

May-June 2021
Vol 5 Issue 5

eShe

— the female gaze —

Dipali Goenka

The eminent industrialist on compassionate leadership and pandemic survival strategies



HISTORICAL ODYSSEY

Linguist Peggy Mohan and novelist Trisha Das journey into India's past

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

An exploration of Jaipur and Jodhpur through its textile conservationists

FEMININE RISING

Meet Karen Downes, founder of the global FemmeQ movement



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A NEW LEADERSHIP

No one in India is at present immune from the second wave of Covid that has struck us with monstrous, unforgiving vehemence. Whether battling the virus ourselves or caregiving for loved ones at a time when everything is in short supply – from doctors, oxygen, medicines, hospital beds to even RTPCR tests – this wave has tested the best of us in unimaginable ways.

Some cope through prayer or by service to others. Some get lost in a labyrinth of helplessness. Some misuse people's desperation to make a profit.

But more than anyone else, the pandemic has put India's leaders – political, social, business and community leaders – to the ultimate test. This is a time for decisive leadership based on wisdom, empathy, and informed judgement. While some of our leaders have fallen pathetically low on all counts, there are others who have shown up and been a beacon of hope for their people and communities.

Cover personality Dipali Goenka, CEO and joint MD of Welspun India, exemplifies this kind of leadership (p.16). Not only has she protected her employees and the communities their industries are located in, she has ably steered her ship through the most difficult of storms in 2020-21.

As founder of the FemmeQ movement Karen Downes (p.44) says, it is time for a new paradigm of leadership, powered by feminine intelligence.

Women must rise. Our broken world needs us. ■



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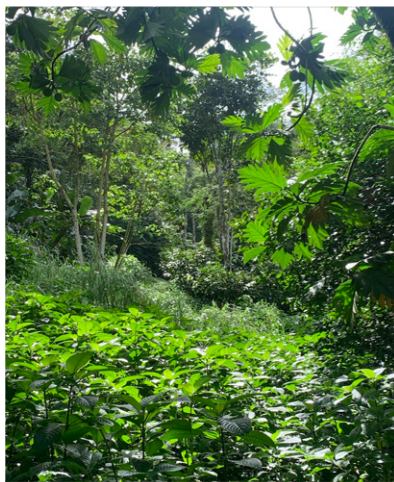
"a deep knowing that we are all part of a living universe, an innate sense of responsibility for the survival of human and planetary life. A conscious intention to heal. The concentration of love, energy and life-force, dedicated to someone or something that is of the greatest importance beyond self-interest."

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HEALING WORDS

Holistic psychologist Dr Nicole LePera has promoted self-healing to her 3.7 million Instagram followers for years; she's now written a book on it

By Manvi Pant

Even as a child, Nicole LePera loved learning about human thoughts and behaviour. “Growing up, I often felt different from others I met, and for as long as I can remember, I was drawn to understand what made people

behave as they did,” writes the successful Los Angeles-based psychologist and Instagram icon in her newly launched book, *How to Do the Work* (Hachette, ₹599).

The book, which Dr Nicole’s 3.7 million followers on Instagram had

been anticipating for weeks, lays a strong emphasis on awakening one's 'inner child', and is equally applicable for parents and non-parents. "The inner child is created from our childhood experiences," Dr Nicole tells *eShe*. "The greatest impact on our inner child comes from our parent-figures who ideally meet our physical, emotional, spiritual needs. As each person does the work, they heal their own inner child, and model a new way of existing for their children. We teach the younger generation to have a healthy relationship to their inner child by showing them our own healthy relationship with our inner child."

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Dr Nicole's understanding of human behaviour coupled with her own experiences as a child led her to Cornell University where she studied psychology, and then to a PhD in clinical psychology at the New School of Social Research, New York. After studying various therapeutic models designed specifically for mental ailments, she realised, "The idea of harnessing the power of the body to help heal the mind was dismissed

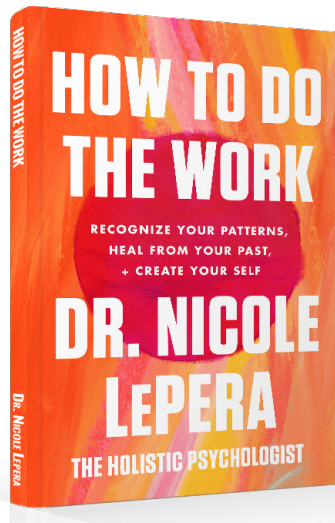
as antiscience. Or worse, New Age nonsense." In 2018, she launched her private practice focusing on holistic psychology.

In the 20th century, healthcare globally developed strategies to address mental ailments. It was ascertained that mind, body and spirit, which were treated as separate entities earlier, were in fact closely related. The policies and interventions used thereafter attempted to understand a patient's need in a more holistic manner. And, that gave birth to an integrative ground approach called 'holistic psychology'.

While we in the Indian subcontinent are familiar with the concepts of yoga, the chakras and Ayurveda, all of which take a more holistic ap-

proach to wellbeing, this approach dates back to 2,500 years ago in the Western world as well, when ancient Greek physician Hippocrates introduced it for the first time. However, it took several years to enter mainstream healthcare in the Western world.

Even today, as mental health issues continue to be on the rise, holistic therapy is not as widely





known or practised. However, Dr Nicole in her book ensures that her readers from across the world get an in-depth view into all aspects of this approach. She defines it as a movement that's committed to the daily practice of creating your own wellness by breaking negative patterns, healing from the past and creating a conscious self. Coupled with engaging exercises after every chapter, the book offers its readers the support and tools that will allow them to break free from destructive behaviour to reclaim and recreate their lives.

With her vast following online, Dr Nicole feels strongly connected to her community and religiously promotes self-healing when it

comes to mental health. Her posts are empowering and re-affirming in nature and most of them insist on using the self-care tools that all humans already have inside them as a means to heal. She also talks about 'reparenting the inner child', 'intention setting', and 'the power of manifestation' on her blog.

In April 2020, Nicole started the #selfhealer movement to further the idea that mental health is directly proportionate to the will of an individual. She is brutally frank in her posts, narrating her own journey to empower others in theirs. Sample this post: "When I was 19 years old, my parents were devastated to find out I was gay. My mom pretty much had a breakdown and refused

to speak to me for months... I've come to understand that the level of tolerance and understanding of others is in direct connection to the tolerance and understanding people have with themselves. The more disconnection there is to the Self, the more fear. Where there's fear, there will be projected pain."

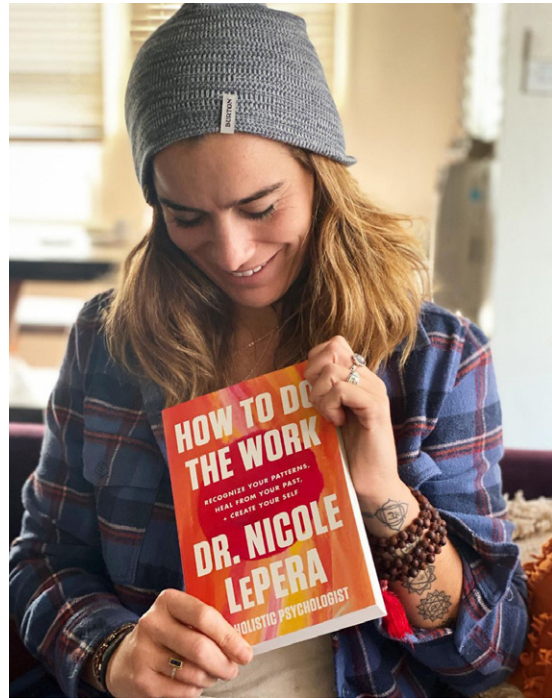
She also says, "When people struggle to accept other people, remember, they're also (internally) struggling deeply to accept themselves... You need no one's permission to be yourself."

Dr Nicole herself condemns the traditional approaches to mental wellbeing and feels that these psychological systems seek to diagnose people as "mentally ill" and fail to look at why people have symptoms in the first place. Another important aspect she emphasises is setting clear boundaries. According to Dr Nicole, boundaries allow us to have clear limits in a time of high overwhelm. "If we don't have boundaries around, how we spend our time and how we use our energy, we will feel drained or resentful, which does not allow the time and space to practise self-awareness. By setting boundaries, we can create small amounts of space for us to take care of ourselves and to get to know ourselves, our true needs, and our true passions," she says.

Dr Nicole also maintains that this should be done from the beginning

since children learn not by what they are taught, but what they are modelled within their home. "Parents need to work on and prioritise their own emotional and emotional wellbeing in order for children to learn how to do the same."

As we move to a more informed



Dr Nicole LePera with a copy of her new book

world, more and more people are now drawn to holistic psychology. Recognising the growing pattern, Dr Nicole believes the world is getting highly receptive to holistic healing because people intuitively understand that there are deeper, root causes to their behaviours. ■

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

These two fashion labels based in Rajasthan are keeping alive their region's unique textile heritage

By Priyamvada Singh



A chiffon sari
with sequinned
border from
Kriya by
Kadambari
Rathore

Exploring the rich fabric legacy of Rajasthan, we follow the trail of two craft crusaders who are passionately reviving traditional workmanship in the cities of Jodhpur and Jaipur, while creating modern interpretations.

From the blue city's delicate hand embroideries to the pink city's bold block prints, here is a glimpse into the state's much-loved textile forms with its two homegrown labels – Kriya by Kadambari Rathore and Rekha by Rohini Singh.

KRIYA BY KADAMBARI RATHORE



The evolution of Kadambari Rathore's label Kriya is also the story of the city of Jodhpur, the revival of its vintage artistry and the resurgence of its ageing embroideries, crafting eternal finesse in the fabled six yards.

A self-taught design revivalist, Kadambari creates an eclectic ensemble of saris distinctly reflective of a flavour of the present with a fragrance of the past. "My aesthetic quotient mostly stems from my understanding of the ethos of this region," says the entrepreneur. "Jodhpur is a treasure trove of artistic brilliance for centuries. This city is like my proverbial professor who never closes the door on its eager

pupil, generously offering creative solutions to my curious mind each time I seek its guidance."

Kadambari entered the realm of artisanal handiwork about half a decade ago when her younger sister Hemadri got invited to a high-profile wedding in Udaipur and coerced her older sibling into designing something special for the occasion. "I created a lemon-yellow shaded chiffon for her and embellished it with subtle sequins and an antique net border in gold. This sari piqued the interest of many cosmopolitan connoisseurs at the event and I was soon flooded with queries." She seized her first few orders within a week of this talked-about wedding.

For a self-confessed sari lover, her label Kriya presented her the perfect opportunity to delve into the marvels of vintage design sprawling across her hometown. "I have always been an advocator of the sari because it evokes a sense of style and sophistication like no other garment," she says. Kriya not only allowed her to do something she thoroughly enjoyed, it also became a medium for her to reciprocate the generosity of her beloved city by reviving its native artistry and financially empowering its artisans.

She may have found her initial clients without much ado, but the



L-R: A chiffon sari with net border and a shaded chiffon sari with silver sequins motifs, both from Kriya

journey ahead was not as breezy. Kadambari aspired to recreate the traditional drape in its modern-day relevance. Unfortunately, her quirky sensibilities did not sync with the local artisans in the initial days. “They harboured notions about conventional design and often voiced their hesitation about my creative decisions in the beginning. Yet, as our pieces garnered appreciation and orders poured in, their skepticism was replaced by conviction.”

Each sari takes about a month of relentless collaboration with embroiderers and dyers to produce striking masterpieces. Whether it’s a traditional floral motif or a con-

temporary geometric pattern, every design element comes alive through a passionate interplay of craft and colour. Besides catering to loyal clientele across the globe, she connects with new clients through her Instagram page or with prior appointments at her studio.

Kadambari is conscious of the fact that her patrons aspire to take home a coveted collectible and she feels fully responsible to ensure that they are never disappointed. “We often remind ourselves that every creation by the house of Kriya serves as an ambassador of our region’s textile legacy, and this is what inspires us to keep going,” she says.

REKH BY ROHINI SINGH



Block prints have always held a place of pride in the textile history of India. Jaipur's age-old craft of printing on fabric using carved wooden blocks has been perfected over centuries, but what distinguishes Rohini Singh's work from her predecessors is the fact that, with her new-age initiative, Rekha sprinkles a dash of contemporary seasoning to the traditional art form.

Having completed her Bachelor's from MS University Baroda and

Master's in painting from the Delhi College of Art, Rohini worked with water colours on canvas and paper during early years. Recalling the time she used blocks for the first time in college to imprint an image on paper, she admits how she loved the process. "I was so fascinated with the hand-printing medium that exploring the world of textiles was probably a natural progression for me."

After her academic tenure, Rohini participated in several

exhibitions across India and created a number of commissioned pieces for homes and commercial spaces. When she moved to Mumbai after marriage, her ability to produce art declined. For someone who only draws inspiration from nature, she felt a sense of disconnect in the maximum city. “All I saw was crows!” she chuckles.

A few years later, she shifted to Jaipur with her husband Siddharth and re-discovered her inspiration in the kaleidoscopic landscape of the city. Producing new work was not a challenge anymore but the dearth of art connoisseurs continued to disappoint. “There aren’t too

many people in our country who understand or purchase art. When I started longing for the high I got by seeing my paintings hung on the walls of my patrons’ homes, I decided it was time to expand my horizons.”

She transitioned from paper to fabric with a vision to take cues from the past and create a collection that works for the modern woman. Not wanting to bind her creations under any limitations, she launched an eclectic range of free-flowing saris, dupattas and stoles. Her kaftans are created in a single free size to endorse her unrestrained design ideology.



L-R: Pomegranate-print kaftan by Rohini Singh; pomegranate-print bags by the Jaipur-based label



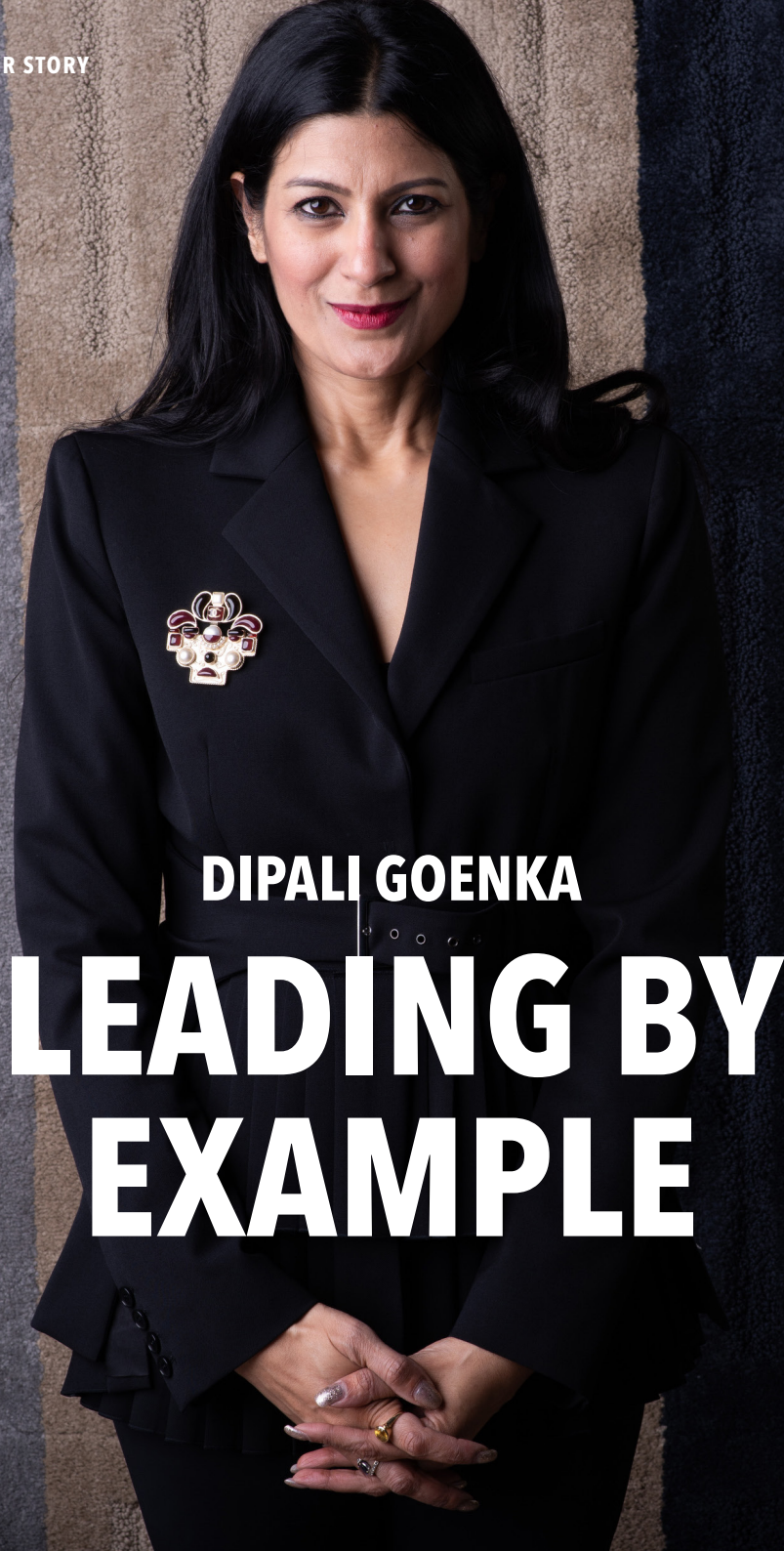
L-R: Actor Soha Ali Khan wearing the elephant print kaftan and mask by Rohini Singh; Maharani Radhika Raje of Baroda wearing a tiger-print shaded Kota doria silk sari by Rohini Singh

Surrounding elements like a pomegranate tree in her garden, a parrot sitting on a jamun tree, a dancing peacock in a temple, sparrows chirping outside her window and the elephants engraved in the city's magnificent architecture have all found place in her creations. She has re-designed some old blocks belonging to her grandmother and also collaborated with her five-year-old daughter Ahilya to interpret her version of 'wheels on the bus' on a travel-bag, which landed up being a bestseller.

Rohini's collection was earlier available at some luxury stores in Jaipur, Udaipur and Goa but she currently caters to clients through

her Instagram page and studio appointments. While her Kota-silk saris have found place in the wardrobes of actor Lara Dutta and Maharani Radhika Raje Gaekwad of Baroda, her kaftan with a matching mask was recently sported by actor Soha Ali Khan with the caption, "Who says you can't be safe and stylish?"

With people choosing comfort clothing during the pandemic, Rohini's kaftans are heading the popularity charts at the moment. "It gives me immense gratification to see people adorning my wearable art and feeling good about themselves. This validation from patrons is my ultimate high!" ■



DIPALI GOENKA

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

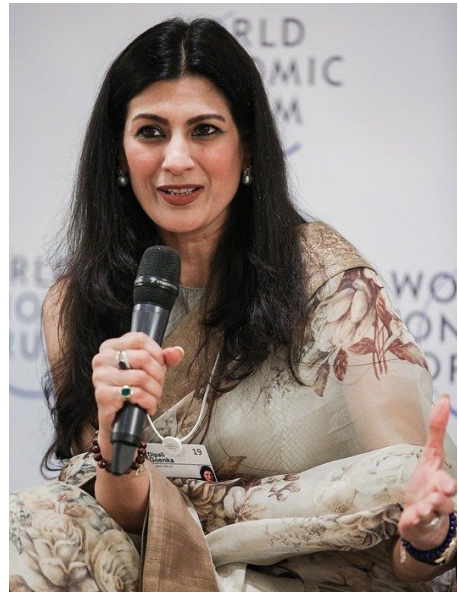
Dipali Goenka, one of India's most successful industrialists, exemplifies how compassionate leadership during a crisis can be a formula for growth

By Anita Panda

Dipali Goenka believes that one should “never let a crisis go waste”. The CEO and joint managing director of Welspun India Limited (WIL), India's largest exporter of home-textile products, says that the Covid pandemic brought the greatest challenge the world faced in decades and WIL faced the impact too. But, she adds, “Crises are the best opportunity to innovate and reinvent. Even with the coronavirus pandemic hitting businesses globally, at Welspun we have re-purposed our people, products, and processes to align with the changed ecosystem.”

To meet the immediate medical crisis, WIL – a ₹5,400-crore company by annual revenues – provided health and wellness support and round-the-clock medical camps to all the communities around their operations, and even donated linen to Indian Army isolation wards. “We conducted awareness drives, distributed masks and also collaborated with the state government and municipal authorities to provide masks and PPE kits,” says Dipali. In order to protect their 20,000-strong workforce, WIL introduced a five-layered security framework and an integrated app.

Focusing on employees and communities during a crisis is not just the right thing to do, it also translates into good business. Share prices for WIL – which touched a five-year low of ₹19.70 per



Dipali Goenka at World Economic Forum (2017)

share in March 2020 when India's stock markets crashed following the unprecedented nationwide lockdown – reached ₹84.95 in April 2021. Net income nearly doubled in the quarter ending December 2020, compared with June 2020, and was up 30 percent from the same period the previous year. At the same

time, WIL went on to win several international awards and accolades, including Tesco's value award for support during Covid, Walmart private brand supplier of the year, and Home Textiles Today supplier titan for Covid responsiveness.

Despite the privileges of being the wife of Balkrishan Goenka, chairman of the \$3 billion Welspun Group – which, besides home textiles, is also a major player in line pipes and has a significant presence in infrastructure development, spanning roads, water, oil and gas

had no prior work experience. All I had was innate passion, zest for learning and strong determination,” says Dipali, who was inspired by her mother, a consummate multi-tasker.

From then onward, Dipali had to prove herself at every turn. “BK was clear that I had to earn my spurs and create my own space. Nothing was handed on a platter,” says Dipali, who went on to complete the Owner/President Management programme at Harvard University. “As a businesswoman, there are immense opportunities, and if you



L-R: Dipali Goenka with Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson; at Wimbledon 2018 with her family

– Dipali has had to chart her own path in business.

Welspun was launched in 1985 as a small textile mill in Palghar, Maharashtra, and was in its infancy when 18-year-old Dipali married Balkrishan and moved to Mumbai from Jaipur in 1987. In 2002, when their daughters were 10 and seven years old, Dipali joined Welspun. “I

have the right skills and vision, success will follow. Having said that, I have also witnessed many challenges in my journey,” she shares.

She goes on: “The first challenge a woman faces is support from her family and friends. Women are multi-taskers, but the men of the family need to start taking up more responsibilities in the daily affairs of



Dipali Goenka was a speaker at 'Fashion for Good' Global Innovation Fest in Amsterdam (2019)

the household. The extended family needs to understand and provide support. Women deserve respect as an equal contributor and we need to build this into our culture now.”

Dipali made her presence felt soon enough. “The primary buyer of home textiles is a woman. It appalled me that the industry was male-dominated,” she says. Until 2002, Welspun was primarily an exporter. Dipali championed its foray into the domestic retail market with the brand Spaces. “It was a major transition for me,” she shares. In 2004, Welspun City was inaugurated on a 2500-acre campus in the historic town of Anjar, in Kutch, Gujarat, and is Asia’s largest home-textile factory.

The success with domestic retail and later involvement with the

exports business eventually made way for Dipali to become CEO of Welspun’s global business in 2010 and its joint MD in 2014. “It caused a flutter in the male-dominated textile and manufacturing industry. The challenge was further amplified because as a woman leader you face unconscious biases,” says Dipali, who was ranked 16th on *Forbes’* 2016 list of Asia’s 50 most powerful businesswomen and the fourth most powerful in India.

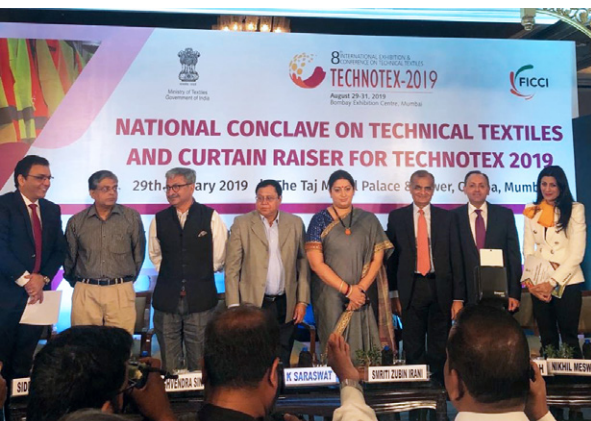
Under her watch, WIL has not only become a global leader in home-textile retailing in over 50 countries, but is also strategic partner to all top global retailers such as Macy’s, Marks & Spencer, and Marriott among several others, with farm-to-shelf capabilities and solutions from assortment to analytics.

With over 30 patents, Welspun has the highest market share in the US, and holds a dominant position in India and the UK. Their luxury label Christy England is the official towel licensee to the Wimbledon championships.

And yet, despite these achievements, Dipali Goenka still doesn't have a Wikipedia entry in her name. The missing page is symbolic of the missing women in India's corporate leadership space, a fact no

teams you employ and work with. In traditionally male-dominated industries, women have to work harder and smarter to prove themselves," she says. Aware of her own position of privilege, Dipali is keen to pay it forward. In a country where the female labour force participation rate has fallen from 30 percent in 1990 to 20 percent in 2019, the group has 25 percent women employees and plans to increase this count.

"I personally believe that if you



L-R: Dipali at Technotex 2019; with current World Champion para-badminton player Manasi Joshi

one is more acutely aware of than Dipali. One of only 3.7 percent of CEOs and managing directors of NSE-listed companies in India (2019), she is often the only woman invited to major business leadership conclaves and is the lone woman on the eight-member council of the Welspun Group. "One big challenge as a woman leader is to garner the trust and confidence of the

want the nation to progress then you need to empower women," says Dipali, adding that the textile industry is the second largest employer in the country, contributing 3 percent to India's GDP. "To become a USD 5 trillion economy, India needs to engage and employ its women demographic," she asserts.

Last month, the group announced its 'Women of Welspun' initiative to



Dipali and Balkrishan Goenka with daughters Radhika and Vanshika

provide an environment of growth and opportunities for its women employees, institutionalising progressive policies that actively help women to reach desired positions. “Women should be provided the right mentoring, right environment of respect and skilling platforms to grow and transform into future leaders,” says Dipali. She also championed the company’s Super Sports Women programme where they sponsor promising women athletes across sports, such as Manasi Joshi, who is the current World Champion para-badminton player.

Besides women empowerment, Dipali is dedicated to WIL’s ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) focus, and has taken great strides in ensuring sustainability in production and retail. The compa-

ny runs various community initiatives in education, environment and health, and has zero dependence on freshwater for manufacturing.

A fitness freak with a disciplined routine, Dipali believes one of the key lessons of the pandemic has been to collectively adapt to the changing ecosystem and showcase agility in business operations. “Leaders who create agile and resilient innovation-DNAs in their organisations will be positioned to meet the new needs of the post-Covid world,” she states.

Thanks to Welspun’s vertically integrated facilities and ecosystem, she says, “We were able to showcase agility and build new capabilities faster than ever before.” After all, Dipali Goenka is not one to let a crisis go to waste. ■



THE LAW OF POETRY

Legal regulation strategist Naina Pachnanda is out to motivate India's youth through Instagram inspiration and her new book of patriotic poetry

Law and poetry make an unlikely combination. But as far as Delhi-based lawyer and Instagram influencer Naina Pachnanda is concerned, they are both avenues to follow her passion and purpose. Through her work as Senior Innovation Specialist at Invest India (the country's national investment promotion and facilitation agency), she is able to contribute to India's legal framework and policymaking, and through her inspirational poems, she motivates others who may be on difficult journeys.

The 31-year-old go-getter has now added another feather in her hat: she has just released her first book of patriotic poems, *A New India*, which was launched last month by Smriti Irani, India's Minister of Women and Child Development and Minister of Textiles. "I get my patriotic fervour from my grandfather, Brigadier KD Pachnanda and my father, RK Pachnanda, IPS, both of whom have served the nation with great sincerity, loyalty and unflinching resolve," says Naina, who is also an accomplished basketball player, squash player, swimmer, tennis enthusiast, and now a golfer.

Born in Delhi and raised in Chandigarh, Delhi and Kolkata, Naina completed her schooling from Delhi Public School RK Puram and enrolled for Bachelor's in economics from St Xavier's College

in Kolkata, where her father was posted at the time. One year into the course, however, she changed her mind and decided to go for the five-year law degree. "I told my parents that I wanted to drop economics and give the Common Law Admission Test (CLAT). My



Naina Pachnanda with Union Minister Smriti Irani

mother flipped because there was just one month left for the exam. With God's grace, the exam got postponed by two weeks giving me some more time to prepare. And then, two weeks before the results, I didn't step out of the house, I just

prayed 10 hours a day – I recited the Hanuman Chalisa 100 times every day for 15 days, till the date of the result,” she laughs.

Her hard work and prayers paid off, and she secured a good rank and admission into the National



Naina Pachnanda with her parents

University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata. “So, my mantra ever since has been to work hard and back your hard work up with a lot of prayers,” says the vivacious young achiever, who calls her mother Nita the ‘domestic engineer’ of their

home and family life.

After practising litigation for five-odd years, Naina moved to policy-related work a couple of years ago. “I decided to tap the patriotism that was bursting inside of me, and to work on something that could have a positive impact on India,” says Naina, who currently looks after the legal regulatory, policy and strategy affairs to help commercialise Indian technological innovation as part of the government’s AGNI programme (Accelerating Growth of New India’s Innovations).

At around the same time, she rekindled her childhood interest in poetry. “I wrote my first poem at age 10 on Harry Potter and it got published in *Télé Kids*, a popular supplement with *The Telegraph* newspaper in Kolkata. This naturally gave a 10-year-old a lot of confidence,” smiles Naina.

However, poetry took a backseat as the rigours of a career in law took over. In 2018, on her father’s 60th birthday, her mother insisted she write a poem as a gift to him. “I was waiting for an email from a client, and I had a 20-minute window. I quickly wrote a poem for my dad and presented it to him at home.” The poem not only moved her parents, it also inspired Naina to write more poems on topics such as the meaning of happiness, how to create your own destiny, and so on.

She began reciting her poems on

her Instagram page [naina.pachnanda](https://www.instagram.com/naina.pachnanda). Then Covid struck. “It was a year full of challenges. I decided to write about these very challenges and post them on Instagram for everyone to benefit,” she explains. It was no easy task. “I was fully committed to my office work during the day and would burn the midnight oil writing my poems. I would then wake up and shoot my videos early morning, well in time to be on my work desk by 9 am.”

Naina was overwhelmed with the feedback and support she received. “My page really started to become popular during lockdown. I received over 300 messages from my friends, colleagues, acquaintances and others whom I refer to as my ‘larger Insta family’. I have saved them as three gratitude jars on my Insta highlights,” she says.

The success of the poems also triggered Naina to share all that she learnt from her practice of Nichiren Buddhism and the study of tarot cards. “This also in turn motivates *me* to stay fit, eat healthy, to chant and pray every single day – because if I am to inspire people about how to stay positive during the pandemic, I have to follow the same too!” she smiles.

Naina’s following grew from 200 to almost 20,000 in a very short time. She also managed to put together a book of patriotic poems to create awareness about various

government schemes. “I have always been in awe of Ms Smriti Irani and I am beyond blessed to have the good fortune of the Union Minister launching my first book *A New India*,” says Naina.

The young lawyer sees challenges as opportunities for growth and a means to fix patterns within her own life. “I have learnt to have



Naina Pachnanda's new book of patriotic poetry

unquestionable faith in the ways of the universe. I have learnt to dream big and to work hard to achieve those dreams. I have learnt to set my targets but to also accept and go with the flow. Most importantly I have learnt to have gratitude. The more gratitude you have, the more the universe will give you reasons to be grateful for,” she concludes. ■



WORDS WOVEN INTO THE THREADS OF TIME

Linguistic expert and author Peggy Mohan traces the history of the Subcontinent through its languages, and notes how homogenisation of language reflects centralisation of power

Linguistic expert Dr Peggy Mohan's new book *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants: The Story of India Through Its Languages* (Penguin Random House, ₹599) challenges the idea of 'racial purity' in India. Interwoven with anecdotes from her childhood in Trinidad and later experiences in the US and other parts of the world, the Delhi-based educator and author of three novels looks at the migration patterns and intermixing among the larger Indian population down the centuries through the lens of our words, grammar and syntax. The book

concludes that Indians are hybrids, like our languages.

Having earned her PhD in linguistics from University of Michigan, Dr Peggy was a professor of linguistics at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. She has developed educational television programmes for children, and learnt cartoon animation and opera singing. She now teaches music at a reputed high school.

We spoke to her about the book, her study of languages, the dominance of English, and how

digitisation is adding to the mix.

What excites you about the study of language – or linguistic archaeology as you call it – and why do you think it is important in this age of digital communication?

‘Important’ is a hard word for me to process. Maybe it’s better to say ‘interesting’.

Anywhere I go, my first sense of the place is through language: what are they speaking, what does it say about who settled in the region, and what new migrations are still going on. For example, in Sikkim, many Tibetan groups use Nepali (a language from a different family) to communicate between themselves, the way in Nagaland the different tribes have begun to use Nagamese, which is close to Assamese (again, a language from a different family). It’s like seeing history and population shift happening before your eyes! There is so much to mull over, without any final answers, only more questions, taking the journey further into strange and exciting territory.

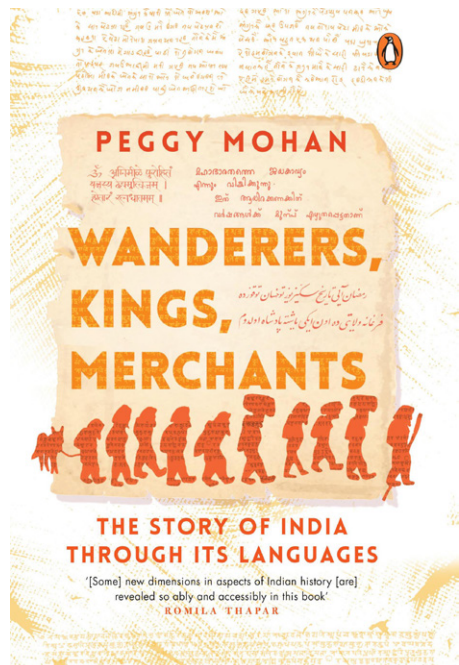
I often feel that I’m like a dog, who perceives the world through scents that humans cannot detect, experiencing a landscape familiar to people, but in different ‘colours’.

And in this digital age you can even get a glimpse of language in motion without leaving your desk. Google searches take you to a huge amount of ‘published’ material that

you would not have even known about earlier.

What are your thoughts on the Englishisation of the internet?

Language is a mirror that reflects whatever is happening in the world of politics, economics and human society. Over the past few centuries, the world has been moving towards



greater centralisation – of the market, of technology, of political systems – with fewer and fewer people at the top. Language cannot but reflect this in the way it seeks to band us together. If you are unhappy about the way more and more languages are falling into disuse, and want to see them survive, you have



Dr Peggy Mohan giving a talk at a BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) India convention in 2016

to be just as unhappy about the shape of a world that is forcing us to be more and more similar. It's a political issue.

The upside is that we can easily have conversations like we are having now. The downside, I think, is that the loss of linguistic diversity is as harmful to us as all the other loss of diversity we are seeing in the natural environment.

Just as a language is identical in size to the group (or empire) it services, an internet run out of Silicon Valley will have the stamp of American English on it. Let's not forget that China too has its own internet ecosystem, and it isn't in English. But even in China smaller

dialects are falling between the cracks, and we are seeing greater homogeneity asserting itself.

The word 'communication' is, after all, linked to 'community'.

Has digitisation (messaging, emojis, abbreviations) further added to this erosion of diverse mother tongues or has it added its own new kind of complexity and nuance?

Notice how easy it is now to get children, even those who have 'reading problems' in school, to use the internet to seek out the kinds of things we want them to learn. Many kids are addicted to the kind of videos we once had to push on them as 'educational'; children with learning disabilities are able

to send and receive messages on their phones. Where has the reading problem gone?

Language is not static; it is alive, so it will keep adapting to the new niches that open up. And internet is one of them. The simplified style, with emojis and abbreviations, is not really a 'new' language. The rules and grammar are almost the same as earlier language.

The change is mostly in vocabulary, and that too mostly nouns. I regard them as just clothing, stuff that can be taken off and replaced without the 'genome' of the language being affected. We have moved on, so the old literary styles with longer sentences and archaic words had to be put away in mothballs. One thing is certain: today's language, thanks to the internet, is way more accessible than ever before. Because we now need people to be able to use it. Earlier we were happy to 'fail' those who didn't 'speak like us'!

And no more spelling mistakes! What's not to like?

How many languages do you speak fluently yourself? And what about your daughter: has she picked up the love of languages from her mom?

Difficult question! I don't know them all in the same way! I can't speak Creole on demand, though I slip back into it in the right company. French, Spanish: need a day or so to wake up. Hindi (though I still Google a few words

to be sure of their gender: Bhojpuri – the language of my ancestors who migrated to Trinidad – is like Bengali and has no gender). Sanskrit, Latin: not really used for years. And I know a bit of a lot of others and can listen in and find my way. I'm reasonably okay in Turkey, Iran, Indonesia and Japan, staying with nouns and a few sentence types. And I'm always ready to blunder into more languages.

My daughter is different: she

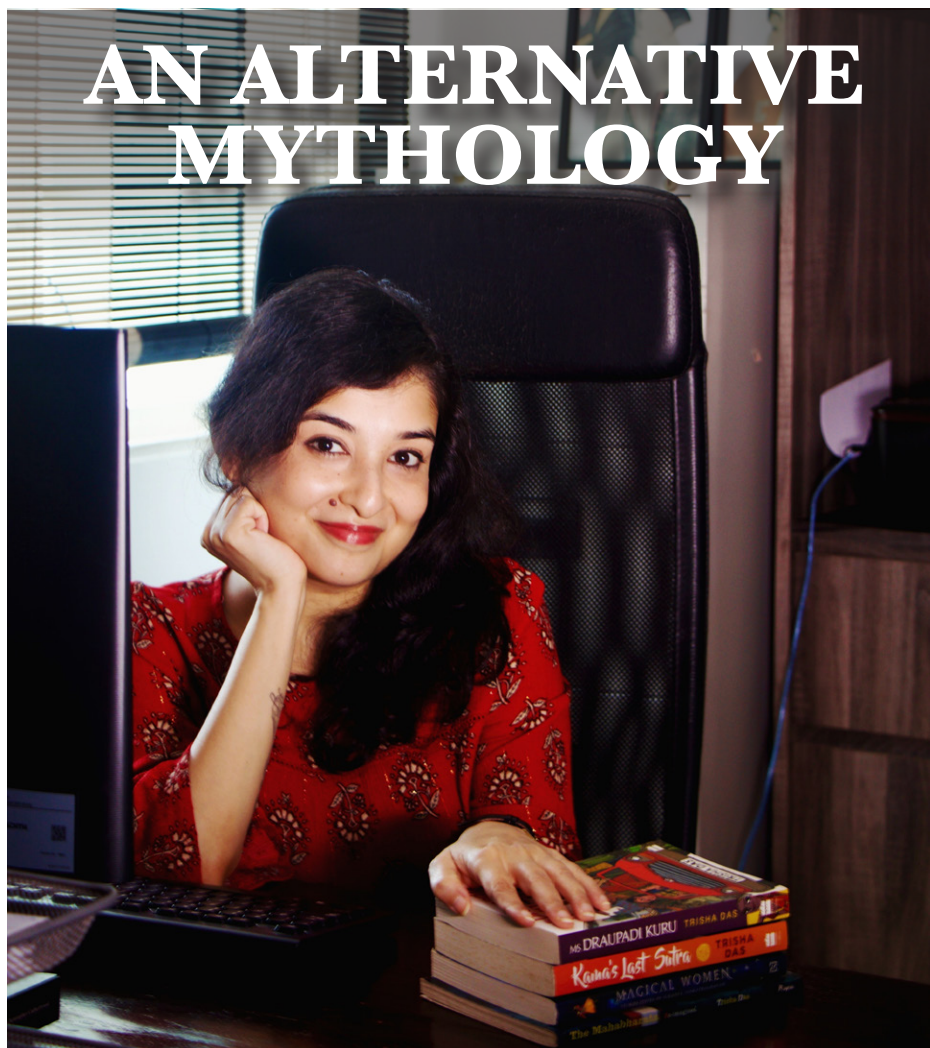


Screen grab of a talk by Dr Peggy Mohan on YouTube

didn't like Sanskrit in school, though we made her learn Tamil, and she was thrilled when she worked in Chennai for a year. But she feels she really 'only speaks English and Hindi'. My granddaughter knows Spanish – growing up in California – so we have a secret language between us. ■

Read more on eShe.in

AN ALTERNATIVE MYTHOLOGY



Filmmaker and bestselling author Trisha Das's novels present a comical, feminist take on the Mahabharata

By Neha Kirpal

Filmmaker and bestselling author Trisha Das has just released her latest book of feminist mythological fiction, *Misters Kuru*:

A Return to Mahabharata (Harper Collins India, 2021).

A sequel of her book *Ms Draupadi Kuru: After the Pandavas*

(HarperCollins, 2016), the racy, sassy roller-coaster ride, full of action, adventure, romance and comedy, is written as a kind of continuation of the Mahabharata set in the modern-day Kalyug in Delhi.

Previously, Trisha has also written and directed over 40 documentaries in her filmmaking career, and won an Indian National Film Award (2005) as well as was UGA's 'International Artist of the Year' (2003).

She talks to us about the importance of reimagining and rewriting mythology from a female perspective, her earliest influences of Indian mythology, and incorporating comedy in a mythological context.

How were you motivated to write a feminist retelling of the Mahabharata in a contemporary setting?

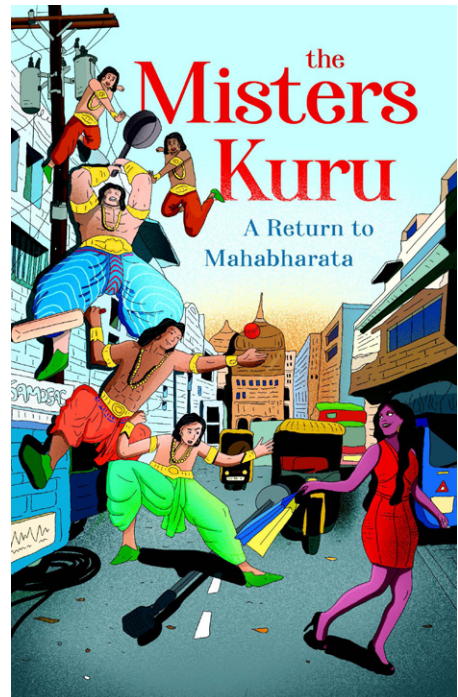
The Kuru novels aren't so much a retelling of the Mahabharata as they are a sequel of sorts. The story of *Ms Draupadi Kuru* picks up in the modern day, thousands of years after the end of the original Mahabharata. Draupadi and her friends come down to Delhi from heaven. In *The Mistery Kuru*, the Pandava brothers follow their women to Delhi.

My motivation was simple – I wanted to give these characters another shot at their lives, at reshaping their destinies. So many of them were forced into living lives they didn't want to – being stripped of their kingdom, exiled, et

cetera. I thought it would be fun to see what kind of lives they would choose, given the choice.

What were some of your earliest influences in life when it comes to Indian mythology?

My maternal grandfather started my fascination with mythology as a young child. He was religious, but



in an inclusive way, and he told the best stories from both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. I read various versions and interpretations of the Mahabharata growing up and, as an adult, delved into the Ganguli and Debroy translations, alternate versions like the Bheel Mahabharata

and mythological fiction. I also used to watch the TV series every Sunday on Doordarshan and point out mistakes, which everyone in my house found thoroughly annoying.

What do you feel about the conventional depiction of women in Indian mythology?

It sucks. They're praised not for their achievements, but for their sacrifices or their beauty. Any kind of resistance to being pushed around



or attempt at self-determination is severely punished and the women constantly suffer for the stupid decisions of their menfolk. Consent is virtually non-existent – just ask any beautiful woman trying to have a bath in the forest.

Apparently, a mythological woman only has influence over men if she has a tiny waist and lotus eyes or if she's their mother.

Recently, several authors have been reimagining and rewriting mythology, particularly from a female perspective. Why do you feel it is important to do this in contemporary times?

To keep the stories relevant and relatable to the inhabitants of a modern society. That's how the Mahabharata and the Ramayana have kept up with the times, instead of dying out like European mythologies.

Millions of authors have rerecorded the epics over thousands of years, so writing and reimagining mythology isn't a recent thing at all. It's part of Hindu tradition.

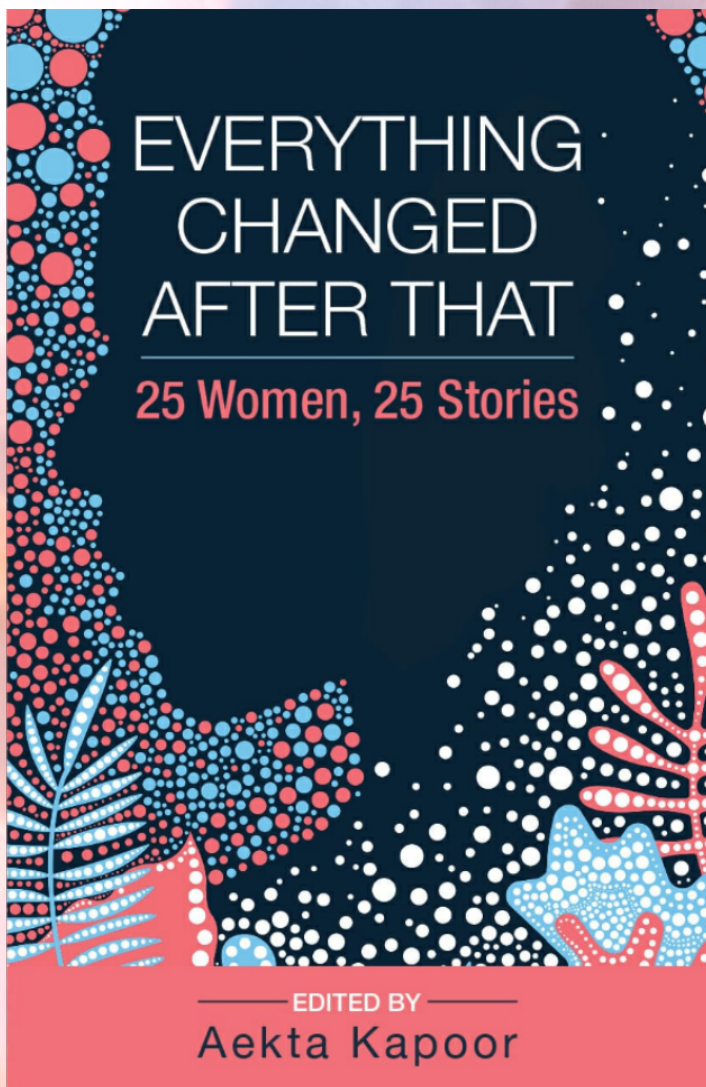
Would you say that feminism exists in the ancient Indian context?

Yes and no. Feminism is a modern concept, but female power has existed in one form or the other throughout history. Women have always been influential, even when the official narrative didn't support it. They worked from behind the scenes, or wielded power by dressing as men or becoming saints or a thousand other ways that circumvented the system. Nowadays, feminists are trying to change the narrative and modify the system – same result, different approach.

As a keen filmmaker, tell our readers what is the essence of a good documentary.

One that tells a story and inspires a call to action – without being preachy. ■

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**25 short stories by
25 women writers
from India**

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SURVIVORS' STORY

Journalist Urmi Bhattacheryya's hard-hitting new book looks at the aftermath of sexual assault for five girls and women in India

An independent journalist based in Delhi, Urmi Bhattacheryya's debut book *After I Was Raped* (Pan Macmillan India, ₹399) tells the heart-breaking story of five survivors of rape and gang-rape. Urmi writes for various national and international publications on issues of sexual assault, women's health and culture. In 2020, Urmi

won the UNFPA Laadli Award for Gender Sensitivity for her reporting on child sexual abuse.

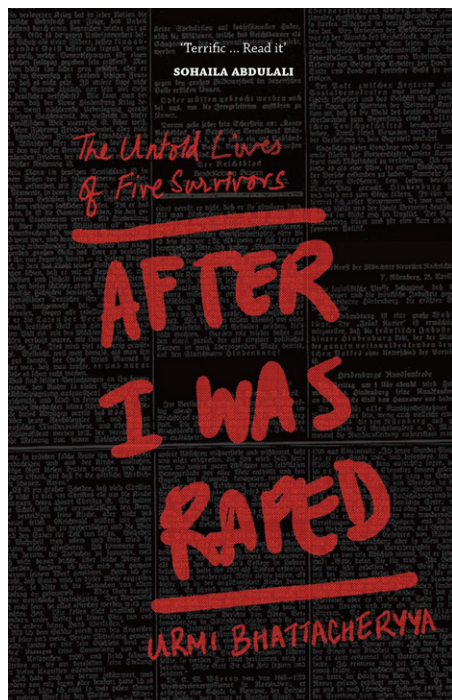
Even while laying bare the apathy, cruelty and injustice that survivors of sexual violence have to deal with during and after the assault, the book is grounded in empathy, objectivity and a sincere search for solutions.

We asked Urmi about her key learnings from her years of research. *You have interviewed rape survivors of very varied backgrounds in this book. What were the main insights about violence against women that you gathered during these interviews?*

That it is a systemic and systematic problem and it isn't going to go away without active, concerted effort. That we still don't hold men responsible and accountable – both for the crime of rape and for rape culture that perpetuates it. Men aren't held responsible – particularly, cisgender heterosexual men – because that's what patriarchy does: make one loath to question the abusers of power – men themselves. Until we stop tiptoeing around this problem, until we stop judging women for their clothes, how late they were out at night or not (sometimes, inadvertently – sometimes, blatantly – saying women “deserved that rape”), the crime will continue unabated.

We need to hold men accountable; we need to dismantle patriarchy and rape culture so insidious that it excuses men and protects them from the law and disadvantages women. Most of the women I spoke to for my book belong to socio-economically underprivileged communities; two of my case studies are Dalit women who were subjected to the utterly invasive, humiliating and unnecessary two-

finger test. These women were raped to be “shown their place”; in the context of the Dalit survivors, the rape occurred as a result of dominant-caste anger at the woman “stepping outside” dominant-caste-delineated caste lines. Their rapes were committed by men who fully



believed they would get away with it, despite living in close quarters, and/or being related to the survivor, and/or having known the woman/child for some time. They were entitled and their entitlement is a horrifying indictment of rape culture in India: they know all that is to know – that the woman might

not report, that she and her family might succumb to intimidation or reminders of “family honour”, that cases would drag on for years and that they would ultimately go scot-free. We need to stop placing an idea of honour in a woman’s vagina and place culpability solely in a man’s violation of her consent, agency and body.

Are these cases taking so long in court because the judicial system is generally slow, or because these are ‘women’s issues’?

It’s obviously a bit of both, in a cycle. Rape happens because women are devalued and dehumanised in India. As a result, our judicial system is taxed – in fact, overtaxed. Official data from the country’s high courts (from 2019) show that 1,66,882 rape cases are pending trial – and, in fact, have a time lag of a little over a year. And this is official, recorded data – to say nothing of the cases that go unreported or are withdrawn before trial.

You’ve talked about the psychological impact of rape on the women. Do their families and communities understand their need for healing and do they make any efforts in that direction?

Ranjini was disbelieved by her husband who as good as said that

she must have been in a relationship with her rapist – and had made up the story. Smita’s family didn’t understand for years; heck, she didn’t either, choosing to denigrate herself for loving the man who eventually raped her. She censures herself for a trope of a survivor she’s been told she doesn’t live up to.

These women do receive kindness and affection from their immediate family – their first support system – but what they need and what they don’t get, is solidarity. Solidarity against the crime and empathy for the many tiny ways in which they are changed.

Smita, now married, can no longer think of sex the same way. Nidhi’s mother does not trust the daughters beyond the parameters of the railway tracks where Nidhi plays

(yet, it is next to the tracks that a man the family knew lured her and raped her and slashed her with a blade). It is important to understand the ‘what-after-rape’ not only in the sense of a larger, cumulative healing but also the many ways that one cannot imagine they need to heal and unheal, recover and unlearn that recovering, every second of every day. ■

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“WE NEED TO DISMANTLE PATRIARCHY AND RAPE CULTURE SO INSIDIOUS THAT IT EXCUSES MEN AND DISADVANTAGES WOMEN”



A NEW LEASH ON LIFE

A young girl suffers brain injury; her mother determines to bring her daughter back to life through love, care, surgery and Bharatanatyam

When facing everyday problems, we cry, console ourselves and move on, says Swati Anil. “But when your daughter is lying unconscious in the ICU with brain damage, no amount of consolation or philosophising can help you. You have no time to think or curse God. Crying only drains your energy, and you need every ounce for the battle ahead.”

This was the lesson Swati learnt in March 2015, when her daughter Nirmohi Anil had a tragic accident

while waiting for an auto-rickshaw in Mumbai. The mother-daughter duo had planned a celebratory dinner that night – Swati had just completed a fundraising event for the NGO where she worked, and Nirmohi had given the final paper of her second-year exam at Sophia College where she was studying psychology. An accomplished Bharatanatyam dancer, Nirmohi wanted to be a movement therapist and had been teaching dance to children in Dharavi’s slums in those

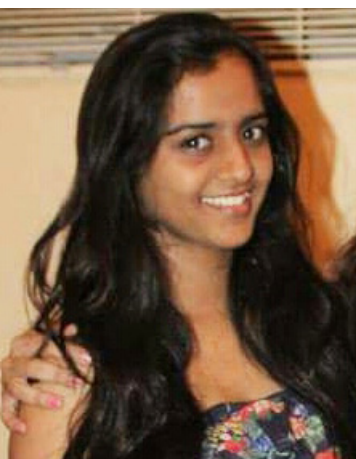
days. Swati's husband Anil and son Rahul were away – Anil for work and Rahul for studies in Australia.

The next thing Swati knew, a stranger picked up when she dialled Nirmohi's number, and told her that her daughter was in hospital.

No one really knows what happened that night, but it left Nirmohi with a ruptured skull. Dr Vishwanathan Iyer, neurosurgeon at Kohinoor Hospital, Mumbai, explains, "On arrival, she was

ness but the right side of her body was paralysed, the left was feeble, and she could just about move her eyes. "The first battle was to make sure she survived," says Swati, who was overwhelmed by the number of well-wishers who turned up at the hospital with moral and financial support. "Her school and college friends, teachers, professors... all stood by us," she says.

For most of 2015, Nirmohi lay passive while her mother took over



L-R: Nirmohi Anil before her accident; with Dr Vishwanathan Iyer; with dance guru Geetha Venkateswar

unconscious and went into a coma. We performed surgery to remove the clots and bone on both sides of the skull. Over five years, she underwent 11 different surgeries to replace the bone flap and to treat water accumulation in the brain."

Nirmohi was in hospital for 55 days on ventilator support. After three weeks, she regained conscious-

ness but the right side of her body was paralysed, the left was feeble, and she could just about move her eyes. "The first battle was to make sure she survived," says Swati, who was overwhelmed by the number of well-wishers who turned up at the hospital with moral and financial support. "Her school and college friends, teachers, professors... all stood by us," she says.

For most of 2015, Nirmohi lay passive while her mother took over



L-R: Anil, Nirmohi, Rahul and Swati at present; Nirmohi (second from left) with her closest friends

herself to reawakening the dancer in Nirmohi. “Even the physiotherapist learnt Bharatanatyam *mudras* for her sake,” says Swati. In 2018, Nirmohi performed on stage for the first time after the accident. It wasn’t perfect, but Nirmohi’s family and friends were ecstatic. A year later, Nirmohi’s performance was perfect.

“Her cognitive skills are 90-95 percent of what they used to be, but in terms of dance, she has recovered her skills 100 percent,” smiles Swati, who moved with Nirmohi and her family to Ahmedabad last year.

Nirmohi needs one more surgery as a three-inch ‘dent’ in her skull causes her immense pain. “But she is a brave girl,” says the mother, who gave up her job to tend to Nirmohi 24x7, even buying her textbooks from class one onwards to re-educate her. “I wasn’t a very strong per-

son earlier,” admits the 55-year-old, “but when this happened, I prayed to God, ‘Give me my daughter back and I will never crib about anything again’. Ever since Nirmohi regained consciousness, I have lived up to my promise,” she says.

This January, Nirmohi, now 25, gave a performance that was broadcast live on Facebook. Swati beams as she plays it over and over. “In the initial years, I was hollowed out with sorrow. But when I saw others like us sitting in the neuro-rehab centre, I realised it is not worth remaining sad. We are not alone.”

Now Swati wants the world to know that there is hope for their loved ones who have been through similar brain trauma. “Don’t give up. Just shower your loved one with your love and care,” she urges. “You can bring them back.” ■



FEMINISM IN ACTION

Dubai-based feminist publisher Sabin Muzaffar is documenting female trailblazers and empowering women and girls globally through her digital platform Ananke

Sabin Muzaffar had been working as a journalist for over 15 years in the UAE when it struck her that all of the ‘movers and shakers’ of the corporate world whom she had been interviewing were men. “It just hit me that we need to have a platform digital-

ly documenting female trailblazers – and not just those already in the news, but also the unsung heroes, who have their heads down and are busy working with no time to celebrate themselves or are too humble to do so,” says the Dubai-based media entrepreneur.



L-R: Sabin with IBM's Melissa Sassi (L) and Suzana Obradovic (R) at IBM Works organised by *Ananke*; Sabin conducting Google's #IamRemarkable workshop at Careem, Dubai



That's how, in 2014, the digital magazine and platform *Ananke* came to be. "Ananke is the Greek goddess of inevitability. The website anankemag.com has a wealth of content in the form of interviews, articles, research papers, news stories, trailblazer profiles and more. We cover everything from sustainability, development, technology, finance, gender equality, education, culture – everything under a gender lens," says Sabin, who is a UN Women's Empower Women Mentor and Cherie Blair Foundation Mentor.

Born and raised in her "beloved, hustling bustling city of Karachi", Sabin was greatly influenced by her father, a writer, economist and poet. "My grandfather was a friend of the late Subcontinent poet, Faiz

Ahmad Faiz, who also solemnised my father's nikah. He was someone obviously much talked about at our home apart from other *danishwar* (literati) like Kishwar Naheed, Razia Bhatti, Fehmida Riyaz and of course Habib Jalib. The last two were friends of my father. These were people who fervently spoke or wrote about human rights, politics and social justice. So, I guess the seeds were sown right from the very beginning," shares Sabin.

She adds, "I think we should all aspire to create a world and a community that embraces and celebrates tolerance, equity and justice."


Moving from Karachi to Dubai was relatively easy for Sabin. "Both cities (one an emirate) welcome people from every walk of life. You

can see a Pathan, Punjabi, Balochi, Urdu-speaking second and third generation Mohajirs, as some call them, and even Afghanis in Karachi. And you can see people from so many countries residing not just in Dubai but across the UAE. I think Dubai is innovative yet also celebrates its traditions and culture. It's such a synchronous, diverse community of people," she opines.

When Sabin launched *Ananke*, her vision was to encourage and initiate inclusive conversations in the digital realm without leaving anyone behind. Her other goal is more developmental in essence. "*Ananke* has an amazing digital capacity-building programme called Empower for women and girls from all over the world. They are not just mentored but can attend workshops facilitated by field experts from the advocacy sphere, world-renowned tech and media organisations as well as academic institutions," says Sabin. Workshops include topics like design thinking, feminist peace journalism, data visualisation, personal branding, overcoming the imposter syndrome, human rights, entrepreneurship, soft skills and leadership.

Sabin has also ensured that *Ananke* focuses on engagement for she believes dialogue builds pathways to inclusion, innovation as well as disruption to the status quo. This was

the motivation behind the launch of the Women in Literature Festival earlier this year. "I really do think we need a continuous, inclusive and diversity-focused conversation about literature especially during these trying times of the pandemic. And by the pandemic, I am not just referring to Covid-19 but the pandemic of hatred, discrimination and racism against those who do not look like us," she says. The festival saw speakers from around



"We should all aspire to create a world and a community that embraces and celebrates tolerance, equity and justice"

the world come together over three days to discuss feminist literature, the digital revolution, diversity in publishing, and other issues.

"We keep seeing manels even on subjects of women's rights and empowerment, and we keep hearing statements that there aren't enough women available for public-speaking opportunities," says Sabin, adding, "We have continuously proven those claims wrong. While we do think an inclusive



L-R: Sabin interviewed by Female Quotient's CEO Shelley Zalis; Sabin and her son with UN Women's Anna Falth

conversation is essential to trigger impact, if we do not have proper representation especially on issues centering women, I fear there will never be change in the status quo.”

She smiles on the subject of how the internet has enabled feminism and gender equality in South Asia. “The digital revolution has been transformative; it has played a catalysing role when it comes to unifying women’s voices from all over the world. From the streets of Tunisia, female majlis in Dubai to the alleys of Karachi and Chandni Chowk in Delhi or a college in Bangladesh – women and girls are stepping up and taking their rightful place in public and private spheres, lifting one another, finding and providing support,” she enthuses.

About the dominant themes in South Asian feminist literature, Sabin notes, “While violence and silence, a woman’s social status and position in the hegemonic power structures have been portrayed across all forms of literature, I think contemporary works have also showcased how women are navigating the politics of colonialism (of the self, mind and body), politics, society, conflict, the effects of urbanisation and economic empowerment vis-à-vis care work and the double shift.”

Sabin is optimistic about a gender-equal future: “We live in a world that has known inequality from time immemorial. So, yes, the journey is long and there are miles to go. And yes, we are destined to reach it.” ■



Steering a New World Order

Leadership consultant and agent of change Karen Lee Downes believes it is time for leaders and organisations to tap into their feminine intelligence

When it comes to conscious leadership and social entrepreneurship, Karen Lee Downes literally wrote the book. Not only did she co-found and build an \$8.5 million alternative healthcare enterprise in Australia, she went on to support five successful international startups, and is now a leadership consultant designing development programmes in global corporates such as Molton Brown, Intel, BP, Unilever and Virgin Atlantic among several others.

She is also founder and managing director of FemmeQ, an international movement based out of Costa Rica committed to creating new paradigms of thinking and acting in core sectors of society using feminine intelligence. Shuttling between UK, USA and Costa Rica, Karen supports civil-society organisations in India and Bangladesh to transform entrenched cultural norms. A serious road cyclist who competed in the World Masters, Karen has authored six books that have sold over half a million copies.

In 2012, Karen launched [The Flourish Initiative](#) where she brings her expertise and hands-on experience to transform outdated organisational systems into those that enable human flourishing and business prosperity. We asked her to

share her top tips for organisations and leaders.

What are the top qualities that business leaders need to develop (and especially women leaders) so that they can build sustainable and profitable enterprises?

Develop your three key intelligences. First, 'Heart'. Develop deep listening. There is a vast difference between hearing and listening. Sounds



Karen built an \$8.5 million aromatherapy enterprise

carry a vibration, words express our perspectives, beliefs and concerns. All people wish to be heard, seen and known for who they truly are. By giving time to listen to our people, we are able to understand the important messages being conveyed at the heart of the business. Developing the quality of deep listening is a lifetime practice, it cannot be forced. When it is authentic,



Karen Downes has designed development programmes for a diverse portfolio of clients

it comes from a deep concern for others and a curiosity to discover what lies beneath the surface.

Second, 'Gut'. Trust your intuition. The left brain of rational and logical thinking has been overvalued and dominated our decision-making for centuries. The feminine way is instinctual and intuitive. This requires giving ourselves contemplative quiet time. It is the ability to understand something without the need for conscious reasoning.

Third, 'Head'. Understand systemic thinking and the principles of systemic change in order to address the root causes of entrenched social norms, which are often intractable and embedded in networks of cause and effect. We can see these patterns

play out in any organisation. Seeing the patterns and then taking intentional action to fundamentally alter people's perspectives, mindsets and behaviours that cause the 'system' to behave in a certain way.

Please tell us about your work at The Hunger Project in India and Bangladesh. What inspired you to get involved and what have been your learnings?

When I was first introduced to The Hunger Project, I had been working with women for almost 10 years, across five countries. We exported our products and training programmes to different regions and I saw that, in every country, at every level of society, women were carrying the brunt of the load in their homes, and often in their organisa-

tions, and not being recognised for their worth or contribution.

One day, I learned that one of the main root causes of the chronic persistence of hunger had nothing to do with food, but was caused by the subjugation and marginalisation of women. The very next week I was on a plane to New York to be part of the solution to this problem. Going to the cause of the problem is the solution to transformation. I

developed and developing societies?

In every sector of society, in every country, the rules, the decisions made, the policies developed and governance of our systems – be it politics, education, science, medicine, religion or in corporations – have all been determined by men. For centuries, women have been recipients of what is handed to them or decided for them.

But now, across the world, the



L-R: Karen Downes with the team of Virgin Atlantic in Crawley, UK; she founded the global initiative FemmeQ

wanted to support the education of girls and empowerment of women.

The workshops we led in those countries were transformational for those women who changed the course of their life, the future of their families, and their villages. I became a global investor, activist and fundraiser, and visited India and Bangladesh every year for five years.

What is your view of patriarchy across

suppressed part of our human dynamic is rising and taking its rightful place to heal, protect and create a different world. That is the feminine rising in our human psyche. Women are taking up their agency to protect what is sacred for their children and future generations, and acknowledge that we must take a stand for a flourishing future. ■

Read more on eShe.in

THE JOY OF LIVING



Slovakian transformational guide and web show host Slavomira Harcegová is driving across Europe in search of inspirational stories

By Kay Newton

Slovakian Feng Shui healer and web show host Slavomira Harcegová is still in the process of discovering who she is. Having achieved all her childhood dreams 10 years ago at the age of 40, she still felt a complete failure.

“I had a big house in a beautiful natural environment, three children and even a horse in the garden!” she shares. “Yet, I felt burned out. I kept asking, is life supposed to be only a never-ending to-do list?”

Slavomira was not unhappy or depressed. “Yet when I took away all my roles, who was I?

A respectful member of society, with a University degree, married, children, home and running the perfect business. Yet behind all that, what is the meaning of life? Where were the fun and adventure?”

Looking back to her teens, she recalled that she had been so joyful, full of positive energy, and had fun all the time. “I missed the girl I was. It was time to find my purpose and get the girl back,” she says.

Slavomira looked for answers, studied books and went to esoteric seminars. She watched others have epiphanies but felt nothing.

She narrates, “One day, while browsing the computer for an English language course for my daughter, I froze. The emotions came from nowhere. Tears dropped onto the keyboards. The images of Italy on the screen stirred such a deep and strong desire. At last, I knew what it meant to feel connected to my soul.”

There was no hesitation, no feeling of guilt in Slavomira. “I



had to travel, no matter the cost. I sold my personal belongings, left my three children with my husband and went to Florence for two weeks. For the first time in 18 years of marriage, I understood freedom. I got out of bed when I wanted, walked through the city and allowed myself to just be.”

She felt alive at last. “I understood that I no longer needed to sacrifice myself, hide my soul, or put myself

on the backburner. I did not need to be the perfect wife and mother, and to take care of others constantly.”

Upon returning home, Slavomira connected to her newfound deep soul feelings and allowed herself to follow joy. She picked up Feng Shui again and began to help clients. Feng Shui is an ancient art and science developed over 3,000 years ago in China and uses energy forces to harmonise individuals with their surrounding environment.

Slavomira says, “I realised that just moving bedroom furniture to resolve a relationship issue was not enough. In effect, it is necessary to ‘Feng Shui’ a person’s mindset also. When you create your life, you need to do it on three levels. Firstly, your level of intention or vision, what you believe is possible, a connection to your desire. Secondly, your level of action, to make a plan and do the steps with consistency. Thirdly, your source of energy, which comes from your environment and mindset.”

Slavomira’s Italian experience made her realise that travelling is the perfect way to find out more about yourself. “Different situations, new faces and conversations facilitate a discovery of hidden parts of yourself,” she asserts.

Slavomira hired a campervan at first and then bought one. “It is possible to travel and stay isolated. We have travelled across our country, deep into nature. There is very little



space in the van. I have to pack intentionally. To get a good night's sleep, I Feng Shui the direction of the campervan."

As she journeyed, she became fascinated about other people's stories. "It led me to the next adventure: recording interviews so that the message can inspire listeners worldwide." Slavomira now makes a variety of videos. Some demonstrate the most practical and relevant aspects of Feng Shui. "These show you how to harmonise your environment using simple and easy methods. Also, because I know that I am not an expert in every mindset method, I ask professionals to fill in the gap," she says.

Slavomira will be travelling this summer in her campervan through Europe, particularly Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Germany and Netherlands (depending on Covid-19 re-

strictions). She will be interviewing along the way. Perhaps you will be one of her guests.

Slavomira has profound insights to share: "If you are feeling stuck, unhappy, or out of kilter, change something in your home. As you grow personally, your environment will need to change to fit your new personality. If not, you will stagnate. You can also change your environment first. Bring fresh air and new energy into your home with colours of pieces of furniture. Ask 'what do I need to change in my environment to support my vision?'"

She also believes that travelling on the road is a symbol of life. "It is a journey in which we choose how to proceed. Everyone can always find more joy, ease, happiness and freedom. There is always a path – keep your eyes open." ■

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