



# INSPIRING WOMEN

*boys & girls should read about*

Chennai Edition





## VARAM AND THE BIRTH OF A VISION

Varam from MGM Healthcare, is passionately rooted in the power of womanhood. It strives to celebrate women from all domains who rouse minds and shift cultures in meaningful ways. It revels in the women whose ingenuity shines through, moving all and acting as beacons of light to aspirers and seekers.

Varam sought to showcase the lives of such incredible women beyond healthcare, to celebrate their triumphs in other facets of life. 'Being her' came along with the perfect initiative to champion Varam's beliefs. The documented tales promise the fruition of perseverance without neglecting the journey and the willpower it takes to truly cause ripples. They've lived lives that kindles hope. These women are inspiring in every sense of the word.

The lives of 50 women documented herein, instill positivity and reassurance, and the kind of inspiration we desire to live our own triumphs.





Born out of a need for altruism, MGM Healthcare is dedicated to bettering patient experiences and improving clinical outcomes through expertise, passion and technology. The manifestation of this dedication is a state-of-the-art hospital on Nelson Manickam Road, Chennai, having 400 beds, 50 outpatient consultation rooms, over 100 critical care beds, 250+ doctors, 30+ clinical departments, 12 state-of-the-art operating theatres and 24x7 comprehensive Emergency Care. Here, a host of eminent surgeons, physicians, nurses and trained paramedical staff wield a potent combination of skill and cutting-edge technology to elevate care and outcomes to new levels.

Patients are at the core of everything MGM Healthcare aspires to do and we intend to revolutionise patient experience by taking medical services back to principles of kindness and goodwill, paired with excellence and intelligence. In the midst of a pandemic, we launched MGM Healthcare's dedicated women's specialty centre, Varam. We believe that every woman is integral to her family and society at large and she deserves special care. That is what we provide with Varam. Most women do not even realise that they too have health needs that need attention. This is Varam's mission, to educate and empower women to seek that healthcare and to ensure them that these needs can be met in a safe and comfortable environment.

Come and experience premium care at Varam and take comfort in knowing that you and your loved ones are in safe and expert hands. We are here for you and the women in your life.

# varam

*for women*

A comprehensive centre, driven by a need for a holistic approach when it comes to your health and well-being, Varam combines the values and ethos that MGM Healthcare stands for with cutting-edge technology and unparalleled care to deliver exceptional healthcare for women of all ages with empathy, expertise and excellence. From navigating all the new changes as an adolescent girl to the wholesome care you deserve as a young and confident woman, all the way through the wonderful journey of motherhood till your graceful senior years — Varam by MGM is that one-stop centre that you would desire. Our endeavour is to deliver quality healthcare at every phase of your life, and it's our promise to stand by you throughout your glorious journey.

Through this initiative, we want to dictate a certain narrative — tell stories of the everyday woman who has done and continues to do extraordinary things. Our desire is for you to be inspired by these women from different walks of life, see yourself in them, and know that you too can achieve the extraordinary. As a dedicated women's specialty centre, we wish to support you and inspire you to love yourself and prioritise yourself and your healthcare needs. And may the real-life stories of these 50 incredible women serve as your motivation for personal transformation.



**Dr Urjitha Rajagopalan**  
Director, MGM Healthcare



Amar Ramesh, founder of Studio A, is an entrepreneur by choice, a wanderer by nature and a creative by obsession. He trusts the process over results, and pursues multiple ideas passionately with the support of his equally persevering team.

## Photographer's Note

"Who is an inspiring woman you look up to?" - when asked to any young boy or girl, they'd come up with a name that is often far away from their reach. The probability of a name in close proximity was almost zero. But in reality, there are endless women right around us, braving the odds, rising above the situations and doing extraordinary things. It is very important for the younger generation to be inspired by people to whom they can relate, reach out and connect with on a personal note. My inspiration for this book came from this realisation. I set on a mission to capture the stories of 50 inspiring women in Chennai. It started as a portraiture project but in the process, it became something else. It became a magical experience to be listening to the transforming stories of these women. There was resilience. There was pain. There was madness. There was boldness. Each of these stories came with a powerful message that at times made me cry, laugh, think, and feel lost. It was a mix of emotions but what struck me hard was the clarity of thought they all had in unison. They all knew exactly what they wanted to do with their time on this planet. They

had their purpose attached to a cause, and they were committed. They were perseverant. They were brave. From a girl who was born blind yet sees the world through music to a lady who was issuing railway tickets before she went on to write 5 books in 4 years to a mother who didn't have a child for herself mainly to stay committed to the cause of taking care of hundreds of specially challenged children as her own, these are life changing stories. The grandness of their character supersedes anything else I've ever seen in life. The conscious decision to capture them in black and white was to capture this magnificence of their sheer character. In fact this is not at all about photography to me, but the humane nature of genuinely knowing the story of these women who are not only creating the change but are also being the change themselves. I cannot emphasise enough the amount of impact this project has had on me. In short, I am not the same person as I was when I started this. I am a different person, with a better understanding of life, filled with gratitude and positivity. I humbly invite you to experience it for yourself as you read through the book.

Happy transformation!

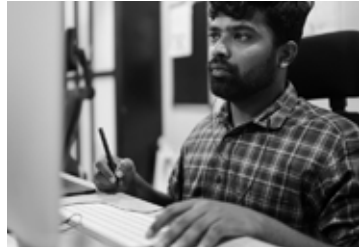
Amar Ramesh



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*Credits*



## ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The idea of this project came from the 200 WOMEN book by Kieran E.Scott. Being from Chennai, the natural starter was 'What if we capture the inspiring woman of Chennai?'. As exciting as that question sounded, soon after we kickstarted the project with full-to-the-brim enthusiasm, other questions followed - 'How can we find a partner to support this cause?', 'How can we reach out to these inspiring women?', 'Who will take care of the profiling, logistics, and the processes?', 'Can we even pull this off?' - One question led to another, and the search began. When you truly wonder, things fall in place. As a matter of heart, they did. MGM Healthcare's "Varam" came on board to champion the entire project. "SPI Edge" joined hands to take care of the entire operations. One of the inspiring women, Thirupurasundhari, whom we shot took the effort to curate the full list of women for us. When the intentions are right, everything falls in place. That's how this project came to life. It was a genuine set of people coming together for a genuine belief in the cause of celebrating the real-life stories of women who raised the bars.

THIS IS NOT A PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK.

This is a storybook of powerful women who are making a difference out there; women whom we can show to our children as living inspiration. It is a true responsibility for all of us to celebrate the journey of these change-makers.

Presenting,

50 stories of women.



## ‘ N E Y A M ’

is a combination of “being loving”, “being kind”, “Being understanding”. I think its more of “understanding” than being “kind” - I can understand you, but I might not agree with you. But I can understand that you have a point to make.

# JAYASHRI RAMNATH

"Bombay" Jayashri Ramnath is an Indian musician. She has sung in multiple languages including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi movies. Born into a family of musicians, Jayashri represents the fourth generation of music practitioners in her family. She was awarded India's fourth-highest civilian award the Padma Shri in 2021.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "Neyam" is a word that comes in many songs. I run a program called "Neyam" for children with autism, where we learn with music. And that is my current favourite word, if you ask me 2 months from now, it might change.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** My journey is a treasure I have, and I feel blessed about it. I think, to really find your treasure of a journey, you need to give up a few smaller things in life.

"Vittu-kudukuradhu" they say in Tamil. I don't know what's the right word to use in English to explain that - perhaps "Letting go" is a fair translation. So, I think you should let go of a few things in life to really find the larger treasure.

What might be a small or a petty thing for you might not be a small thing for others. So, it's okay. Don't try to pull things and have them your way and spend your energy. It's okay. Let them go. If people want some things their way, let them have it. I think, letting go of things so you can concentrate on the larger things

you want to do is really important to find your treasure.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Learning should be a constant no matter what. I keep telling this to my son. Have you learnt two more compositions today? If not learnt, have you heard two new compositions today?

Nowadays, there are so many things that could attract and distract you. The young are getting into professional work at a much younger age than before. When you start working very young, it's very easy to fall into the routine of work and be distracted from the process of learning. There is competition and a lot more to deal with. You don't stop studying because you started working. The moment you stop studying, whatever work you get, you won't be able to live up to it. When someone is approaching you for work, they expect you to do better than before. And to do better, you should keep learning.



“ C O N F E S S I O N ”

# Bessie Cecil

r. Bessie Cecil has a doctorate in Textile Design and Textile Conservation and is based in Chennai. She specialised in reviving the traditional art forms of textile dyeing using natural dyes extracted from plants, animals and insects. She presented about the importance of revival, Indian dyeing tradition way back to 5th century B.C. Emphasized the potential of Indian art forms and elaborated about 'Kodali Karuppur: The Traditional Textile of Royal India'.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "Confession" - Confession to oneself. That is very dear to me. I know if I am jealous, I know if I am angry. I may tell that I am not jealous or angry but I know that I am. The minute I confess to myself that I am jealous, I accept it and I am at peace with myself. So self-confession is a very strong word for me. Once you do that, everything else begins to feel peaceful. Being honest and confessing the negative thoughts you feel to yourself puts you in a positive space and makes you stronger - I really believe and trust it.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** All my 5 senses are working well, all my dear ones are alive. That is the blessing I have in my life. I am happy to be who I am and have what I do.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Be true to whatever you are doing. You don't need a third person to come and validate that you are doing a beautiful job. Your heart tells you what is right and what is wrong. Listen to your heart, that's all. I don't listen to anyone. I know what I am. When someone comes and appreciates "Good work", I just reply "Thank you" and let it go. Because I know my work. I know what I am capable of.

“ E N T H U S I A S M ”



# Janaki Sabesh

Indian media professional, actor, model, storyteller, author of children's book, theatre and voiceover artist. - Janaki Sabesh wears multiple hats. Throughout her film career, she has played the "screen mother" to several leading actors, appearing predominantly in Tamil and Telugu movies.

In some ways, I'm like a child, cheerful! People often ask me how I'm so energetic on a Sunday morning... I think it's all about the mind. My 92 year old mother-in-law is my biggest inspiration and cheerleader! I go to her and talk to her about my day and whatever I can think of. She listens to me fully and understands whatever she can, and asks me just one question at the end "Did you enjoy it?" And I think that is amazing. When you enjoy something, your face can't lie. It just shows in your eyes - the way they twinkle. So if I'm able to, with my energy and intent, share the same joy with someone else, then I'm happy!



**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** My ability to bring a smile to the face of a listener through a story is my biggest blessing. And when I say smile, it isn't just the curve on the face but also inside the mind. It's quite an enthralling experience, to be able to engage with and hold a set of minds for a specific period of time. In an age where people, especially young ones, spend so much time on mobile phones and tablets, I feel grateful to be telling stories and seeding thoughts.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** So... I'll tell you the Mantra that I follow. It's actually by an American author, Hugh Prather. He said, and I quote, "There is a part of me that wants to write, a part that wants to theorize, a part that wants to

sculpt, a part that wants to teach... To force myself into a single role, to decide to be just one thing in life, would kill off large parts of me." That's what I follow.

If I wake up one day and I feel like writing - I write. Another day, an opportunity to give my voice to a character in a film by an amazing crew comes by - I say yes! If I am able to do it, and they like it - that's it! It's one more door opening.

I find it boring to do just one thing; I need to do multiple things. I only have one rule: I must stay focused on the one activity that I am doing at that particular point of time. If I am acting and I am thinking, "Oh! I have to write a page!", it's not going to work. So, 100% attention or even more, to whatever I am doing in that moment, is something that I ask everyone to follow, even my (not) very young daughter.

# Uma Venkatachalam

Uma was an academic topper. She went on to procure no less than 10 degrees and certifications in the fields of mathematics, science, education and management. Education was the way to turn things around - the Suyam Charitable Trust was born. Suyam takes care of students from end to end to accommodate I, body, family, society and nature. Now Suyam works with 43 kinds of activities touching thousands of lives in more than four districts. Suyam is working with 500 nomadic tribe families, 1000 school students, 1,00,000 slum dwellers, 10,000 engineering students on professional ethics and values, networking with other NGOs for their guidance and projects. The whole sum approach is the need of the society is addressed through Suyam

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** HARMONY. This is the nature of Indian society, where we are connected to everything and everyone around us. Be it music or literature, you can see that everything is interrelated. There is unity in diversity. This harmony has to start from you, between the mind and the body. It then manifests onto society too, creating a healthy and peaceful world for all of us.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** The children we serve are my greatest blessings. In the school and the trust, we are gifted by God to work with these children on a close note. They are our creative gurus for they make our lives purposeful. They make us think beyond the limitations and push our potential.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** An ocean starts with a drop. A building starts with a brick. Never underestimate the power of small. We started our foundation with Rs. 10/-. We did not know that we will be starting an ICSE school, rehabilitating 500 people from begging, nurture hundreds of youngsters from underprivileged backgrounds. All we had was the intent to serve society. When your intentions are pure, the momentum will build on its own. There are no individuals in making a change. It is a collective effort. The kids have to understand this. No matter how small their contribution can be to society, it will still make a change. They have to start being society-centered rather than self-centered.



‘ H A R M O N Y ’



“EXPERIMENTAL”

# Parvathi Nayar

Parvathi Nayar is a New Delhi born visual artist and creative writer. She is best known for her intricate drawings, creative videos, sculptures, paintings, bookmaking and photography. Her works have also been collected by the Jaya He Museum Terminal 2, Mumbai airport, Singapore Art Museum, Sotheby's Institute of Art, The Australia India Institute and Deutsche Bank.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A. EXPERIMENTAL.** I enjoy pushing the boundaries when I create art. As a multimedia artist, I allow “form to follow function”, picking the medium that will best express my ideas. For example in a work that talked of how we are all the same “under the skin”, I drew detailed images of skin as viewed under the microscope, of different coloured people - which looked so similar. Science is often the prism through which I create my work. Water, another subject that runs through my art, is explored through drawings, videos, and even trash installation as Nature, as a resource, as a fluid form of endless beauty. Dialogue is important, and I let my art create the conversations.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A. MY PARENTS AND MY DAUGHTER.** I am truly blessed to have parents who wanted me to follow my dream of becoming an artist. Yes, I remember when I was a state rank holder, the school principal counselled my parents to urge me to follow a more conventional path – but they stood firm in their support. Even after my father passed away, my mother held strong in her belief that I should realise my passion and commitment to a life in the arts. I hope I can do the same for my daughter and help her follow her dreams.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Sir David Puttnam, the producer of Chariots of Fire – whom I was interviewing for an article on the arts – advised me: “At the end of your life, you will never regret the things you did, only the things that you did not do.” It has become a mantra that I live by, knowing that even if I fail at something I can always pick myself up and try something different.

So, to the next generation I would say – do your research, acquire your skills, hone your craft, work hard – but then have the courage to jump without a safety net. To find your destiny in the arts demands that leap of faith. The reward is the daily satisfaction of doing what you want to do, not society's definition of success. Van Gogh, one of the most widely known names in the artworld today, is said to have sold only one painting when he was alive.

# Thirupurasundari Sevvel

Thirupurasundari Sevvel is an Architect and Urban Planner trained in India, UK and France. She runs 'Studio Conclave', an architectural consultancy and 'Nam Veedu Nam Oor Nam Kadhai', an initiative that stems from her passion for storytelling, heritage, history and education. For her platform Thirupurasundari curates stories, exhibitions, workshops on social issues, heritage, household heritage, personal/ social history etc. She uses her expertise as material restorer and conversationist to document traditional techniques and practices of design. Predominantly, she works with artisans who work on traditional materials and techniques, and their livelihood sustenance .



**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Storyteller.

I think every space has a story - the buildings I design, events I curate or the stories I tell children - everything has a story. It has to convey something. So a person who steps into a building I designed, I think should feel that something is being conveyed. The stories maybe different and be of all kinds, but it conveys something. If someone is able to feel that connection with the building -

yeah, that's what I feel I do - narrate stories through spaces.

And, "Inclusive" is another word, which by itself drives the kind of work I like to do. Whenever we do something, it involves a lot of stakeholders in the whole work. A workshop, building a house, an urban project, community initiative- every voice from the community should be heard and only when working together as a team - the outcome would be holistic and apt When you become inclusive of people around you, the stories you will experience are just

amazing. In a school for deaf children, there is so much silence, but once I took steps to learn their world, I hear so many stories amidst that silence. Being inclusive, opens our mind and heart to different dimensions and gives meaning to our work.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** My family and my friends, who are my chosen family. Especially my grandmother, who told me this when I was a child. When you really want to do something there may be millions of hurdles, There may be so much of judgement on you and a lot more that would



# ‘ INCLUSIVE ’

at the time be out of your thoughts but if you really want to do something, you will find ways to do it of that solution.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I'd say - just observe what is around. There are a lot of problems and we generally stop at the sight of a problem and point that out as an excuse for an outcome. Rather than pointing the problem out, point yourself out and ask "What can be?" - that will change our view entirely. And I think that's the basic idea from which most of the work I do stems

from.

Treat others the way you want to be treated - if you just have that one value carried through whatever you do, you'll do something amazing and it'll teach you a lot of things.

In one line, if I must try to put it, the lesson is - rather than pointing out what the problem is and accusing someone of an issue they need to handle, it's about equipping ourselves with a solution for that problem and working with others in the implementation of that solution.

A public toilet or space that needs attention,

or a heritage structure which needs ethical heritage management, someone who wants to build earth based structures for them or want to create an accessible inclusive space, or an artisan cluster who are looking for opportunities or a need to document and develop a community with people centric and social history based approach through art or a need to create an interactive community event or initiative. All of these have something to do with space, place and architecture - how can I work on these to arrive at holistic inclusive solutions? That question drives what I do.



“SARCASTIC SAROJA”

# Malini Jeevarathnam

Malini is a social activist, filmmaker and public speaker known for their sarcasm and wit. For their outstanding film “Ladies and Gentlewomen” which spoke on homosexual suicides made its official entry to 9 International film Festivals and won 3 awards for Best Documentary. It was in 2013, Malini declared herself as a queer person. Having undergone various forms of discrimination after this, from denial of houses and job opportunities, being a victim of derogatory comments on social media platforms, etc. Malini underwent a lot of mental trauma. They hit back the society with their activism. They continue to fight.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A. SARCASTIC SAROJA.** It is my name on social media. You can call it a nickname or an alter ego, I wish to tackle the hassles of society in a light yet strong way. We can break fascism or sadism only through sarcasm. There is no need to break down when aiming to break down the walls of societal pressure. You just need to be mindful, stay conscious and play the game of life the light way.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A. MY VOICE.** By "voice", I don't mean how I sound, but how loud I can voice out my opinion. When I started talking my heart out, it wasn't easy, they tried to pull me down. It was difficult to cut through the noise. But with a never-give-up attitude, I was able to establish my thoughts strongly.

It is always about how long are you able to stand by your opinions. You will definitely be heard, it is a matter of time.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A. Be ready, be rebellious, be sarcastic. Never, ever give up. Always brace up, and face the weight of life in your eye. Life is tough, and nothing is given to you easily. You have to first understand this and then accept the reality.**





‘CONSISTENT’

# BEGUM SEEMA AHMED

Seema Ahmed is the begum of Nawabzada Mohammed Asif Ali, Heir Apparent and Dewan to the Prince of Arcot. She voices for women empowerment and is a peace activist.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "Consistent" - I love that word. I feel that it suits me a lot. Whatever it is, no matter what, if you are consistent, you will achieve that. It could be across any aspects of life - health & fitness, relationships, work and people - if you are consistent, you will achieve whatever you want.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** I don't think I can say that there is just ONE big blessing in my life. I think everything is a blessing for me. I see a blessing in everything. Even if there are certain shortcomings in something, there are surely blessings elsewhere. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't be breathing. I wouldn't have a wonderful family. None of these things would have been possible had there not been a blessing at every point of time in life.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A:** Making conversations with people makes us more open minded and breaks stereotypes and prejudices that we might already perceive. It is important to not judge people based on their exterior but simply talk to them and be surprised by how much you can learn from them instead. In today's world, especially for women, its easy to feel lost amidst the vast number of responsibilities that the society puts on you. Women, by nature, are nurturers. They are the ones who give birth and have the tendency to nurture life. But make sure that the responsibility of nurturing life, your family and kids, doesn't let you lose who you are and what you want to do. Prioritise the things that you want to do and love doing. Communicate the same to the family so they know what you want to do. Young people should prioritise what is important to them so they don't lose track of themselves and what they want to do.

# Santha Sheela Nair

An IAS officer of 1973-batch, Ms. Santha, is much renowned for the successful implementation of rainwater harvesting architect announced by the then Chief Minister.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** I have different words at different points of time through my journey. Currently, the one word that I keep talking about is sustainability. How can we make our growth, our development, our priorities such that they lead to a sustainable planet? I am very much concerned about the way we are going particularly as a nation towards a highly consumer-oriented society. Today, if you have Uttarakhand floating in glacier's melting waters, it's because of how much we let go of sustainability and steered towards consumerism. We should give back more than how much we have consumed. And I think sustainability is something that we can work on in any profession.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** The biggest blessing I have is, "Never say die". People, after a point, start to

think about dying because of various circumstances they might witness in their lives. I have seen a lot in my lifetime and it's amazing to think about how you thought of all the things that are possible are still possible having come past all this time. Never say die. Nothing is better than a heart kindled with hope - with a feeling that it will all work out.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** The one thing that I would like to convey is - Whatever you take up, take it up with passion. Whatever job you choose, choose something that you enjoy. That way, you won't dread going to work and you rather look forward to working. Go in whatever direction it may take you - be it arts, teaching, social activity, medicine... I see a lot of people take medicine with no enjoyment for medicine. They just go for jobs thinking they can earn money. Unless you have that passion for whatever you are doing, you will be stressed out.

A black and white portrait of an elderly woman with a bindi on her forehead, wearing a light-colored short-sleeved blouse and a saree with a dark border. She is seated and looking slightly to her left. The background is dark. The word "SUSTAINABILITY" is written in white, all-caps, serif font across the middle of the image, enclosed in quotation marks.

“ S U S T A I N A B I L I T Y ”

“Intrigue”



# Nivedita Louis

Nivedita Louis is obsessed with history. She is a freelance journalist, writer and historian who depicts history brilliantly before our eyes.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Intrigue. I question norms. I am driven by curiosity to always know more about life and the stories I keep chasing. I do things I love. I am gifted to be in a place where I am able to find my passion, work on it, and create an impact through it. This is a huge privilege, and I strive to use it to the maximum.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** I'll call it a privilege, more than blessing. My financial freedom I have now empowers me to work on things that I want to. I feel this freedom is important to create the space for creation and expression. I have worked in the railways department for many years in the clerical section. And then moved to Saudi with my husband for four years where he worked. It was then that I understood how privileged we are here in India, despite of all the challenges we face everyday. This journey of life taught me so many things and turned me into the rebel that I am inside. I am privileged to be in a position where I am able to pour all this energy and curiosity into the books I write.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** It is never late to start on your dreams. All it takes is the bold heart to let go of things that do not matter and grab on to your passion. I have had a very hard journey and it is only in the last 4 years that I took up Journalism and writing. With focus and mindfulness, you can achieve anything you wish to.

# Bharathi Thirumagan

A human with diverse talents is what defines 'Kalaimamani,' Mrs. Bharathi Thirumagan. She is a talented and responsible Villu Paattu artist, literary speaker, and a musician.





**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** DISCIPLINE. I breathe it. I trust it is essential for every artist. It is very important that you should live as an example of what you preach. Only then it resonates and reaches people. I live by the values I preach. I am not attracted to the glamour of success, but the reputation I've carved for myself by being a disciplined person in this Industry means a lot to me. There is love in Discipline. There is character in discipline. There is pride in discipline. Almost all the good things in this world can be rooted to this 10-letter-word. Speaking about the love in discipline, it is not just about what you give but also about understanding what you receive too. As an artist, it is very important to

handle all the love and limelight you will receive in the right way. When you start realizing this, everything that you aspire in life falls in place.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** My father Kalaimamani Subbu Arumugam who fed me with the love for Tamil, my mother who fed me love in breast milk, the immense support of my husband, Dr S Thirumagan who is an Educationalist & Artist, and my son Kalaimagan who has joined hands with me to take Villu Paatu as his life's mission - these are the biggest blessings of my life.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** When my father Mr. Subbu Arumugam was spotted as an emerging talent in his teens by the great N.S.Krishnan (popularly known as Kalaivanar), my Aachi (grandmother) had only one thing to say - "Son, cinema is a tricky world. No matter what, just stick to your values and be disciplined". He learnt that lesson from his mother, I learnt it from him, and I feel responsible to pass it to my younger generation too. Stick to your values. Live a good life as long as you are here. That is all that matters.

# VINO SUPRAJA

Vino Supraja has her own fashion brand which has sustainability at its core and hates wastage from the textile industry. Her brand is a premium label and recently has been awarded the Sustainable Fashion Runway Award by Fashion Revolution, UAE.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Kindness. I have seen my Dad, for whose death there were 10,000 people gathered in what was a small town. We didn't even know who they were. They all knew him and were there for him. He served until he was 80 years old in that small town. He used to give the bus fare to the farmers to go back home, who came for the treatment, and he used to just do so many things. I genuinely feel that my family and I are now able to lead such a beautiful life because of all the good karma that he has accumulated in his life. He's just an awesome person and a great man! I've never seen him angry or yelling at someone - just ever smiling and always kind.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** My family - my husband and my son! For the crazy decisions that I make, they put up with me and support me. They are truly my blessing!

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I'm a person who never used to look great, who never used to speak English, who never had exposure to the world, who never had an outlook, who never read a book for a really long time in life. If I could do so much in career and life, the kids of this generation who have such a good exposure to so many things in the world at a very young age, have a good education, live in a city, wear good clothes and have so many privileges can do so many wonders! They should look at the opportunities they have in hand and build on what they want to do. They shouldn't complain about the shortcomings and acknowledge the blessings they have.

You should just say "YES" when an opportunity comes and later figure out how to do it. You should be willing to knock on the doors and ask for opportunities. You will get what you want only when you seek it. If you are shying away from asking for help, nothing comes your way. Opportunities. You will get what you want only when you seek for it.

*"kindness"*





# Archana Stalin

Archana Stalin is the co-founder and Growth Champion of "My Harvest Farms" which nurtures a handful of farms in and around Chennai. After having a spin as an engineer for almost 8 years, she took up this mission to ensure safe food and sustainable farming.

## “ G R I T ”

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Grit. I've been breaking a lot of templates in my life as in my career and as a daughter. First I studied engineering and then decided to do farming. In terms of personal life, it was a big deal to say no to my parents, not talk to them for 6 years, and get married to a person of my choice, and now I want to adopt a child. I take my decisions with conviction and follow my choices with grit.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** I think the people around me are my biggest blessing. I don't read books, I understand people. I cannot exactly point out who but every person who has been there in my life, left a lesson for me to learn consciously or unconsciously. So, several parts of

such experiences are what formed my thoughts and learnings too.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Resilience & conviction. I was supposed to be living in the US, I have been married for 11 years now, we don't own a car or have a child - I want to adopt a child. So, what a lot of people think are the traditional qualities of a woman are things I am not into. I see a lot of girls giving up what they want to do, not because they are weak but because they are influenced easily by people around them. Young minds should understand that they need to stand up for their own voice. It took me a lot of time to learn that. If you have something in your thoughts, you must voice that out.

# Arul Mozhi

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Self-respect. That is definitely the one word that I wish to relate myself to, and shout out loud to anyone reading this. It is important that you maintain the respect in your stand, always. If you are to maintain self-respect then you are to live by values. If you live by values you understand the importance of character. If you understand the importance of character, everything else is set. Do you get the idea? The meaning of happiness takes a different turn, and you start feeling content.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** My daughter, she is the biggest blessing of all. Firstly, it was my dream to have a daughter and it came true with divine grace. It was a revelation as she grew up to be a support system for

me now. As much as she looked upon me, I look upon her now. She literally manages my thought flow, giving me clarity and what I should be focusing on.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Learn to appreciate differences. Listen to your opposite views. Often we are tuned to love similarities, and despise differences. But in reality, life is a mix of both and you have to accept and evolve. A fine balance is essential to go seamless on the long run. With this rational mindset, you will be able to cruise through life sensibly. The young children today need to know this, and the knowledge sharing has to happen from the grass root level.

Arul Mozhi, is practising Advocate in Madras High court since 1988. Her parents were such staunch Periyarists that they published the Tamil translation of Manu Smriti by late Mr. Tamil Nadan. Arul Mozhi is presently the Propoganda Secretary of Dravidar Kazhagam and is instrumental in carrying the message of Periyar in various conferences held across states of India for social justice. She has also traveled across the world promoting the messages of Periyar and his philosophies.

“SELF RESPECT”



**“WOMEN”**



# Anita Sathiam

Anita Sathiam is a documentary photographer who was born and brought up in Pune, lives in Chennai. She works with and helps rural women, starting from the families who suffered the Thane Cyclone in Cuddalore district. She helped the community build 6 houses with her friend's help. She was interviewed by Doordharsan, Tamil Magazines, Chennai Photo Biennale, Thalam, Jaffna Photography Society from Srilanka, and others. She has also worked as a Still Photographer with one of the finest Film Makers of India, Shri Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Women. I relate my existence as a woman at a deeper level. I was born and brought up in Pune. I had a tragic childhood, and my hope for a better turnaround of events was marriage. But it only got more challenging, as family life took over. With two beautiful children, my life was a full plate yet I kept feeling incomplete. It was only when I was diagnosed with cancer that I was reborn. The purpose of my life felt clear. I took up Photography as a medium of expression and I started capturing stories as I witnessed. There is nothing that a woman cannot achieve. I love and respect those who boldly brave the odds and chase their dreams, however small or big they are. That boldness is everything.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** The power vested in me to fulfil the dreams of women I meet is a blessing to me. I feel blessed every time I meet a woman, hear their stories, capture their life and help them in as many ways as I can. I want to reach out to as many women as I can in this life time.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Never let go of your passion. Do what you are really passionate about. The situations can be challenging, especially if you are a woman. For housewives, it is even more difficult for you to have daily chores to attend to and a family to take care of. But make space. Set some time apart for yourselves. Work on what you are passionate about. That is when life becomes a full circle, and you will feel happy and content.

# Halitha Shameem

Halitha Shameem is an Indian film director, screenwriter, and editor who predominantly works in Tamil cinema. She worked as an assistant director with Pushkar-Gayathri and Mysskin. In 2014, she made her Tamil cinema debut with 'Poovarasam Peepee.' Her most recent film is called 'Aleay' that has come out in the year 2021.



‘ I Y A L B U ’

Only when you are in your true nature without any layers, you can express your best.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "lyalbu" (Nature). I feel each of us has a story to tell and the best way to share it is as it is. I try to capture that in my films too, just the sheer nature of people and life that I see. Truth is powerful. Only when you are in your true nature without any layers, you can express your best. That raw energy is momentous. I guess that is what we call a 'vibe.' And that is why you attract the people with your vibes.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** It has been a while since I started stepping out of my notion of life, and have started working hard towards my dreams. I love my work, and I am a workaholic. In this journey, I now see that the dreams are paying me back in return too. The perseverance is getting paid now. It is like the universe gifting you for all the sincerity you've shown in your endeavor. I am enjoying this realization, and this to me is a precious blessing.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I never had any role-model. I never looked up to anyone and I never felt the need to. That's what I also want the younger generation to take away. If you like something, you should pursue it even if you don't have anyone to look up to as a role-model.



# Jyothi & Kalai

Jyothi is a singer supported fully by Kalai Selvi, her single mother. Recently, Jyothi has made her debut in Tamil Cinema by singing in the film Adangathey, composed by GV Prakash. Jyoti Kalai is a brand name in social media now.



**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** FRIENDSHIP. That is what Jyothi and I share, more than a daughter-and-mother relationship. The way she calls me *Yen da dai* (Hey dude) instills energy in me. Yes, she might not be able to carry a mother's pain like every other daughter, but she is a source of joy to me. We are bound together 24/7. I feel proud to share this friendship with her.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A:** Music is the biggest blessing that I see in the life of Jyothi. Her ability to take on life independently has been possible because of music. I am only a caretaker

in that place, as she cruises through work. She is a performer, a teacher, and a student all by herself. This to her is a blessing. And she is my blessing.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A:** When Jyothi was born with a visually challenged condition, the first thing I did was accept the situation. And it all started from there. The moment you accept is when you will be able to rise above any situation in life. She sees life through her music. I am eyes to her dreams. In this journey, I also realise that you can never live for society, or strive to fulfill its expectations. It is your life. Nothing is impossible. All you need to have is a positive eye to see life.

# Jayanthi Narayanan

Jayanthi has been a teacher at Sadhana Unit at The Clarke School for Deafblind students and creates innovative educational videos for these special kids. Doing so for more than 20 years, she always says "What Ann Sullivan was to Helen Keller, I am to all my little students,"

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** GRATEFUL. I really wish all of us could count our blessings more than we count our problems. Life is really simple but we complicate it a lot. However, the moment you enter our school and look around the children there, all your ego stands shattered. You feel light and heavy at the same time seeing them, but at the end of the day you will have a different meaning to life. That is how I feel every day. I have been in this school for 36 years, and every single day is a blessing to me. Every kid is a child to me. I take care of them as my own. These are children with gifts, and it only a matter of time for them to realize it. They need help. I am here to help. I have dedicated my entire life to this cause of uplifting the lives of children with special challenges.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** To be able to work with special children gives me the opportunity to give peace to their parents. It is very depressing for a parent to be going through the reality of seeing their child struggle to cope with the normal world. When working closely with these children, they gradually show development. Even the smallest success they see in their child's behavior sparks a big smile on their face. That to me is a blessing. I keep counting my blessings. I am grateful to be doing what I am doing.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Love unconditionally. There is no point in loving selectively. There is no place or time for hatred in this world. Just keep loving your life, your work, and the people in your life equally. I feel there is nothing more important than this.



“GRATEFUL”

# Aparna Ganesan

Aparna Ganesan is a multimedia journalist working at Asiaville Tamil. She predominantly works on videos with a focus on documentaries that shed light on the gaps between policies, their implementation in the country and their impact on communities.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** RELENTLESS. It is a boon and a bane, but I feel the positive side of it. Gone are the days when you can study, get a degree, go to a job and sit poised. It is a dynamic world and things change at the speed of light. You have to be relentless, be it a job or a dream or an idea. You have to be 100% relentless if you wish to taste the fullest potential. As a documentary filmmaker, I cannot emphasise this fact enough for it took lots and lots of perseverance to reach where I am today. I am still in the journey, and a long way to go, but I never cease to be relentless.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** The opportunity I was presented

with to do a journalism course after completing my engineering degree was a blessing by all means. It was then that I understood the difference between working hard and working hard for something that you want. That gave me purpose and reason. It just changed the way I looked at life. Nothing is really set or certain in life, especially when you are in the search of your purpose.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Follow your heart, whatever it takes. Give your 100%, whatever it takes. If you fail, it is fine. But give your best. Pay attention to what drives you crazy. End of the day, it is about knowing that you have given your best to the time you have in hand. It is a short life, but it is important to make it meaningful. You live once, and you better make it count.



*“relentless”*

# Aparna Karthikeyan

Aparna Karthikeyan is an author, storyteller and independent journalist. Her non-fiction book *Nine Rupees an Hour* documents the disappearing livelihoods of Tamil Nadu. She has written four books for children (*Cat's Egg*; *Kali Wants to Dance*; *Woof! Adventures by the Sea*; *No Nonsense Nandhini*) and has contributed articles for the People's Archive of Rural India, *The Hindu*, *The Wire*, *Scroll*, *Caravan* and other media outlets. She was awarded the 2015 National Media Award for her work on "Vanishing livelihoods of rural Tamil Nadu" by the National Foundation for India.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** I've never thought of my favourite word. One word that I keep coming back to is "Grace" because it symbolises so many beautiful things to me. You can live your life with grace. It is not restricted to a human experience. There is "grace" in the blessings you get. There is life that is lived with grace. There is grace in what you do - for work or for the joy of it. I like that word. I like what it symbolises in life.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Mine has been a life of privilege - that is a blessing - but I don't think I deserve it. I always criticise capitalism at home. My family stopped me one day and said, "Hey.. YOU are a function of this capitalism." True, right? I have to accept that I am able to do what I am doing because of the inequalities that exist in society. I benefit from this in-equal society and I am a part of it. I can't walk away from all this. So the idea is to realise that, accept it and then make the privilege work not just for me but for others too. If I can make people aware of this through my stories, through the stories I choose to tell - that I think will be my blessing.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I would like to believe the most important takeaway from the journey is that it's not just celebrity lives that are important and worthy of attention. Everyday people have extraordinary stories. If only we sit and listen, we'd learn SO much.

“Grace”



# Sundari Sivasubbu

Sundari started as a Banker and later discovered her passion for writing. She also started contributing to society through her CSR foundation's activities and now she is an independent writer, author and speaker. She published her memoir *A Bumblebee's Balcony* which chronicles her life experiences as a person living with Cerebral Palsy.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Sanguine. It's about sunshine, sunny spirit - it is about looking at the brighter side of life. When you look outside, today is a beautiful sunny day but the day before was very grey - it was drizzling. "Sanguine" is a word that tells me to wait for the sunny days and be optimistic.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Being aware of myself. Being conscious and mindful of my thoughts, emotions and feelings has always helped me to rise above my challenges and to remain positive despite circumstances. Life isn't about earning money, going to a job, retiring - there's more to life than that. I think few people find themselves in that cycle too but I feel there's so much to life than that. Self-awareness is the starting point of personal growth and intelligent living.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I would say that if you really want something passionately, you will get it no matter what Himalayan challenges you face in life. If you remain focused on what you want and work towards it, you will raise the level of your personal vibrations which will not only protect you from falling down when you face hardships but will also attract the right people, support system and opportunities to help you achieve your dreams. That is also the crux of my story from where I started to where I am now – from being labelled as a “disabled girl” to “an Author, Writer, Communications Specialist and a role model for young people”. So, dream on!

“ S A N G U I N E ”



**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A. EFFECTIVE.** I believe living an efficient life is very important. Especially in our LGBT community, low self-esteem is a prevalent issue. Work is the key to break this block. When we work hard, live an effective life, the way the world sees you change. They will then no longer see Transgenders as people who beg and poke for money. This change is essential, and it is in our hands.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** I studied B.Com in Pachayappas college, and finished my MA Sociology in Madras University. Many people from our community have studied, but have all of them settled in good positions in life? That number is very less. Even after

education, many transgenders struggle to find a proper job. The community needs people inside the community to take this up and many other problems we face. On that note, I feel blessed to be serving for the upliftment of this community. I love my community. I love my profession. I feel grateful.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Never discriminate in your life. Treat everyone equally. And pay attention to education. Study well. Not just for the transgender community, but education is vital to every child. Once a child completes education, the entire life changes. But a child who doesn't complete the education cycle gets stuck in the poverty line. It is as straightforward as that.

# Jaya

Jaya is currently the General Manager of the NGO Sahodaran, founded with an intention to create safe space to the LGBTIQ community. She has participated in many national and international conferences representing LGBTIQ community of the country.

“ E F F E C T I V E ”

# Chithra Devi Muthu

Chithra Devi Muthu is a sign language interpreter. She also trains and guides in speech therapy and vocational training for the hearing and speech impaired.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** SOCIAL SERVICE. Any human being must think beyond his needs, and help the fellow beings. What we learn has to be shared to as many people as we can. Everyone has something that they can offer and share with others. This sense of social responsibility is important.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** The opportunity I have with this community of hearing impaired people is my biggest blessing. Ever since a child, I've always learnt by listening to life and people around. As someone who literally grew by listening, it struck me hard to realise how difficult it is for hearing impaired children to learn. They can't listen, and learn only through sign language. I've dedicated my life to this cause of uplifting this community. That is how I wish to be recognised too, as a bridge that connects and translates.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** On one side there are people with needs. On the other side, there are many youngsters who are determined to help. This is a healthy culture. If you ask me, I'd ask the youngsters to learn sign language, because working in the area of helping hearing impaired people, I can vouch for the significance of it. It is easy to learn the basics, but the extent to which they can share knowledge to the hearing impaired people is vast. This bridging is needed.

S A M U G A  
U N A R V U

Social responsibility, the sense of which is important.



# Shobha Menon

Shobha Menon is a trustee and founding member of the NGO, “Nizhal”, in Chennai. She and her team, work with communities to preserve and restore vanishing biodiversity of flora and fauna of urban areas.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** GRATEFUL. Our work and its impact have been very fulfilling. Whether working with prisoners across Tamil Nadu to initiate organic farming work, or in therapeutic gardening for patients at the Institute of Mental Health, Kilpauk, or facilitating urban forests and community gardens in neighborhoods! Nizhal believes in providing green spaces where anyone can come forward to care for the space and benefit from its healing environment. Greening the land is one step, but to green minds is the bigger step! Truth is, we can all be prisoners of our own thoughts in many ways, and our mental health always needs tending. And a community that can nurture its green spaces proactively supports its own health, of body and mind.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing of your life?**

**A.** Supportive friendships, within the family and beyond! They help nurture and keep me grounded, amidst the draining challenges of grassroots work. And of course, an exceptional team from different walks of life, who give of themselves to our cause in many special ways! It is very humbling to be part of such special people. Also, the serendipitous connections to genuine volunteers across the city that mean so much to our efforts!

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Be persistent and committed in all efforts to your goal! There will be a lot of challenges, especially at the grassroots level. Ask yourself... 'What is the difference I can make to where I live - my street, my neighbourhood, my city? How much cleaner, how much greener?' And there you have the baby steps of big changes that are definitely possible! Nurture the gentle trees and green spaces around you and they will certainly nurture and care for you and everyone around!



“GRATEFUL”



“ C O U R A G E ”

# KAVITHA BHARANIDHARAN

Kavitha Priya is the author of the book traditional aerial yoga, a mother of three year old and a proud Guinness world record holder for the Yoga marathon she performed for 5 days in an event in Chennai. She looks forward to setting new records and scaling new heights.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "Courage" - It is not just a word but a world to which I feel belonged to. Because all the education and work abroad was related to Biotechnology, and when I decided to return to India my quest was our tradition. I wanted to work closely to where I felt rooted, and Yoga was one of the mediums to express. It wasn't easy, the transition. But I stuck with grit and swam past the tides.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Motherhood is my first biggest blessing. The ability to be able to raise our next generation in a quintessential way is a big blessing. The next biggest blessing is my world record in Yoga. It made me stand out from the crowd. It gave me a reputation to which I am living upto.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Be yourself. Follow your dreams. Chase your passion. And all of it, do it from your heart. There will be instances where you will have to flip the coin. In those situations, the head will say one side of the coin and the heart will yearn for the other side of the coin. Always take the heart's side. It will never disappoint you for you would have tried and strived for what you really wanted to do. Do it with heart. Do it with love. Love is the biggest power of all. Let there be love in everything you do.



“ R E B E L ”

# Kausalya Devi Apparao

Kausalya Devi has been the Honorary Consul in the Honorary Consulate of France from 2002 to 2017 during which she was awarded Chevalier and Officier : L'Ordre National de Merite for her service to the Republic of France. She is currently a member of the Alliance Francaise of Madras Trust and a trustee of the Dakshin Chitra Trust

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "Rebel" I always rebelled, even as a small child - my grandmother was very conservative about a lot of traditions. I used to question her. "Why should I not touch a person?", "Why should I not do this?" or "that", and many things. I never listened when she asked me to not do something, I ask her why. "Tell me why I shouldn't do that. Don't simply tell me not to without reason", I used to tell her. So, that nature of asking questions and being a rebel against things without reason carried forward since I was a kid. You shouldn't accept what is without reason. So, that nature of asking questions and being a rebel against things without reason carried forward since I was a kid. You shouldn't accept when someone says, "You shouldn't do this because you are a girl".

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** My biggest blessing is my family - my grandmother, my mother, my father and my spiritual guru. We do need an anchor in life. We cannot be a kite without a thread. To fly high, you need someone holding you down on the ground, who could help you guide yourself. The love and support you get from your loved ones is something you cannot get anywhere else. You need to have those anchors in life and stay rooted

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** You have to have a passion for what you do and you should not be discouraged if you make a mistake, or if you are not able to achieve in the first attempt. Doing anything new is like learning a foreign language - it's a completely new thing that you don't know

the rights and wrongs of. You will make mistakes. Young people who are making lots of mistakes, and not able to cope with them drop out of the foreign language course. Don't drop out of whatever you choose to do just because you make mistakes. The main things I would stress on are perseverance, patience and keep fighting for what you are passionate about. If you are really determined about what you want, nothing can stop you.



“ D R E A M E R ”

# KAVYA GIRIDHARAN

Kavya Giridharan is the founder and director of Black Swan Dance academy. Having read in the US, she is so passionate about teaching as well, and so teaches dance through Teach for India.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most?  
Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** It might sound a little cliched, but I would say, "dreamer" is my favorite word. It's because I feel that things can change especially considering how the world has been in the last year - not just India, not just one country, rather the whole world. I just think we CAN make the world a better place and I am not thinking, you know, on a large scale - nothing too out of our hands. Rather, very small things. I was in Tenkasi last week for a shoot and my sports bra kept showing. There was a girl on the set who kept pushing it inside. I asked her why she was doing that and she said, "No... this is not how it should be. Girls' cannot be showing these things". When I showed her a man in front of us whose pants were almost off, so low that I could see his bum-crack, and asked her why that wasn't a problem, she got uncomfortable and said, "This is how it is". It doesn't have to be that way. One of my dreams is that I get to walk on the Marina beach wearing a bikini without anyone staring at me. She thought I was mad when I said that to her.

My Chitti comes home, I don't even say my "household help", "servant" or "maid". I insist that she sits on the sofa, that she uses the normal glass plates as everyone at home. It's by bringing small changes in our own behaviors every day that we can be change-makers. I dream that one day all these things will change and I keep making my smaller changes for that. That's why "DREAMER"

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** For me, it's definitely my immediate family. They are the reason that I am able to do what I am doing right now. In the initial stages, they didn't exactly

understand what I wanted to do. They did not emotionally or intellectually support my decision of moving to India, changing into choreography and dance - a completely different field. We would fight a lot about it, but obviously, that came from a place of concern. However, they still supported me every time they asked if I was okay if I need anything - they were concerned about the "Kavya, their daughter" although they didn't really understand the "Kavya, the choreographer or the dancer". Even to this day, they support me as my family and make sure that I am doing okay. They comment on my work, tell me how they like it, tell me about the places they feel can be improved - they make themselves involved in my career slowly and understand that this is what I want to do. This is a blessing that a lot of people don't have. If not for their love and constant support, I don't know if I'll be here right now.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** What I want young boys and girls to take away as a lesson from my journey is to follow their intuition. I have always followed my intuition when it came to my journey - I always chose dance and told myself that this is what I want to do. Listen to the intuition. It's the only thing I have really followed throughout my whole life. If your intuition is telling you, "This is it" follow that voice. That's obviously easier said than done. There's a lot of hard work that's gonna go behind it. There are a lot of difficult conversations you need to have with your friends and family to be able to do it.

*“humour”*



# N. Meera Raghavendhra Rao

N. Meera Raghavendra Rao is a Feature Writer and Columnist with over three decades experience in the field. Author of 11 books, both fiction and non-fiction, including one on Free verses she is also a communicator and teacher. She travelled widely both in India and abroad and has published her travel book with 120 pictures taken by her non digital camera

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** HUMOUR. When some of my readers said they enjoyed my humorous way of writing and wanted to know if I was a fan of O Henry as my humour had a twist in the tail, I confessed having not read much of his short stories., I wrote a column 'The lighter side of life' on web site as life by itself is serious enough. There is no need to complicate it further. I believe in being an optimist and seeing things on a lighter note. My writing is very straight. Even a 9-year-old can understand it clearly. That's not just my style of writing but my way of living too. I feel I am gifted with a funny bone, which I am putting to the best use. It truly is hard to sustain humour, but I have managed to do so over the years.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** I always say, 'By God's grace' whenever I am being interviewed about my success. God has been kind enough to keep me churning my creative juices. What started as a passion lead me on to write 11 books and fortunately I got reputed publishers to publish them, My blog has crossed 92K hits so far. The journey continues. It is a very satisfying feeling to be acknowledged and appreciated by readers across the world.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Once during my book launch in Odyssey, a youngster came up to me and asked, 'Ma'am, how do I write a book that becomes the best seller?'. I told him with a smile that he first has to start writing a story and find out his forte. Is it poetry or humour or fiction? Nothing happens overnight, and you have to work your way up. It is important to believe in yourself. Most important is to reach out to avenues where your work will be recognized and published. Don't always aim at popular or premium magazines alone. Reach out to regional players too. And not all the time your work will be accepted. Be it writing or any profession, you have to accept denials and regrets. Be prepared for both pleasant and unpleasant experiences in your journey to success.



‘TRADITION’

# Sabita Radhakrishna

Sabita Radhakrishna is a freelance writer, columnist, textile revivalist and scholar, and broadcaster, associated with Doordarshan and AIR for over 20 years. She has authored 4 cookbooks on traditional cuisine two of them winning her international awards. She was Senior Consultant at CERC Kalakshetra for 9 years and office bearer at Crafts Council of India for many years

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Tradition. I feel we are losing tradition. Our weavers are straying away to corporate fields, we are losing them. I am sorry to say that in India, we are not proud of our heritage. When we visit our local museum we are proud to showcase the finest of bronzes, but where are our textiles? We have a wealth of them in our country and we need to showcase them.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Love. I've received a lot of love. Perhaps because I was hurt so much. My daughter passed on at the tender age of 34 leaving behind two very young daughters and her sorrowing husband. My husband Kittu and my mother passed away within six months of each other in 2016. I am still learning to live alone after being part of one big happy family.

I founded an NGO for elder care UDHAVI, and we have become family as the amount of love and regard they give me is amazing.

Having worked with weaving centres for 45 years, I decided to help at least some of them during the pandemic, arranging for grocery bags to be given to their villages. Strangely enough they said that this was not the hunger that drove them to me for help. They wanted work, raw material and wages. How would they sell their products? "You are there to help us with marketing. Did you not tell us that we should never allow weavers to leave their profession?

If we don't provide work, they will."

I took on a challenge of giving at least 100 weavers sustainable living and worked with four clusters, just sitting at my laptop encouraging them to use Whats app, making calls to them and showing them how to take photographs of their sarees, and forwarding them to my groups and friends. The response was astounding and I got the feedback that I had managed to sell 8 ½ lakhs rupees worth of stock which directly went to their bank accounts. The greatest joy was when they told me that this year Deepavali fetched them better sales than last year!

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Children today are attached more to the Internet than at any other time. Earlier it was the grandmothers telling stories, today kids listen to characters online. Somehow this makes them impatient, they keep switching between things, and they have no time to listen. Technology is great, they can learn it any time, but I wish they are empowered with the space to learn their culture and heritage. There is so much in our country, from food to textiles to handicrafts. I wish they take the time to learn and absorb the values in it. It is a global village this world, and nothing wrong in drawing inspiration from the west and the east, but as I said, I really wish they understand the value of our roots in the first place. What I am today is because of what I've embraced from our culture and its richness. I want that rich wisdom for all our kids.



# Uma Vangal

Uma Vangal is filmmaker, film curator, film professor, gender activist, and columnist. A Fulbright scholar, with a Ph.D in Film Studies, she is a Visiting Professor of Film at Kenyon College, Ohio and an adjunct faculty at Asian College of Journalism, Chennai. She was an Honorary Senior Fellow in the Women Archives project with Prajnya and has documented the oral histories of the 'Freedom generation women'. As a Founder-Trustee of the MIRA Trust, she works with youngsters especially young girls/women to create opportunities for empowerment, employability and enhanced livelihood choices.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Balance. Balance yin & yan. Balance dreams and reality. Balance modernity with tradition. Balance family with your professional ambitions. Essentially it's about BALANCE. Find that balance in your life.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** My family is my biggest blessing - the family I was born into and the family that I made. My parents are my biggest champions, my sister is the cheer-leader, my husband is the silent supporter and my children are just really patient with me to understand and let me do all the things that I want to do. They are the

reason I am able to effortlessly wear multiple hats in life.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I may have two things to say to this. First thing is that you should see every person you meet as someone you are meant to meet. People walk into your life for a reason and there is always something you can learn from everyone. Secondly, recognize and understand that we are all different from each other in many ways. We are all uniquely one single family. Never let go of your dreams. They will come true in some form or other.

Celebrate the differences and realise we are all part of one big 'universal' family.



“ B A L A N C E ”

A black and white close-up portrait of a woman with long, wavy hair. She has a nose ring and is wearing large hoop earrings. Her hands are clasped near her chin, with a ring on her finger. She is wearing a watch with a metal link bracelet on her left wrist. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting her features and the textures of her hair and jewelry.

“ H U S T L E ”

# AMBIKA GUPTA

Ambika is the founder of The-A Cube project, an award winning wedding design company which focuses on Zero-Waste weddings. Being a journalist by education, she is also a Columnist and TedX Speaker.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** The only word I can think of is "hustle" because that's what I do. I am a hustler! Of course, I do get tired sometimes with the amount of work I juggle between - everyone has their days of burnout but I go back to hustling immediately. Yeah, "Hustle" - "Hustler" is the word.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** There are two. My daughter and my work. My work is my favorite hiding spot, favorite adventure spot - it fulfills almost everything - whenever I am low, it's my place to create, to be secure - it doesn't leave me. It keeps me alive. My baby and my work. They are my two blessings

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I think you need to have a fire in your pit. If it were my daughter, I'd teach her to think about the bigger picture and a legacy that she should

leave in whatever she wants to do.

Life is about different perspectives. There is no definition for right or wrong because everybody thinks that they are right. So, I'd ask her to understand and not develop hate within. We are all born and brought up differently and we, in each of our situations, feel we are right. I'd teach her to respect everyone, and not hate.

There is no substitute for hard work and hustle. You need to have that fire in your pit as I said, and I think that fire comes from whatever journey that the young go through. It's subjective when someone goes through their journey of difficult times, heartbreaks, and tough situations.

# Sudha Umashanker

Sudha Umashanker is an independent Journalist , spiritual and self help columnist , author and Storyteller for both adults and children. She focuses on gender violence, personal safety and infertility among other causes. Her storytelling video on Elder abuse won her the prestigious Laadli Media award for Gender sensitivity 2017. Committed towards causes she has led several campaigns for Seat belt and Helmet wearing, Reduction of Carbon Footprint and Prevention of Child malnutrition. She runs "Storycorner" at "Bookmine" a storytelling space and has her own podcast and YouTube channel.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** NEVER SAY DIE. You can be knocked down, fail many times, and be shattered into pieces. What matters is how you pull yourself together and brace yourself for the next endeavour. Look at the failures with a clinical eye, and learn from the set backs. All that matters is whether you put yourself out there with renewed determination.

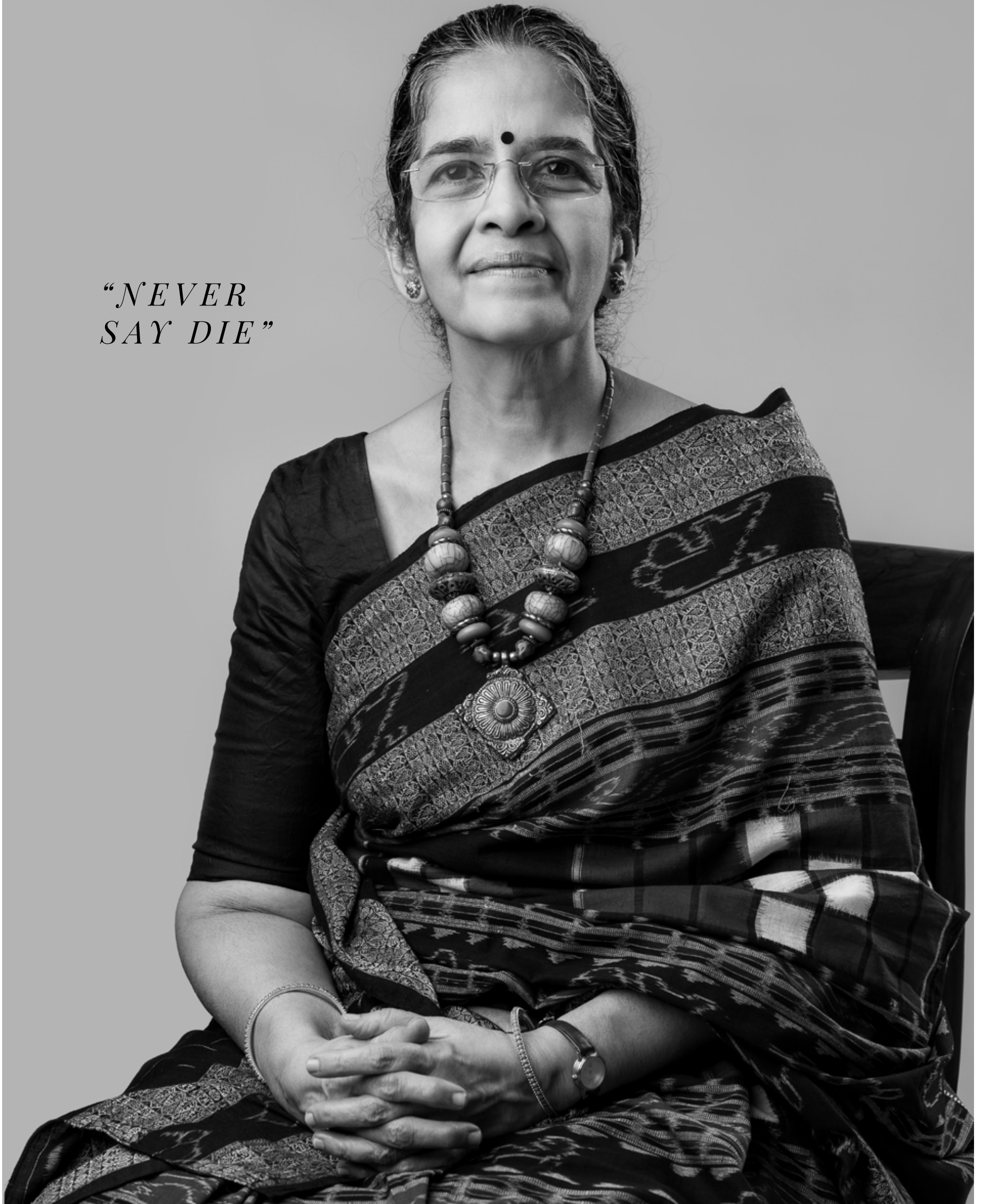
**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** The opportunities that came my way, and the divine grace that helped me through and out are my biggest blessings. Speaking of opportunities, not everything came knocking. I had to set out to find them. I was persistent until I got them, and made sure I thrived till the end. The journey still continues.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Be good at what you do. Take your work seriously and be absolutely professional. Commit carefully, live by your word and walk your talk. Young women especially have to be aware of your rights on all fronts. Be financially independent. Choose your partner with care. Never undersell yourself, instead take time to understand the other person. The world is changing at the speed of thought. To have a support system that is reliable, be it personal or professional, is amazing. But if you are meant to plough a lonely furrow, be prepared to farm your life with complete conviction. 18 years ago I lit the funeral pyre for my father. I didn't have the inhibition of how a woman can do it. To me it was a loving responsibility to bid a final farewell to my father. Society always has a say. What matters is, *what's your say?*

*“NEVER  
SAY DIE”*



# Sandhya Rao

Sandhya Rao is an editor and writer, with long experience in mainstream journalism and publishing. Her books for children have a wide fan base; some of her popular titles are *My Mother's Sari*, *Picture Gandhi*, *Ekki Dokki*, *Look the Moon* and *Zakir and his Tabla*. She writes a column on books called 'Wordsworld' for Rotary News and teaches Business Communication at the Crescent School of Business.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Positive. I think I am a positive person. I believe that being positive will help you gain so much in life. It'll help you cross whatever bridge you need to cross. It'll cheer up people around you and it'll help the environment. Sometimes friends ask how I am so optimistic all the time and tell me to be more 'normal', but I can't!

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Many things. I can't think of any one thing. But, yes, certainly my parents. They let me do whatever I wanted to. They never stopped me from doing anything. My grandparents too, they were very encouraging. My grandmother... if I asked her to tell me a story, she'd drop whatever she was doing

and sit down to tell. Yes, my family is my biggest blessing!

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** It's a bit difficult to suggest to other people what they should learn from my journey. What I can say is what I have learned – to listen to yourself and to do the things that you feel you believe in. Don't worry about whether you will succeed or fail, don't look too far into the future. If there's something you'd like to do or want to do, just do it, enjoy doing it.

I know all this is easy to say and it's a choice that everyone might not be able to make. People think making a choice like that can happen only if you are privileged in terms of parents, wealth and other things. True, privilege helps, but I don't think that's fully

true. I think what you need to have in order to make your own choices in life is self-belief.

In my case, thinking back, I realise that I took all my decisions myself: whether it was to do with studies, or quitting studies to take up a job, or changing jobs, or with regards to marriage. They weren't really all thought-out. They were more instinctive, spontaneous. I followed my nose, I guess because I had self-belief.



“ P O S I T I V E ”

# Shreya Devnath

Shreya Devnath is a multi-talented Carnatic violinist. She's considered an authority on the use of the violin in Carnatic music and shares her knowledge through talks, classes and performances on the subject. She is a disciple of Lalgudi Jayaraman, the famous violinist based out of Chennai. She was awarded the KS Mahadevan Endowment award by Naradha Gnana Sabha.





*“solitude”*

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you’d associate yourself to?**

**A.** I don’t have one favourite word, but I do have a phrase that I love. “The Universe is listening”. That is something that I believe in, I often say things out loud when I feel things are just not happening, as self-affirmations. It makes me feel better because I feel the universe is listening and that it will respond to me.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing of your life?**

**A.** Well, there are many answers to that because life has been kind. I have a lovely family. I have amazing parents who said, “Do whatever you want but do it well” - so in that sense, many blessings. My partner who is just like me in so many ways that makes it so much fun to be together and do things together.

But if its within myself, then the answer is very simple - if you want to figure out life for yourself, then you also need to have the patience, drive and the guts to back that up. When you are deviating from what the world has set for you already and when you are figuring out things by yourself, you’ll have a lot of rough patches, lots of beating, lots of frustration - it won’t be all happy and romantic. You need to have the back-end strength in you.

It is very easy to say, “Do what you want” but its an entirely different thing to figure out what exactly makes you happy, to have the drive to get there because its not going to be easy, and to be fully aware, that you could be wrong at the end of all the journey. You cannot feel sorry for yourself, you cannot be angry - you have to go from there, whether you are right or wrong, and see where it takes you. That takes a certain reconciliation.

I have that. I think, that’s my biggest blessing - patience, strength and everything that you need to figure out what you want.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I think it will be too obnoxious if I talk about a “lesson” from my life and journey. Its not like I have everything figured out.

But what I would suggest a young boy and girl is to not worry too much. Don’t give too much importance to what is expected of you, what is considered success and what is considered happiness. There are people around you whose ideas are still different from yours. Don’t take your decisions based on their definitions and thoughts of your ideas.

We are raised while having things like “happiness” defined by others around us. Going somewhere, doing something, eating something, earning a certain amount - take a step back and figure out those ideas by yourself. As you choose what you want to do, be the absolute best version of yourself. Push yourself. Don’t compromise, don’t cut yourself slack. I don’t believe in that. Be absolutely merciless with yourself. And just do what you want.

# Swarnalatha Ravi

Swarnalatha Ravi is the Director of the Vasanta Bhavan group of hotels. Her hard work and sheer determination have seen the brand reach heights and is now growing to be an organization that is majorly empowered by the women workforce.



**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A. BOLDNESS AND DEDICATION.** They both come together as one word. In my journey of building Vasanta Bhavan, this is the value I lived by, and it has taken me so far. As a woman, I am inspired to bring in more women and empower them with opportunities. Right now Vasanta Bhavan stands with 25% of its workforce as *women*, and we are marching towards 40% in the next couple of months.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Vasanta Bhavan is my biggest blessing. It is hard to differentiate me from it on any note. I've literally worshipped work and have

persevered my way through every challenge. I've seen every challenge as an opportunity in disguise, and have been able to build a name for myself and the brand in this Industry. I feel blessed to be able to continue on this journey.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Be religiously dedicated to what you are doing. It is the relentless dedication that will take you forward in life. Often we start out with passion but lose interest in the middle. There are days when your limits will be pushed. There are moments when you feel like giving up. But you have to keep going with determination.

**‘BOLDNESS & DEDICATION’**

# Florida Tilton

A first-generation Entrepreneur and Dr. Florida heads Biozone Research Technologies Pvt. Ltd., a Biosciences start-up enterprise based out of Chennai. Her pioneering efforts in educating and simplifying research in the field of Biotechnology have gained statewide recognition and acclaim.

## “FIGHT”

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Fight - Don't give up on anything at any point of time for anything in life. Have the self belief and confidence that you can achieve anything and you can make anything happen if you really believe in yourself and take effort on - if someone says you cannot do something, you have to try. Nobody can define what you can do - its for you to try and achieve.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** I was born to an army officer. My Dad has taught me great discipline in life. Out of all the challenges, he has told me one thing - don't give up on your moral discipline and what you've learnt. Success can be delayed but it will never be denied. So if you don't give up on that and stick to your principles - principles are really important - you can achieve

what you set out for. That learning, I got in my life at a very young age from my family and my father.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** People should really think that anything is achievable. People should really think about risk taking. I always tell my younger ones - work against odds. If you work against odds, you will stand out and you will feel high. When you feel high and happy, that is the purpose of living. One day, when you live with that high, you will feel satisfied. I am really sure that if you work against odds with perseverance and hard work, with a "never give up" attitude, you will definitely see light at the end of the tunnel and reach heights.



# Vinita Sidhartha

A journalist transformed to an innovator, Vinita, found Kreeda Games to bring back the old generation traditional games like Pallanguzhi to life again. She promises that there is a game for all age-group in Kreeda.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "Choice". I have always chosen my own path. If I conform it is because I choose to do so. I do what I want to do and when I want to do it. I find it hard doing things simply because somebody tells me to do it or how to do it.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** Life. To live and experience everything that happens. Whether good or bad is secondary. Life itself is the biggest blessing. I am happy to be alive.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Life happens. Too many people say, Oh! If I had followed my passion, I would have been happy. Yes, it is wonderful to have a passion, but sometimes life happens. We don't get the right opportunity, or there are obstacles in our way. Sometimes you have to choose go with the flow. It is about balancing the things you love to do with the things you need to do. Life is always about balance and it is within us to be happy.

*“choice”*



# Dr. Lakshmi Vijaykumar

Dr. Lakshmi Vijayakumar started her practice nearly 25 years back and is famous for her research on Suicidal Prevention Strategies. Dr Lakshmi Vijayakumar founded 'Sneha' in 1986, India's premier suicide prevention centre. She was instrumental in the inclusion of suicide prevention in the National Mental Health Policy of India and she is currently working towards decriminalisation of attempted suicide.

“Empathy”



**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** One word is, "empathy". Empathy is different from sympathy. Sympathy is - you feel sad for him, you feel bad, you want to help him/her. So in that, you are kind of putting yourself in a higher pedestal compared to who is on the receiving end of that warmth. In "empathy" - how do I define empathy? Suppose you're in a car and your friend is driving it. Suddenly, someone comes onto the road - your friend applies the breaks immediately. And, although you are not in his seat directly, you instinctively react to apply the breaks too - that is empathy. You may not be in the exact shoes of another person, but to feel what he is feeling, understanding their reaction and being with them.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** The fact that I am able to come across so many people who are willing to give their time, energy and emotion for another person instinctively without expecting anything - I think is my blessing.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** "SNEHA" has been working with all its people as a foundation for the last 40 years now. Everyone who works in Sneha are volunteers. The only person who is paid is the watchman. A lot of the time, when you volunteer in any place, you usually come out after doing some work that makes you feel good. You are happy or you feel peaceful. But talking to people who feel suicidal and preventing those suicides isn't like that. When you come across stories like a girl who was molested by her father and more such unimaginable stories, you just feel like you've gone into a washing machine and come out. You really feel like - I don't want to use a four-lettered word - it just leaves you with a feeling that cannot be handled very easily.

The lesson I have learnt through so many stories, and that the young need to know is - when there is life, there is hope.

# Sarada Nambi Arooran

‘HARD WORK’



Dr. Saradha is a professor by career, and a strong orator by choice. She has traveled across countries to debate and speak about Tamil Savaite philosophy. Her husband Mr. Nambi Arooran is the grandson of renowned Tamil poet Maraimalai Adigal.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** HARD WORK. Nothing in life comes easy, and character is very important to see the mile. You can have all the talent in the world, but if you don't live by values, then you are prone to face a downfall anytime. I've lived by my principles all my life, and it has paid me well in return.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** MY WHOLE LIFE. It starts with my parents, who gave me space and freedom to see a home in the society and a society in the home. And then, my husband. I was blessed with an understanding bond where we co-existed, traveled together, and contemplated life together as poets. And last but yet the most important blessing is the gift of two daughters whom I look upon for inspiration, and cherish as the most important part of my life. They see me as a friend and a friendly companion. This is my life, and it means everything to me.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Youngsters today do not see the bigger picture, but bank on what has been already given to them. The culture of parents pampering their children plays a huge role in this, as a lot of hardships are skipped in the process. The boys and girls hence find it difficult to face the realistic difficulties of life. They need to take control and own their decisions. Everyone should learn to have an opinion about life and society. The mobile phone in their hands puts the world in their palms, but that amount of freedom has to be exercised properly too. How we approach life, is how life approaches us too.

“ C H O I C E ”



# Dr. VR Devika

Dr. V. R. Devika, Founder and Managing trustee of The Aseema Trust, a nonprofit organization for linking traditional performing arts and education and Mahatma Gandhi and education, is a well-known cultural activist who has a passion for performing arts and education.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** CHOICE. Happiness is a choice. Sadness is a choice too. Ultimately, it is the choice you make in life that defines you.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** The freedom that my family gave me to think and be what I am is my biggest blessing. I still remember how my mother told me, 'Everybody gets married and has children. But not necessarily that social quotient needs to influence your family life. Think on your own. You are your necessity, and nothing else'. I am 67 years old, single, and happily independent. This is my life, and this is my choice.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Enjoy the moment. Open your eyes and be curious. Have more wonder in your eyes than being cynical. Believe in everybody, just the way nature has this diversity and has so many forms of expression. Likewise, see people beyond differences and see them equal without any discrimination or superiority. Everything in this life has a reason, and hence we have a mix of things. It all comes together and makes life worthwhile.

# Sujatha Vijay Vaidyanathan

Sujatha Vijay Vaidyanathan is an entrepreneur and the Founder of Bamboola - one of India's best awarded, and Chennai's sought-after Play School and Day Care Center. She finds her passion in creating healthy minds in young children. She is also a fitness fanatic, an avid trekker, a surfer, and a jewelry designer.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** I can't think of one word, but I'd say "Never too late" is a phrase that defines me really well. Everything in my life happened a little later than I would have ideally liked for it to have happened. Even now, post covid, I seem to be doing a lot of new things stepping out of the comfort zone. Be it home or outside home, I'm always engaging in new things that I would have perhaps loved if it had happened a little earlier in life but I love this present moment as I do all of that. When you want to do something, it truly is never too late to step out to catch that dream by the hand and walk along to new places!

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** I have a fantastic support system - my mother, my husband, my children and my whole family. I think, its so important to have the right partner when you want to take risks.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** This generation seems to be closed. They don't want to take risks, they don't want to experiment because they are afraid to step out of their comfort zone. Everything is right there - internet, information, opportunities, people, help. It's so important for all of us, especially women, to step out of our comfort zone and say, "It's okay to mess up!" and one should really try it. The young are putting too much pressure on themselves trying to prove something to someone all the time. Be it on social media or in conversations or at work. This makes them feel like they haven't done enough all the time. You shouldn't take competition so seriously. You need to calm down and understand that it's not a rat race. The moment you realize and understand that it's not a rat race and that you don't have to prove anything to anyone, you will be able to do a lot more and a lot better.

*“NEVER  
TOO  
LATE”*





**“GRATITUDE”**

# Vidya Shankar

Vidya Shankar, a widely published Indian poet, writer, editor, motivational speaker, English teacher, and a “book” in the Human Library, says poetry is not different from her. The recipient of literary awards and recognition, she uses the power of her words to sensitise her readers about environmental issues, mental health, and the need to break the shackles of an outdated society. Vidya is the author of two poetry books, *The Flautist of Brindaranyam* (in collaboration with her photographer husband, Shankar Ramakrishnan), and *The Rise of Yogamaya* (an effort to create awareness about mental health.) She finds meaning to her life through yoga and mandalas.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** “Gratitude” - When you are grateful, you are happy. You are able to see another side of every situation. It is a very powerful feeling - because what we often see is but a small portion of a whole story, seen from our perspective only. There are so many connected dots that we don't even know about. I am grateful for the experiences that I went through. I am grateful for anything that happens.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** To believe in themselves. You cannot blame anyone else for your circumstances. Everything depends on the choices you make. You may have a great support system in family and friends, but if you do not choose to come out of something you are going through, no support can help you. It's okay if you fall, it's okay if you ask for help, but ultimately it must come from your heart. The need to rise, the push to rise, the choice to rise - unless you choose to rise, you will never rise.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing of your life?**

**A.** My husband. I wouldn't have been here today if he was not with me. I can trust him till my last breath.

# Mahima Poddar

Mahima Poddar is certified in Expressive Art Therapy with specialized training in Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting as well as School Violence Identification and Prevention. She is the founder of "The Kindness Foundation" and "The Kindness Week" is her brainchild which is an initiative to celebrate everyday acts of being thoughtful and kind, hoping to spark a million more. She's worked with several schools in Chennai to help children experiencing difficulties due to abusive and neglectful parenting.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Kindness - it's in the receiving and the giving of it. Yes, there are so many values that define us but Kindness supersedes everything I feel. Imagine a world where we are all kind to each other, all the time?

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** My family, my kids, my parents - they are the biggest blessing of my life!

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I think, integrity is a big one. You should always think about your integrity, honesty and transparency. That will take you very far in life. Remember that you are just as good as your word. If you give your word, you must keep it. If you get into a space of not thinking before you give your word, then you can't keep your commitments. And that's where your integrity, reliability - just everything comes into question. As far as the world is concerned, you're just as good as your word.

*"kindness"*



# A. Vennila

Vennila, in her 15-year journey in writing and publishing, has penned a lot of books, based on history and feminism. Her publication house 'Akani Veliyedu' focuses mainly on the on hidden history and struggle faced by the women in India.



**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** LOVE. I feel our very existence is meant to feel and share love. It can keep us grounded and also take us to cloud nine. Everything is possible in love. What a pleasure it is to love and be loved? I feel it has to be mutual, with enough space for the individuals and the companionship. Instead of dominance, if only we can celebrate love that binds all of us together.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** MY WHOLE LIFE. It starts with my parents, who gave me the space and freedom to see a home in the society and a society in the home. And then, my husband. Even though we fell in love and got married, it is not guaranteed that life will always be as sweet as it was during the initial days of the relationship. But I am blessed with an understanding bond where we co-existed, travelled together and contemplated life together as poets. And last but yet the most important blessing, is the gift of three daughters who I look upon for inspiration, and

cherish as the most important part of my life. They see me as a friend, and a friendly companion. This is my life, and it means everything to me.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Be original. You are unique. We often are carried away by what others expect from us, and end up living a life for the society. Yes, there has to be society-centric thinking but not a society-driven lifestyle. Be truthful to yourself and express your authenticity. That is how you will find your place in this world.

# AISHWARYA MANIVANNAN

Educationist, artist, designer, and Silambam practitioner, Aishwarya Manivannan is the Founder of Maisha Studio for Art & Design Foundation Studies, Creative Programs, Education and Career Mentoring. Popular for her unique pedagogy, she has mentored thousands of students on creativity and design thinking through multiple academic forums. Aishwarya has represented India in multiple International Silambam Tournaments, winning medals and taking this ancient traditional martial art form of Tamilnadu to stages across the world. She is working on documenting Silambam and showcasing it in a renewed light. A TEDx Speaker and International Silambam Champion, Aishwarya has won numerous awards for her work in creative education.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** BE. Just "be". Be all that you can be and more. We are constantly trying to define and brand everything that we feel, do and want. I believe that we should live every moment being all that we truly are as individuals. We hold such infinite potential in ourselves and it's beautiful to experience life fulfilling our true self. Be whatever this present moment requires you to be. Take up all that life has to offer and embrace every moment. When you learn to just "be", you realise that every situation will reveal a new facet in you. I think that's what defines me. What can I be right now? Whatever it is that I need to be, I become that. I strive to be like water, fire, wind and earth all at once.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Life itself! It is incredible how much beauty, love, learning and adventure exists in every moment of our existence. There is inspiration all around us through our culture, stories behind every person, nature's awe-inspiring details, emotions, evolution, change and the magic that reveals itself for those in search of beauty. Seek and you shall find! When you observe and see, you realise the undeniable miracle that life in all its glory is.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Learning occurs anywhere and comes from every single happening in our lives. I am on a constant search for knowledge and skills which has led me to experience and understand myself and the world around. We tend to limit learning to a set system of education. But it is intrinsic for learning to be a way of life. This will make us more open, dynamic and aid to discover and rediscover ourselves all the time.



*“ b e ”*

# Neelam Jain

After starting as a financial analyst in an MNC, Neelam found satisfaction in creating PeriFerry. She is the Founder & CEO of PeriFerry Inc., which enables members from LGBTIQ community to become financially independent.



“RESILIENT”

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** RESILIENT. I feel resilience is one of the strongest traits I've developed over time. I am grateful to all the times that had taught me the hard part of life. Especially during the COVID times, when the entire Jobs market crashed, imagine the plight of the transgender people. They had no avenues to work in. But they didn't give up. We didn't lose up. We kept our heads and spirits high. It was resilience that brought us through. And we survived, and in face thrived in our own ways.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** My biggest blessing is my father, who seeded strength and character ever since I was a child. He started his entrepreneurial journey at the age of 16 when his father passed away. He has come a long way and if there is one thing that he constantly told us is, 'Nothing is impossible. He always pushed us to break the traditional routes. There are no road maps to success, he said, and that we had to start believing in the path. True to every word, that is exactly what I did too. 4 years ago if you said that you are setting out on a journey to find proper jobs for transgender people, people would laugh or discourage you. But you see what is happening today. We have a team of 7 people and have

successfully placed 170 transgenders in different companies.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Young people today give in too easily. Especially girls, they succumb to societal pressure. They look at the chains around them, and surrender to the routine. Yes, it is difficult to break structures, but that doesn't mean you can't live life the way you aspire to. Live your life. I am saying it again. Live YOUR life. Do not worry about the chances of success. Trust in the journey. Believe in yourself. Belief is all it takes to reach where you want to. I got there. You will get there too. We all will, and it is only a matter of time.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** Womanation has to be the word that I love and what defines me. To me, its about being the voice for voiceless Women community. That's what inspires me me to do more.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** Leadership qualities without any bossy attitude is my biggest blessing! I know that I am a leader and I make sure to drive my team with a purpose. I am also very well aware that being a leader and being a boss are two different things. A bossy attitude will get people to work for you, and they are usually doing something for you because there is a certain fear. When you are a leader, you will work with people and people are inspired to be doing something with you.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Focus on what you are doing. We tend to think about the results that come in the future, without paying attention to the process we are involved in right now. So, focus on what you have at hand. Give more priorities to your career. Choose what you want to do and consciously give importance to it. And remember that only continuous learning can get you to a place you want to be. So, keep acquire new skills and never stop learning.

# Madhu Saran

Madhu Saran, represented our country as an Indian Ambassador – Women Entrepreneur, Global. United Nations, Headquarters. She is the part of reforming in Indian Panchayat institutions and new projects. She combines her conviction that education is the most effective transformational tool and her unshakable belief in scalable and sustainable practices for social inclusion to champion the cause of academic – industry linkage. Her Dream Come True Company is RIVER – The Power of Women is social service companies which focus only onto women. Her goals are to make each woman should be independent, educated and prove they be an example for all women.



*'womanation'*



*“purpose”*

# Sarah P Ramya

Sarah P Ramya is a Child Rights Activist & Policy Researcher. She works towards social justice and envisages herself to be a catalyst in the process of development and enable the oppressed in the community to access their own rights.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** "Purpose" - Purpose of living. It's not just about existing, right? It's about your purpose. You need to have a purpose so that your journey in this world is defined properly. You need to have a purpose to live your life the most.

**Q. What is the biggest blessing in your life?**

**A.** The communities that have accepted me are my biggest

blessing. It's not easy to be accepted by people who don't come from the same background as you - who are different in their ways of living. To be accepted by them as a family member is a blessing.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** Be a change maker. For the world to change and become a better place, you need to believe in the change that you can bring. The tricky thing is, "change"

doesn't have a definition. It's a very dynamic word by itself. When you travel in your path, believing in the change you can bring in, the world will change too. You need to keep inspiring people. It doesn't cost you much, you don't have to spend a penny out of your pocket to inspire someone.

# SHALIN MARIA

Shalin Maria is a writer and a social activist. She discusses, in her writings, blogs, articles, podcasts and various other social platforms, on issues relating to women, cast discrimination and strongly takes a stand to support the just cause. She has authored the books, "JENSY EAN KURAIVAGA PAADINAR?" and "VADACHENNAIKARI".

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most?  
Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** ECSTASY. If you listen to ARR's music laying on the beach and look at a full moon, the kind of ecstasy you get cannot be described in words. It is often these little acts that bring in so much pleasure. Not necessarily the big things, but even the little acts of self indulgence brings so much joy to self. Just by saying the word ecstasy, you can feel the any pain in the moment go away and all you are left is an ecstatic feeling. Pleasure is hence a powerful word and world, and I feel we all have the right and responsibility to find the pleasure of our life. Be it music, art, love or lust, find pleasure. Period.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** PARENTS. My biggest blessing is the relationship I share with my parents. They are not like a typical Indian parent but have always given me the space to explore. They never really spoon-fed me, but always empowered me to be a strong individual with independent opinions. The fighting spirit in me greatly comes from the way they have let me be on my own. They accepted me as I am and fuelled me to what I can be.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** I come from a socially oppressed community, and have fought against the odds for the purpose of representation. Representation is important I feel. I've reconstructed my life through what I write. It is important to fight against the odds on all platforms. Be it literature or cinema, I feel you have to take control and have a strong political statement. Otherwise, you will always stay the victim, and others will keep commenting on your life. I am still learning, and am constantly evolving. But, if there is one lesson for the younger generation, it is resilience.

*“ecstasy”*



*“household  
heritage”*



# Sivagamasundari

Being an architect by profession, Sivagama Sundari always had an affinity towards heritage conservation. When she started learning more about material conservation, she felt the importance of household heritage and how it plays a key role in knowing local history. She is the founder of an organization called "Muttram" which documents, restores, and curates exhibitions on household heritages.

**Q. What is the one word that you love the most? Or a word that you'd associate yourself to?**

**A.** HOUSEHOLD HERITAGE. Now, that's a word me and my partner coined. We arrived on it after a lot of intrigues, because the moment you say heritage, you tend to think of temples, old buildings, and faraway tombs. To be honest, our very homes hold such a rich heritage. The things it holds, the people it houses and had housed, everything adds up to real heritage. I guess my passion for heritage preservation and architecture roots from this idea.

**Q. What is your biggest blessing in life?**

**A.** At 22 I was diagnosed with Lupus, I was restricted indoors and I couldn't travel a lot. Initially, I was devastated for all the plans I had ahead came to pieces. And then, I accepted. It was then I concentrated on what was inside my house. I started to work on what I can do. slowly, I started to realize the power of perseverance. What I am today is because of the Lupus disease I was diagnosed with. It broke me and then transformed me into a new person. It is both my curse and blessing. I would like to keep the blessing part on a higher

scale.

**Q. What is a lesson that the younger generation can learn from what you do?**

**A.** If you are really passionate about something, give your full heart to it. A lot of young kids today have big dreams, but I feel at times they lack conviction. They are not ready to take up the long journey of seeing it through the end. I feel they must instill the spirit of passion and perseverance.



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