



Expressions

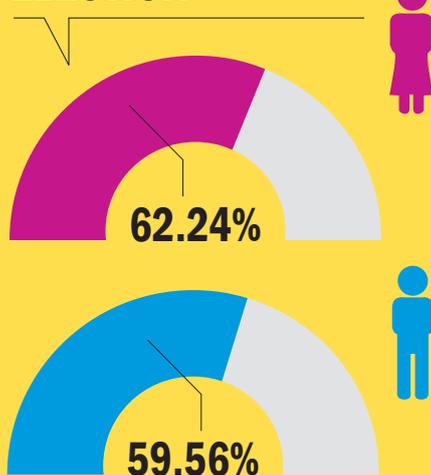
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WOMEN VOTERS

Decision makers or followers?

ELECTORATE CAST THEIR VOTES IN THE 2022 UP ELECTION



**in the 17th Lok Sabha elections,
the number of women voters
outnumbered men in 13 states**

Source: Times Of India online portal

Vaishali Gautam

The path to women's enfranchisement was strewn with struggle across the globe. Women got the right to vote after a long battle, but that too with many conditions applied. It had been many decades since then. Now, the scenario has changed to the point where every woman has an equal right to vote with just the condition of being above 18 years of age (in most nations), which is common for all genders.

The question which arises is whether we did justice to the right we achieved after such hardships? Have women actually become decision makers? Trends have shown an increase in the number of women voters over the years. But the fact that women have always ma-

gorily followed the male members of their family to choose their candidates cannot be denied.

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Photo: Trilochan S Kalra

Editor's Desk

Hats off to women of substance

"There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing" – Swami Vivekananda.

Every year when the results of any examinations, in particular, the secondary education gets published, we always find girls out numbering boys with high percentages. Visit a bank, an educational institution or private establishment and you will find females more visible and even occupying important positions from managers to heading HR cells. In classes you find a ratio of 70:30 with girls in higher figures.

Indeed, a welcome sign of women empowerment though it remains the most talked about issue in socio-economic and political environment for decades. Numerically women are equal but in terms of power, position and influence they still are in a minority group. However, discrimination against women continues to remain a global concern though the Constitution of India guarantees the equality of rights of men and women and empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, education and political advantages faced by them.

Overall, I personally think the law of our nation has contributed significantly to change the lives of women, to influence them to live with poise, respect, and regard not as a slave.

We also cannot deny the fact that many Indian women have hogged the limelight from Roshini Sharma the first Indian woman to ride a motor-bike from Kanyakumari to Kashmir to Shila Dawre (Pune) country's first woman auto rickshaw driver in the 'male-dominated' zone, Arunima Sinha the first female amputee to climb Mount Everest, Mother Teresa, the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1979 for her selfless social work with the missionaries & Indira Gandhi, the first woman Prime Minister of India and the list goes on.

Recognising the great work of women in their respective field and to celebrate International Women's 'day- 2022, this issue of Expressions is dedicated to many unsung such women who are contributing in their own way.

Photo Feature gives a visual treat to a select few. My compliments to the team.

Prof (Dr) Sanjay M Johri



'ASCO faculty let me chart my own course'



They say that every decision you make in your life affects how and what kind of person you will become in the future. My decision to attend ASCO in Lucknow was one such decision that shaped who I am now. Not only professionally, but also personally.

It's hard to realize it's been four years since I graduated. The three years I spent at ASCO under the direction of Dr. Sanjay Mohan Johri gave me a clear vision of what I wanted to do with my life. I was allowed to figure out things at my own pace without passing a judgment at any point. I have gotten the support of my friends and all faculty members and for that I am really grateful.

Although Johri sir himself presented me with a position in a government body just a few days after the course, but it was him after a few months

ALUMNI CORNER

who made me realize that I was not cut out for hard-hitting journalism. And, thanks to his persuasion and faith in me, I enrolled in Azim Premji University's Masters in Development Studies programme. And I can say with confidence that it was one of the most enriching experiences of my life. Masters can be difficult for many people, as it was for me. However, I had been in continual contact with Amity faculty members, who assisted me in completing the course successfully. It is true that things do come back into your life. And so did my passion for writing, which I had abandoned before starting my Masters.

I currently work for The Takshashila Institution, a Bangalore-based non-partisan policy think organization. I work in the public health vertical and have been involved in research work. For the past few months, I have written several Opinion-Editorials for publications such as Hindustan Times, Deccan Herald, News-18, The Print and The Wire Science. My learning and writing classes at Amity have definitely helped me here. I had gone back to my notes from our writing class in Semester V for my first Op-Ed.

I shall always cherish my time at Amity University. I am aware that life ahead will be full of surprises and challenges. But I am sure that my learning from my journey will guide me through them.

I shall always be grateful for the faith people have shown in me during my time spent in ASCO. The experience shall always be reminisced fondly.

-Mahek Nankani, Assistant Programme Manager
The Takshashila Institution

Decision makers or followers?

Continued from P1

However, according to an article on the Times of India website, more women voted for the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) than men in the recently concluded assembly elections, which shows that women are playing a major decisive role in making or breaking the fate of a political party.

Speaking on the issue Seema Singh, a housewife, said: "My husband and I supported and voted for the same party, but it was our individual choice. I believe as spouses we do affect each other's decision, but there's no compulsion for the decision to resonate." Kajal, a house help shared, "I was asked by my husband to vote for a particular party. I'll admit that I couldn't deny on his face but voted for another one as I believed that the other party has done better work in terms of women empowerment over the years."

There seems to be a gradual change. Gone are the times when women, owing to their disinterest in politics, would

I followed news about different political parties. I also read their manifestos and compared its relevance with the work they've done in the past. I chose my candidate on the basis of my wisdom

Aishwarya Chandra | FIRST TIME VOTER

merely follow the male members in the family while making such decisions. The future graph of this change can be determined by the attitude of the young female voters towards this role of decision making. Aishwarya Chandra, a first time voter, shared, "I followed news about different political parties. I also read their manifestos and compared its relevance with the work they've done in the past. I chose my candidate on the basis

of my wisdom. I think women in the contemporary world are not easily persuaded and are well aware and smart enough to make a decision of their own."

Another young female voter, Pragati Sinha said, "My decision was completely based on how promising a party seemed about the future of the youth in the nation. I often have discourses on political topics with my father, though my mother seems to show no interest. My father being a political science scholar has deep insights, which do help me understand politics better. But our thoughts differ many a times and in the end the decisions are seldom mutual."

Though the conclusions can differ for different sections of the society, still a revolution seems to have taken place on a macro level. Women on a major scale are independently choosing their representatives on the basis of their own analysis. Women seem to be massively emerging as decision makers. This development will only get better with the youth taking active interest in the working of the governments.

Photo: Trilochan S Kalra





Smiles, Sparkles & Shimmer at Amiphoria 2022

Drishti Vanaik

After 18 long months of being locked up at home, something which brought enthusiasm & exuberance to students' lives, was when they got the much-awaited opportunity to, "Celebrate Zindagi", with Amiphoria 2022, a two-day wholesome fest, which took place on March 3-4. Bringing the best of both worlds of online and offline, Amiphoria 2022, was everything that students hope for and even much more. From shows to events and programmes, it was washed in the hues of joviality and full of package of dance, drama, music, art, fashion and what not!

The floor was set on fire with the inaugural ceremonies and carnival gaieties, wherein each individual department put forward their best performances to mark the beginning of the fun-filled extravaganza that was enjoyed by every Amitian. Talent hunt programmes like Xpressions, Amity Idol, Reel Deal, Art exhibitions, Nukkad Natak etc, shrouded the entire institution with, glimpses of the colossal amount of talent, brilliance and creativity. "It was our first Amiphoria, and it certainly exceeded the expect-

tations. It has set a bar for the coming events", said Sushmita Gupta, a first-year, psychology hons student.

Not only this, but Ankush Gupta, from B. Com (Hons) added, "We as freshmen, were so excited for Amiphoria and were eagerly waiting for the event for begin". Meanwhile, Amiphoria for newcomers can be summarised in three words: Surprising, Exciting and Amazing. Those who had witnessed both the last-year's entirely online mode Amiphoria, and this year's hybrid mode, had much more to say. Bhargavi Singh, a 2nd year student of Mass Communication, cheered, "Last year was fun in its own way. And this year, obviously, it was more thrilling, as we got the opportunity to explore the college fest life, that every student dreams of". Speaking about her experience, Arshma Minai, student of English Hons., said, "Amiphoria expanded the horizons of my imagination and innovation".

Dance drama captured the audience's attention; fashion shows filled one's mind and heart with awe and admiration while quizzes challenged the mental abilities and thinking skills. For many, Amiphoria was a blend of both delight and nostalgia, as this was their last fest at the University. Areeba Ahmad, a 3rd year

journalism student, mentioned, "Being a part of the core student team, and moreover being a part of Amity for three years, had always given me the best of opportunities and good times. It's going to be difficult when I will have to leave my Alma Mater forever, but I am unequivocally going to take a bag full of memories, happiness and smiles".

Another to-be-graduate, Mantasha Asif, from B. Pharma, mentioned, "I am happy that my last Amiphoria wasn't hindered by Covid-19 and I could enjoy it in the offline mode with my friends. It was the best two-days, that I have had after the college reopened".

While, the students of Amity certainly relished and enjoyed a lot, others who came in from different universities and colleges, as participants of various events, also got to witness the gala. "I took part in a psychology quiz, and have got to say that the faculties were so helpful and generous. Also, I thoroughly enjoyed the food, glamour, and the frolicsome performances", said, Sukriti Bansal, a student from Lucknow University.

The two-day fest ended with concluding ceremonies with a hope of meeting in the next Amiphoria with even more entertainment, excitement and enjoyment.

Grit in her veins, winner Mamta takes it all

The story of a salon worker who fought life's odds and emerged a role model for others

Kavya Rangan

Married at the tender age of 17, Mamta was thrust into the world of responsibilities before she could even realise what they meant. She wasn't just a daughter, but a wife, a daughter-in-law and more importantly the woman who would give birth to the next heir of the family.

She realised; daughters weren't heirs when she gave birth to her first child, and that the happiness of her future life depended on it. While the diatribes worsened, her resolve got stronger, and she swore she would never let her gender dictate the respect she got.

So Mamta started her training as a salon worker, hoping to give wings to both her confidence and independence with a source of income. Little did she know, it would soon become a necessity. A road accident took away her first husband and what little control she had over her life. Not only was she blamed for the accident, but she was also married off to her brother-in-law so as to 'keep her in the family'.

Unwilling to surrender to life's gruesome realities, Mamta continued to train in a salon to take care of her daughter who she was adamant to educate. While the salon training

was an arduous task, what made it worse was the added burden of household responsibilities and the pressure to assist the family.

She recalls, "I was working 18 hours a day. Waking up at 4 am to cook meals before leaving to train at the salon and then go about the day fulfilling house calls from my growing customer base."

The lack of amenities made her job more difficult with having to travel more than 20 kms a day by public transport to complete the house calls. After the monthly expenditures were completed, there was barely any money left for herself and what little she could save, she would keep aside for her daughter's education.

Finally, her hard work paid off and she got a permanent job at a salon. Now, she earns a stable income without having the need to travel throughout the city. It was during this time that she had her second daughter and her youngest son. "Life was finally settling, as much as it ever settles for people like us."

But the struggles weren't over yet. When the economy crashed in 2008, Mamta's husband who was working with a telecom company lost his job, which left the family penniless and with no income source other than her salon job. She was back to working long hours at the salon, now handling both on shop and house calls and while it payed the bills at home, she had to withdraw her daughter's name from the school on the insistence of her family. Her husband who earlier supported the kids going to school was now against it, saying the money was meagre and sending daughters to school was a waste.

Gradually, she established her work and with the years of experience and dedication working in her favour, she soon became a trusted name in the field. She was able to

send all her kids to school and became the sole bread-winner of the family. What Mamta did not see coming were the taunts from society and her own family and all because she was earning more than her husband. Her own mother referred to her as 'selfish' when she told her she was saving some money to open her salon. The rest of her extended family withdrew, fearing that with their precarious financial condition, they would ask them for money or help. "I have always tried to live my life in the most honourable way possible," says Mamta when describing the harrowing social situations and embarrassment she had to go through.

When in the year 2019, she was finally able to set up her own salon with the money she had saved over the years, Covid spread and state-wide lockdowns reduced any hope of establishing her name to dust. She was back to working house calls. Recalling those days, she said, "I waited for life to get easier but it got more difficult. The more I hoped people would help me and stand by me, the more I was abandoned and it was at last I understood why - because even in such difficult times (referring to Covid period) while others were struggling, I stood tall, ready to face another challenge."

Her perseverance is her best trait. She stays, ready to fight even in the worst of times because after years of life trying to throw her down, she has kept going and will keep doing so. Mamta now runs her own small salon, decorated with pictures of her grandchildren, son and daughters, who are now happily married. She says she is satisfied with her life despite the odds. She trains young girls at her salon at reduced cost so that they too can stand on their own two feet and be more than just daughters or mothers.

Photos: Trilochan S Kalra



SHEROES WOMEN HERO'S

Sheroes hangout, situated in front of Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow is home to the unsung warriors of women empowerment. The young women at Sheroes are acid attack survivors and are giving a new meaning to bravery in the face of adversity. Not only do they work and earn an income and command respect, they have also paved way for other victims of such attacks to stand strong and move on in their lives with a renewed sense of self-reliance. The smiles of Seema, Kunti, Garima, Rupali, Asma, Seema, Mausami and Reshma are proof of the power that becoming independent can bring.



BHAVIKA BHACHANI

Online education during the pandemic could have become a hindrance in the life of Bhavika who was pursuing Hotel Management. But she utilized the lockdown period and turned this bane into boon by trying her hand in bakery at home during 2021. She made some bakery products at home and posted on them Instagram as a way to showcase her talent. While, she started with one kg cake, it soon sold out she went to make variations as large as four and 10 kgs. Bhavika knew she will face difficulty in getting any formal training due to pandemic conditions and so, she decided to use her knowledge for getting training at Hotel Oberoi in Gurgaon and today she is making wedding cakes. Business is in Bhavika's blood with her father being a cloth merchant and her long-standing dream to start her own bakery post her hotel management course, which she is already making strides towards.



SHOE-MAKER SUNITA

Sunita's husband used to work as a cobbler (Mochi) in a village in Amethi but they shifted to Lucknow and put up a small shop on the crossing of Vikramaditya Marg, near the Samajwadi Party (SP) office. Her husband, unfortunately died during the pandemic. Instead of returning to her village, Sunita continued shoe making as a tribute to him and for her own survival.

Sunita's major earnings come from PAC or police personnel around the city, as they prefer simple black and red coloured shoes and sandals, which she makes and sells. She makes shoes on order, ranging from Rs 400-800 and sometimes if it is pure leather the price is as high as Rs.7,000. Most of her customers prefer to buy shoes in the range of Rs 400 to 800 or go for repair work. She is assisted by Rajaram, who works for her on daily wages. Her children, however, are opposed to shoe making and continue to do farming in the village.

VARSHA VERMA

Who has a passion for social service since the age of 13, is a multi-talented person who started with her training in judo. Today she gives self-defence training for women's safety. People mostly knew Varsha Verma for social service, but she came into limelight when she stood outside the hospitals with her free Ambulance service to take the bodies for the last rites during the deadly second wave of Covid. She bought an ambulance on her own and stood outside Lohia Hospital with a placard. Many people did not take her seriously, but gradually when she started transporting bodies free of cost, people realised about her helping hand. National magazine Reader's Digest and international magazine Forbes appreciated this helpful social endeavour of Varsha Verma of Lucknow. For the last five years, she has been helping in the rehabilitation of the destitute & today her three ambulances are being used to help the common people.

**MUMTAZ KHAN**

Father made daughter's dream come true by selling vegetables and today the daughter, Mumtaz is making slap shots in women's hockey and is part of the Indian Team travelling to various countries. Mumtaz Khan became a member of the Indian Women's Hockey team (Jr), after facing a various challenge. What makes Mumtaz's journey commendable, are the circumstances of her life. Belonging to a very simple family, Mumtaz's father Hafeez Khan and mother Kaiser Jahan were selling vegetables in the artillery area of Cantt, Agra. "I was interested in hockey since childhood. Despite all the difficulties, my family supported me. I used to do running during school days and when my hockey coach Ms Neelam Siddiqui spotted me in a race in Agra in 2011, she advised my father to get me into hockey." The junior Indian team performed brilliantly in the Youth Olympics 2018 in Argentina. Even though the team lost to Argentina in the title match, they managed to win the hearts of the audience. Mumtaz is a star player and is making her parents proud by going places.

**DARE DEVIL SISTER DUO**

Karuna and Vasudha Agarwal, better known as the Dare Devil sister duo, their car trip to Ladakh in 2016 inspired them to do that which even few men dare to. During their car trip to Ladakh, they saw motorcyclists who travelled hundreds of kilometres on powerful motor bikes for adventure. After returning to Lucknow, the bullets that these two sisters bought were registered in their names, a first for female riders in the state. The sister duo plan to go on long distance trips to Nepal, Bhutan, and Odisha. They shot to stars, as the first sisters & women bikers to travel from Lucknow to Ladakh and from Ladakh to Lucknow. Apart from traveling to areas like Agra and Pilibhit, they travel to Kanpur to drink tea as a hobby. Bike riding has become their passion and the blaze of the bullets grab the attention of the people when these two daredevil sister pass by on it.



Courage under fire: Journey from a prostitute to teacher

Muskan Bakshi

Your past is not your destiny, you can change your future at any moment.
~ Anthony St Maarten

Women are the paradigm of courage because we are the only ones who can go through the worst adversities in life and still have the will to stand back on our feet and continue. Kamana*, is a live example of this wilfulness, because not only did she fight the appalling horrors life threw her way; she survived and thrived despite them.

Kamana started teaching in a Hindi coaching centre in Ghaziabad where she currently lives with a friend who also left the streets of the red lite area behind and began a new life

Belonging to Takiya village near Rampur, Kamana was a class 12th topper with dreams and aspirations until she was sacrificed on the altar of poverty and her parents married her off to a 42-year-old construction worker due to financial constraints. Merely 18 years old and naïve to the ways of the world, she was carted off to her husband's home in New Delhi.

Some would say what happened to her was horrible, but no, the worst was yet to come, and it would

“ I saw that 85% of women were either deceived or forced to come here and, in this process, their lives along with those of their children were being destroyed. So, I decided to do something to change it

break even the toughest. The man she married, whom she trusted to keep her safe, first assaulted her mentally and physically and then sold her off as a sex worker within 6 months of their marriage.

Caught in a world she had no idea about and at the same time rejected from the only world she knew, Kamana was bereft. She tried fighting the ghastly realities of her new life but after 3 months of poverty and abuse, she surrendered and began working as a sex worker. From being a topper in 2012 to being a sex worker in 2013, Kamana's life had turned upside down and the only thing keeping her sane amidst the innumerable horrors was her will to survive.

It was this same will that drove her to teach the kids in the red lite area. These kids though innocent were rejected by society, unable to get admission to good, respectable schools due to their mother's profession. Kamana could not watch the dreams of these little kids die and so, she took it upon herself to teach them and put her skills to good use. "I saw that 85% of women were either deceived or forced to come here and, in this process, their lives along with those of their children were being destroyed. So, I decided to do something to change it."

Teaching these kids and bringing about a small change in their lives is what motivated Kamana to fight the innumerable odds. She recalls, "In

the initial days due to forceful behaviour by clients, I was admitted in the hospital twice," and the only thing that kept her standing was the hope to survive and create a better life for herself. The only way to do this was completing her education and becoming independent and so in the year 2015, she started pursuing a B.A. degree.

Three years of surviving in that place gave her the courage few possess, and Kamana was able to leave her old life behind in pursuit of happiness and independence. In 2018, after getting her degree, Kamana started teaching in a Hindi coaching centre in Ghaziabad where she currently lives with a friend who also left the streets of the red lite area behind and began a new life.

Now, at the age of 27, she teaches the kids of women from the red lite area who do not have access to schools. She says, "I don't have any regrets because I challenged my destiny and instead of going on the path that fate had put me on, I changed my course."

Kamana aims to complete her post-graduation next and keep helping other women facing similar predicaments.

Her story is an inspiration for all of us because she teaches us that with the courage to change, you can turn your life around and make the best out of the worst situation.

(* Name has been changed to protect the identity of the individual.)

Bound by many, freed by herself

Ashna Ali & Shahida Khan

The journey of empowerment and freedom is arduous no matter what your caste, creed or religion. It is more so when you are a woman caught in the web of society's rules and regulations. This is the story of countless women and despite everything that women must go through, they are rising and taking a stand when it comes to recognizing their rights and responsibilities. Muslim women too are coming up ahead in this fight for their liberty and leaving no stone unturned to fulfil their dreams.

The stories of Maha Zehra and Hadiya Usman are live examples of this wave of change. Both are mothers and homemakers who have dared to venture outside the bounds set for them by society.

Maha Zehra, 43 and a mother of three, is an educator despite all the hurdles she faced in her early years. At 20, she was married into an authoritarian household where her in-laws did not let her go outside to study or have a career because they believed that any woman who did it was committing the sin of 'bepard-

agee'. However, Zehra fought for her rights and completed her Bachelor's in Education from Unity College but while she dreamt of having a career, her family remained stuck in their rudimental thinking and even her husband who had helped her in completing her studies, opposed. It wasn't until the family began facing a financial crisis due to the unemployment of Zehra's husband that she began her career. The irony? The in-laws were the ones pushing her to have a career now.

She is currently a teacher of social sciences to class 8th and 9th students at Rajkumar Academy while giving tuition to Muslim girls where she also motivates them to have a career and become independent in life.

With tears in her eyes and a graceful smile, she said, "I try to give my children and others the best of the education, especially girls, so that if one day they are oppressed by society then they can be self-dependent. That will be the day when all my efforts and struggles would have been worth it."

Hadiya Usman who is 48 years old and a mother of 4, is another such fighter for women's freedom. She has literally given wings to her eldest daughter by helping her pur-

sue her graduation in aviation.

Hadiya raised her kids like a single mother because while her husband worked in Dubai as a manager in a hotel, he considered his familial duties over after sending her money for monthly expenditures. Hadiya gives tuition and does stitching in her free time to manage her own expenditures and remain financially independent. She adds, "I teach my daughter to be independent but I also teach my son to be respectful of women and that is how I do my small part in making this world a fairer place for all."

When talking about the limitations her life has put in her path, she says, "There have been many, which is why I told my daughter when she was starting her journey in aviation that your gender and burkha must never stop you from seeing and reaching for the skies." Hadiya's eldest daughter is completing her on-field training in aviation and gracefully wears her burkha on the job.

In their own way these two women are trying to make a difference through their efforts. It is rightly said that 'the first step is the always the hardest', which both Maha and Hadiya have taken and now it is up to the others to take up the gauntlet.

Photo courtesy: Ashna Ali



Journey of a home-maker to home-baker

Kashika Nigam

Starting a new venture comes with great difficulties and challenges, with a multitude of sleepless nights and contemplative afternoons. During the first phase of Covid-induced lockdown, various start-ups came to the notice of people, some were remote and others physical. Be it the online jewelry stores on social media platforms, or home delivery, "Dabba" system, these startups in some way or the other, acted as an escape from the

brutal reality of Covid-19 and also as an additional supplement to the earning members of the family.

Expressions reporter, on the occasion of, "International Women's Day", found one such story of a woman, who with her extensive passion of cooking, took on the journey of cooking food for just the four people of her family to baking mouth-watering cakes for hundreds of people and bringing wide smiles on their faces on their special days.

Obviously, it was not easy for Richa Singh to start a business during the pandemic when most of the start ups were shutting down, but when asked about what kept her going, she mentioned, "During the pandemic, there was stillness in the atmosphere but one thing which did not come to a halt was people's birthdays, anniversaries and special days. They still wanted a cake to be cut and a wish to be made". Being a mother and a wife, Richa's trait of putting everyone's happiness before gave fuel to her desire of doing something that would bring a smile on the faces of people. "It is said that the way to the

heart is through the stomach, and being a baker, I understand the core and the

kind of feelings which are involved and

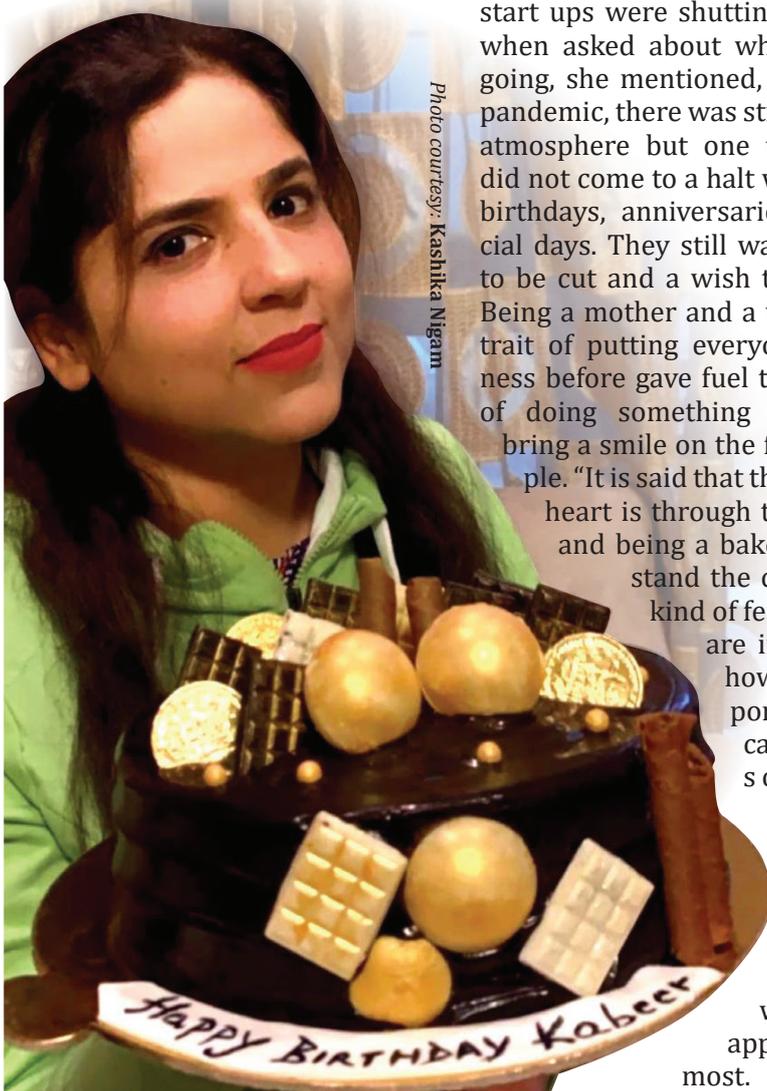
how much importance a cake holds on someone's special day", she said.

The support from her family, is what Richa appreciates the most. She adds,

“ I felt like giving up on some days, and go back to my normal life, but the very feeling of being independent did not allow me to turn back and kept me moving forward - SHE RECALLS

"My 14-year-old daughter, did her best to support and help me in all ways possible, with creating accounts on digital media platforms to opening my account on online food selling platforms like 'Swiggy' and 'Zomato'". But the journey was filled with several obstacles. There were days, when she had absolutely no orders, and this pattern would continue for weeks, but again on the contrary, there were days, when she was overwhelmed and overloaded with orders, and had to accomplish the tasks without anybody's help. "I felt like giving up on some days, and go back to my normal life, but the very feeling of being independent did not allow me to turn back and kept me moving forward", she recalls.

The lady, who proudly calls herself a home-baker and an entrepreneur, mentions that "She wishes to see all other girls and women to stand on their own feet in their life and do what makes them the happiest and achieve whatever they wish and want for". Life for her is and was, all about making her family happy, but after taking on the voyage of becoming a Home-Baker, she started to have a new and positive outlook towards life.



Roopa auto 'drives' her way to success

Photo courtesy: Bhargavi Singh

Bhargavi Singh

Situations either break or make a man or rather a woman in this case. For Roopa Kashyap, 38, an auto driver harassing her while returning from her job at night changed her entire perspective. The incident, which happened 3 years ago, gave Roopa the courage to enter the male dominated profession of auto-driving.

She made the decision to start driving an e-rickshaw, went ahead and rented one and never looked back on this journey of empowering herself as well as other women.

"I had to travel at night due to the timings of my job and while most people were good, there was always a fear in my mind. On one such usual day, while traveling, I got harassed by a driver. This traumatic experience led me to a decision to start driving my own rickshaw. It is still scary when I drive at night, but I have only become stronger over time", affirms Roopa Kashyap, mother of three.

Owing to the poor financial condition at her home, Roopa had to leave her studies to support her family when she was just 10 years old and since then has done many odd jobs. Her journey as a female driver has also not been as smooth as her rickshaw rides. She earns around Rs 20,000 a month after driving all day but has to give away Rs 10,000 as rent. Apart from financial issues, there have been societal issues too. Initially her in-laws weren't supportive of her decision as they thought it wasn't a job suited for women. But through her strong will and husband's support she persisted. She adds, "Even now there are some relatives who pass comments but I don't care anymore."



Limca Book of World Records holder Shila Dawre was the first Indian woman to become an auto driver as early as 1988

All her hardships seem to fade away when she steps out and receives ample admiration from her customers. Roopa said, "I was scared that people might hesitate to sit in my rickshaw due to the stereotypes associated with driving skills of women but I was pleasantly surprised by everyone's attitude towards me. Most people are curious to know my story and how I started this journey. I feel the

best when women say that they feel safe when they sit in my rickshaw. These encouraging words make my day and make me want to work harder. The most important thing is that more women are joining in the profession overcoming all inhibitions,"

Through her hard work and dedication, Roopa is supporting her family and bringing about a change in the society, one ride at a time.

When Reetima gave wings to her dreams

Drishti Vanaik

Every year on the 8th of March, the world celebrates Women's Day. But why do we dedicate a single day to the women, instead of recognizing and appreciating their contribution to our lives every day?

Perhaps, we are trying to pay homage to the great sacrifices a woman makes everyday of her life to support her loved ones and help them grow. But is that enough? Or do we truly need to change our mindsets and give the women in our lives the freedom and support they need to fulfill their dreams. Such is the story of Reetima Nigam, who proves the proverb 'age is just a number' every single day. A teacher at Cathedral School, Lucknow, she is a 34-year-old homemaker defying all odds in her life and continuing to pursue her dreams.

In conversation with Expressions reporter, Reetima tells us the story of how she came to realise and fulfill her needs despite the many hurdles that were in her way.

"I got married at the age of 22, when I had just completed my graduation and thought of pursuing my childhood dream of modelling. But being from a small town like Kanpur, the very idea was considered a profanity and I was married to a boy in Lucknow." Elaborating about her initial modelling experiences, she adds "When I was in college, I used to participate in activities like ramp walk, fashion shows etc and would get a lot of appreciation. At the age of 19, I took part in a lot of local beauty pageants, which used to happen all around the year. After getting married, Reetima like many other women had to face the pressure of having kids. She has two children and says, "After having kids my dream of becoming a runway model slipped further away and I knew I would never get back the lean and fit body of my youth, which was perfect especially with my 5'9 height, but I consoled myself and dedicated to raising my family."

Reetima, despite her courage and braving her emotions, could not pursue modelling because of infinite reasons which her family forced on her, but currently she is a resolute and accomplished Nursery teacher. With her ironclad resolve, she is a motivation for many of her students and even their parents, who refers to her as an 'absolute gem'. Satvik Sahu, a 10th grader, who belongs from her first ever batch of students, mentions, "Whatever I am today is because of the way Reetima Ma'am has groomed me. She has not only been an amazing teacher but a friend as well."

No matter what life threw her way, Reetima celebrates her talent, beauty, and dreams. She is pursuing a career in modelling, which has long been her dream and does photoshoots for local boutiques and saloons. She says, "I may have crossed the age limit for becoming a model, but my age can't restrict or bind dreams."

NEP 2020 fuels 'Jack of all trades' motto

Sonia Singh

The old saying "Jack of all trades, master of none" is no longer true. To succeed in today's worldwide competitive working environment, you must master all of the skills required in your area and beyond. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a project that aims to modernise the Higher Education system by giving students more options in terms of courses to study and academic pathways, among other things. One of the most essential recommendations of the NEP, 2020, is to use a creative combination of disciplines for study with different entry and exit points.

Amity University has embraced NEP 4.0 to give students the option of customising their degrees or making particular alterations or specialisations rather than following a fixed and pre-determined path.

Students can get skills and knowledge from three fields for the price of one degree programme, without having to spend an extra year or money. During their three-year degree programme, students in the mass communication department can major in Journalism & Mass Communication, Psychology, Political Science, Filmmaking, Management, Information Technology and Environmental Sciences.

Apart from three major domains, the students will also be benefitted with three minor electives teaching them various skills and gaining industry expertise. As earlier, value added courses such as behavioural sciences, communication skills and learning foreign business language are parts of the new curriculum as well.

This combination of skills will add value to a student's resume and help them learn more efficiently. In today's world, having one skill is insufficient; complementary abilities gained early in a student's professional career will enable them to flourish in their chosen industry. For example, a student who wants to start her own digital marketing company does not need to get an MBA to understand business operations because she may now learn it while earning her bachelor's degree in mass communication.

Students will now have an Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) to keep their academic credits in addition to multidisciplinary learning. Students can take a break from their undergraduate or postgraduate study and return within a certain time frame without losing any of the credits they earned during the previous session. With ABC, you won't have to worry about squandering years.

This revitalization and modernization of the educational system will ensure that research-based, skill-based learning is supported and new students will have all of the abilities they need to succeed in their chosen industry.