

meri beti  
meri Shakti

MY DAUGHTER MY SHAKTI

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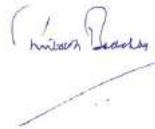
# meri beti meri Shakti

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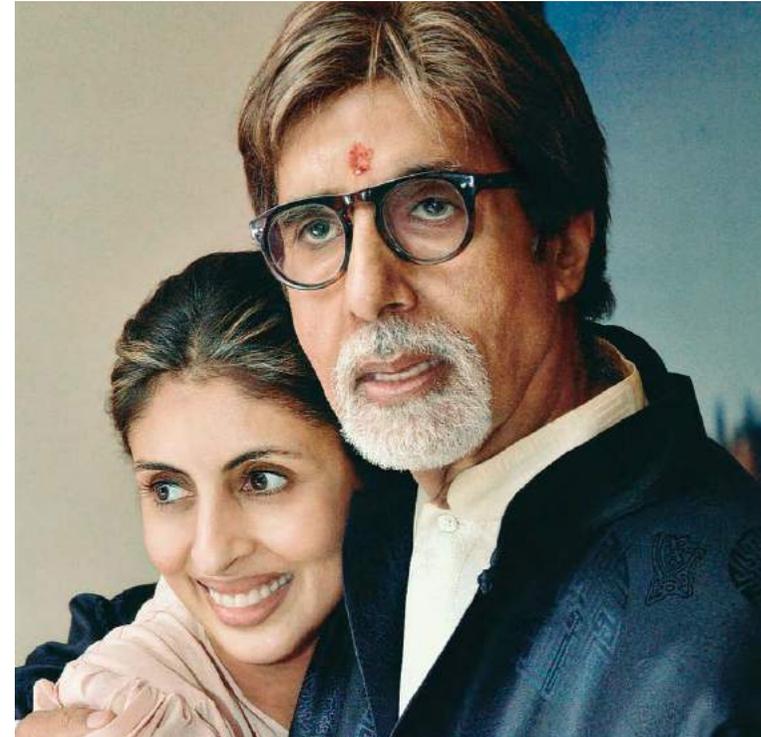
## FOREWORD

"Fathers" please enjoy your daughters/ children. No matter what kind of father you are- traditional, long distance etc. Only you can touch the life of your child like no other can. Love them unconditionally, support, trust and guide them, indulge them and most importantly spend time with them. It is never too late to get involved in your daughter's/ child's life. Many men feel that if they weren't involved in their daughter's/ children's life as she/ they was/ were growing up, that it is too late to make a difference. This simply is not true.

These words of Shweta's during an interview, has touched me like nothing else has- "It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be his daughter. I want to live up to the kind of human being he is. It has nothing to do with his screen presence or the kind of adulation he commands. But as a human being," What more can I ask for!



Amitabh Bachchan



AMITABH BACHCHAN  
WITH SHWETA

## INTERPRETING SHAKTI

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***Shakti is the primordial cosmic energy and represents divine feminine creative power***  
Yet throughout history, women have been given second status to men. They are called the weaker sex, and their labour is taken for granted. In many parts of the world, women earn less than men for the same job, and almost everywhere in the world, their contribution in the home goes unrecognized and unappreciated.

***Shakti manifests itself through fertility and is responsible for creation***  
Sex selective abortions, early marriage, child mothers, unsafe birth deliveries, denial of school education and poor nutrition continue to affect the survival, health and development of girls and women.

***Shakti embodies the active feminine energy called Prakriti and is the agent of all change***  
Most girls and women in our country continue to have little or no say in decisions that affect them, over their own bodies, the wages they earn. Those who 'rebel' against patriarchal norms and try to change such imbalanced equations, often face isolation and opposition.

***Shakti....Prakriti....Woman....She is our Mother, Sister, Wife and Daughter***  
Domestic violence affects the lives of one in three women across the world. This is regardless of economic and social strata. Rape, molestation, physical & mental abuse are other threats that a woman faces, in or out of her home.

***Shakti is our little daughter - our Beti who will grow up strong, independent, compassionate, free thinking and free spirited***  
The girl child remains among the most discriminated social groups in India. A victim of gender inequality, in a society that negates her significance, her power, her *Shakti*.

This is our cause.

To remove the injustice, eradicate the prejudice and the unequal power relationships between men and women, boys and girls. To equip, enable and engage every girl so that she gains the skills and knowledge to succeed in life. Investing in girls equally means all children benefit, the families and communities benefit, society benefits and in turn the country benefits.

**Let us take pride in empowering our girls. As the achievers you will meet in the following pages have done.**

**Because...Our Beti is our Shakti.**

Govind Nihalani  
Chairperson, Plan India Board

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Meri Beti Meri Shakti offers us an opportunity to visit the lives of so many role models in their journey as parents of daughters. Celebrities, influencers and opinion shapers who not only inspire us by the way they lead in their professions, but also by the principles they apply to their personal lives. And as they share their stories, we see a reaffirmation of Plan India's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign message - that by investing love, providing good education and equal opportunities to our daughters; and to every girl, we are actually investing in the future of our country, and the future of the world.

Plan India is indebted to all the parents and daughters who have graced the pages of this book - they have welcomed us into their homes and their lives and selflessly shared their memories and personal vignettes in support of this advocacy endeavour. That so many of you have assured us of your continuing support for our campaign only reconfirms your own commitment to the rights of girls.

The idea and the title of this book came from Mr. Govind Nihalani, famed filmmaker and Plan India's Chairperson. This book would not have been possible but for his nurturing of the concept and his overseeing of the development of this project to its fruition.

Our heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Amitabh Bachchan, for penning the Foreword to the book. Mr. Bachchan and his family have been consistently promoting the education of the girl child and they have supported Plan India's campaign for the same cause as well.

Our sincere appreciation to Ms. Sathya Saran. Sathya spent considerable time on the one-on-one interactions with all the interviewees and subsequently worked towards translating these into beautiful inspirational stories.

Due credit to Saify Naqvi, Santosh Jadhav, Bikramjit Bose, Dinesh Khanna, Mansi Midha and Varun Mehta for capturing the tangible love and affection between the parents and their daughters via their photographs.

We would also like to specially acknowledge and appreciate the efforts put in by Sapna Kar and Burgundy Events, especially Subhrajit Kar and Nimisha Paul who have worked with energy and passion, coordinating at so many levels for months to make this book happen.

We thank Ms Gayatri Ruia for her generosity in hosting the book launch.

We are grateful to our partner organizations in the various cities who have contributed towards the success of this initiative.

It has been an amazing journey with countless heart warming moments, and we are touched by the support that each person who has participated or engaged with Meri Beti Meri Shakti project has shown. If the feelings contained in this book touch your heart, do join us in spreading the glow of education, to light up every girl's life.

Bhagyashri Dengle  
Executive Director, Plan India

My Daughter My Shakti

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मेरी बेटी मेरी शक्ति

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My Daughter My Shakti

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My Daughter My Shakti

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mi hija mis shakti

Neerja Birla opted to be a hands-on, full time mother to her three children. Ananyashree, Aryaman Vikram and Advaitesha. They are gathered in the living room of the Birla family home, and Ananyashree's quiet confidence is a foil to Advaitesha's shy smile, as we get introduced. Neerja's obvious pride in her daughters is like an illuminating light in her eyes.

"For us, both our son and daughters are our greatest blessing. Each of them have their own unique place in our hearts. We make no distinction between them whatsoever. The family has always been my first priority. After spending time with my children and looking into their needs, I pursue my other interests. My engagement with our International School, Aditya Birla World Academy and on the boards of Pratham, Make-a-Wish Foundation, Save the Children and Akanksha, enthuse me enormously. The corporate set up is not my cup of tea."

For her children too, she wishes they always have the power of choice.

Ananyashree's confidence comes from her business experience. "Things are changing socially now, in business families too," Neerja says. "My daughter is already running a micro finance company. She thinks nothing of going out to the rural areas, interacting with the

women there, discussing their financial state and offering help." The pride, Neerja realises is not just motherly love. It is pride in her children's abilities and achievements.

"When Ananyashree goes into the villages, she sees women who are bread earners, girls who are studying to be CAs. She tells me girls today are capable of so much, once empowered by education. I believe her company is helping in that direction and I am proud she is spearheading that change," Neerja adds.

"It is parents who need to be educated to understand that a girl child can do what a boy can do. This need exists across all strata, including business families like ours," she adds. "Parents still feel, a daughter will marry and go away, so... you know." In her unspoken sentence hangs the story of many influential families who still stick to a tradition that has been proved outdated. That daughters are '*paraya dhan*'.

In the Birla home, however, "the rules are the same for both my son and the girls. No concessions just because he is a boy and vice versa. Gender does not matter. They have the same rules for staying out late, they must all complete their post graduation, and so on."

In fact, Neerja says, touching on an insidious trend, "I worry sometimes about reverse discrimination. I believe if a daughter has the right to choose her career, and chooses to work in the family business, a son should also have the same freedom to follow his passion. Even if it means he does not wish to join his father. Every child must be allowed to grow up following his or her passion and dream."

"A good education, freedom of choice and equal opportunity, every child in India has claim to these rights!"



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

NEERJA BIRLA  
WITH ANANYASHREE AND ADVAITESH

She has been articulate and spirited both in personal life and in politics, and it comes as no surprise that Renuka Chowdhury's two children, Poojita and Tejaswini are as self possessed and communicative. Their lives reflect their upbringing. Poojita, an independent documentary filmmaker, has effected real change with her film on women in off-beat professions or jobs-focusing on women barbers in Tirupati, houseboat owners and guides in Kerala, or engine drivers and Dalit tube well repairers in caste ridden UP, to make her point that today women can do anything they set their mind to. Tejaswini, on the other hand, is setting up her own clothes label, tellingly named 'Roar'.

It has been raining all day, but the three women brave the wet weather to please the photographer who wants the garden as a setting. Their self assurance and ease with one another comes through in the way they face the camera.

Renuka has an explanation for the way they are. "I come from a long lineage of first born daughters," she says... "five generations to be exact. My great grandmother was alive when my first girl was born. She had been widowed at 20, with two children. But she set the tone for the generations to follow."

And indeed they have. Renuka, free spirited, dares to go where many don't: taking the bouquets and brickbats with equal aplomb. Inspiring Poojita to blaze a new trail of her own with her sometimes controversial documentaries, and Tejaswini to follow her own dream.

Renuka credits her father's attitude to bringing up his daughters for her family's fearlessness. "My father was a very evolved man, who brought his daughters up as citizens, not as women. He did this without succumbing to societal pressure. If someone complained to him that his daughter was seen riding a motorbike, he would first check if it was true. All he would do then, would be to tell her to be careful and wear a helmet."

"My husband too is the same with his daughters," she says. "It has helped to reap the advantages of an all-girl family. The girls do what all children can do: change tyres, haul a gas cylinder and not wait for the brother to do it, because there isn't one anyway! They grow up confident; they can do anything a man can."

Of course she had her fears while the girls were growing up in a world different from the ones they lived in at home. "For one, I was seldom around for their school functions, measles,

all the things a child needs a mother for. And sometimes I feared I was too radical. Luckily, with good education they have both found their ground, and are young women sure of who they are. And they have found husbands who are sensitive, self made and caring."

"I am lucky to have found what I was looking for," Tejaswini adds, "a husband who is broad minded, progressive and has the ability to be honest with me. Someone who has grown up seeing women as equals."

Poojita of course is ensuring more men besides those in her own family see it that way, with her path-breaking documentaries. "It feels good that thanks to my research so many women have been able to enter fields once closed to them, and find self reliance. Minds are opening up today - the future looks bright," she says.

Amen to that!



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

RENUKA CHOWDHURY  
WITH POOJITA AND TEJASWINI

Iconic is the word that comes to mind when one mentions Kapil Dev, whose name will remain part of cricket history for eons to come. He comes out to greet us as we stand at his gate, and leads us into the well appointed home he shares with his wife Romi, daughter Amiya and a small contingent of dogs of various sizes and seniority. Amiya breezes in wearing a brilliant red kurta ensemble and the two settle down for the interview.

"I can never go to the market with Dad, or take him for a ride in the Metro which I want him to see," Amiya says. "But we go on drives instead."

"Once or twice a week, we go on a drive without a driver, so we can talk freely," Kapil Dev adds.

Kapil doesn't bat an eyelid when questioned about being an absentee father while his daughter, born after 16 years of marriage, was a child. "It was part and parcel of life," he says, "a public figure is not master of his time."

One way of making sure he spends time with his daughter is to take his family out on a holiday. "As long as I can remember, we have taken two holidays a year," he says, "and I have said no to taking a maid along when she was a baby, and carried her right through. We still go on holidays to where my wife and Amiya wish to go. They love London and Bangkok. For me though, my favourite place is home," he adds throwing a smile in Amiya's direction.

For the first few years of her life, Amiya thought her father was a famous golfer. "I retired before

she was born, you see," her father explains. Amiya adds, "Only when I was 7 or 8 I realised he was a cricketer, because my friends told me so, and because the school used him incessantly for its functions. Now even my friends have got used to him, and he is like any other Dad to them. The boys though get more self-conscious in his presence, and my teachers are full of awe about him, each has a story to tell."

Amiya admits to having no patience to watch a full match of her father's on You Tube, but has logged on to see some montage.

Fielding my question about his dreams for his daughter, Kapil Dev hopes she will be a good human being. "Education is important, but percentages do not matter to me. Education helps shape character and when kids learn good values, it makes me proud."

He felt pride when, after jumping a yellow light and being stopped by a policeman, his daughter insisted on the policeman cutting a *challan* and taking the fine. "The man recognised me and hesitated to fine me, but she insisted," Kapil says.

"I apologised to her, and to the policeman then," he says, making it clear that this maiden had bowled him over.

Amiya is as close to her mother. "She takes after her, is not good in sports at all," Kapil says without any regret in his voice. While Amiya "shares everything" with her mother, she and her father also can "talk about everything. It is an open connection," her father says.

The open connection, he believes will remain, though roles may change. "I will guide her till she is 21... then she will guide me. Already, at 17 she is telling me what to wear or not to wear," he says indulgently.

Kapil Dev has one grouse about his precious daughter, though. When Amiya tells me she loves dancing, her father chimes in quickly with, "But she won't dance with me!"



PHOTO CREDIT: DINISH KHANNA

KAPIL DEV  
WITH AMIYA

His voice, his compositions, his music has enthralled millions across the globe. Pandit Jasraj holds his place firmly as one of India's greats in the classical music field. His house is under renovation so he graciously agrees to be photographed in a Plan Board member's friend's house. Unerringly, he seats himself near a window, and the overcast sky welcomes him with a ray of sunlight, that the photographer makes capital of. As daughter Durga takes her position at his feet and they sing for a natural shot, magic uncurls. Eloquent enough to dispense with the need for an interview, but we must go on!

I am having a tough time as an interviewer. Pt. Jasraj is obviously a fond father. I see it in the way he looks at his daughter, I see the give and take of affection in every interchange between them. He has been her guru, indulgent where her mother has been strict, yet teaching her everything from music to being tech savvy.

But he will not say much about his daughter. He smiles when asked to talk about her. "I am her father, I cannot separate that when I talk about her," he says. Again that fond look that speaks volumes but cannot be captured on paper unless articulated.

Durga, on the other hand, sings her father's praises non-stop. Every question I ask him is a ball tossed into the air and caught by her. "I had the best childhood any child can have," she says. "I was blessed to be born in a family where creativity was everywhere." Durga's mother is the daughter of the legendary V. Shantaram, and Durga grew up with music and cinema as companions.

Of course her celebrity father travelled a lot, but when he came home, it was a celebration. "He

would play cricket with us, or table tennis on the terrace, and discipline would go out of the window. I would forget to do my homework, and miss the school bus...mother would be at her wit's end."

"We may not have had cars lined up outside the house, but we had a Zakir bhai dropping in on his way to the airport at 2 am, or a Lataji paying a surprise visit, C. Ramchandra coming across in his shorts...today I feel sad I cannot give this experience to the next generation!" Durga says.

Pt. Jasraj adds that he was so proud when his daughter, while a mere teenager sang, along with other children like Sadhana Sargam, in an Extended Play (EP) record that his son, Sharan, composed music for. "She could have taken to professional singing," he continues, "but the influence of her maternal grandfather was too strong. I could not get her out of it."

He looks proudly too as he listens to Durga enumerating her projects: Jalsa... the amalgamation of art and artistes of different streams, which reached out to 21 crore people in India, and Golden Voice, Golden Years,

which brought in the music of the greats in 51 compositions under one label. "It sold 10,000 units of CDs and cassettes in 20 days," Durga says, and Pt. Jasraj nods appreciatively.

The daughter's praise of her father's achievements in music is boundless... of the 'Allah Om' composition that he sang at Lahore during Ramzan, reducing his Muslim audience to tears; and his performance at the Golden Temple during the height of the Khalistan movement. " 'Music for unity and love' is his motto," she says. And perhaps nothing speaks of their closeness as much as what transpired after their falling out over her idea of creating a publicity blitz to celebrate 50 years of her father's professional singing. "I couldn't sleep after turning her egoistic idea down," Panditji says. "so at 4 am I walked out towards her room to say, do what you think is right...and she was coming towards mine with exactly the same thought in her mind, that she would do what I thought was right!"

Nothing more was needed to be said after that story.



PHOTO CREDIT: BIKRAMJIT BOSE

PANDIT JASRAJ  
WITH DURGA

Hidden away from the hustle bustle of the teeming metros, dancer Daksha Sheth and her family live a life dedicated to art. Their set up on the outskirts of Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala, attracts students and research scholars from across the seas. Trained in Kathak, Daksha is also known for her experiments in contemporising that and other dance forms, while daughter Isha Sharvani has won acclaim for her expertise in aerial performance.

"As a child, I danced on the tables at Delhi's Bengali Market," Isha says, adding that she grew up watching her mother's solo Kathak performances from the wings, and invariably ran on stage to join her when the bouquets were being handed out. "Yet my mother never ever told me I should take to dancing," she adds. "Sometimes, though, I would join in the classes she conducted for her students, if I was in the mood," she says.

More often, Isha and her brother would try freestyle dancing to Western classical music. Or, when the family moved from Delhi to Brindavan and Mathura and Daksha offered her dance worship at the temple, her daughter would join her, "but dancing freestyle. There was no structure to my dance education," Isha says. Yet, today they collaborate beautifully in the many dance ballets produced by their company.

Dressed in rare creations by the legendary Zandra Rhodes, mother and daughter are posing for the photographer while the rain beats a rhythm outside their studio. They could well be

peacocks celebrating the rain in their complete involvement with their movement, quite unmindful of the clicking of the camera.

"I was dancing even after Isha was conceived, so she already had the rhythm in her body," Daksha says. "I think when I stopped public performances, and used to offer my dance to Krishna, it inspired her to join me. The scene was magical... my husband on the flute or pakhawaj... it drew her into it. When she said she wanted to dance I told her, 'It's your decision, dance is very demanding, needs discipline! I put her on a three-month probation, but she never wavered. I never had to tell her to practise... in fact it was the reverse!'"

Daksha says she gave her daughter the freedom she had to fight hard for in her parental home. "I told my mother, 'I don't want a life like yours! My mother understood, but my father objected when I became a professional dancer. For my children, I decided to give them the best environment to grow as human beings. I gave them my trust and emotional security!'"

The children grew up imbibing the spirit of music and dance... "I missed home too much, and returned from the Rishi Valley School. I told my parents give me a year off. Let me dance seriously, no tra la la stuff, but warm up for 1½ hours then the actual dancing. They allowed me distance education, I completed my 12<sup>th</sup> and kept dancing too," Isha says.

"We kept our minds open," Daksha says, "I went to all music concerts... jazz, rock, hip hop as part of my learning... she too has the same thirst for knowledge. Her reading is prodigious, she has an incredible library, she loves philosophy and history, and her interpretations are a result of all this. Parents try to control too much... you cannot control a flower, only nurture it."

True professionals, mother and daughter change into yet another dance costume and pose in the pelting rain, so we can capture the verdant Kerala background. Free spirits indeed!



PHOTO CREDIT: BIKRAMJIT BOSE

DAKSHA SHETH  
WITH ISHA SHARVANI

The terrace of his Palace home we are sitting in is fanned by soft breezes. The Lake Palace gleams like a jewel on Lake Pichola. Arvind Singh Mewar or, Shriji, as he is fondly called, is quite at home and particularly happy at this time of the evening. This is when his family gathers to have dinner together. When they are in Udaipur, daughters Bhargavi and Padmaja, with their husbands, add to the joy, making the evening more special.

Lord of all he surveys, Shriji is a man content. A man who can sit back and enjoy the knowledge that his mission, of making HRH Group of Hotels a well run business, is completed! And knowing that his two daughters and the youngest, son Lakshyaraj, have helped make it happen, and will continue to tend it.

Shriji's ability to tailor traditional practices to modern needs is reflected in his attitude to his daughters. "I have realised a long time ago, that unlike other men, I carry no excess baggage. I do not view men and women differently where abilities are concerned," he says.

And so, when a teenaged Bhairavi expressed the view that she wished to study at a boarding school in London, he let her go. Despite the fact that it would be the first ever time a girl from a tradition bound family like his would be crossing the seas to live and study on her own. "Once I was convinced it was what she really wanted and not just a whim, I trusted her to conduct herself responsibly, and let her go. It was the same when, the younger one, Padmaja, wanted to go to the US for graduate studies. I did not want to deprive them of the exposure," he says.

Proud of his "two lovely, intelligent, pretty daughters" he admits to consulting them, independently and collectively, on everything. "And I am definitely more indulgent toward them, than to my son," he adds.

"It is something I learnt from my father: he would give my sisters 7 times the allowance I got, more than what he gave my mother or drew himself. It was his sense of fair play that created this mechanism, as once the daughter is married, he would not be able to spend on her. I have only continued what he started."

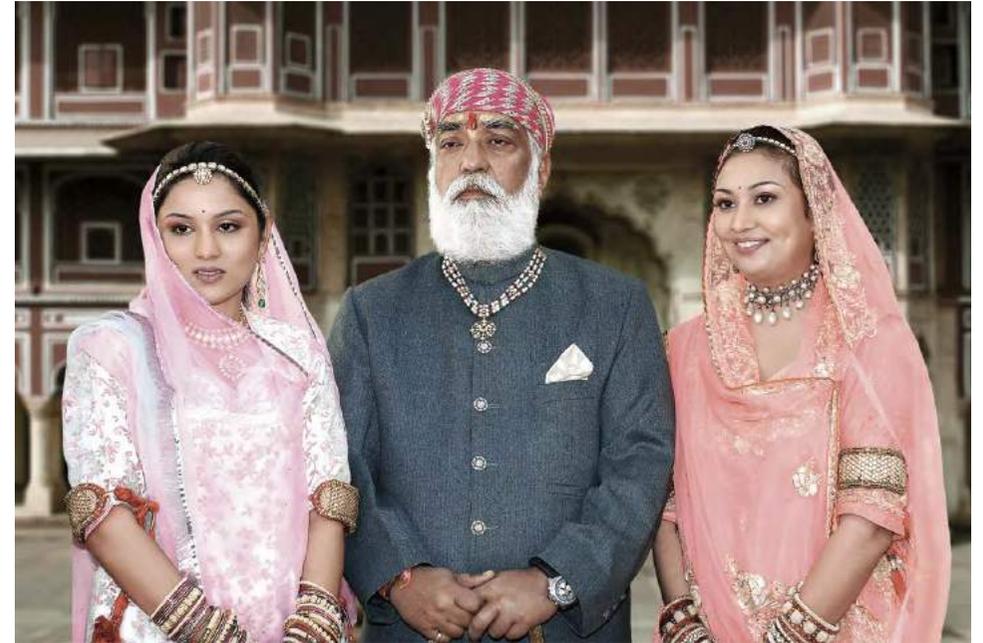
Shriji says he is a man in a hurry. In the interest of completing his mission, he gladly shares, even passes on, responsibility. "My daughters had the aptitude to take on responsibility and I nurtured it. Bhargavi was given charge of Jaisalmer and Gajner properties when these were started. Her duties included understanding everything from plumbing to layout and how old structures could be modified keeping in mind the capacity of load bearing pillars. She spent days in 50 degree heat, with one AC office room holding a 2x3' camp bed for her to sleep in. But she had the commitment and the perseverance to do it."

"Padmaja took on the refurbishment of Shiv Nivas and Fateh Prakash palaces... her potential lay there. Now that she is married and in the

US, my son Raj has taken over a lot of my responsibilities. But the girls are still consulted and do their bit, and remain very involved," he says.

His faith in his daughters' abilities comes from the fact that he encouraged them to drink deep at the fountain of education. It built confidence and strength at the core of their being.

At any rate, Shriji is clear that women have great inner strength. "I believe women have more *Shakti* in every aspect, and that is why *Shakti* is embodied as female in mythology. Men have courage and valour, but the multiplicity of wisdom women bring, as inheritors of one tradition and then establishers of a new line of progeny for a new family, makes them the real *Shakti*. Their impact is greater. Which is why, parents who downplay their daughters, do a lot of harm," he says, with finality.



ARVIND SINGH MEWAR  
WITH BHARGAVI AND PADMAJA

As Vice Chairperson of Kinetic Engineering, Sulajja Firodia Motwani takes care of matters financial and is also concerned with marketing issues.

One of four sisters, she believes education is the key to success. An example set by her mother, Jayashree Firodia, who holds a degree from the Harvard School of Medicine, and her grandmother, who won her BA degree, after a hunger strike against being relegated to household work, while growing up in Beed.

"All of us sisters excelled in studies," Sulajja says, "but I was yet different. I wanted to do everything... Gymnastics, Swimming, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, French..." "And she did it all well," mother Jayashree adds. "But she was always an active child, she did not let me eat for five months, while I was carrying her, kept kicking," she laughs, a twinkle lighting her eyes. "And she had four sets of uniforms, as against the two her sisters had, because she would get hers so dirty, they had to be washed incessantly," the mother adds.

Much of Sulajja's energy was channelled into her studies. "My grandpa encouraged me to study,

and to work. I completed my MBA in the US and worked there for four years before coming back to join Kinetic," Sulajja says. "Even as a student, if I was not attending a summer camp, or travelling and staying at dharmshalas, I would attend office during the summer vacations."

Her grandfather, who created the first gearless scooter to 'benefit society', gave her the dictum that one must 'do business for doing something for one's country.' "I keep it in mind," Sulajja says.

Mother Jayashree seems happy indeed that the daughter who gave her anxious moments by swinging too high on the backyard swing and

cutting her chin bad enough to need stitches, has sobered down to be a leader and mother in her own right.

Sulajja believes that the path to self esteem and achievement is through education. And all round development. Her own track record proves this amply.



PHOTO CREDIT: BIKRAMJIT BOSE

SULAJJA FIRODIA MOTWANI  
WITH JAYASHREE FIRODIA

Two sleepy cats watch through orange flecked eyes as Kajal's family take positions outside their home for the shoot. The traffic on the pipeline that runs just outside the line of hutments, and is the thoroughfare for its residents, is stopped temporarily while the camera clicks repeatedly, capturing Kajal and her parents. Her father who made a life here baking and selling *Pao* breads for the shops at suburban stations, came here 25 years ago from Bihar, with wife Tara and their son. Kajal was born in this house, and it is the place she calls home. Even as she dreams of other aspects to her life.

"My friends are all here, we grew up going to the nearest Kherwadi Municipal School together, playing *pakda pakdi* (catch catch) around these trees," says Kajal. She is dressed for the interview; a satin silk kurta in maroon with black panels, a dupatta and leggings to match, her eyes bright. Curious neighbours are quickly enlightened; she will be a star among them for sure. All because, she went to school!

We sit in the little space that is their living room; another room a level below is where the family sleeps and cooks. The floor is lined with linoleum that mimics tiles, a small table fan sends some breeze around.

Kajal was a good student, her mother vouches for it. "We wanted her to study, and get a job, stand on her own feet. I do not want her to depend on anyone. I can only sign my name. I want her to be much better," she adds frankly. "Even when it is time for her to marry, she will marry someone

who will let her work, so her study does not go waste," she adds.

Kajal's studies suffered a setback when thanks to domestic problems that included economic ones, she couldn't clear her 10<sup>th</sup> exams. But she is unfazed. "I will appear for the exam in the coming years," she says, "and join junior college for sure." Her attitude tells me that she knows her life will have its hurdles, but she has the determination to cross them without admitting defeat.

For now she attends private classes paying Rs. 400 a month, to get tuitions in English, Math, Science, and Geography, to prepare for the exams. "I am determined to pass," she says.

Sharing her own enthusiasm for education, she meets and counsels children who are drop outs from the families residing on the water pipeline to return to school and complete their education.

"After the have completed their basic education these children can then pursue higher education or vocational courses. Plan India and its partner NGOs working in Garibnagar slums of Bandra East, has empowered me to do this," she adds.

"We go back to our village in (what is now) Chattisgarh every year," Kajal says. "We have family there, some land, a nice house. But it is difficult, especially for men, to earn well there in the village. "Women work for 15 hours to earn 50 rupees a day," her mother adds. Already her son, who works as a driver with a company, is showing signs of lifting their status. "And I am sure Kajal will use her education well too," her mother adds looking at her daughter with a mix of hope and pride.

Kajal smiles back brightly, with a look that is eloquent. Nothing can really come in the way of that dream, it implies!



PHOTO CREDIT: VARUN MEHTA

KAJAL WITH TARA

From the time he breezed onto the screen in *Woh Saat Din* till the very present, Anil Kapoor has kept his special place in cinegoers' hearts. From the vulnerable romantic of 1942: *A Love Story* to the suave quizmaster of *Slumdog Millionaire*, he has played every role with aplomb. But it is his daredevil foray into the television world with the adaptation of *24* that has signaled clearly his free, no boundaries approach to his passion for the world of the moving image.

Walking close to his footsteps yet carving out their own imprints are daughters Rhea, who works with him in production, and Sonam who has donned the actor's mantle.

"Both Sonam and I admire our father's focus," Rhea Kapoor says. "Once he sets his mind on something, he completes it." "When he was just ten, he decided to be an actor, he ran away from home and did *Hamare Tumhare* when he was 14... the trend continues. With *24*, he has done something that has never been done before in Indian TV," she adds.

From her father, daughter Sonam finds in herself the confidence to break the norm, to take her career firmly in her own hands. "It is Dad's influence," Rhea explains. "She focuses on the script, and takes on directors exactly like he did. I work with Dad, and being the middle child, am very level headed, and that works for us," she adds.

Anil Kapoor on his part finds in his daughters different qualities that he treasures in each of

them. He finds their "innocence, honesty and love for the family, precious," and adds that he admires the fact that despite both of them being "modern and independent, they are still rooted in the family values."

Rhea admits though that the relationship the sisters share with their father is on different levels. "Sonam and my father are very alike, he is more protective of her perhaps because she is out alone in the world of films. They understand each other at a subliminal level," she says, adding, "I work with him, so with me, he is the boss, more matter of fact and we take decisions together. Of course I am always keen to know his opinion on logistics, and his creative take on things," she adds. "Actually my Mom and I are very similar," Rhea continues. "We have the same control freak tendencies. I get my shyness from her, and even sound like her."

Anil rues the fact that he missed out on his children's school years. "I missed out on a lot of things I should have been involved in," he says, "and at that time, my wife, their mother,

was almost like a single parent as I was so busy pursuing my career. Now when I look back, I feel I could have done both."

Yet he is nothing if not proud of his daughters, and has always believed in them. "I have given them the right kind of independence so they make their own decisions, and treated them as equals and as friends," he says, adding, "of course there were some rules they cannot cross, but they have always had the freedom to speak their mind without fearing anybody," he says.

Perhaps it was the fact that most days the family met for at least one meal together in the days; a fact that both father and daughters hold dear. "He's Dad to me," Rhea says, "not a film actor, in fact I have not watched most of his films. Sonam is the more dramatic personality, she is more tuned into his actor persona, but he is Dad first for both of us," she adds definitively.

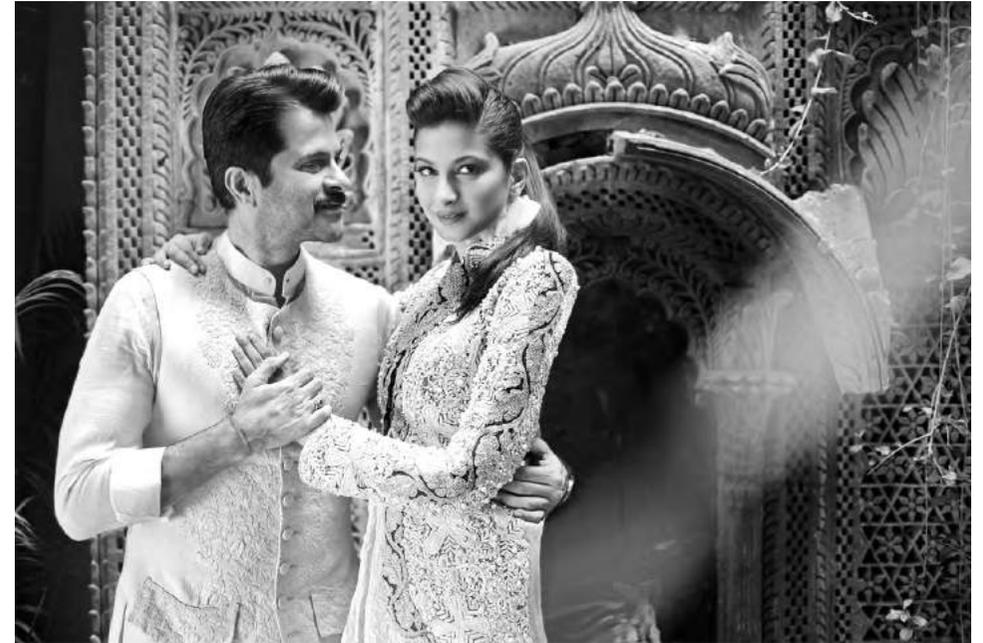


PHOTO CREDIT: HELLO MAGAZINE

ANIL KAPOOR  
WITH RHEA

India's hope for a gold in Boxing at the next Olympics, Padma Bhushan Mary Kom is Manipur's pride and has created a surge of interest among the young in boxing and related sports.

She makes time for the shoot as well as the interview between quick visits to tend to her three-month-old son whenever he frets for her. Her many trophies stand half hidden in a cupboard in the room we are in, a makeshift visitor's room, in her new house still under construction. Mary Kom is unassuming and friendly as she shares her story.

She has chased a dream and turned it into reality. Crossed innumerable hurdles, fought gender bias, and lifted herself and her family out of poverty to bring glory to herself and her country. But Mary Kom takes it all in her stride. Her story, she says is far from complete.

"I had few friends among girls while growing up," she says, "they were all older or younger. So I played football with boys my age, and also developed an interest in martial arts. I taught myself."

When she felt her village, Kangathei, too small for her, she moved to Imphal where after a bout with Athletics, she took to Boxing. "Here too I had only boys to box with, and it made it easier for me later, I think," she says, laughter lighting her eyes. It was a man's sport, she was 17, old by any standard to start learning, but she kept at it, practising even between the morning-evening two-hour-long class sessions. Of course she dared not tell her parents about her passion; they learnt of it only when they saw her name and photograph in the newspaper as the State Champion.

"I had a lot of convincing to do, my father forbade me to continue. I had to explain it was not like the professional boxing he saw on TV or in movies: this was with strict rules."

Chasing her dream, with little extra nutrition or financial help, Mary Kom struggled for 12 years, winning World Championships repeatedly to stay in the eye of the Olympic selection committee. And when she finally competed for the qualifier, it was in the 51 kg category, as her own 48 kg category is not a part of the Olympic Games.

Her win at the London Olympics of a first ever bronze for Women's Boxing has made her a star, and won her a place in history. It has also got her land a new house, and the respect of her family and State. Changing the jeers based on gender bias into applause.

But Mary Kom has new dreams. "I want to win the gold," she says, and is raring to start training. "The doctor advised a year's rest after my Caesarean section delivery, but I am planning to start training by November," she says.

She has not been idle in between. Though she is on the police rolls and carries the honorary designation of Superintendent of Police with all benefits, she believes in doing her share of household chores. And when the road to her home, named in her honour, was riddled with potholes by rain, Mary stepped out to smartly fill the pits herself.

"I never completed my studies, there was no time from boxing," she admits, "but I am studying for BA exams now. Education is so important for everyone in our country." More significant is the fact that her parents are with her now, beaming with pride every time they see their star daughter.

Her sons, just back from school, join her for a shot and she tells them to smile, and to say thank you once the shot is taken. They quickly obey.

I am sure it's because at no cost do they want to risk being boxed in the ears by their mother!



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

MARY KOM  
WITH TONPA AND AKHAM KOM

Whether it is writing poems that take the shape of songs, or screenplays; whether he is creating advertisements that linger in the memory, Prasoon Joshi is known to bring to his task a certain unique quality that holds the scent of excellence. We sit in his study that bears witness to his love of Hindi poetry, and music... a collection of hand painted portraits of Hindi poets hangs on one wall, a portrait of Bhimsen Joshi made from a spool of cassette tape hangs on another. And Prasoon talks about another love in his life... his daughter.

"I can forget everything else when I jam with her, she brings me calm and happiness," says Prasoos Joshi when I ask him what it means to have a daughter. He has repeatedly gone on record stating that his daughter is now his primary inspiration, though his sisters have played that role too in the past.

"We grew up in the mountains, we had each others' company a lot," he says of growing up playing with his sisters' dolls and sharing his cricket matches with them. "I was very fond of them," he adds, his eyes taking on a faraway light.

When summer came the family would repair to Almora, where the grandmother lived, and the children would go on long walks, led by Prasoos. "Every walk led to a temple, as Almora is full of Bhairav temples, and sometimes one of my sisters would grumble that she was tired as I had dragged her out too far, and insist I carry her back. I would," he adds matter-of-factly.

I even wrote poems about my sisters... "*Behan aksar tum se badli hoti hai umar main chahne chotti hat par ek bada sa ehsas lekha khadi hoti hai,*" he quotes.

About daughter Aishaanya being an inspiration he says that when Aamir Khan asked him to write children's songs in *Taare Zameen Par*, he looked closely at his daughter... her hands and feet and her movements, her emotions, and used similes to transcreate his observations as poems.

"Children have vivid imaginations, only a child can paint a sky green... we forget it," he says. So he plays word games with his daughter and her free flowing responses often become a song.

Prasoos believes girls are super observant. That it is Nature's way of preparing them for a caring adulthood. "Aishaanya knows at once if I am upset, she is very observant," he says.

Despite his crazy hours, which span his job as CEO of an advertising agency and his passion as song writer, he finds he comes back to spend time with his 'anchor'. "I know she sleeps at a particular time, so I work around it, and if I need to go jamming with Loy, I go after she sleeps," he says.

He hopes the upbringing his daughter is privy to, with a grounding in Eastern philosophy will help her find meaning in her life, and aid her in

discovering her own truth. For now he is content that Aishaanya is a well rounded student and enjoys Math as much as she does the languages, with a special ability to use just the right phrase or word in her speech. "She does need to work more seriously on her reading and writing... her involvement with the iPad is a block," he says. "I am hoping to change that."

But she does give him moments of great fatherly pride... as when she composes tunes on the piano, to which he writes the words.

"*Hum ne choo liya aasmaan*. It was a variation of our school song and we performed it in my school," Aishaanya says, beaming. And the light of her smile reflects off Prasoos's eyes, as his gaze lingers fondly on his daughter.



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

PRASOON JOSHI WITH AISHAANYA

Writer, trailblazing editor, columnist, social commentator, wife, mother... Shobhaa De has made her various persona public through her books and columns. We see her in this space as a mother around whom the daughters gather, leaving behind their own schedules, to pose in her sprawling living room. The setting sun creates a vivid backdrop to the scene of four well coordinated women posing in black for the photographer.

"My daughters grew up seeing their parents working really hard," says Shobhaa. "It is a carry over from my own youth, where we lived a modest life, shared the family car among six people, and I learnt to value every minute and every paisa I spent. Also, sharing meal times was very important, as it is in our home today."

Shobhaa admits that being the youngest in her family gave her quite a few privileges, but her independent nature made it necessary to be disciplined. It was the best way to prove that her choices were right for her. "Since my own individuality was respected when I was a young girl, there was no question of not respecting the individuality of my daughters," she says adding that every human being has the right to enjoy the freedom of choice. However she adds that it is a parent's responsibility to help children make informed decisions. "Recognising differences and nurturing passions is again something that helps children realise their own potential," she says. "My parents didn't force me to 'become' anything. I found my own calling. As have my daughters."

The daughters, Avantika, Anandita and Arundhati are very clearly their own people. Yet, one cannot but see some of their mother reflected in each of them.

They try to pinpoint one another's most prominent qualities... laughing as they do so. After some bantering and discussion the consensus (well almost), is that Avantika is the quiet, balanced one, Arundhati the best time manager who balances work times with living life to the full, and Anandita, the 'spiritual one'. "Thank God they are not my mirror images," Shobhaa exclaims, but all three daughters swear they are much inspired by their mother's discipline, and emulate it in their own lives. "She has taught us to be grounded, and humble. Most of all, to be practical," Anandita adds.

"Our mother is very today, she relates to each of us, dad is more old school," Anandita says. "She works out of home, so stays keyed in into all our lives," Avantika says "sometimes I think it is to a degree that is not healthy," but Shobhaa dilutes that by saying it is only because in the times we live in, she worries incessantly for the safety of her girls.

"We do have fun together, all share a passion for beauty in all its forms. Travel, Food, Music, Dance, Art, Design, Movies, Jewellery (junk included). We share a similar sense of humour. We balance out each other's neuroses and hang ups. We form a decent ensemble cast in the theatre of life. And the Circle of Trust that surrounds us, is what I value above all else," Shobhaa says.

Avantika, who is expecting her second baby puts the lid on her mother's statement when she says, "My daughter is the best thing that happened to me, I am hoping for another little girl so she can enjoy what I did. I hope to pass on what I have learnt from my mother!"

Shobhaa has the last word though, "I am, because they are! Daughters are the wealth of any family. They are my emotional support system. My comfort zone. My allies. My severest critics. My censor board! Life would have been utterly dull and colourless without my girls. I thank God for this precious gift every day of my life. Even when they are driving me crazy!"

Wow!



PHOTO CREDIT: BIKRAMJIT BOSE

SHOBHAA DE  
WITH AVANTIKA, ANANDITA AND ARUNDHATI

Determined not to be just an industrialist's wife, Sangita Jindal takes a leading role in the community service initiatives of JSW. She also oversees the art magazine, Art India and has steered it to a position of leadership in its genre. Mother of two daughters and a son, Sangita believes any child who gets the right chances can succeed in life. And is happy she got hers, even as she was growing up.

"My uncles and aunts would buy jewellery, my mother would buy art," Sangita Jindal says with a dramatic flourish. "My mother was very different. She started a boutique, Sonali, along with Ritu Kumar; it was possibly the first, at that time. She was also very close to Prof. Lal and sponsored many of his cloth bound books." Her mother, Urmila Kanoria, Sangita says, "was not part of the social clique, she had many Bengali friends, and loved poetry and song. She was completely out of the box. I am who I am because of her," she adds.

"I grew up in a well off family, we lived the luxurious life, but we were not materialistic in our tastes." Though sporty, Sangita was also idealistic, influenced greatly by the Bhadrak and their love of the arts. Her mother instilled the spirit of independence and enterprise in her, through the growing up years.

"I got married early (at 20), and as my husband's family was in Hissar in Haryana, I moved there. For some years I followed the norm of staying at home, because I remembered what my

mother had told me. That if one wants to create change, one must do it not by challenging or confrontation but by convincing. My husband's family were hardworking farmers, but my artistic sensibilities changed them sofly to see my point of view too."

"My mother's example inspired me. She had faced much adversity with guts, always with a smile... she enjoyed the better things in life because she chose not to let anything get her down. I used that to change my life. I got married in the first year of college, and always felt the loss of my education, so I completed my graduation after that."

When the Jindals moved to Mumbai with growing prosperity, Sangita found ways to use her talents. "I delved into the art and publishing world, having seen it all while growing up. It was easy."

Education, Sangita believes, is the key to financial independence, and every girl should get the right to it. "My mind told me my daughters

should be financially independent, and no lesser than any child, regardless of gender." Tarini and Tanvi have lived up to their mother's dream. Tarini, confident and independent thinking started Muse, a lifestyle store of its kind in Mumbai. And Tanvi is graduating from NY University. "In my daughters I see myself in a new avatar," Sangita says, "this generation has the wherewithal to fulfil its dreams, and I am proud I empowered that."

"I try to help as many women as I can to financial independence," Sangita says of her other ideal. "I want them to stop having to ask money and permission for everything from the men... Fathers, husbands, sons. We provide education in villages, learning centres, clean toilets, even sanitary napkins at Rs. 3 each. Learning and education is empowerment. It changes the lives of communities," she says as we end the interview.



SANGITA JINDAL  
WITH TARINI AND TANVI

Rana Kapoor welcomes us to his duplex home on the top floor where the spacious hall has paintings hung on every wall, vying for space with wall and table pieces in silver relief. The Gods do look down kindly on him, from every available space. As he settles down for the shoot, surrounded by his three daughters and his wife, the expression on this very successful, intrepid banking entrepreneur's face seems to ask, What more can any man want?

Truly, Rana Kapoor is a man content. "Each of my daughters brought me luck," he says. "With my first born, Radha, came my first promotion; when my second, Raakhe followed. I went for an overseas assignment to South East Asia." He turns to look at his youngest, Roshini and says, "when she was born, I got an opportunity to shift to Bombay, and that changed my life completely."

Being surrounded by women all his life: his mother, an elder sister, and his own family of four, he says has taught him enough about the love and respect women bring as nurturing beings. "Bindu and I on our part do our bit to ensure our daughters are given full opportunity for growth and self expression," he says.

While Bindu Kapoor, his wife who is often mistaken for their elder sister, steps beyond being a friend to her daughters and inculcates values of good conduct and behaviour in

them, the father plays a role in catalysing their ambitions. "Even when he comes home late at night, he will ask every detail of how the girls have been, what they have achieved that day..." Bindu says.

Rana Kapoor admits that life was lonelier when both his daughters decided to pursue their educational dreams in colleges overseas. "But they came back the richer for it, and ready to take off on their chosen career paths," he says.

Radha explains then that she has launched the Indian School of Design and Innovation in Mumbai, in collaboration with her alma mater, Parsons. As its Director, she oversees every aspect, including course curricula and faculty appointments. Raakhe, who completed Entrepreneurial Management at Wharton has plans of following her father and finding her own niche as a financial entrepreneur. Roshini has yet

to complete her study of Business Management at the University of Warwick, where she is in the second year. All three sisters are also launching the "The Three Sisters' Foundation" to help lesser privileged girls. Their father will guide them in this.

"Work is work, and dedicated as I am to it, I miss out on many beautiful moments," Rana Kapoor says. "He does try and make the time to be with us," Radha says in quick defence. "Two days ago, we spent an entire evening together. We watched a play and followed it up with dinner. It was a royal treat," her father says.

"These girls are an inspiration for me... They teach me calm. I am a restless, impatient person, they communicate their calm to me and it helps me handle stress wonderfully!"



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

RANA AND BINDU KAPOOR  
WITH RADHA, RAAKHE AND ROSHINI

She is the youthful but professional face of Facebook in India, but her looks belie her track record. In her life before Facebook India, Kirthiga Reddy has led a global team located across five countries for Phoenix Technologies, and worked with Motorola across two continents. Holder of an MBA from Stanford University, and a MSc in Computer Engineering from Syracuse University, she has used her learnings in her "dream job" as Director of Online Operations and Head of Office, India, Facebook to grow the users to a staggering number of millions. We Like. She takes time from her basketball game with her two girls to talk about them. We like some more!

Before she had her first baby, Kirthiga Reddy and her husband discussed how many children they would have. "We kept veering between one and two. Though I wanted two at least, he said, let us have the first one, then decide," she says.

When her first child, Ashna was born, Kirthiga Reddy was delighted. Her husband more so. "Within a week of his daughter's birth he said, 'Let's have a second, and when I was expecting again, he said, 'I hope it is another girl,'" she says. "Ariya completed our family; my happiest moment was when she was born."

Kirthiga herself is one of two sisters. Her father was a first born son who came many years after his parents' marriage, and when Kirthiga's elder sister was born there was a sense of disappointment. "When I followed born there was dismay... my grandpa would not even come to the hospital," Kirthiga says. "My father however, told my grandmother, 'Even if there is to be a third child, I want a girl...I shall name her Kanchana', he had already thought up a name," Kirthiga says laughing.

She sees her own relationship with her sister echoed in that between her children. "They fight with each other, but they do love each other very much," she says, "and Ariya, who is listening hotly denies her love for her sister. Disregarding the murmured denial, Kirthiga continues, "My sister and I fought too, only as we grew older did we become best of friends."

"There is much talk of gender diversity in the workplace, but I believe attitudes are formed long before, and I am guiding my children accordingly," she says explaining that she did not bat an eye when Ariya wanted Spiderman and Batman cakes for her birthday. "The cake shop kept thinking she was a boy," she laughs adding that she was surprised when her daughter asked her if she should also order a Barbie cake so her friends would not laugh at her. "She was only 3, but it was an indicator of how societal peer pressure operates," she says.

Kirthiga finds great joy in the fact that her husband, Dev, has been the complete Dad "from day one". "He does as much for the girls as I do. He takes complete charge of their home work."

On her part, she involves the girls in community service. Putting in 40 hours shared between old age homes, orphanages, social media consulting and such. But when it is plays, movies and traveling, the family operates as a single unit.

"In Hyderabad, (where they lived till very recently) we were a social group with 5 families who had children of the same age, and we socialised a lot, but now I have to make new friends. I get my energy from them, I get tired juggling my roles, but part of the 'Why we do it' is for them, and they are part of the 'How we do it'" The girls also listen to her talks once she has written them out, and comment on the interest quotient. "I take my speeches to them, for dry runs, and value their inputs," she says.

Both girls, like their parents, are multi talented. They play badminton and basketball, and are good at studies. And both want to also take up journalism. "In them, I see my tomorrows," Kirthiga says.

Tick 'Like'... to that too.



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

KIRTHIGA REDDY  
WITH ASHNA AND ARIYA

Her parents, Srinivas and Nagamani left their village, where they were working on agriculture, to seek work in the city. For 20 years, they have lived in the slum they occupy in Hyderabad. Times have improved, and now they have a *pucca* one room space, with steel utensils and a bed, but they still eke out their living as daily wage earners, who live from one day to the next but hope of a better life lives on, in their daughter, Sasikala and their younger child, son Shiva.

"We wanted a daughter as our first born," Srinivas says. "I think it is good to have a daughter first. And we were sure we wanted to send her to school, and educate her."

Sasikala's story is one of quiet courage and hope. Though a keen student, it looked as if destiny would push her out of school. Her mother could not work because of ill health following an operation for appendicitis, and her father's earnings were barely enough. An extra hand would help. "I almost dropped out. But my father was adamant, he said, let her continue," Sasikala says.

Along with her studies, Sasikala is a peer educator. Her task as a peer educator is to get dropouts to come back to school, to take their exams and qualify for further studies or vocational training. Her own experience and the emotions that she must have experienced when her studies were threatened must empower her arguments, as she makes her case for education to those she counsels.

"It is not easy being a peer educator," she says, contradicting my thought. "Parents and children don't listen easily. I have spoken to many, and at least three, a girl and two boys joined studies again, completed their 10<sup>th</sup> and are in Inter college. My mission is to develop interest in education among poor children and encourage Anganwadi children to join school."

Plan India, sponsored Sasikala's brother, and also indirectly helped her to complete her schooling and Inter college. But Sasikala's dreams reach further.

"I am doing my B.Com now. I also work part time. I want to do my MBA and find a job so I can help my parents. They have struggled to help me reach this far," she says, adding, "Even if I marry, I will make it clear that my parents are important to me, just as his (my husband's) parents are to him."

Hoping to realise her dream of inspiring other girls like herself, Sasikala launched and leads a youth group. "At Genius Group we try to create awareness about clean surroundings, education and slum development." It is tough going though, but she soldiers on.

Hoping to continue her journey in education, Sasikala also applied for a B.Ed training course. "I want to do B.Ed, as I enjoy teaching," she says. "But my rank is low. So I don't know if I will get a chance to join. If I don't, I will continue my B.Com. I will do what I can to make my parents happy and proud."

The look on her father's face, tells us, he already is proud of his daughter.



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

SASIKALA WITH NAGAMANI AND SRINIVAS

She has won more gold medals than she can remember, but it is the bronze that she thinks most fondly of, as it made her the first Indian woman to win a medal in Badminton at the Olympics. Her quest for the Olympic gold spurs her now, and her determination could well turn her dream into reality. Icon, sports star, honorary employee with BPL, Saina Nehwal is also the sun around which her family revolves as is evident from what her father, Harvir Singh shares with me in a long and exhaustive interview.

"Her mother used to play badminton and continued to do so even when she was 5 months pregnant with Saina, perhaps that is where my daughter got her talent from," Harvir Singh says, with utmost seriousness. Mother Usha Rani adds, "She is a dedicated learner; she believes in me and that I will guide her for badminton tips. She listens to me and applies what I give as advice in her game. She does it even though she is trained by international coaches like Gopi Chand. Her trust in me is wonderful."

Saina took up sports when the family moved to Hyderabad from Hissar when her father, a scientist with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research was posted there. "Saina was in class 4 at the Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, and though she was a good student, she could not speak Telugu and had no friends. I put her in karate class so she could mix more freely and make some friends," he explains. Saina won a brown belt in karate, but when her teacher said she had to let a motor cycle ride across her stomach, she stopped going to class. Luck and a chance visit to the Lal Bahadur Shastri Stadium where she was noticed by Dronacharya Award winner S.M. Arif got her into training in Badminton... and Saina was soon, well on her path to creating history. "We as parents allowed her to

excel in sports and she proved an excellent player of badminton. She continued her studies after that and passed the high school in first division," Usha Rani says.

"Since then she has no time for anything else," her father says. "We were happy when our two girls were born, but now we have enough and more reason to be so proud too," he adds. He speaks of her quiet confidence in her abilities. "Yet when she loses, it destroys her spirit," he says, telling me of the time when she lost in the French Open. "We had two more days, and could have explored Paris, but she said, 'change the ticket, let us go back,' so I did just that. She came back and started practice in earnest immediately," he adds.

Life has changed for the family completely after the Olympic bronze. She is rich, her father says, has commercial property as well as houses gifted to her by the governments of three states. She has cash endowments and then there are the endorsements.

"It keeps me completely occupied, I find I have no time for anything but managing her affairs and her investments. I have to pay her service taxes, advance tax etc every few months... She has no idea of what she is earning or where the money

is invested, all she worries about is her practice and her matches. Even the endorsements and the shoots and celebrity appearances she has to make now irritate her, but she does it as a duty," he says. "The M.P. government wants to gift her 50 lakhs in person, and she can't find the time to go to Bhopal," he explains. Incidentally Saina is one of the country's highest tax payers, and her father says every paisa is in the bank, ready for scrutiny, should such an occasion arise.

Of the six cars, one a BMW gifted to her, another bought by her, she only drives the one she paid for. "It is a white car, and she likes the colour. The other BMW, in black, she will not even sit in, because it is black. She also drives her silver Honda city, and maintains both cars herself," he says. The family has no time for holidays, and Saina's best companion is her Spitz, Chop Suey.

Of his daughter's success, Singh says, he is elated. "I was only a gazetted officer, I never dreamt I would drive my own car, I used a scooter while she was growing up. I get Rs. 60,000 as pension now. But I am happy being full time manager to my daughter, there is no ego involved in that."



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

SAINA NEHWAL  
WITH USHA RANI

Aparna Sen is practically India's first woman director who has written and made films that cross the barrier between art and popular cinema. Accomplished actor, editor, and writer, she has also shaped the psyches of her two daughters. Daughter Konkona, very much her mother's daughter, has blazed her own trail in Mumbai, even as she holds her own in Bengali cinema. Nothing brings out the closeness of mother and daughter as clearly as the fact that they both turn up with almost similar saris for the shoot! And carry with them an air of practised, quiet professionalism.

"There was never a generation gap between me and my parents," says Aparna Sen. "We were friends till the day they died."

She is not so sure of her own relationship with her daughters. "My elder one, Dona, is a rebel," she says. "But Konkona has always been very close. In fact she was quite clingy till I forcibly sent her away to Delhi to study at St. Stephen's."

Aparna is full of stories about her two girls. "My marriages did not quite work out, so I was practically a single parent to both," she says. The stories include Dona watching her from her dressing table, legs dangling, as she applied or took off makeup and being punished for sawing off the brand new coffee table with her brand new carpentry set. They include Konkona, just 10, walking around the airport in Moscow drawing a tap and signaling drinking, to ask for water; while her mother sat helpless, armed only with languages the Russians could not understand.

"I realised that this child thought out of the box, and decided I did not want her to be boxed in

with formal education and instead wanted her to learn," her mother adds about Konkona, "but Dona, on the other hand advocated a formal education and degree."

Aparna took a cue from her own upbringing. "My father was extremely liberal. He also started the first Calcutta film society along with Satyajit Ray. My parents would sing Tagore songs... I lived in a charmed circle of art. My parents included me in all decisions concerning me, as it was my life, they said. And though I married very young against their wishes they never gave up on me."

"My biggest influence has been my mother," Konkona says, adding, "I admire the strength she has, the conviction to live life on her terms. It is a wonderful experience for a girl growing up to be around someone like her." Konkona believes her mother has given her the courage to be true to herself. "I have the strength not to seek the approval or acceptance of others for my decisions; if one does that, one may not make the right choice, or choose what is the truest choice

for oneself," she explains. "It is the most valuable gift a mother can give her daughter."

As a child, Konkona was not allowed to watch television. "No Ramayan for her, because then her Sita would be the same as everybody else's. I wanted her imagination to flower, I wanted her to read the Ramayan story and create her own version of Sita from it," her mother says. "And yet, she grew up to be a film buff!"

Thinking for herself is one of the things Konkona is known for in Bollywood, choosing films that are "organic with my lifestyle," and hoping now that she is a mother too, the industry she works in, will still view her as an actor and not someone who can only do motherly roles.

Though I believe there is little chance of anything stopping Konkona. Even if that does happen, she will, taking another page out of her mother's book, go on to blazing her own trail. And surprise everybody!



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI  
LOCATION COURTESY: TAJ GROUP OF HOTELS

APARNA SEN  
WITH KONKONA SEN SHARMA

It is a bit strange to single him out... one has got so used to saying the three names as one: Shankar-Ehsan-Loy. But Loy Mendonsa is as much an individual as he is part of the group, and brings in his brand of musical experience into what the trio create. Little wonder, daughter Alyssa has decided to follow in her father's footsteps. As they share the story of their musical journeys, the creative space they occupy between them is almost electric. And the energy lies in the fact that they are alike, yet different.

Like her father, Alyssa has always been surrounded by music. Loy grew up listening to family symphonies: the harmonica played by his dad, his mother at the keyboard and a host of instruments including the piano and the accordion played by his uncles. Alyssa had much of this and of course her own father's music, as often played at home as it came drifting over the air waves.

If Loy started with Ebony, a band that grew so popular in Delhi that it got him into composing for TV, including the theme for 'The World This Week', Siddhartha Basu's Quiz show and Fauji, which introduced Shah Rukh, and hooked up with his two musical partners after moving to Mumbai, Alyssa has, at 23, her fair share of success too.

Unlike her father though, her talent took time to take the stage. "As a child, singing was very secretive, something deep down inside," she

says, "I sang all the time, secretly because all princesses in stories sing, and can then talk to animals," she adds. "So in the first standard, when I went to Dad and said I want to take part in the singing competition, he turned from the piano he was playing and said, 'How can you, I have never heard you sing.'" Alyssa sang for him then and "her voice was 'huge,'" making her father exclaim in wonder 'Where did that come from?'

Realising she had aptitude and wishing her to make the most of it, Loy set her firmly on the path of training. Alyssa has trained in Carnatic and Western classical, and listens to every kind of music to keep her ear tuned to melody.

"I tell her repeatedly it is a long, hard journey, and she must get used to it, and stay rooted," the father says, while the daughter nods in agreement. "She has to rehearse, I cannot do it for her; I am a resource person, a blessing

and guiding force," Loy adds. Aiding him in nurturing Alyssa's talent is her mother, who "gave up everything she could do, which included music, fashion, hotel management, just to be at home for us."

"She writes music intuitively, and has sung for three of our films, *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, *Patiala House* and *Kartik Calling Kartik*," Loy says proudly. Alyssa has also sung for a Tamil film, learning the enunciation as she went along. "Her studies have gone hand in hand with her music. Now it is for her to forge her path ahead," Loy says.

They are connected, despite their different tastes in music. "I point her in directions she should listen in, to be able to develop her own style," Loy adds.

Which is the best thing a parent can do!



PHOTO CREDIT: BIKRAMJIT BOSE

LOY MENDONSA  
WITH ALYSSA

She has a string of amazing performances in films like *Monsoon Wedding*, *Kal Ho Na Ho*, and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, but it is as a director of stage plays that Lillete Dubey comes into her own. Her most successful directorial venture, *'Dance Like a Man'* written by Mahesh Dattani has notched up 425 shows across the world including Broadway, and is still counting. Her passion for acting is shared by her family. Of whom Lillete speaks with candour and frankness.

Lillete says she is the sum total of the experiences her parents exposed her to, in her youth. "My father was a Renaissance man; he had a 360 degree view of life. He exposed me to all his varied passions, to classical music at 5, to painters... I could tell who Matisse was at 12. He was very strict about our dos and don'ts, but very liberal in his approach to our informal education," she explains. "My mother came from a long line of very beautiful women, she practically glowed. But no one made a big deal about it, beauty was not an accomplishment, it was a matter of genes. What one did with life was important and open to applause."

Lillete admits that though very fond of her mother, she did not appreciate her enough. "Yet she had been fiercely independent, she swam, played tennis, and as a Captain in the Army would go off to work in the staff car wearing her olive green uniform, hair piled high. There was nothing strange in her mother going to work," Lillete says, and "I did not really think of her as my role model, but I have imbibed so much from her, all the same."

On her part, Lillete expects her daughters to stay connected. "I have given them freedom in many ways," she says, "I don't stress on marriage. I wanted them to grow, find their passion, be fearless. When Neha realised theatre was not her oeuvre and switched to psycho-therapy which she enjoys thoroughly, I told her it was important once in a while to fail, and find," she says.

Yet there have been times the free rein backfired... as when Neha had her big fight with her very first boyfriend. "He stormed out of the house, she was crying...! I tried to talk to her, she shut me out, so I went to my room. Later, she came storming into my room crying, 'how can you be so cool, you don't care...' You can't always win at parenting," Lillete says wryly. Yet it seems the connection with her diversely talented daughters is strong.

"Ira takes care of all production hassles, ties up loose ends beautifully. I can depend on her emotionally and otherwise," Lillete says.

She also narrates the story of the time she had to be away in Canada while her mother was sinking slowly away. "I had been with her, she was gravely sick, then she improved, and I had to leave for Canada. Suddenly, her health deteriorated, and I was alone in a hotel room, in another time zone, helpless. My daughter, Neha, would call and give the phone to my mother, and she did this everyday for as long as my mother could speak on the phone. I felt I was there. And almost every few hours she would give me an update. It kept me from depression and despair," she says. "In such ways my girls are my strength," Lillete adds. "I can discuss my triumphs and sadnesses, I can share every emotion, and they offer support and companionship. I can say without hesitation, as I have many times before when I am asked which is my best work to date, that my daughters are my best production," she says with finality.

Applause for that statement!



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

LILLETE DUBEY  
WITH IRA

Actively involved in the affairs of the very successful Phoenix Mills Malls in Mumbai, Gayatri Ruia is elbow deep in furnishing fabrics when I visit her in her eighth floor office for the interview. As we sit in the posh director's lounge that occupies space in the newly launched Palladium Hotel, Gayatri talks about growing up as a single child and being a woman in an enterprising family setup.

She was almost 12 when the question of gender difference first presented itself to her. "As I watched the boys among my cousins overtaking me in height and growing taller and stronger and outrunning me, I realised that males had some distinct advantages," she says.

Till that time, Gayatri did not realise that in many other homes, there were distinct differences in the ways girls and boys were viewed and treated. "I was an adopted child. My mother was in the education space and naturally also taught all the girls in the family, which is possibly why she wanted a girl child. So I was a chosen child, and knew it. It made me happy."

Through her growing years Gayatri says, she never heard the phrase 'only boys do that'. After completing her studies at Villa Theresa, which was opposite where she lived, she went to Xaviers and then to SNDT University, Juhu, to study Interior Design and finished off with a year of studying the subject at Pennsylvania University.

She took her freedom to explore her creative learnings with her to her married home, and after launching a label in her own name which sold successfully at Ensemble and Melange, as well as in Calcutta, she moved on to launching Mogra at Phoenix Mills. One thing led to another, and she could apply her learnings to all aspects of the Palladium Mall, as well as the hotel property.

When her daughters were born, Gayatri embodied in them her hope for them to be strong, independent women. "I named them Sharanya and Tarini," she says, "they are *Durga's* names. Sharanya signifies shelter, and Tarini the way forward. Both names signify the energy of the Goddess."

"I think women need to embody *Shakti*," she adds. "A lot of my children's growing up is an extension of what I experienced." She adds that beyond material privileges, it is the freedom to make choices as a girl and as a married

woman, that really matters. "It has given me contentment," she says, of her own freedom. "I would have done a good job as a mom, if I give them the life I have had."

Her daughters are taking the cue from their mother, quite clearly. Sharanya is sure she wants to be a CEO and is also a good writer. Tarini is still seeking her vocation but veers towards teaching. They seem to be living up to their names!

Gayatri herself is involved in rural help programmes, and among them is one that helps educate the very poor till the 12<sup>th</sup> standard and settle them into vocational training programmes after that. "Spiritual, academic and emotional counseling is provided so the deprived can find the *shakti* to make their own way in life," she says.

"Every girl and woman has a right to that!"



PHOTO CREDIT: VARUN MEHTA

GAYATRI RUIA  
WITH SHARANYA AND TARINI

Arti became a Kirloskar at 21, even though her family was still showing her other prospective matches. "Atul used to come home and they liked him, but they were worried because Maharashtrians do not usually marry outside the community and they did not want me to get hurt. However Atul proved them wrong and we got married," she says admitting that her parental family was progressive but yet tied down to some typically old ideas.

"During my first pregnancy, there was pressure to have a boy. I would often hear 'hope it's a boy' statements from friends and relatives," she says. But Atul's grandma and his mother were strong women with a sense of pride, and I took my cue from them.

Arti has brought up her two daughters with the same pride-never stopping them from doing what they wanted. "When Gauri (now 30) wanted to study overseas, I let her go... She was admitted to the United World College in Singapore. She then heard of Phillips Academy (a boarding school) near Boston and was so enamoured with the school that she would fall asleep reading the brochure every night, and knew it by heart even before she applied and got in. Education was the key to meeting her intellectual needs and there was no question of compromise."

Gauri went on to college at Carnegie Mellon and then worked at Merrill Lynch and Pearson in New York. "Today she is married to an

American, and they are both in Pune, working with us... I did not lose a daughter but gained a son," Arti says. The couple works at Kirloskar Integrated Technologies Ltd.

When her younger daughter, Aditi wanted to join Concord Academy, Arti let her go more reluctantly. "She studied Ecology for 2 years, then shifted her focus to HR at Northeastern University in Boston," Arti says. When Aditi's employer in the US, Zensar, sent her to train in Pune, her father asked her to join the family group. She was involved with the group's HR and Kirloskar Institute of Advanced Management Studies.

Arti herself felt the need to put her own education to use once the girls grew up. "I joined Atul as a consultant and set up the intranet at Kirloskar," she says. "I loved the challenges: making people change their mind sets, pushing them to look at things anew..." When the company policy changed to decide that wives of the family members should not draw a salary,

Arti decided she could use her time more profitably than sitting in an office "which did not use all my talents."

A Board position at Plan India, and WaSH (under the aegis of the Kirloskar Foundation), and being the convener for Intach Pune resulted. "I used my learnings at Plan and infrastructure of Kirloskar companies and their employees, to make my roles here effective," she says. Education about health and keeping the girls in school is emphasised in all the 40 schools we work with, clean drinking water, toilets and hygiene is our primary areas of operation," Arti explains.

"Women can find empowerment within themselves, they all have the power and it only needs education to awaken it," Arti says, adding, "educating girls can change where the country is going."

We agree.



PHOTO CREDIT: BIKRAMJIT BOSE

ARTI KIRLOSKAR  
WITH GAURI, ADITI AND GRAND-DAUGHTER PIA

His career in media has seen him in many roles. From political reporter to opinion maker to environmental crusader. His passion for television which he watches unabashedly has worked well... Today, Uday Shankar heads Star TV as its CEO. Just back from overseas, he is still jet lagged as he shares space with daughter, Apoorva, to face the camera. Both admitting ruefully that it is not as much the journey as the fact that they were catching up on their cache of recorded serials that accounts for their fatigue. 'Alike, yet different', is the phrase that comes to mind when I chat with father and daughter in their spacious home in Malabar Hill, Mumbai.

Perhaps because he did not want to repeat his own strict upbringing, carrying it to his daughter, Uday Shankar decided to "let her be her own person." Letting her eat, study, dress as she pleases. "We eat everything, but she chose very early to be a vegetarian," he says adding that neither he nor his wife ever tried to change her mind about it. "I was pushed into Science and studied it till I rebelled, so when she chose humanities, we went along," he says.

When Apoorva decided she too wished to finish her schooling abroad, "my wife and I got very emotional about it. And delayed her going." But she finally left to do a year of Economic Development at the UCL, "we were lonely," her father says simply.

Apoorva, on her part is making the most of her empowered status. "I think there is a lot that needs to be changed in this country," she says, "I like the idea of being a development planner, and want to train and travel for it."

The one year training complete, Apoorva is back, and the family is happy hanging out together. "I spend most of my free time with them at home," Uday says and, as if ensuring her free-as-a-bird status, Apoorva retorts, "for me home is wherever I am."

"It hurts," her fathers shoots back, but then his look says 'that is the price of giving a child a liberal upbringing'.

Apoorva admits that perhaps she is more mature about family ties now. "The *kit kit* is less over small things. I find it easier to understand their point of view. I also know they will support me if I want something badly enough. That helps," she smiles.

Uday Shankar says despite the jolts her independence gives him, he would not have brought Apoorva up any other way. "It has helped her development, she has an in built ability to see things and grasp their complexity

completely," he says. He admires her clarity of thought as expressed in speech and writing.

"At times it gets too literal." Uday Shankar says, sharing a story. "She must have been 4," he recounts. "I had just come from office and was in the living room, when the guard called saying Apoorva wanted the gate to be opened so she could go out. It was 9 pm at night, so I was surprised. Turns out she had refused to eat her dinner and her mother had said, 'Either eat or leave the house'. And she had taken her option. She sure has a personality," he laughs, "and I value that. In fact my way of acknowledging it is to include her in all family decisions. Here we each have one vote." he adds.

Giving a daughter the power of choice and listening to her! Uday Shankar's method sure needs wider acceptance.



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

UDAY SHANKAR  
WITH APOORVA

The banner outside his office flutters in the sea breeze, challenging a city to wake up to an ever changing kaleidoscope of issues. Besides being Mumbai's conscience for 42 years, Nana Chudasama has been its Sheriff, Mayor, Founder of the now world wide organisation, Giants International. And has many more hats in the cupboard in his office, to be donned as the occasion demands. His daughters, so different in their choice of careers however are alike in one thing: the common fount of their inspiration is their father. Brinda is an artist with a formidable reputation, and Shaina, a designer with a dedicated clientele and a politician.

"He always wanted us to be equal achievers, goaded us to seek excellence and be successful," Brinda Miller, Nana's eldest daughter says. "He would constantly tell us, 'my children will grow up successful!'"

Perhaps it was this that made Shaina, his second daughter, want to be her own person. "I just wanted to be different, not just my father's daughter," she says. "That is why I adopted the 'NC' after my name. There was no resentment, just a search for identity. It worked so well, that I have kept it."

"It's true," Nana says, "the girls found their own paths. And yes, Shaina always wanted to do things her own way."

Of course he encouraged them. "I chose to be an artist, and if he was disappointed, that I was

not going to be an interior decorator and take up the company he had started, perhaps with me in mind, he never showed it," Brinda says. "And though I showed no signs of getting married till I was 29, he never pushed me, instead he would say, 'even if you don't marry, you still have your career!'"

When Shaina showed signs of following in mother Munira's designer footsteps, her parents knew she would make her own rules. "Munira is conservative, Shaina is a revolutionary." Little wonder, Munira took a back seat and let her go ahead. "Draping a sari 48 different ways is not easy, I grew up with my mother's involvement with clothes and could not escape being fascinated," Shaina says.

But watching her father play the stormy petrel in politics had its effect too. "Joining politics

was her decision," Nana says. "I guided her, all I wanted was for her to do well. And even if our political ideas sometimes clash, that is fine." He had guided her through the school years too, and honed her skill for public speaking. "Today I am proud I can stand before 10,000 people and deliver a speech," Shaina says. Nana nods in approving pride.

Brinda on her part is proud of her two girls. "I have brought them up the way I was brought up," she says, "and have emphasised their need to complete their education before chasing any dreams. I know my elder daughter is quite capable of joining her father's architect firm, and will take the business forward. In fact my husband often says we should name the company Miller and Daughters," she adds, a sparkle lighting her eyes.



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

NANA CHUDASAMA  
WITH SHAINA AND BRINDA

She meets us at the crossing outside a mall in Vasant Kunj, Delhi and we drive to her home. The road flows through tree lined avenues with swank farmhouses stretching out on either side. Then we are on a gritty patch as we turn off to enter a quasi village. Kanchan's days are divided between the air conditioned retail store where she is a sales girl, and her modest home, where she shares a bedroom with mother Saroj and her younger brother and sister.

When Saroj was left with three children to tend after the husband who drank himself to illness, passed away, she determined that they would not lead her kind of life. "My mother worked at the farms, did odd jobs, but sent us to school," Kanchan says.

The mother, still young, dressed in a faded, now colourless salwar suit raises her startling green eyes to look at her daughter as she adds, "I had to stop studying in fifth class to look after the buffaloes, then was married off. I want my daughter to stand on her feet and marry later, only when she is ready."

Kanchan is good at Math, and is also studying through distance education for her B.Com degree. "I get little time to study; we stand for long hours at work, then I travel back and I get very tired," she says but adds that she does try

to study during lunch breaks and on her day off, which could be a Wednesday or a Monday.

She earns Rs. 7500 a month. She gives it all to her mother. "None of it is saved yet," she admits. Her mother is quick to explain that as a shop assistant Kanchan needs to dress the part, and much of the money went in getting her clothes and shoes. In contrast to her mother, Kanchan wears a top and slim pants.

With work and household chores and study taking up her time, Kanchan admits she barely goes out. "We don't mix with our locality people, they are rustics and use very bad language," she says.

Part of the Customer Relations and Sales training implemented through Plan India, where 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> pass students with a will to take up a job are

trained for two months and offered placements, Kanchan has seven other shop floor employees whom she accompanies to and from work. "They live close by," she says, "and there is safety in numbers."

Saroj presses cold drinks on us, and as we gratefully down the sweet, orange liquid that allays the dry afternoon heat, Kanchan shares her plan of taking the next course that her job offers and aim for a promotion. "I want to be Department Manager or move to Accounts," she says, shyly.

Her smile, when I tell her she surely will realise her dreams through hard work and study, lights up the room and reflects in her mother's eyes.



PHOTO CREDIT: MANSI MIDHA

KANCHAN WITH SAROJ

Only a father who loves his daughter can write these lines... If he is a poet of course, I thought, as I watched Javed and Zoya chatting before the shoot, the song *Ek ladki ko dekha toh aisa laga* was pictured as a love song, but could so easily be a father's thoughts on seeing his little girl playing round the house! The interview confirms my idea... Here is a relationship built on the solid rock of trust and understanding.

"Only in college, I realised that in many homes girls are treated different from boys: it blew my mind," Zoya says, adding that through the growing up years brother Farhan and she never realised there could be a difference possible. "Every opportunity and rule was the same for us, we were not fitted into a mould, but allowed to make mistakes and learn," she adds.

"And why not," Javed counters. "I belong to a family where my mother, my aunts were all independent women. They had ideas on art and literature, culture... There were discussions on everything... If the base is right, one develops on the same data through one's life, and supports that foundation," he adds.

*I have proof of the weight of his words. Not a moment ago, Zoya has scoffed affectionately at his suggestion of a shoot location. "It's so flat, no depth at all, let's drop it," she tells her father, directing him out of the room. Papa meekly follows.*

"There is continuity in my family," Javed says, even as he talks about son Farhan's daughter, who he proudly asserts is a voracious reader. "It comes from watching me and those around her reading all the time," he explains. "But the fact is, in one other thing we are all similar... That none of us is influenced creatively by the other. My grandfather wrote poetry, he was very popular, his work was well known. Then my father wrote poetry too... Very literary in its quality, not at all like his father's work. I too write some poetry," he says, emphasising 'some' in his typically deadpan way, only his eyes giving away the humour hidden in his words, "but my work is again completely different. And now both Farhan and Zoya are their own voices, different from me and each other," he adds. "I am proud Zoya is not an echo, but has her own style."

Her style, he adds, is derived from who she is: "totally honest, never lies, says exactly what she means and vice versa. I respect that in her. Also,

her mind is extremely logical. I may agree or not, but I have to concede her point in an argument... And we have many. She questions every idea, has a pin sharp mind, even at 13 she proved she could be a good lawyer if she chose to. Yes, sparks often fly between us," Javed concedes, "but the relationship can afford anything. What is not said by either, is conveyed to both of us."

*Spoken like a poet I think, and listen while the father reads out the first lines of the poem he wrote for his daughter when she was a child. Almost at the end, the poem says:*

*Doosra raasta  
Bahut kathin hain,  
Yeh un logon ka raasta hai  
Jo khud apne tak jaate hain.  
Apne aap ko jo paate hain  
Tum is raaste par hi chalna.*

*QED*



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

JAVED AKHTAR  
WITH ZOYA

Students who have passed through Manju Kapur's lectures have learnt more than just English from her, imbibing some of her gentle yet unshakable spirit of independence. Acclaimed author of *Difficult Daughters*, which won the Commonwealth Prize (Eurasia), Manju followed it up with three other books that held a mirror to different aspects of middle class life in India. Sitting in her spacious living room, with her eldest daughter, Maya, and granddaughter, we sip warm *kahwa* as Manju talks about herself and her not-so-difficult daughters.

"Education was the thing, while I was growing up," Manju says. "My mother did not instill the domestic arts in me, she said there was enough time for that. As such my brother and I were given every opportunity in education we wanted, though there was a limit in the level of freedom I was given. I often heard my mother worry over my being a girl; '*ladki bigad jayegi*' was a constant... Yet, unlike for many of my peers, getting high marks was not a big deal, so I was not under pressure if I failed to perform well in some exam," she says adding that the lack of pressure was very empowering.

"But I did fret over the double message my parents sent out: Empowering me to think on my own and yet holding me back from doing many of the things I wanted to do, because of their fear that I would be led astray," Manju says. "When my daughters were born, I did not want to be like my mother. I did not want to instill the same fear in them, or send out contrary messages."

Even as a lecturer at Delhi university, Manju encountered the harnessing of daughters. "There were these girls studying for their BA and it was as if college was their last chance at freedom. Marriage and bondage were waiting. There would often be brothers controlling them, or fathers. I would ask them questions to shake them awake. Yet I had to be careful not to stir them up so much that they would get into trouble," she says. "Questions like 'who owns your body' would shock and jolt them... All of it seeped into my writing."

It also influenced the way she brought up her three daughters. "I let them pursue their dreams," she says. Maya, the eldest has a Ph.D. in Math, while Katyayani is working towards her Ph.D. in Anthropology in New York. "Everytime she comes home to visit, she tells me she is hounded by people asking her questions on marriage," Manju says laughing. "But all her friends are also

independent like her... Times have changed and I accept that."

On her own part, though, Manju carries some guilt... "I would have loved to have a great kitchen, cooked wonderful meals for my family," she says. "But I need my time to write, and have to take it out from my other duties as householder, mother, teacher. In fact, much though I enjoyed teaching, I have given it up to finish my next book, which has been five years in the making," she says.

Daughter Maya has to rush off; her daughter back at home in Gurgaon has called to say she is unwell. And there is a birthday coming up the following day. "Come by five tomorrow," she tells her mother. "Or at six, if you wish to avoid the kiddy noise."

"I'll come by five," the mother says, smiling at her grandchild.



PHOTO CREDIT: MANSI MIDHA

MANJU KAPUR  
WITH MAYA AND GRAND-DAUGHTER AADYA

She earned the title of Tigress in the film industry for her fierce individuality, and managed to hold her own in a world that was still convention bound and male dominated. Yet she was adaptable enough to fit perfectly into the worlds her husband, Nawab Mansur Ali Pataudi inhabited, and become a perfect helpmate and mother to their three children. Sitting in the confines of her tastefully done up living room in South Delhi, Sharmila Tagore speaks about her own upbringing and how it influenced that of her daughters.

"I was born into a traditional yet liberal family, it was a joint family with three babus. My grandfather was a patriarch, played the piano, was a Freemason, ate with *kanta-churi*. My grandma, on the other hand, wore only Bengal saris, spoke no English, but learnt to cook beef for her husband. My father was transferred out, but we were in and out of the great house. I think it taught us to adjust," Sharmila says.

"My aunt brought me up, and when I got married there was the usual line up of trays set out, with hand worked baubles and everything created had a cottage industry feel. It contrasted sharply with the silver and damask and a tabla made of silver that carried spices; as did the white and red saris with the ghararas... But it was all beautiful and fitting. When we came to Delhi, I lived with my mother-in-law, and my relatives would come over. Yet, it all worked well," she says.

"The children of course grew up imbibing the best from both worlds." They enjoyed the flavour of sharing three generations," Sharmila says. "It was very important," she adds.

"Only technology made it different," she says. "I used to sit with my grandfather and listen to the radio drama on Fridays, they had television!"

She made sure her film life stayed outside the home, except for Deven Verma and the producer of *Amrjuna*, and "of course, Shashi and Jennifer, no one from films came home, and when they did, they did not talk about films," she says.

She also ensured the girls pursued their studies. Soha has a Masters in International Relations from LSE, after which she joined Citibank. "She was living with Saif and Amrita in Bombay, when she decided to join films," her mother says, adding that Soha did not share her intent with her father because he was keen she work in development.

"She told us, when we said we imagined another profession for her that we had given her the power of choice, and she was exercising it," Sharmila says, laughing, with pride adding depth to her voice.

When Saba showed less excitement over her studies than her younger sister, Sharmila was happy to let her pursue her dream. "She went to the Gemology Institute of America, and did very well there," she says. Saba is her own person too, designing beautiful jewellery now.

"Children's memories are flighty, it is important to keep in touch, talk to them. I would talk to them

everyday, share their homework, their growing up pains, plan their holiday projects... I love reading and now neither is ever without a book," she adds. "I was PTA Chairperson in their school, so was in their school every other day, it helped me keep in touch with their school work too."

Of course she dreams of them getting married, "doing what I saw my mother do, who did as her mother did... make a home... learning their traits and yet doing something on their own. But this generation does its own thing. And exercises its choices," she says, adding, "and that is the power education has given them."



PHOTO CREDIT: HELLO MAGAZINE

SHARMILA TAGORE  
WITH SOHA ALI KHAN

His brand of journalism has been to be in the thick of things, and see it all for himself before interpreting it in print. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the first jihad in Afghanistan, Operation Blue Star, the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, 1989—the student uprising in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, the first Gulf War from Baghdad, Jerusalem and Kuwait, and the Sri Lankan struggle through an entire decade are some of his eye witness stories. But the current Editor in chief of the Indian Express, Shekhar Gupta, has always found time for his children... as his daughter vociferously affirms.

"My father always told us stories," daughter Mandakini says. She is dressed simply in a saalwar kameez, no hint of makeup on her face. The only concession she makes for the fact that she is going to face camera is borrowing a prettier dupatta from her sis-in-law.

"When he was off covering the Gulf War, there was no cable tv, and only the five star hotels had access to international news. So my mother would wait for us to sleep and then go to some hotel to watch the news," she says. "She made sure we were not scared." "But when Papa returned, he would tell us stories, and make it all sound very exciting."

Shekhar admits he made time for 'bedtime' stories. It was one way of teaching and sharing. "Some stories were more popular, and I would repeat them many times over for Mandakini and her brother, Abhimanyu."

Running is another way the father and daughter stay connected.

"I was always a tom boy, except when peer pressure made me try on glitter on my face and disgusting clothes," Mandakini says. "I started

running after my 12<sup>th</sup> standard exams. I had got into the cycle of staying awake till 4am studying for my exams. Then I would go for a run, come back at 5am and go to sleep. My father was always a runner; he would run from India Today to Saket when the traffic was bad; he runs the 15 km at the Marathons. These days we run together."

Looking at father and daughter in the same room is to see the obvious affection they have for each other passing constantly like a live connection between them. When the children were younger, the family would take holidays together, extending Shekhar's work trips into 'fun and education' vacations.

"We travelled economy, Mamma would be with Papa in a 'companion free' business class. But every few minutes he would come asking if we wanted his cake, or a chocolate," the daughter says.

Her parents' sense of adventure has rubbed off on her. (Mother Neelam has braved the rigours of starting Vishwas, a school for children with special needs.) Mandakini, after a stint with NDTV, CNN IBN, has started her own Patisserie,

named Smitten—after her beloved cats. Before that she worked at WDSO, in NY, and Indigo Deli, Mumbai where her father was strictly forbidden from telling the owner she was his daughter. In fact the only time Shekhar has used his 'influence' for his daughter has been when she was unwell and appearing for her exams. "My father was invited to a dinner where Rahul Dravid was also coming. If I wasn't ill or didn't have an exam the next day, I could've also gone with him. So instead, I asked him whether he could call me from the dinner and request Rahul Dravid to say hello to me. And he did. Rahul Dravid said, 'you must concentrate on your exam, don't think about your fever'. And that made me feel better," she says.

"She was always caring," Shekhar says, "when I would call from assignments, she'd ask me if I had had my vitamins. She was just a kid then." Again that look of affection, passing across the room. "We made sure one of us was there for them. Often when their mother was busy, the two kids would sleep on the sofa in the India Today office."

All a part of learning informally, while growing up as the daughter of busy but caring parents.



PHOTO CREDIT: DINISH KHANNA

SHEKHAR GUPTA  
WITH MANDAKINI

Vandana's career turnabout could be an inspiration to any woman dreaming of making a mark in the corporate world. Shedding her stay-at-home avatar along with her extra weight, she strode into the studios of TV 18 and learnt the ropes fast enough to take on the responsibility of almost everything from budgets to interviews and all the stuff in between. Managing Director of TV 18 is one of the many professional hats she wears. And as she poses for the shoot with daughter Avantika, even as a supply of eats is maintained throughout, it is easy to see how she has juggled her many roles successfully.

Her father qualified for the IAS the year she was born, so the first years of Vandana's life were spent in the districts he was posted in. And then he remained mostly in Delhi. It taught her how to adapt to both worlds.

"We had very little pocket money, but went to the best schools," she says. "My father knew the importance of making a girl self-sufficient through a good education," she adds, smiling. Yet when she wanted to pursue interior design after her graduation, "he could not understand how it could be a career option, and told me to do what I wanted after marriage," she adds.

"I learnt the importance of educating a girl to be economically independent," Vandana says, "when my marriage broke down and I had no means of supporting myself and Avantika and Vedant." Luckily for her, brother Raghav Bahl was setting up TV 18 in Delhi and asked her to manage some of the operations in Bombay.

Vandana talked it out with her children, and jumped in... and has never looked back.

"I empowered Avantika even when she was but 11," her mother says. "By the time she grew up, she was working at Studio 18, reading scripts. I gave her a free rein... my bottom line for both my children was, I want nobody to turn around and say, she is a single parent, she did not know how to bring up her children," Vandana says.

"Yes, I am empowered," Avantika chimes in, "but it's more by seeing how my mother operates, and is a pillar of strength. Seeing her transformation from a housewife to a woman who can make a difference in others' lives. I know women can achieve anything they set out to do. She helped my brother and me blossom and be our best selves."

Vandana says she did not wish her relationship with her daughter to be a follow up of her own

with her father. "I did not want my children to see me as a tyrant and hide things from me," she says. "The trust between us works both ways; I knew I could depend on Avantika to be responsible," she adds giving the example of an evening when she landed up at the same club as her daughter and friends, and realised Avantika was not drinking because she had to drive home. "Even when she was dating Imran, I was not worried, for me the kind of wonderful human being he is overshadowed the fact that he was from another religion."

"In 10 years, I will have something substantial to show as a body of work," says Avantika.

"The education my mother gave me and our contacts will make it happen," Vandana smiles at her daughter indulgently. "She embodies my strength, my success," she says.

Looking at the self-assured woman giving her mother a quick hug, we cannot but agree.



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

VANDANA MALIK  
WITH AVANTIKA

Her brainchild, the Tao Art Gallery in South Mumbai has hosted some of the city's finest exhibitions of art. Self-taught artist and curator, Kalpana Shah's home above her gallery is a reflection of her fine aesthetic sensibilities. As Kalpana and her teenage daughter Sanjana pose for the photographer with the sea as a backdrop, it makes as pretty a picture as any Kalpana has painted.

Sanjana Shah was less than a couple of days old, so she possibly did not notice the flamboyance with she was welcomed home from hospital, but her mother, Kalpana Shah was awestruck by it. "My husband had filled the house with flowers, a corridor of fragrance led us to the bedroom, and once there, he presented me with diamonds for giving him a daughter," Kalpana reminisces. "It was as if a princess had come home!"

"Even when we were leaving the hospital, he held on to her, wrapped in his arms so possessively, that I laughed and said, 'someone would think you had delivered her,'" she adds.

Sanjana was a planned baby, as her first born, son Sarjan, demanded a brother to play cricket with, when he was six. "He was disappointed of course, but we were delighted. My husband so wanted a daughter, and we had suffered a great trauma when I had earlier miscarried an 8-month foetus which proved to be a girl."

"Having a daughter in the house brings so much colour and beauty," Kalpana says. "Sanjana loves dance and music and creating rangolis. She dresses up in traditional clothes every festival

and celebrates each to the hilt, it makes the house come alive."

"As a child, she would gather with her school friends, and they would stage beauty contests at home. At that point I told her that beauty without brains was not enough, and she should read a lot and study hard. Luckily, she loved her books too," Kalpana says, looking fondly at her daughter. "Education is something that remains forever, and I have inculcated that in both my children," she adds.

The mother-daughter bonding grew closer when Kalpana's husband, Pankaj, was killed in the terrorist attack at the Oberoi, in Mumbai on November 26. "My happy, perfect world fell apart. I had to deal with the grief and also take on his real estate business, emerging from the cocoon of my life as creator of Tao Art Gallery. My son had to be away at the London School of Economics, and it was Sanjana who gave me support. She was only 13 when the tragedy occurred, but she gave me so much strength to go on. Her smile motivates and inspires me even now."

Kalpana is justifiably proud of both her children. Her son deferred joining Harvard by a year, to stay in Mumbai to help her. "He is dynamic, like his father, my daughter is creative. I think they make for a perfect family."

Already, as she waits to join college, Sanjana is adding to her mother's creative effort at the gallery by starting a venture that will focus on art films and include symposia and talks. "It will enhance what we currently offer and add a new dimension, bring in new energies," she says. Her line of thought on how her project will develop is clear, and she is "raring to go."

"My husband would have been so proud of the way his daughter has developed herself, he would have loved to see her as she is now," Kalpana says.

And we wish indeed that he was there for us to capture the love that would have shone from his eyes, had he posed with his women for our picture.



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

KALPANA SHAH  
WITH SANJANA

The steep iron staircase in the one room hall leads to a space upstairs. Nineteen-year-old Kiran runs up and down it with an alacrity born of practice. Upstairs is where the poster bearing her photograph with seven others creates an eyecatcher on the otherwise blank, coloured walls. It is easy to believe that every time she looks at the poster, Kiran can feel it coming alive, transporting her to the time when she was performing in Germany.

"Going to Europe was a life changing experience for me," Kiran says. Much of her conversation dwells on the trip, and its excitements. "The local papers carried a story on us almost every day," she says, pulling out copies of news filings, carefully preserved.

Just about a year before she was chosen to go to Europe as part of a team to perform a dance based play titled Drop by Drop: Water, Kiran was a disappointed girl. She had got a first class in the 12<sup>th</sup> exams. An achievement indeed for the daughter of an unlettered mother and a rickshaw man. But financial restraints and the resultant stress had come in the way of her continuing her studies. "I was depressed," she says simply of that time.

However, despite her disappointment over the indefinite break from studies, Kiran actively participates in awareness and capacity building activities organised by Plan India and its NGO partners working in the slums. When trainer Manjul Bharadwaj was appointed to work with the children on a leadership programme that would help them be 'a leader of their own lives', Kiran found her life taking a new direction.

A challenge that Manjul sir threw at the 300 odd students in the programme that he would take the hardest working and most committed among them to Europe, motivated Kiran enough to give of her best. "I was one among seven others chosen to travel to Europe. We would take a play, based on a universal concern: water." The play would showcase India even as it addressed the universal issue of depleting clean water resources.

The play created a favourable stir through 18 shows in three countries across Europe, but it was the interaction with European children, during the workshops that made the biggest impact on Kiran. "I talked to them and understood how one's attitude and view of life can actually change one's life," she says. "I came back a new person."

But, it's obvious that Kiran was born with the spirit to meet odds head on.

Odds she encountered while applying for her passport, for one. "People laughed at me, saying how can a chit of a girl like you go abroad, why should you get a passport." Rather than being

laughed at by uncomprehending elders or friends, she got through the formalities on her own; a process that started the realization of her leadership potential.

"I motivate children to study, to look at life as a positive challenge," she says. Her own challenge lies in completing her studies. "I completed my first year in college before leaving for Europe, but the two-month trip made me miss out on admission to the next year. I will continue my studies next year, privately and work to finance the fees and books," she adds. Her aim is to be employed in a bank. "I am good in Commerce, and will also complete my MBA," she says.

Her mother, Kausalya, looks on, smiling. Knowing her daughter to be her own person now, armed with a new confidence, she has little to contribute to the story of her future, "I will support her in whatever way I can, and pray she leads a fulfilling life," Kausalya says.



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

KIRAN WITH KAUSALYA

Pinky Reddy's high profile life includes a picture perfect house in Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, carefully tended, in which we find more locations for shooting than time permits. Known for her flair for lavish entertainment, she is also an opinion maker in her social circle. Despite growing up in the cushioned environment of her MP father Subbarami Reddy's home and now enjoying her status as industrialist GVK's daughter-in-law, Aparna Reddy prefers to be called Pinky and is a down to earth person with decided views of her own. Which include the fact that daughters are precious, and need to be educated.

A thought that she instilled in her children too, ensuring that they did not give up on educating themselves. Thus, though daughter Mallika married young, before she could quite complete her education, she continued to pursue it. "Mallika did exactly as I did," Pinky says laughing. "She accompanied her husband to the US and both of them took up their courses of study there. Now she has completed her graduation and is checking out her options... It could be more study or a career path," Pinky adds.

Pinky was 20 when Mallika was born. "She was my toy, and the life of the family, being the first grandchild. I still have a picture of her on my BB," she says, quickly scrolling through to share it with me. The pride in her eyes is eloquent, it is a look that I see each time she looks at her daughter, through the shoot.

Pinky tells me that having a daughter is indeed a precious gift, though it can throw a few surprises. "It is a mistaken belief that only sons can be difficult while growing up," she says. "When Mallika reached her teens, she transformed into a very rebellious child. I was, according to her, 'the mom from hell,' always telling her this and that. Luckily the phase did not last very long, and I realise now that even at that time, a lot of my advice was sinking in."

Pinky realises her children are very different from each other. "Mallika takes after my husband and Keshav takes after me. Yet, they are very close; there is no competition between them, they know no one in the family prefers one over the other. In fact Keshav used to be like her tail when they were younger, and still dotes on her."

She adds, "And regardless of a child's gender, I think if a mother is paranoid, nothing can change that. I surely was. I would sit up waiting for them if either was out, and if they were late returning, I would tell Sanjay my husband. 'Ring them up, they are late, I am worried'. He however is Mr. Cool, and would say let them take charge of their lives. And it held good about Mallika too."

"A father's approach to bringing up a daughter makes a lot of difference too, and his attitude has given her confidence and self esteem. I think the balance between our approaches has worked well."



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

PINKY REDDY  
WITH MALLIKA

He is quite the guru of marketing one can say. Self taught, supremely observant, he has managed to stun the retail world by the speed and scope of the success of his Future Group. Kishore Biyani's expansive office in the eastern suburb of Vikhroli is where he arranges to meet us, his daughters, Ashni and Avni are by his side. As in life, so at the interview too, they add the perspective of youth to their father's statements.

He has named his daughters himself, they tell me. Perhaps, I think, he chose their names carefully indeed, to signify two qualities that are necessary in good businesses. Ashni, Mother Earth, the grounded reality any business needs to be based on; and Avni, lightning, which signifies the surprise, brightness and speed that growth requires.

Yet he is forceful about not believing in the theory of succession... but letting his daughters "be their own people in their own thoughts." That translated in both of them deciding not to pursue business studies. "We had attended enough store openings to understand every aspect of the business," Avni says. "We chose other lines of study instead."

Ashni is the ideas person, trained in Design; she uses it to guide the future of the business.

"Earlier, our stores communicated chaos, because I realised the Indian shopper likes hustle bustle," Biyani says, "but the changing consumer now needs more order, and we are designing our stores accordingly." "Ashni is involved in every new product, from idea to process," he says, "she is the eyes and ears of the 'societies' we fit our customers into."

Ashni, who heads a team of demographers, ethnographers, design consultants and mythologists, says they help her understand how belief influences consumer behaviour across communities. The understanding is then used to design everything from the product in the stores to store spaces.

She admits that her approach to life is based on the simplicity she has learned from her mother.

Avni, younger by 5 years, has put in years of research on the emerging food habits of consumers, to set up the Food Halls in the Big Bazaar outlets. At present they are the biggest money spinners for the brand, and it shows she has learnt her father's lessons well. "We accept various viewpoints and include them in our decisions," Avni says, explaining her success.

Her father gives her an approving look. The obvious pride with which he views his girls tells us he trusts them implicitly to ensure the future of Future Brands!



PHOTO CREDIT: SAIFY NAQVI

KISHORE BIYANI  
WITH ASHNI AND AVNI

He is best known for the TV programmes he has spearheaded... Including the Bournvita Quiz Contest and now the super successful KBC. Siddhartha Basu however is proudest about his children and their progress in life's journey, especially his daughter. Medha, lives in London where her job involves planning and organising policy discussions and events with global movers and shakers-heads of governments, corporations, leading thinkers like Aung San Suu Kyi or Hilary Clinton. Proving herself very much her father's daughter.

"It amuses Medha no end when I declare she's my best daughter in the world, because, as she points out, I have no others," says Siddhartha Basu. "It's just my way of letting her know of the delight and love I have in her."

"She's not so much a Shakti for me as a Saraswati. That's why she was named Medha, another name of the goddess of learning and speech, and a synonym for intelligence and merit. It's not a common name at all among Bengalis, or Kashmiris, but even when she was in the womb, when my father was once in full flight in Bangla, which I don't follow that well, about meritocracy and excellence, he used the word 'Medhavi' and it immediately rang a bell. I asked him what it meant, and he told me it meant meritorious or brilliant, which is what it also means in Hindi. I liked the sound of the word too, and with Rosa (my wife, Anita), I decided that if our second child was going to be a daughter, we would name her Medha."

Medha seemed to justify that name at his first sight of her, tiny and swaddled in green, held out to him on the single arm of a doctor, "eyes wide and absorbing, bright as a button." This was 1988, in Delhi, a city that had never really been too safe for women. It hit Basu then, as it hadn't before, of what it meant to be born a girl

in a male dominated society. "My most ardent prayer for my daughter was that she have an enlightened mind and compassionate heart, not only to fully live out her potential, but also to make a difference to the world she'd come into," he adds.

Rosa has been an extraordinary mother to Aditya and Medha, chucking up her job at the most happening magazine of the time, India Today, to be a full-time hands-on mom, till they were in their tweens. "We were very much a nuclear family with no back-up. We weren't particularly well off, with me working as a self-employed professional in a fledgling media industry, but in all our decisions, our children and their well-being came first," Basu says. "They had a pretty middle class upbringing, with strong family values, and though there was little wanting, there was no overindulgence."

Medha was an affectionate child, and interacted easily with people of all ages, her father explains. She's also quite driven, doggedly pursuing her interests and furthering her capabilities. She became head girl in her final year at school, topping in her outgoing year. She went on to read Sociology at Warwick University in UK, at 18, was active as an elected student representative,

and became Co Chair of One World Forum, part of the world's largest student run international event, organising talks and interactive debates with thought leaders including Nobel prize winners.

Medha followed an internship with a job at Chatham House-the Royal Institute of International Affairs, a prestigious and leading think tank, which she has held for the last 4 years. "At the same time she is quite the independent London girl, with an active social life, managing to tuck in Spanish classes, and contemporary dance or salsa over weekends, with occasional breaks with friends in Europe, and an annual trip home," her father says proudly.

"I'm proud of our girl," he adds. "Her accomplishments are very much her own, and she has her own individual outlook on life. She's now planning further studies, and exploring areas in International Relations that she wants to specialise in."

"In my eyes, my daughter is beautiful, thoughtful, caring, and accomplished. That's why she's my Medha."



SIDDHARTHA BASU  
WITH MEDHA

Her love affair with literature takes many forms. Six novels, including the news making *Paro - Dreams of Passion*, many non fiction books, including those with autobiographical edges like *Mountain Echoes*, a swathe of literary festivals, like the now globally acknowledged Jaipur Lit Fest and Bhutan's Mountain Echoes, and imprints with Yatra and Westland books are manifestations of her involvement with the written word. Meeting her in her home, we chat with Namita Gokhale and her equally erudite mother, Neerja, on what it is to be a woman who loves learning.

"What gives me my strength is the fact that I belong to a long line of strong matriarchs," Namita says, opening a diary and carefully pulling out a sheet that traces her family tree of women... Tilottama, Devki (1884-1936), Shakuntala (1917-2006), Neerja (b. 1935 ) and Namita (b. 1956). "This is the gift my mother has passed on to my daughters," Namita says.

Neerja, ramrod straight despite her years, silver haired and dressed beautifully for the shoot, adds that unlike in most North Indian societies, Kumaoni women are not weak or repressed. "We are stronger than the men," she says, smiling. "In *Mountain Echoes*, I worked on oral biographies of my grandmother and three aunts. Some interesting facets of their lives emerged. Pahari women in Brahmin families were not supposed to cook until they got their gotras through marriage, and they often sat in the same room as their brothers while they received tuition, so learnt to read and write."

Not inclined to cooking or pretty girlish clothes, Namita grew up with a deep love of books. "My mother made all the books in the world available

to me, we were allowed to buy one book a day. Further, my sister and I would spend hours reading at Nainital Book Store, on the Mall Road, Nainital, during our formative years."

Though she grew up with her grandmother Shakuntala Pande in Nainital, learning from 'the grand old lady' a love of Nature, roaming through the gardens and the huge house that often resounded with music and laughter, Namita came back to Delhi later, to join her mother, who in turn passed on her own love of reading and books to her daughter. "She was a strong influence," Namita says, "I fell in love and wanted to marry when I was 18, but my mother was very concerned about my education. However, I did get married and learned from the school of life, as my formal studies was interrupted."

Namita re-bonded with her mother when she had, first a bout with cancer, then lost her husband when she was 39. "She gave me a renewed sense of security, and we bonded over our common love of literature," Namita says. She adds that her mother reads all the

books she can in English as well as Urdu and discusses them with her. And completely dotes on her granddaughters and her little great granddaughter.

Yet, Namita says, "despite our closeness as women of one family, we are all very individualistic. My mother is the pragmatic, no nonsense one, my sister is a hands-on person who holds us all together, and I live in my own world of books and ideas." She adds that one aspect of her mother she admires immensely is the fact that through the years, Neerja has always made it a point to dress for dinner, and come down for a pre dinner drink, looking fresh and scented with one of her favourite perfumes. "And, at the Jaipur fest, she can hold her own across the table with Javed Akhtar and other famous writers discussing Urdu or English poetry," her daughter says.

"I find my mothers ability to get on with younger people, to keep her mind sharp and yet listen and act with compassion to one and all, is immensely inspirational."



PHOTO CREDIT: MANSI MIDHA

NAMITA GOKHALE  
WITH NEERJA

She is Bollywood's darling, with a National Award to her credit, adding to the impressive list of films she has designed costumes for. Her work in *Devdas* and *Jodha Akbar* for Aishwarya won her acclaim, but Neeta Lulla has a life beyond films. Her passion for fashion, which she nurtured despite hurdles, burns unabated, and her loyal clientele never misses a new collection or her shows, where she has often espoused the cause of the girl child. By launching the Neeta Lulla School of Fashion in collaboration with Whistling Woods, this designer hopes to blaze a new trail, giving back to society some of what she has learnt in the creative business of fashion.

"My father was my best friend and teacher, he gave me my first copy of *Cosmopolitan*, because it had a nice fashion component and could teach me how to dress well," Neeta says. "He also taught me to drive, and shared my first drink with me. We were four daughters, and he nurtured each of us. Even today, he sends us jokes and keeps up on Facebook and Twitter," she adds.

When her own daughter, Nishka was born, "my husband was thrilled," she says adding that from day one, her daughter forged a bond with her father. "He still calls her 15 times a day, and she will ask him why he calls so often. If he is busy and does not call as often she will ask accusingly in the evening, why he hadn't called," she says laughing. Father and daughter have a ritual where every night, post meals, they eat chocolate together. "No one else can eat it, he hides it away," she says.

Though Nishka was a 'boisterous' child, preferring to watch WWF and sitting down heavily on her brother or parents if she did not get her way as a baby, her mother's influence was strongly felt. "I used to take her along for shoots till she was five," Neeta says. "I stopped that when at one shoot, when after I had left the room for a while, I came back to find her draping the clothes on the artiste just as I would, except that she could only reach hip height."

"When she scored well in her school leaving exams, we thought she would follow her father into medicine," Neeta says, but Nishka announced of her own will that she hated the sight of blood and wanted to study designing. "I think she was very clear in her mind about that," her mother says.

"I have always regarded my daughter as my Lakshmi and Saraswati," Neeta says. "But today, as she comes unto her own, she is also my *Shakti*," Neeta credits her daughter with a quiet strength and a confidence in what she does. "I have realised that she has a pragmatic core," she explains. "Though I operate in a fickle and insecure world and do not let it affect me, there are times when I get unnerved. At such times Nishka takes me in hand. She'll get hold of me and say, 'what's wrong with you? Did you get out of the wrong side of your bed?' and somehow that works," Neeta adds.

"Nishka is very focused, she is a different person when at work. One does have to leave oneself behind when you are at work, it is something she does very well. It amazes and even inspires me!" her mother says proudly.



PHOTO CREDIT: SANTOSH JADHAV

NEETA LULLA  
WITH NISHKA

His reputation as the man who established rock music as an Indian entity with his band Euphoria, overshadows his medical career. But composer, singer, actor Palash Sen is however happiest in his role of father, especially to his daughter, Kyna. Star of his path breaking bhajan, *Sharmagat*, Kyna has also a starring role in the video her father created for Plan India to sensitise viewers about the importance of girls, titled *Main Hoon*.

"I am completely in love with her, she has me wrapped around her little finger." Palash Sen says, when asked to talk about Kyna. "Whatever was missing in my life, my daughter has completed it."

Palash believes that Kyna embodies everything that he has appreciated as different qualities in his mother, grandmother, wife and sister... "the qualities come together in her... wit, sunshine, caring, passion, artistic abilities. She is a superb actress, a good dancer," he says, stopping just short of gushing.

I try to ask a question, but he has not yet finished.

"When I lose my temper, she makes me see reason, she is very *must*, happy always, it does not bother her when things go wrong. And best of all, she looks like me, so it's like seeing myself," he adds, chuckling happily at the image he has created.

Kyna was named after an Irish princess in a book Palash's sister was reading. The name signifies intellect and courage, he explains.

If there is any discordant note in his relationship with Kyna, it is the fact that he is jealous of her relationship with her mother. "They fight and are often at odds with each other," he says, "but they are also each other's best friends. It makes me jealous."

In his own growing up years, he would try to "find a space between his mother and sister, who were very close. I see the same closeness reflected in my daughter and wife too," he adds.

His daughter's talent spurred Palash to use her in two major videos, and now he feels he "cannot do a music video without her."

She is just in Class 5, but Kyna believes that like her father, she will balance two careers together. "She sees me being a doctor and a musician at the same time, and keeps planning her future," he says, adding that her choices change constantly to include doctor and fashion designer, dancer and painter... for now at least. "But, she refuses to sing," he adds, sounding a tad disappointed.

"I do believe her studies are important too," he says, but adds that he will not force either of his children to follow any particular stream. "My wife is a scientist, my mother a gynaecologist, I am a doctor. She knows education is vital, and I am sure she will choose to study well."

Her father admits Kyna can be stubborn. "Nothing can make her change her mind once she makes it up, and sometimes I have to really work at making her see my point of view," he says. He admits that he is a doting father and Kyna, within reason, is someone he spoils unabashedly!

To me it seems as if Dr. Palash Sen has found the real cause of his Euphoria!



PHOTO CREDIT: DINISH KHANNA

DR. PALASH SEN  
WITH KYNA

Her art works hang in homes across the country. Seema Kohli's creative journey has a strong mythological base. The variety of religious texts and books on mythology in the wooden cupboard that stands quietly in her studio among the clamour of colourful canvases is eloquent testimony to the strong base her work is built on. Seema's home with its burning oil lamps and period furniture is a reflection of her strong spiritual leanings, and the fact that her favourite creations are of feminine figures, including the larger than life smiling Kali painting that stands tall against her living room wall speaks of her belief that all *shakti* comes from within.

When her father realised that unlike his other daughter who was a chatty extrovert, Seema was withdrawn and silent, he took the 3-year-old to a psychoanalyst visiting from Germany, to find a way to draw her out. The gentleman watched her and told the father she was an introvert who would blossom if he gave her paper and colours. "I haven't stopped since," Seema laughs, "even now he says 'The madness has not ceased, I am a gone case.'" "My Dad was a very concerned father," Seema adds, "he and my mother were full of ideologies about bringing up children to be equals."

"It guided me in my own role as a mother," Seema says, "I learnt from them not to say this is right or wrong." Like, when Seema at 16 wanted to become a renunciate and join an ashram, her parents told her to complete her education first. "I rebelled at the thought at first, but realised later that my studies opened new doors for me."

Her Honours in Philosophy led her into a deeper understanding of spirituality.

"Parenting is like the patting of clay a potter does," she says, "it is a guiding hand." Guiding her children keeping in mind Khalil Gibran's advice to parents to let them grow to their own space was tough in the conservative family set up they were born into, where even the fact that her daughter was left handed became a major source of angst for the elders. "I let her have her choices," she says. "I wanted her to be comfortable with her body. She was only 11 months old when she chose her own birthday frock."

Anshika has grown up to be "sensitive, vulnerable but strong, and wants to overcome her weaknesses," Seema says. "She is of course, also independent minded and very focused."

Anshika has struck out on her own as a photographer. "She keeps odd timings, and travels a lot, and I worry," the mother says. Anshika's affair with the camera probably started when Seema walked out of her marriage, taking only her camera. "She has watched my journey all through," says Seema.

"I protected her through her growing up years, nurturing her individuality, but when I was struggling alone, she was the one who protected me. She is still my strength, I lean on her." Life comes a full circle.



PHOTO CREDIT: MANSI MIDHA

SEEMA KOHLI  
WITH ANSHIKA

Her mother worries about how her children will fare in life. Kunda, on the other hand, knows exactly where and how she wishes to steer her life. I meet Kunda in her tiny house, at the far end of a long corridor in a far away suburb of Mumbai. Crossing a playground of rubble where boys play cricket with sticks and a torn ball, walking past homes from where curious eyes peer to see a procession of outsiders, including a photographer carrying a large camera picking its way past playing children and supine dogs.

The mother supplements her husband's income from carpentry, by making stick-on bindis which a *matwala* buys off her to sell on the local trains. Her neighbours are similarly engaged. But Kunda has more concrete dreams.

"Education is most important for children these days," the mother says, explaining why she has encouraged this, her third daughter to study. Kunda for one has completed her 12<sup>th</sup>, with a creditable 63 percent. And is very serious about her Jr. College Commerce course.

To help supplement the expenses of her education, which her mother mostly funds, she works part time, making costume jewellery; the 3½ hour a day stints earn her 50 rupees daily. "I want to get my degree in Commerce and go for my C.S., and take a bank job," Kunda says. The line of thought is clear, and she explains that a bank job is both respectable, safe and ensures steady promotions if one is "hard working and capable."

To emphasize her ability to learn enough to shed the travails of living on the edge, Kunda answers most of the questions I put to her during the interview in fluent English. She steers the conversation deftly till I switch to English myself. Her mother looks on proudly, though it is clear she understands little of our exchange.

"She likes to sing too," the woman says, and Kunda admits that she sings as a hobby but hopes to be serious about pursuing music some day. "I think I will learn classical music, it costs Rs. 400 a month, in the class they run nearby," she says, "then after a year I can try my luck with the 'Sa Re Ga Ma' talent show on TV. I want to become famous as a singer," she adds, "like Falguni Pathak."

The mother listens nodding. "Shall I sing for you?" Kunda asks and sings a song for us, quite unselfconsciously. "I speak Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati too," she adds.

A younger sister and brother might find inspiration from this feisty girl who dreams of finding her place in the sun. "The older girls are married and lead their own lives, but Kunda is different," a neighbour says.

By the time we leave the sun is setting. "My mother will cook, and I will study for an hour," Kunda says, as she stands leaning on the door of her house.

To me it seems she stands on the threshold of new tomorrows.



PHOTO CREDIT: YASMIN KHAMBATTA SHASTRI

KUNDA WITH MAHADEVI

Daughter Masaba has kept up her mother's tradition of being a path blazer. Her use of colour and prints has marked her as the next big thing on the fashion front. Neena Gupta blazed her own trail with a series of roles in Shyam Benegal and Merchant Ivory films, and went on to write, direct and produce much lauded TV serials, like *Saans*. Though a post graduate in Sanskrit, she believes life is the better teacher, and has tried to share life's lessons with her daughter. Even as she encourages her to find her own learnings.

"Education held great value in my family. My mother was a double MA, and she encouraged me to study. I was keen on joining the stage, but she insisted I complete my post grad, and tried to persuade me to try for the IAS," Neena says of her youthful years.

"Neena straddled two worlds, studying for her M.Phil and at the National School of Drama at the same time... It was very tough on me," she sighs. She dropped the Ph.D. she enrolled for next, because "my guide would not let me do my research as I wished, and was very limited in his approach to my subject."

"I wish I had joined the IAS," she says ruefully. "I think I could have done a lot then, made a huge difference."

Instead, Neena joined films, won a National Award for Best Supporting Actress, and had a relationship with Viv Richards which resulted in her being a single mother to Masaba.

"No one should have to bring up a child alone, a child misses a whole lot of people who should add value to her life, uncles and aunts and cousins, and a father. It was a selfish thing to do," she says. Torn between working to support her daughter and herself and bringing up the child, Neena worked "without holidays, with only my dad supporting me emotionally by living with me. I could leave my daughter with him and go on shoots."

Luckily, Masaba was a bright child. "I instilled the need for education in her, passing on what my mother has taught me. She got good marks in the 10<sup>th</sup> scoring 80 percent. She got 90 percent in Hindi as well as English. She was good at sports, and, after classes with Shiamak Davar, wanted to be a professional dancer."

Life had other plans and an unsuccessful shift to Delhi, followed by an aborted course in music in London, found Masaba joining SNDT's fashion

course, and finding her place in the designing fraternity, as a designer in her own right as well as creative director for Satya Paul.

"I am making up for the neglect of early years," her mother says. "I let her concentrate on the creative aspect and look after her business. I do all the dirty work; shops, tailors, fabric. I have put all else on hold. I also play mother still, and try to help her keep her sharp temper in check... It works sometimes," she says laughing.

"It is so good to see a child flower and grow. And if family doesn't help them, who will," she asks. "I am Masaba's only family, she has no one but me," Neena adds.

And that one statement sums up the entire story of the relationship.



PHOTO CREDIT: FILMFARE

NEENA GUPTA  
WITH MASABA

The world knows Subhash Ghai as the man who ploughed several hits. Including the musical *Taal* and the patriotic *Pardes*. But it is Ghai the father I go to meet on the sets on his latest film, *Kanchi... The Unbeatable*. It is the story of a rural girl who makes it into politics and changes the system he tells me. An apt background to the subject of our interview. His life with his daughters. Meghna Ghai Puri, who heads Whistling Woods International sits in to add her bit to her father's views.

"As Meghna grew up, I asked my wife who was rather over-protective of her, do you want her to have a career or be a *bahu* who has a car and driver and spends her time shopping?"

"Personally, I felt we had to let her fly, and get a feel of the free air, away from our 11-member family. Luckily, I had just had a line of hits, there was ample money, and so I sent her to London to earn a business management degree. I had seen how she was calculated about money, and had organising skills, and felt it suited her best," Subhash Ghai says. Daughter Meghna nods approval. "He did expose me to films," she says, "I worked with him on *Pardes* on every aspect from scripting to editing. But I was not excited." "Her interests were towards management, and not the creative side of film... I noticed that," her father says.

Subhash Ghai had some choices on how to invest his money. "I could have started a studio like most filmmakers have done, the rent would be enough to take care of Meghna. Or I could grow her talents," he says.

Deciding on the second option, Ghai found a way to fulfil another dream. "I had often thought of opening a library and school for all the aspirants who come hoping to find a place in films," he says. "Most of them stand on Marine Drive and go back disheartened. I feel their pain."

Whistling Woods International would realise that noble dream, and also engage Meghna in a career that used her skills and learning to maximum advantage.

"I spent the years between 2001 and 2006 researching the project," Meghna says. "I was involved in everything from the building layout to the hiring of faculty and visiting experts. Even though many others involved are more experienced, I know it is my baby as I have been with it from its inception." Verily, the wonderfully planned WWI in its perfect location close to the Film City action, hones the dreams of 450 hopefuls, many of them from overseas.

Meghna credits both her parents for guiding her to be a successful head of her project. "My mom always said I could become anything I wanted to be, it spurred me."

Ghai says he is fortunate to have not one, but two daughters. The younger, Muskan, just 11, is 'more creative.' "She's a 21<sup>st</sup> century iPad wielding girl," he says, "I can't dictate to her, she trusts Google aunty more as a source of her information," he laughs.

Meghna, he says was closer to her mother, but Muskan is more like him. "We have long Q&A sessions every morning, it's like being subjected to a masterclass," he says, the pride in his voice evident. "I have both worlds now," he adds, as we move towards the photo shoot set-up. "one daughter in management, the other creative; what more can a father want!"



PHOTO CREDIT: BIKRAMJIT BOSE

SUBHASH GHAI  
WITH MEGHNA



### About Plan India

Plan India is a nationally registered child rights organization, working in India since 1979 with the mission to bring lasting improvements in the quality of life of underprivileged children. We work in partnership with grassroots NGOs, governments and houses and facilitate poor and marginalized communities to participate in their own development and thus ensure their children enjoy their right to be protected from abuse and exploitation, early childhood care, quality education, optimal healthcare, safe water and healthy environment, household economic security. We enable adolescent and young girls and boys to be active participants in their community governance and support them to plan and implement actions for community development. Plan India's programs are spread across India and positively influence more than a million children and their families.

Plan India's rights-based child-centered community development approach supports communities, governments, and corporate houses to develop the structures and skills they need to address the root causes of poverty and provide a safe and healthy environment in which girls and boys are able to realize their full potential. It is our belief, based on many

years of experience, that this can be achieved only if children's best interests are at the heart of everything we do and if children themselves actively participate in the process.

Plan India is committed to the principles of child rights and equality as enshrined in the UN Child Rights Convention and UN Declaration of Human Rights to which the Government of India is a signatory. Our vision is of a world in which all children realize their full potential in societies which respect people's rights and dignity. Plan India is funded by donations from individuals, institutional donors and corporate houses in India and abroad.



### Because I Am a Girl

'Because I am a Girl' (BIAAG) is an initiative launched by Plan India to promote girls' rights and lift them out of poverty. It is geared towards equipping, enabling and engaging girls of all ages to acquire the assets, skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in life. Plan India is attempting to initiate change at a number of levels (i.e. local, national and international) with the assistance of a number of partners.



Plan India invests in girls in the following ways:

- **Protecting** them so that they may be born and lead a safe life free from exploitation and abuse
- **Education** to break the cycle of poverty
- **Healthcare** so they grow up healthy and strong
- **Livelihood initiatives** like microfinance, vocational and financial literacy trainings for adolescents and their parents, so that they are equipped for dignified employment.

#### Our Goals

- Girls enrol and complete quality primary and secondary education in a safe and supportive community environment and acquire the skills they need to access decent economic opportunities
- Girls have time and space to become active citizens and develop safe social networks and life skills.

#### International Day of the Girl Child

A historic milestone for girls' rights was reached when after sustained effort by Plan, the UN General Assembly formally declared October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child. Plan globally helped lead the call for this commemorative day as part of its 'Because I am a Girl' (BIAAG) initiative, a global movement to end gender inequality and promote girls' rights.



#### Why invest in girls

Extensive research has shown that investing strategically in girls has positive social and economic results that may benefit several generations. Investing in girls is the key to reducing poverty and instability. If she stays in school, remains healthy, and gains real skills for economic independence, she is most likely to marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and earn an income that she will invest back into her family.

If we invest in girls equally, all children benefit, the country benefits. We can work together and change the imbalanced social and economic equation for girls and women.

#### Our investment plan for girls

- **Listen** to girls' views- ensure that their voices are heard by decision-makers
- **Learn** from what girls have to say
- **Include** girls in research, planning and policies, so that their rights can be recognised
- **Implement** policies that take account of girls' needs, keep them safe, and build on their asset
- **Invest** in girls' skills, ensuring they have access to data and information to hone their skills
- **Celebrate** girls' achievements- all too often, they struggle unnoticed and unheard



#### Empower girls today

Investing in girls delivers a higher return than any other investment made in a country's development. There are many ways you can get involved. Plan's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign encourages you to support our existing girl-centred initiatives or if you desire, work with us to develop new projects.

#### Sponsor a Girl Child

Saath Saath is a programme from Plan India seeking to help underprivileged girls and boys through sponsorship. Through this unique connection with a child, a sponsor can play a tangible role in the development of the entire community while supporting the child in realising her true potential.

Sponsorship helps the entire community to develop. You also play a significant role in helping a child realise her full potential.

Write to us at [sponsorachild@planindia.org](mailto:sponsorachild@planindia.org) to sponsor a girl child.

#### Invest

Plan has many innovative community based development projects to ensure that girls have the same opportunity as boys to reach their full potential. If you would like to explore possibilities to partner with Plan, do write to us at [deepika.bhandari@planindia.org](mailto:deepika.bhandari@planindia.org)

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## AUTHOR



PHOTO CREDIT: ZAKIA SHAKIR

### SATHYA SARAN

Freelance journalist, columnist and author, Sathya Saran is also a Consulting Editor in the Lifestyle segment, for Harper Collins Publishers, India.

Her stint with Femina which she edited for 12 years during which the magazine was India's most wanted reading material, and the launch pad for Miss Universe and Miss World title holders, translated into her assuming the role of a teacher. Sathya teaches Fashion Journalism at NIIFT and ISDI, Mumbai and holds classes in writing for print and creative writing for students across disciplines.

Her current projects include conceptualising coordinating a Master class Series titled 'From Design to Performance' for Adishakti, Pondicherry, as well as a book drama based on her biography of Guru Dutt, titled Ten Years with Guru Dutt: Abrar Alvi's Journey.

## BEHIND THE LENS



SAIFY NAQVI studied at the Edinburgh University in Scotland, he is an ex investment banker and now a concept, travel and portrait photographer.

India is the sole subject which binds his entire body of work. With India as a broad subject he works on many themes which showcase specific elements of India.



BIKRAMJIT BOSE graduated from The Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, during the course of which he spent a year apprenticing under photographer Pradeep Dasgupta.

He moved to Mumbai in 2008 to pursue photography professionally. After assisting photographer Farroki Chothia for a brief period, he started out on his own, primarily doing commissioned work for magazines like Elle, Vogue, Grazia, Marie Claire, Harper's Bazaar and GQ.



VARUN MEHTA is a photographer, writer, sculptor who believes that all good art does the same thing: they tell wonderful stories. Only their tools are different. And a great story beautifully told, that's what moves us, that are what makes us stare, that's what makes us gasp.

It is this very feeling that Varun loves most.



SANTOSH JADHAV studied English literature, but his heart was in photography since the day in school when he discovered a SLR film camera that belonged to his elder brother.

He assisted photographer Suresh Natarajan to master the technical and commercial aspect of photography, to change his passion into his profession. Today Santosh has a large studio set up, and works on several brands via agencies like Ogilvy, JWT, Lowe, Leo Burnett and others.



DINESH KHANNA has been a photographer for over 23 years, creating images for Advertising, Editorial and Corporate clients. His personal work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions, in India and around the world.

He has 2 Pictorial Books - "Bazaar" and "Living Faith" to his credit - a result of over a decade of traveling through India. Dinesh is also the Co-Founder of Nazari Foundation, which has been set up to promote Photography as an art-form and the Co-Founder of the 'Delhi Photo Festival', which recently completed its second edition.



MANSI MIDHA is a New Delhi based photographer with a Certificate in Photojournalism & Documentary Photography from the International Centre of Photography. A majority of Mansi's assignments focus on documenting outreach programs carried out by NGOs that cater to women and children.

Mansi is the 2013-2014 grant recipient from the National Foundation of India supported by UN Women, to facilitate her ongoing project on 'the invisible girl child' - young girls missing from schools in Rajasthan, Bihar and Kashmir.



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