsahebs* giving their own interpretation of classical and semi-classical Indian music. The scene in which Katherine is writing down the *thumri* sung by Shatabdi Roy in western staff notation, had to be pulled off with a lot of planning. I had sent the audio recording of the *thumri* to Katherine. She played it on her laptop and wrote down the staff notation. In the film, this scene has matched very well with the scene of Shatabdi singing the *thumri* in the courtyard of a heritage mansion at Mukhtaram babu Street."

Subha adds: Jane's renditions of the Hindustani Aairs on the harpsichord have given a new dimension to the film. For the Indian audience, these numbers offer a rare opportunity to enjoy the harpsichord.

The visuals recreating the period in Kolkata within Bengal are beautiful as vibrant reconstruction of a period in Bengal's musical history. Warren Hastings was instrumental in publishing the music book *The Oriental Miscellany* compiled by William Hamilton Bird. Though this book was published in Calcutta, not a single copy of the book is now found in this city - not in Asiatic Society, not in the National Library or the Victoria Memorial.

Says Subha: "I was intrigued not only by the vanishing of this book, but also that this book does not have the notations of the songs that were popular in the Black Town of Calcutta - Keertans, Shyama Sangeet, Kheur, Kobi Gaan etc. This means that the *sahibs* and *mehsahebs* went all the way to Mathura and Lucknow in search of songs, but did not penetrate into the Bengali quarters of the city. Actually, Bengali as a language and as a culture was not yet dominant in Calcutta."

"I am grateful to Sabrananda Chaudhuri (Musicologist and Prof. Of Bengali at Netaji Nagar College), Sourendro and Soumyajit, who are the subject musical experts of the film, Debashish Raychaudhuri who readily lent his support and expertise, Sarvani Gooptu, a singer, historian and the Director of Netaji Institute of Asian Studies and most importantly to Shatabdi Roy, whose rendering of the *thumri* and *keertan* have taken the film to a new level," informs Subha. According to her, "Harpsichords were slowly replaced by pianos and the attitude of the British colonizers changed over time. I guess they were no longer interested in promoting Indo British cultural fusion."

Keertan, *Nidhu Babur Tuppah* and *Shyama Sangeet* are popular even today but *Kobi gaan* and *Kheur* have lost their popularity as they were elbowed by the 'Bhadralok Bengali' of the Bengal Renaissance. Subha points out three takeaways from her film. These are – (a) Greater understanding of the cultural scenario of late 18th century Calcutta, (b) Acquaintance with the harpsichord and (c) Acquaintance with the wonderful performers and resource persons.



Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many awards.

MADHURIBEN KOTAK (1930 – 2023)

Journalist with entrepreneurial vision

Madhuriben Kotak was a senior journalist, photographer and co-founder, owner and editor of the 'Chitralekha' group of publications.

She was a very soft-spoken but firm lady, with a majestic personality, and a legend who shaped and changed the journalism and entrepreneurial landscape of India. She was the unsung Gujarati career woman of 60s and 70s.

Madhuriben had a unique place in my life as I was fortunate to contribute to her magazine and interact with her. I was able to carve my own identity in journalism thanks to her encouragement. To me she was 'Madhuben', a sister and mother and above all a guru.

The fourth of nine children, she hated limelight, and just wanted her work to speak for herself. Inquisitive, her hunger to learn surprised everyone she interacted with. Till the age of 89, she attended office.

Madhuriben was married in 1949 to Vaju Kotak, who was then the editor of 'Chitrapat Weekly'. When 'Chitralekha' started in 1950, he wrote 80 percent of the articles. Madhuri started her career with photography, taught by her husband and became very popular as a female photographer. Specially acquainted with top actresses, her amazing photographs clicked on the sets, in her unique style, were published in elite magazines for decades. She was perhaps India's second well known female photographer after Homai Vyrawala, in the 50s, but she rarely received any awards, honours or attended public functions.

Vaju passed away in 1959 at a very young age of heart attack, when Madhuriben was only 30 years old and her marriage had lasted only a decade. Although she had done limited work in the presence of her husband, she took over the reins of the 'Chitralekha' group of publications with grit, running the three magazines 'Chitralekha', 'Beej' and the Gujarati/Marathi film magazine 'Jee' with great responsibility for nearly 60 years, while rearing her three children. She set onto the path of taking the company to greater heights and motivated others with her ever smiling persona.

For over 71 years, 'Chitralekha' has kept the community informed about news, events, culture, stories and more, unfailingly every Friday of the week. It continues to be the largest selling magazine in Mumbai and Gujarat, across periodicity or language. Over the years, many serialised novels from it have been successfully converted into highly rated television serials like the longest running satirical column, Tarak Mehta's 'Duniya Ne Undha Chasma' produced as a TV serial 'Tarak Mehta Ka Uلتا Chashma' on SAB.

In her biography, 'In the Company of a Creator', Madhuriben beautifully recreated her time with Vaju. Morning walks was their daily ritual. Sipping tea, they would plan out the day's programmes, especially articles to be prioritised, meetings, etc. Another ritual was taking the children out to the beach in the evening. While her kids doodled away on the sands, they would soak in the natural beauty around. Vaju would conceive imageries or metaphors for his novels. From a tiny incident, he would weave whole novels with ease. He would intone away and she would listen, in rapt attention and pleasure. He would read out chapters in his characteristic style and also seek Madhuri's reaction and this would overwhelm her with joy.

Madhuriben passed away in Mumbai on 5th January 2023 at the age of 92. A great loss to the reading world, and an irreparable loss to the journalism world. Best eulogies including that of PM. Narendra Modi encapsulated her journey. She is survived by two sons Bipin and Maulik, a daughter Ronak and grandchildren. As well as a grieving readership.



A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance writer, poet and short story writer.

VANI JAIRAM (1945-2023)

Bollywood's loss, south's gain

Vani Jairam nee Kalaivani, was an Indian playback singer. Born into a musician family in Vellore in present day Tamil Nadu, she initially trained under Ranga Ramunaja Iyengar and later received formal Carnatic training under Kadalur Srinivas Iyengar, T. R. Balasubramanian and R. S. Mani.

Graduating from Queen Mary's College, Chennai, Vani joined the State Bank of India, Madras. After marriage in 1969, her husband T.S Jayaraman goaded her to train in Hindustani classical music under the tutelage of Ustad Abdul Rehman Khan of the Patiala gharana. Learning the nuances of thumri, ghazal and bhajan, she took up music professionally.

The versatile singer sang in 19 Indian languages. Her vocal range easily adapted to any difficult composition and raga while retaining the sweetness and freshness of her voice. It had a classical touch, had clarity and sounded like a perfectly tuned tambura. She embellished her songs with *sangathis* in classical music. Her flourishing five-decade musical career from 1971 resulted in over 10,000 songs recorded in 1,000 films.

Composer Vasant Desai chose her to sing the song *Runanubandhacha* for an album along with Kumar Gandharva, which became a rage among the Marathi audience. It was thanks to his recommendation, she got to sing in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's film *Guddi* (1971) directed by Hrishikesh Mukherjee. Of the three songs Vani recorded for it, *Bole re papihara* became a hit and catapulted her to fame. Her other song in the film *Humko mann ki shakti dena* a school prayer too became popular and many school have included it in their morning prayers.

Her only song for Pakeezah, the Kamal Amrohi directed 1972 classic - *Mora sajan sautan ghar jaye*, was used in the background. Hers was the only female voice Pandit Ravi Shankar used for the 1979 film *Meera*, which had a dozen songs, including *Mere to Giridhar Gopal* and *Main sanware ke*.

Vani could not survive the brutal politics of the Hindi film industry and decided to relocate down South, where the music industry earnestly beckoned. Bollywood's loss was South Indian cinema's gain, as Vani established herself as one of the leading female singers of her generation, along with P. Susheela and S. Janaki.

South Indian cinema's gain, as Vani established herself as one of the leading female singers of her generation, along with P. Susheela and S. Janaki. Hers was the golden voice that soothed Tamil audiences.

Her first released song *Orr Imam Unnidam* was a romantic duet with T. M. Soundararajan for the film *Veettukku Vandha Marumagal* (1973), composed by the Shankar-Ganesh. Her biggest breakthrough was with *Mallaigai En Mannan Mayangum* from the film *Dheerga Sumangali* (1974) that echoed in every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu. Her songs in the film *Apoorva Raagangal*, *Ezhu Swarangalukkul* and *Kelviyin Nayagane* showed she could sing difficult compositions.

Vani's sang for several Telugu films. Her debut song for the film *Abhimanavanthulu* (1973) *Eppativalekaadura Naa Swami*, composed by S. P. Kodandapani, was a classical. In 1979 came the renowned Telugu film *Sankarabharanam* where Vani sang four songs that gained her further recognition.

Vani made her debut in Malayalam film industry in 1973 with the solo song *Sourayudhathil Vidarnnoru* composed by Salil Chowdhary for the film *Swapnam*. Music director Vijaya Bhaskar introduced her to Kannada cinema in 1973 with the film *Kesarina Kamala*. The song *Bhaavavemba Hoovu Arali* from the film *Upasane* (1974) cemented her position in Kannada films, lasting for three decades.

She also recorded *Gita Govindam* composed by Prafullakar with Odissi Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra playing the Pakhawaj. and released *Murugan Songs*, written and composed by her.

A three-time recipient of National Film Awards for best female playback singer, she was conferred the coveted Padma Bhushan in 2023. She has also been feted with Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award, not to speak of innumerable other awards. Vani died at 78, following a fall at her house in Chennai. Childless, after her husband's death she lived alone. Amul Dairy dedicated a sepia-toned, nostalgia-laced creative ad in her memory. Her evergreen voice will defy the passage of time.



A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance writer, poet and short story writer.

NAIK DEEPAK SINGH VIR CHAKRA (1989-2020)

The saviour of Galwan

Naik Deepak Singh was born on 15 July 1989 in Fanunda village in Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh. Son of Gajraj Singh and Saroj Devi, he joined the Army (Army Medical Corps) in 2012 at the age of 21 years. After serving for some years, he got married to Rekha Singh, on 30 November 2019. Post-training, he served in various Army hospitals which included Army Base hospital, 426 Field Hospital and 414 Field Hospital. On 30 January 2019, Naik Deepak Singh got posted to 16 Bihar battalion, deployed in Eastern Ladakh.

Since early June 2020, the tension along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was building up due to construction work in Galwan valley close to the road going from Leh to Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO). The Chinese had a serious objection to the construction of a bridge across the Galwan River into the Aksai Chin area. The area held strategic importance to India as well as China as it dominated the road from Leh to DBO an airstrip of military significance to India.

There had been many rounds of talks between senior military officials from both sides to defuse the tension. On 15/16 June 2020 night, hectic Chinese activity was noticed across the bridge in Galwan Valley. The Indian Army decided to take it up with Chinese forces to ask them to respect the LAC and adhere to the position agreed upon during the talks. A team of medics including Naik Deepak were dispatched to the MI (Medical Inspection) room close to the Point 14, the place of likely conflict. Singh who was loading more medical boxes, surmised it was not a minor scuffle and could result in heavy casualties.

An altercation during the discussion led to a scuffle that turned violent. The Chinese soldiers attacked Col Santosh Babu and his men with deadly clubs, rods and stone pelting. The Indian soldiers were greatly outnumbered and the Chinese attack seemed pre-meditated. As the clashes escalated, Naik Deepak Singh and other soldiers joined the beleaguered Indian troops. The clashes went on for hours. The Indian soldiers pushed the Chinese back. Six Chinese personnel including their commanding officer were so seriously injured they could not

beat a retreat.

The Commanding Officer ordered Deepak Singh to come forward to the scene of skirmish. Upon arrival, he administered first aid to the Chinese commanding officer. He then attended to the other Chinese soldiers. The interpreter was badly injured and not coming to his senses. No one could explain to the Chinese that the Indians wanted to calm things down. The Chinese got reinforcements who were well equipped with clubs wrapped in barbed wire. In the skirmishes between the two sides, Deepak Singh also got seriously injured but continued rendering medical support to the injured Chinese and Indian soldiers. It is believed he was captured, made to treat more Chinese soldiers and then killed.

By 10.30 pm, the situation became quiet and a search started for the missing soldiers. When the search party spotted pieces of used cotton wool and tincture bottles, it realised the injured soldier must be Deepak Singh. The search party carried him to the MI Room where the doctor declared him dead.

Deepak managed to save several lives before he lost his. For his courageous action under fire, he was awarded Vir Chakra posthumously which was received by his wife, Rekha. Deepak's father was unable disraught on hearing the news of his son's death.

Deepak is survived by his father and wife. Rekha chose to pursue a career in the armed forces. He had dreams that pushed her to make it to the Indian Army. Rekha says: "My husband's martyrdom and patriotism prepared me to quit as a teacher and become an officer in the army". She became a lieutenant in the Indian Army.



Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor
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