

Inspiring

CELEBRATING THE INSPIRING WOMEN IN
OUR MIDST – TODAY AND EVERY DAY

Women of India

Success stories that make a difference

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RESPONSE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIST

Driven by patience and a strong sense of perseverance, women multitask effortlessly, juggling various priorities, to reach the pinnacle of success. Over the years, women have exemplified unmatched grit and empowerment that encourages many others to follow their dreams. They have not only set new benchmarks for excellence but also redefined their career paths with out-of-the-box thinking and new and innovative ideas. It is indeed a matter of pride to salute and honour these trailblazers who have made contributions to impact society in a big way.

As we celebrate International Women's Week, this special segment titled 'Inspiring Women of India' is an effort to recognise, appreciate and reward the outstanding spirit of women achievers, and applaud their invaluable contribution towards betterment across various categories – business, media, IT, arts, healthcare, education, fashion, beauty and more. These highfliers from various walks of life are formidable leaders who have demonstrated through their life and work, that women can make a difference – not just a small difference but an impactful and critical one.

The role of women has changed tremendously over the years. Today, women play a major part in ushering positivity in society. These inspiring Indian women are incredible role models for our state, country, and world, serving as an inspiration through generations. These frontrunners in varied fields represent the opportunity for growth in South India and our country as a whole. The go-getters have broken glass ceilings and pushed the frontiers of women's leadership, paving the path for other women and girls to follow in their footsteps and become future leaders.

Even as the world faced unsurmountable challenges in the midst of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic for close to two years, these changemakers sought out new opportunities when all else seemed doomed. Their talents and people skills were indeed impactful agents during the trying times. These exemplary individuals featured in the 'Inspiring Women of India' segment, have been rays of hope, helping many see beyond the gloom, as they defied all odds to build enterprises and succeed in their respective fields. The determination to stand out in the crowd is alive and kicking among these multifaceted personalities. They are truly proof that ambition and innovation cannot be locked down.

Recognising the achievements of leading ladies is essential to help society to grow and develop at a faster pace. They have demonstrated extraordinary commitment, innovation, zeal, and

compassion in the delivery of service to the community, which has led them to excel. The self-motivated women have pushed all possible boundaries, and continuously sought out ways to do and make things better. Their success also gives us a glimpse of what the future holds.

This segment pays tribute to these powerful women, who have been agents of change in motivating us to make a difference in this world. The list is very dynamic and includes people from varied backgrounds, who have created something new and different, or redefined the way things are done. Their energy is infectious and compelling and their performance is rooted in focus, dedication, hard work, and a desire to excel. Excellence has not just come to them. They have excelled despite challenges, because of their determination to overcome obstacles. They have excelled because they have put their talent, skills, and attitude to good use – they have mastered their trade and they have done us proud.

By sharing their success stories, these inspiring women seek to encourage many more women to recognise their greatness and do wonderful things to make the world a better place. Prepare to be stirred and driven by these champions, as they reveal the tale behind their rise to the top.



Lavleen Kaur



Kavya Madappa



Divya Rajasekaran



Niru Agarwal



Vivienne Naomi Vidyasagar



Rekha Raju



Ankita Mehra



Madhuvanti Acharya

ADVT

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

INDULGE
THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2022 | BENGALURU

Niru Agarwal is no ordinary woman. Apart from being a Director in Sattva Group, where she drives the Group's CSR initiatives and welfare schemes, she is also a passionate educationist and the Managing Trustee of Greenwood High International School, Bengaluru.

"From being a small-town girl to an entrepreneur, interior designer, and an educationist in my own right, it has been an incredible journey - one that I never imagined!" she says.

Niru actively partnered with her husband Bijay Agarwal, to establish the Sattva Group in its formative years, in Bengaluru, India. Today, the Group has grown to be a conglomerate, with interests in several core businesses including Residential and Office spaces, Co-living, Co-working, Education, Retail, Hospitality, Warehousing, and Urban Development among others. She was recently named 'Outstanding entrepreneur' by Realty Plus in its 'India's top Realty Influencers Edition' 2020.

Niru has always played an active role in shaping young minds and today, Greenwood High has grown to have 2 ICSE schools, 1 international school, and 5 pre-schools, educating 7000 children across Bengaluru. The two sprawling campuses at Sarjapur extending across 40 acres and Bannerghatta spread over 22 acres, ensure that the schools stand amidst picturesque green cover. Her inherent leadership skills have enabled the meteoric growth of the institutions. Under her guidance, the schools have consistently achieved remarkable milestones, year after year. "To see our schools evolve and grow into

leading educational institutions under my care has been so fulfilling. I consider this my greatest achievement to date," she says.

Niru is also a philanthropist at heart and plays an active role in both institutions to innovate schemes and initiatives for the overall welfare of society.

It is extremely important to bring women to the center stage. Today, women are on an equal footing as men, as powerful, with great responsibilities on their shoulders.

Dedicating a day to them is the world's way of acknowledging this power. My goal in life is to uplift other women and push them out of their comfort zone. Women should be cheerleaders for other women.

— NIRU AGARWAL

Reimagining solutions to save the planet

Innately a coffee planter, **Kavya Madappa** owns and manages several acres of coffee estate in Coorg, successfully established a top rated resort, and owns a tree-free paper brand.

Kavya Madappa firmly maintains that what we do today, affects the present as well as future generations. "Caring about people and the environment must go hand in hand with the goals that businesses set for themselves," she says. Coming from a true entrepreneur who was not satisfied with produce from her coffee-estate in Coorg which included coffee,

pepper and other spices, she established Amanvana Spa Resort in the district. The eco-friendly resort on the banks of the river Kaveri is home to over 300 species of flora, fauna, and 65 species of birds, a true treat to the weary urban soul. It is no surprise that Amanvana has been rated one of the best resorts in Coorg by Condast Traveller.

While running the resort, Kavya realised the constant need for paper, to print brochures, bills, etc., leading her to explore alternate solutions. She researched paper making for 4 years and even took a few courses to understand how discarded cellulose-rich waste could be turned into paper. Thus, Bluecat Paper was born in 2018. The brand produces 100% tree-free, sustainable paper and paper

products.

Kavya says "Since paper is a cheap commodity, no one takes it seriously. The number of trees felled, to print tons of paper every day, is appalling and frightening for our planet earth. Planting, nurturing, and cutting down of trees is an expensive process and therefore alternative ways of paper-making are more desirable for the conservation of the planet."

Kavya creates paper with residual waste from textile and agricultural industries such as cotton rags, coffee and tea, lemongrass, hemp, banana, and even elephant poo. Since its inception, Bluecat Paper has exported products to over 30 countries worldwide including the UK, USA, Australia, Spain, Italy, Canada, and Poland.

Through her ventures, Kavya offers employment, empowerment, and training to over 200 people including many women. To other ambitious women out there, Kavya has a piece of advice, "Follow your instincts. Realize that challenges are a way of life and don't be afraid to seek help when necessary. Understand what's important and make time to appreciate what you have. Constantly nurture your spirit and of those around you."

Women need to be recognized all year round. However, it is nice to have a week that focuses and recognizes all the wonderful work and achievements that women do on a daily basis. Women should become more conscious of helping fellow women and empowering them to reach their potential.

— KAVYA MADAPPA

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THE VOICE OF EQUALITY

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Having struggled with her identity from her days as a teenager, **Ankita Mehra's** coming out as a lesbian on national television was the beginning of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for her as well as thousands of others from the LGBTQ community.

At 20, when Ankita came out of the closet, having faced a life of stigma and struggle, she never realised that she would become the sturdy manuduction of many in the community of LGBTQ. Although she never attended the best of colleges, given her lower middle-class upbringing, she has today made her presence felt as a leading diversity and inclusion professional, who has transformed lives by standing against hate and prejudice towards members of the community. An active content creator and influencer on LinkedIn, she currently has over 22,000 active followers.

Since the beginning of her pursuit, she has not only been creating awareness on diversity but also been a voice for thousands of individuals across the community and passionately worked at the ground level to make workplaces more inclusive. Further, she channelised

her talent and entrepreneurial skills to focus on hiring women, LGBTQIA+, veterans, and persons with disabilities through Careernet, a pioneering talent acquisition platform. "I seek to create equal opportunity for the diverse spectrum in society. Today, we have a team of 10 change makers who act as a channel between companies and colleges and the community and also offer free of cost sessions to increase sensitization and formulate appropriate policies," she says.

Ankita has broken all barriers and today made waves as a leading equal opportunity advocate. A prolific public speaker, she has addressed numerous gatherings in over 250 colleges and corporate offices. She has also organized career fairs to ensure ample job opportunities for the community.

My ultimate mission as an LGBTQ advocate is to ensure equality beyond race, sexual orientation, physical capabilities, religion, and race. I wish to establish a safe space, where everyone can embrace their true self and be accepted at every level. I am also committed to making sure members of the community have optimal mental health support so they can discover and propagate happiness.

— ANKITA MEHRA

Gift the Power of Education

As Head of Communications at Resourceful Education Foundation, a Pune-based NGO, **Madhuvanti Acharya's** aspirations have never been caged; setting herself free to be a change-maker and a humanitarian

From the beginning of her youthful days, Madhuvanti Acharya always reached out to help the needy and inspired many by contributing positively to society. When she was on the lookout for career opportunities in 2020, she met Amarpal Singh, an alumnus of IIM Bangalore, who started Resourceful Education Foundation after an illustrious career spanning four decades. She joined his NGO as the Head of Communications, to actively work towards uplifting meritorious underprivileged children by enabling their higher education.

"Working for an NGO is better than sitting at home dreaming about the ideal society you want to live in. My job role at Resourceful Education Foundation is to lead and manage a team of highly skilled professionals, initiate communication with Corporates, high net-worth individuals, Individuals to ensure funding, connect with principals from different colleges to identify the deserving students for scholarships, and also ensure necessary NGO documents are updated and applied for. I am also

responsible for PR and Marketing. I get immense satisfaction knowing that I am making a significant contribution towards a better tomorrow," says Madhuvanti.

The economic downturn during the pandemic, saw many blue-collar workers lose their jobs, leaving them struggling to make ends meet. Although their children had potential and intellect, the financial constraints made it difficult for them to pay fees. "I managed to increase annual donations by 30%, which helped needy students continue with their education. The funds ensured sponsorship for about 500 underprivileged students from 40 different colleges in and around Pune who were on the verge of dropping out," says Madhuvanti with pride.

Today, the NGO supports thousands of students for their higher education. They also plan to offer job-oriented courses to needy students who are pursuing their graduation, to equip them with relevant skills and improve job opportunities.

To know more about the NGO, and support Madhuvanti in her efforts, kindly visit <https://resourcefuleducationfoundation.in/>
Email: office@resourcefuleducationfoundation.in
Call or message on +91 91686 67811, 9168667816



Defy the stereotypes and make a difference because it comes naturally to you. You are born with empathy, strength & boldness, all the more reasons for you to lead the house, organization, and the world! Don't be afraid. Learn from your mistakes and never stop believing in yourself!

— MADHUVANTI ACHARYA

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Impacting lives through

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INSIGHTFUL NUTRITION

When Chandigarh-based **Lavleen Kaur** established Diet Insight clinic in 2014, she had a fair confidence of transforming lives but with time, she has actually altered thousands of lives around the world thanks to her unique approach towards nutrition & lifestyle

“Wellness is on everyone's radar, as we consciously make choices towards a healthy and fulfilling life. The ever-growing health and wellness segment is fuelled by people constantly wanting to look and feel better,” says Lavleen, an award-winning dietitian, clinical nutritionist & lifestyle coach, whose services are much sought after across the country and the globe. Lavleen is highly qualified, holding multiple Master's degrees specializing in Foods & Nutrition, Education, Public Health, and Family Welfare.

Lavleen's clinic, Diet Insight, seeks to help individuals understand the influence of food and how the right dietary behavior can help cure prevalent lifestyle disorders such as diabetes,

cholesterol, hypertension, thyroid, and PCOD. Backed by over 10 years of experience in the industry, she designs personalised diet & lifestyle modification programs for her clients and patients, which are delivered conveniently through a mobile app.

“My mother and grandmother have been my biggest role models since I was a child. Their tips for healthy living are some of the most important secrets of my professional advice as a dietitian because they align well with nutrition science and offer positive outcomes,” says Lavleen.

The highly trusted and much sought-after dietitian and lifestyle coach proposes simple but impactful dietary modifications. She attracts attention with the ideology that food and lifestyle changes must result in an overall sense of happiness.

“I have promoted a balanced lifestyle

As an individual, my core values are humility, integrity, loyalty, and trust. I believe in the importance of giving back to the community what you take. For me, the trust and commitment that my clients and patients place in me is the most powerful motivator for me to assist them in every way which I can.

— LAVLEEN KAUR

amongst over 10,000 happy clients worldwide, rather than encouraging rapid results. Every positive testimonial is a proud moment. It is inspiring to see how far your clients and patients have come after following your advice, and it's humbling to know that they believe in my work as a professional and me as a person,” says Lavleen.

A doyenne of Mohiniyattam, a traditional classical dance from God's own country, **Dr. Rekha Raju** has contributed to the growth of India's culture through her artistic pursuits.

Tracing her roots to Palakkad in Kerala, Dr. Rekha Raju was exposed to rich Indian art forms even at an early age. Her love for performing, telling stories, and spreading joy through dance, motivated her to launch her very own dance institution 'Nrithya Dhama Temple of Fine Arts' in Bengaluru at the tender age of 16. She currently trains around 400 students, guiding them to carry the torch of excellence and the cultural legacy of a nation.

And when the pandemic struck, impacting the world like never before, Rekha was one of the pioneers to use technological advancements and tools to expand horizons.

A dedicated dancer and teacher, Rekha has taught thousands of students the nuances of Mohiniyattam and Bharatanatyam over the years. A nationally and internationally well recognised artist, she has performed at many prestigious dance festivals globally.

“Ever since we made our shift online, we noticed that people of different cultures, backgrounds, and from across the globe showed keen interest to dive into Indian classical dance. I was

The Joy in her Dance

A talented classical singer, my mother not only opened my eyes to the world of Indian art but also taught me to fight till the last breath. She would always say, ‘never give up even if it's the toughest part, ask questions, change, keep moving and keep growing, be competent within, do better every day, start with a smile and be confident that everything will go smoothly

— DR. REKHA RAJU

honored at the opportunity to help spread our rich culture with people worldwide,” she says.

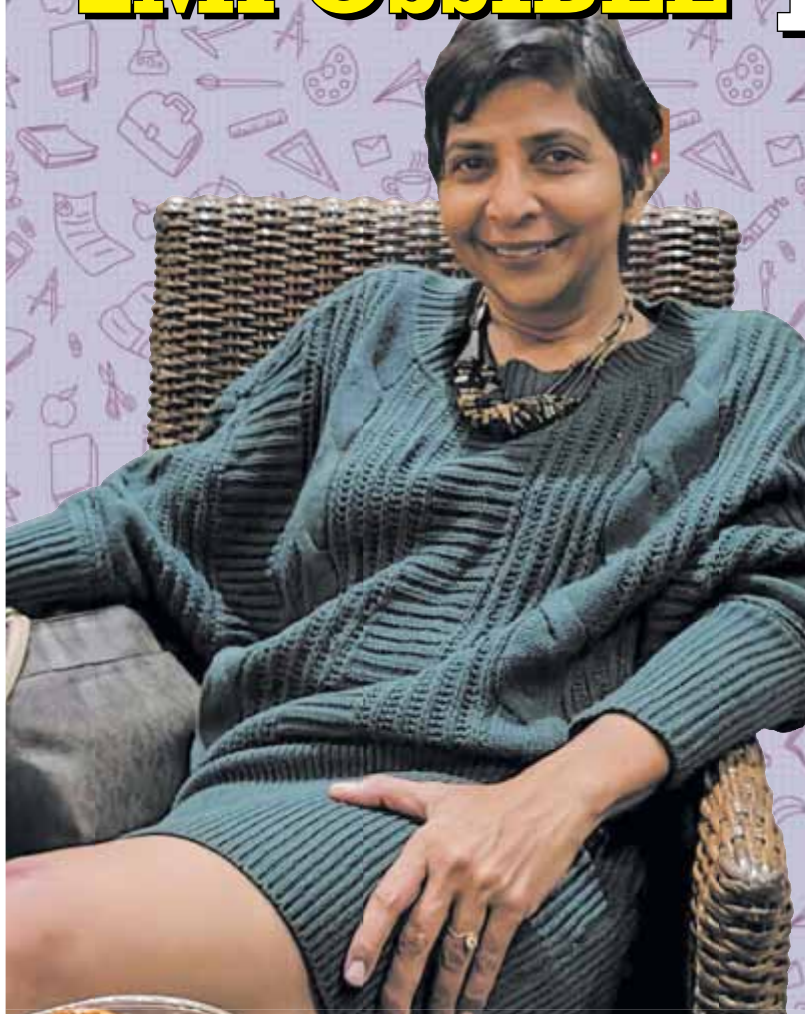
To women looking to make an impact, she says, “Be yourself. Have confidence in whatever you do. Share with others. Do not judge anyone without knowing anything about their life. Always compete with yourself and not others to ensure the betterment of your own individuality.”

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MAKING IMPOSSIBLE Possible

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After a stint in the United States, **Vivienne Victor Vidyasagar** considered music to be a universal form of art, but when she came back to her roots, she found a lacuna, and that was when the entrepreneur in her sprung up with an idea.

T rue to her name, Vivienne Victor Vidyasagar has always been lively and vibrant. Marriage took her overseas for a stint in the United States. Eventually, the family relocated to India to be with aged parents and take care of them.

On her return to India, this young mother of two realised that there was a void in the market when it came to music and movement programmes. "I had experienced the benefits of such programmes conducted in Houston, Texas, with my son, and was keen to give my daughter a similar experience. Sensing the opportunity and encouraged by my love for music and dance, I established Rhythm n Rhyme in 2010," says Vivienne.

Today, the mother of a 17-year-old boy and 14-year-old girl and a determined entrepreneur, Vivienne is so motivated by her success with Rhythm n Rhyme that she further decided to explore her childhood passion for gymnastics. The lack of a structured program and a dedicated space to this sport got her excited. "My husband and I set up RnR Fit Gymnastics Academy as a clean, well equipped gymnastics training facility in 2015. RnR Fit has created national champions and teaches gymnastics at the beginner and competitive levels to over 200 gymnasts each week," she says with pride.

Over the years, Vivienne has added several feathers to her hat, including winning the Times Entrepreneur of the Year 2020 award. Talking about

International Women's Day, Vivienne says, "It is a way to celebrate achievements and creating visibility about successful women who have made an impact in the society they live in. When women are celebrated it's a validation about the efforts they have made. Always aspire to be a better you," she says.

I always believe that if you have a plan and believe in yourself, nothing is impossible. A degree is not essential if you have a solid plan. Yes, it is certainly beneficial but not a necessity. I started Rhythm n Rhyme without any formal degree or education in music and movement. Today, it is the most successful mother toddler program, sought after by most parents in Bangalore City. We are also present in Ahmedabad and Guwahati.

— **VIVIENNE VICTOR VIDYASAGAR**

DREAM DESIGNER

For **Divya Rajasekaran**, creativity was always something deeply ingrained in her personality. The architect, Mompreneur, and co-founder of Design Houzz, is an eternal optimist and her success with design is because she considers it to be the fundamental soul of any creation.

E ven as a young child, Divya Rajasekaran nurtured a deep fascination for design and color coordination, which encouraged her to gain a strong foundation in the aesthetics of design as she earned a Bachelor's degree in architecture.

As life rolled by, Divya got married and had children, but she was determined to follow her artistic pursuits. She joined hands with her husband, a property developer, to establish Design Houzz. The firm has added finesse to various properties ranging from homes, to apartments, to villas and offices with architecture, interior designing and execution, and home furnishing services and solutions.

"Many women consider marriage a big barrier in their life and career and having children an even bigger hurdle. I believe that marriage is a part of all our lives and not the end to any of our dreams; it's a



new beginning. Women must understand that they are powerful and capable of multitasking and prioritizing various responsibilities effectively," she says and adds that creativity is all around us. "It is not something that just happens in the arts; rather it is an essential part of any business in any field, including motherhood," she notes.

The talented mother has passed on her creative gene to her little ones. Her 7-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter are national art prodigies, who have even set world records! "I am so proud that we recognised their skills at a very young age. My experience and journey with them have been fabulous and priceless. In fact, they are my all-time inspiration. When such small children can do so much work and yet be so creative, I can do much more – that is what keeps me moving," she beams with pride.

It is a great source of inspiration for women when people around them offer support and believe in them. I am eternally grateful to everyone around me – men, women, clients, customers, friends, and most importantly family for encouraging me through all my endeavors. Doing what we like is what matters. Think and work towards what you want to be, how you wish your society and surroundings to be, and how you wish to frame your family positively and nothing else.

— **DIVYA RAJASEKARAN**



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From actor Vijay's reel-inspiring 'Elvis the Pelvis' move to Rashmika Mandanna's racy hook step — choreographers are the new stars of the film industry today. We are in an age where a signature dance step can define the future of a film at the box office. We catch up with the dance 'masters' who have spearheaded the trend and find out more... | P12

*The movers
and shakers*