



# HINDU WOMEN FORUM

**Highest Respect  
for Women**



## MISSION STATEMENT

The aim of the Hindu Women Forum is to provide encouragement, support and training for the development of leadership qualities in Hindu women so that they can assume leadership positions in the Hindu resurgence and renaissance.

## INTRODUCTION

Hindu women have displayed their brilliance in different spheres of life, from the Vedic ages to the present times. They have been respected in many ways in our culture. Hindu women comprise approximately 50% of the global Hindu population, and are playing an increasingly important role around the globe in many important fields ranging from business and science to politics and culture. Although not heavily mentioned in history textbooks or the popular discourse, Hindu women have played a pivotal role in sustaining Hindu Dharma.

A number of Hindu women ranging from sovereigns and warriors like Rani Durgawati, Rani Ahilyabai Holkar, Rani Chinamma, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi and Rani Avantibai, to teachers such as Madalsa and Mata Jijabai to devotees like Andal Devi, Mira Bai, Laleshwari and Kannagi, and revolutionaries like Sister Nivedita, Durga Bhabhi and Preetilata, have courageously stepped forward to provide critical and vital support to Hindu society. Unfortunately, the role of Hindu women in the Hindu resurgence has largely gone unnoticed and unacknowledged. Furthermore, the number of women participating in leadership positions in the recent Hindu resurgence has declined to an unacceptable level. The Hindu Women Forum has been created to mobilise Hindu women and to reverse this trend. The Hindu Women Forum strongly believes in the power and potential of Hindu women. HWF seeks to bring Hindu women from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and professions who can support each other in all aspects of human endeavour as well as advocate the Hindu perspective from neighbourhoods to college campuses to the wider society.

The primary focal point of the Forum is to develop numerous strategies and initiatives for Hindu women to gain critical experience on their campuses, at their workplaces, in the social and political fabric of society, and in their communities and homes, so that they are prepared to take on leadership responsibilities of the Hindu resurgence which would play a vital role in the overall progress of the Hindu society.

Today, the Hindu woman's divinity, her identity, her Dharma and her society, for the growth of which she bears pain as joy, are in danger. She has issues to be addressed, she has responsibilities to take and she, for one, has to take forth the Dharma. To do so in present times, it is very essential to provide her with a platform, where she can identify, introduce, address and solve larger issues. Thus Hindu Women Forum was created.

## SESSION 1: WOMEN AND ECONOMY: RECOGNITION OF HINDU WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION

Chairperson:

**Dr Somdutta Singh**

Co-Chair

NASSCOM Product Council, Bharat

**Introductory Remarks**

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Quoting verses from Yajurveda, Dr Somdutta Singh shared the importance given to women in her family. She explained the role played by women. She spoke about Chanakya's six principles that make him the father of economics. Chanakya focused on the value of relationships and had said only with great relationships can a great kingdom be built. He had emphasised the importance of all senses. He also focused on the need for humility and gratitude. She then introduced the speakers of the first session.



**Dr Toni Dasgupta**

CEO, Veda Financial, USA

**Wearing multiple hats and redefining success**

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By quoting Swami Vivekananda, Dr Toni Dasgupta emphasised the importance of improving the condition of women to bring welfare to the world. Financial literacy for women is needed to end the cycle of violence and poverty. While 80% of individuals own bank accounts in Bharat, only 16% actually use their accounts for savings. This needs improvement in the management of income and the investment of money. The speaker emphasised the importance of making a list of all financial assets, and each makes their own investment plan for retirement and the future. Women need less energy to multi-task

and can take this as an opportunity to lead across various areas. The speaker informed about her organisation – Women's Initiative Network (WIN) which helps women to identify opportunities and get to the next level. She wishes for a Hindu Global Women's Business Directory for women to mentor and connects with each other in the future.

**Smt Meena Patel**

Vice-President, Digital Business Services, USA

**Breaking the glass ceiling**

Smt Meena Patel spoke of women who inspired her, including Indra Nooyi, Oprah Winfrey, and several family members. She shared her personal experience of learning Dharma from her parents and the community. She shared how her mother was a living example of the same for her. Women are forces of change from the household to the company. She spoke of the glass ceiling or prevention of progress in a company or unequal pay. She discussed the situation in various countries suggesting that in Bharat the monetary discrepancy based on gender is not that significant. She provided statistics in terms of women's progress in various industries such as healthcare and manufacturing. She said that women are challenged by multiple jobs that can play a role in preventing progress at certain points in their career. She ended her speech by emphasising the importance of networking for growth.

**Dr Nandini Tandon**

Entrepreneur and Venture Capitalist, USA

**Women in finance sharing learned lessons with women entrepreneurs**

Dr Nandini Tandon shared her experience of visiting Ramakrishna Mission, Srila Prabhupada ji, and Swami Chinmayananda ji as a child. She quoted Swami Vivekananda who had said it is only Hindu Dharma that emphasised fearlessness, as God is within. She shared how her mother acted as her mentor from an early age. She shared that if not born a Hindu she would have become one for its rational, analytical and free nature, linking it to science and innovation. She explained the importance of having a support system and emphasised choosing the right business partner. She spoke of the unicorn phenomenon and the zebra concept. Women have the ability to be profitable and provide social returns. She informed that the number of women angel investors has doubled in recent times, and emphasised the importance of going to a venture capitalist who understands the specific area of investment. She also shared information on various grants available and alternative financing options for small businesses.



## SESSION 2: HINDU WOMEN IN EDUCATION

Chairperson:

**Prof Anuradha Gokhale**

Professor, Illinois State University, USA

### Introductory Remarks

Prof Anuradha Gokhale gave two definitions of education: a systematic instruction to earn a living that is tangible, and an enlightening experience that is felt within and is intangible. The latter focuses on Hindu culture, values, and spirituality. She emphasised that women have an influence on culture and the next generation. They need both types of education. She reminded the recent applications of ancient cultures such as the Sanskrit language in artificial intelligence and by NASA. She also focused on Hindu Dharma, a righteous way of living with the goal of self-realization highlighting its tenets. So, a committee needs to be formed to create an action plan for education in Hindu Dharma and oversee all processes from goal setting to training to evaluation, which can be supported by the government or CSR grants.



**Dr Nivedita Bhide (Padma Shri)**

Vice President, Vivekananda Kendra, Bharat

### Responsibility of women as Hindu ambassadors

Dr Nivedita Bhide explained that she expresses herself as a Hindu through her actions and practices everywhere and suggested that all should be Hindu ambassadors irrespective of gender. This responsibility then coexists with one's life. "Dharma is not in believing. It is in being and becoming." The vision of Hindu Dharma is a vision of oneness and unity. She explained that each soul is potentially divine with a purpose to manifest divinity. She spoke of the unity that exists in diversity, that is cherished in Hindu Dharma. She explained life of restraint. She spoke of a three-pronged approach in order to be a woman Hindu ambassador, Gnana, Bhakti, and Karma. She emphasised the importance of practice. In order to transmit the vision and values of Hindu Dharma from one generation to the next, regular cultural practices are needed. She also explained Dharma, Artha, Kāma, and Moksha. She emphasised the need to further evolve the consciousness of human beings.

## Dr Meena Chandawarkar

Former Vice-Chancellor

Karnataka State Women's University, Bharat

**Role of Hindu women in the past, present, and future, in guiding society through value-based education and policymaking**

Dr. Meena Chandawarkar spoke on the importance given to women in the Hindu Dharma. She spoke about the various goddesses and the energies they represent. She traced the path of women in education through the centuries since the Vedic period. She spoke of women sages, warriors, philanthropists, freedom fighters, scholars, priests, and social reformers. The education scenario in the country has enhanced with more enrolment and positive outcomes. One in four graduates in the world is from the Bharatiya Education system. She focused on the role of youth in creating a better and more productive Bharat. Prayer, meditation, and yoga are universal values that need to be inculcated in education. The power of prayer, the spirit of commitment, and sincerity will reduce the evils of mankind – corruption, violence against women, and improper care of elders.

She also spoke of the Centre for Ideal Womanhood which focuses on meditation, spirituality, civic sense, and concern for elders.



## Dr Vindhya Vasini Persaud

Member of Parliament and President of the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha, Guyana

**Preserving Hindu identity in a multi-cultural society**

Dr. Vindhya Vasini Persaud spoke about the inclusivity of the Hindu way of life. She shared the experience of Bharatiya who had come to work in sugar plantations in Guyana. They could have lost their identity due to the hardships they faced from lost lives to poverty but they still managed to keep going by reciting the Ramayana which they carried with them. The speaker encouraged the audience to include their children in the Hindu practices. As they grow up, their Hindu identity should be expressed in all forms – from their attire to the

way they carry themselves. She emphasised the need to educate and explain one's way of life. She emphasised the importance of Hindus speaking with one voice and standing united for mutual respect. She quoted Swami Vivekananda saying that educating a woman is educating the family. She also emphasised the need to teach the younger generation in ways that they understand so that they state their identity proudly in a multicultural world.

## SESSION 3: HINDU WOMEN - MEDIA AND ART

**Chairperson:**

**Smt Anupama Hoskere**

Director, Dhaatu Puppet Theatre, Bharat

**Introductory Remarks**

Smt Anupama Hoskere explained how the Ramayana and Mahabharata are a part of life in Bharat and how media, art, and culture extend to every street, gully, and corner, across all states. Expression through performing arts, sculpture, and storytelling is a part of everyday life. She described this as the trickle-down of culture. She also explained the role of the Vedas in art. She describes cultural attire as an adorning of the Aatma and a celebration of life itself. She explained the role of a Grihini who takes care of the household primarily. She questioned if the woman is always a Grihini. The beauty of Hindu women is inside out, the glow is from within, she emphasised and shared the story of a princess bringing to light the power of women. She highlighted the need to change the yardstick of measurement in society. She also spoke about happiness being unrelated to material possessions.



**Dr Rasita Vishnu**

Public Affairs & Indic Researcher, USA

**From social networks to collaborative networks**

Dr. Rasita Vishnu shared three instances with the audience. The first instance was the 2014 elections. She shared how women of different backgrounds would urge others to vote. The commonality between them is that they wanted to bring about a change in the country through social media. The second instance was the Sabarimala Temple and the entry of women. There are women who report that they will respect the traditions and will not visit the temple before the stipulated age. The #ReadyToWait campaign on social media helped women across the globe voice their stand on the issue. The third instance was

the Indic Academy, a collaborative platform, that was created through social media. Women are actively involved in various projects to create a Dharmic ecosystem. The three instances have social media as the common factor. Be it building awareness about voting, voicing opinions, organizing programmes, or networking, social media can be used as a very powerful tool.



## Sushri Yashika Singh

Head of Genre

Religion: SABC, South Africa

**Social media – Opportunities and challenges**

Sushri Yashika Singh explained that the media landscape has changed greatly and anyone can broadcast content on social media these days. She initially spoke about unity and oneness; starting with indentured labours in South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi's role in South Africa, and Thillaiyadi Valliammai and Nelson Mandela. The Hindu Dharma encourages finding the meaning of life. It fosters the moral development and well-being of society. She spoke about the importance of spirituality which gives us motivation and ideals. Religion and spiritual ideas answer several questions. She spoke of how prejudice was so deeply embedded in South Africa and only slowly was it possible to build hope. The purpose of arts and communication media is to share stories that matter. The media has challenged the assumption that technology cannot be independent of religion. Social media helps devotees to connect to prayers and spiritual matters. She also explained how NGOs can play a pivotal role in gathering support through social media in issues of injustice and rape.



## Sushri Prerna Lau Sian

Founder, CEO of Vaahan Magazine

**The portrayal of Bharat in global media**



Sushri Prerna Lau Sian explained how she started Vaahan to show that Bharat and its politics are not as bad as portrayed in popular media worldwide. She spoke about how Bharat was labelled as unsafe after the Delhi rape incident following the media portrayal. She spoke of how BBC had linked the Hindu religion to the rape documentary. She pointed out the value of women in the Hindu culture and religion citing how women are allowed to perform pujas without men but not vice versa. She spoke of strong women political leaders such as Smriti Irani, journalists, and actors. She mentioned films such as 'Dangal,' and 'Padman' which portray women in strong roles and speak of important issues relating to women. She also spoke about the importance of inner strength and determination to follow dreams.



**Smt Sneha Mehta**

Accounts Professional, US Federal Treasury

**The portrayal of Bharat in global media**

Smt. Sneha Mehta spoke about the power of current entertainment media and its ability to degrade and destroy. She explained that consumers have a responsibility and role to play in stopping this. She suggested that consumers should make their opinions clear on negative messages by taking charge and boycotting such a cinema. She explained that every Hindu woman in a family has a lot of power and control, but should decide to use it. From decisions about the household to children, they have huge responsibilities. She shared the importance of not blindly taking things at face value but doing one's own research. She said that unless the consumers use this power it's not going to change. She also spoke of the importance of educating children at a young age and teaching them the right things. She also explained the importance of a woman and the purpose she has which a man cannot fulfill.



## SESSION 4: THE ROLE OF HINDU WOMEN IN SHAPING THE SOCIETY

**Chairperson:**

**Smt Alka Inamdar**

National Joint Secretary

Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Bharat

**Introductory Remarks**

Smt Alka Inamdar said in Bharat, that moral ethos exists for the wellbeing and sustenance of society or Dharma. A holistic worldview in Hindu Dharma is that there is no discrimination between men and women, and the society can only flourish when there is unity between both. Women have played a significant role in shaping history. In the Vedic period, female Rishis were in the pursuit of absolute truth and understanding of the relation between humans and the universe. In the Puranic period, our sanskriti flourished from dance to architecture. Several women held positions of administrators, warriors, and artists. In the medieval period, the invaders considered women as commodities, and hence arose the need to protect women. Hindu traditions were kept alive by women who acted as cultural torchbearers. In recent history, women across the country mobilized people against the British. Women, therefore, helped protect and enrich the sanskriti in different aspects and retained moral values through motherhood and social duties.



**Yogini Shambhavi**

Co-Director

American Institute of Vedic Studies, USA

**Awakening the Yoga Shakti in Hindu Dharma**

Yogini Shambhavi explained Yoga Shakti, and described Tantra as a weaving of personal energy with the cosmic universe. When we are connected to the reality of Shakti we will be able to share the wisdom with the Universe. She emphasised that women play an important role in teaching children about our Dharma. Shakti is the courage that flows like a river. But women are flowing upstream against the river in anger, this doesn't help. Women need to stand in strength and support each other. Every woman holds the Shakti to make a change but this should be happy and nurturing, not angry. Dharmic views should be taught to every girl. Not being allowed into Sabarimala doesn't lower a woman's Shakti. She differentiated between angry young women and powerful women with integrity. She gave the example of mother nature never stopping giving flowers and fruits despite the harmful actions of humans and described it as Shakti. It is graciousness, harmony, nurturing, and auspiciousness.

### Smt Amrita Tailor

Health Scientist, Centre for Disease Control, USA

#### Positive parenting

Smt Amrita Tailor defined parenting as being a mother or father to someone and taking care of them. Family, society, nation, and the world influence the upbringing of the child. Positive parenting involves caring, teaching, leading, communicating, and providing for the child's needs consistently and unconditionally. In the Hindu context, positive parenting also involves the incorporation of Hindu values and cultural beliefs. These include tolerance, ahimsa, respect for all, Dharma, and humility. Positive parenting requires one to identify the values to impart and the mechanisms to deliver. Understanding needs is relative to age and different stages of life. The values include the Hindu mindset and it is important to be a role model, share positive messages and reinforce ideas. The delivery mechanisms also include teachers, learning environments, and the temple, not just the parents. Ghar Sabha or quality family time is also crucial. The impact of positive parenting is ultimately being a good citizen and being environmentally conscious.



### Prof Madhu Purnima Kishwar

Indian Council for Social Science Research, Bharat

#### Socio-cultural issues and contemporary challenges

Prof Madhu Kishwar said that in the last three decades, policy and law making has been monopolized by foreign-funded NGOs, feminists, Islamists, and evangelicals. They claim to represent civil society and have forced poorly framed harsh laws. They claim to strengthen women's rights but the real purpose was to tear the social fabric of Hindu society. She mentioned the issues in feminist legislation ranging from the definition of crime, the difficulty of bail, mere allegation being sufficient for jailing, and false entrapment before trial. It is time to take courageous action. Although Bharat is actually placed 85th for

reported rapes in 121 countries, there was a concerted campaign to declare Bharat the world's rape capital following the Delhi rape case. She shared those amendments made to the criminal law in 2012-2013, that were backed by foreign-funded NGOs. She pointed out that women who need help are still not receiving it. She ended by saying no self-respecting society allows hostile outsiders to determine laws.



## SESSION 5: INSPIRING HINDU WOMEN

**Chairperson:**

**Smt Chayaa Nanjappa**

Founder & Managing Partner

Nectar Fresh, Bharat

**Introductory Remarks**

Smt Chayaa Nanjappa shared her experience of becoming an entrepreneur after her education was stopped early. She spoke of how she went to Central Bee Research & Training Institute (CBRTI) to learn about the manufacturing and processing of honey. She then became a part of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. She focused on the quality of the product and also wanted to help the underprivileged through her venture. She aimed to compete with foreign brands. She spoke of how her enterprise Nectar Fresh attained success. The speaker explained how she involved the local farmers in the venture as well in making jams without preservatives and other products. She also spoke of her associations with other big companies.



**Smt Shital Mahajan (Padma Shri)**

Extreme Sportsperson

Bharat

**Overcoming the Fear - Be Fearless**

Smt Shital Mahajan shared her experience of becoming a skydiver. She wanted to represent and bring pride to her nation from a young age. She was thinking of joining the military. She tried seven different sports but did not feel that she was born for them. She met the first Bharatiya man who had done skydiving at the North Pole and the South Pole. She came to know that no Bharatiya woman was involved in skydiving. She wanted to prove that Bharatiya women can do what they set their minds to. She was the first woman in the world to skydive on the North Pole without any training. Her next jump was in Antarctica. She is the first woman in the world to skydive on all continents. She did the jump in a saree to represent the country. She holds 19 national awards, six world records, and has done 750 skydives. She gave importance to the country over her family to encourage more women to represent their nation.



### Smt Vanathi Srinivasan

General Secretary, BJP Tamil Nadu, Bharat  
Politics

Smt Vanathi Srinivasan shared her childhood struggle to get an education. She is the first graduate in her family and the first leader in politics from her village. She spoke of her interest in the poetry of Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi during her youth. She then became associated with Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad. She spoke of Swami Vivekananda's influence in building her into a nation-loving value-based individual. His teaching and work empowered her to face any challenge that came her way. She also organized a function in the memory of Sister Nivedita reaching lakhs of college students.

Working with BJP and RSS gave her an identity, responsibility, and vision. She got support from her friends, family, and party members. She mentioned how she brought various important government schemes to the state. She has also been involved in the development of sanitation facilities and a library in her village. Youth employment and women empowerment is her focus.



### Smt Akila Ramarathinam

National General Secretary  
Vishva Hindu Parishad of Australia  
Social work for Hindu cause

Smt Akila Ramarathinam said Hindu women have excelled in all aspects of life but the need for strong Hindu women leaders still persists. Vishva Hindu Parishad of Australia is engaged in several programmes for the youth and women. She has been involved in teaching Hindu scriptures, approved by the Department of Education, in over 70 public schools covering 25,000 children. This Hindu dharma programme includes teachings from Ramayana, Mahabharata, shlokas, and dharma. This is mainly to develop cultural connections and instill sanskara in the

next generation and the project has created mass awareness. It is run by over 350 women including young parents, new migrants, and senior citizens, who are given regular curriculum training. She was inspired by Swami Vigyananand, Ravikumar Ji and Guna Magesan ji. She discussed not only the challenges in training new teachers, administrative work, and monetary resources but also the impact and recognition the group had received. She encouraged other countries including the US to adopt a similar programme.

## Dr Somdutta Singh

Co-Chair

NASSCOM Product Council, Bharat

**An entrepreneur**

Dr Somdutta Singh spoke about her journey of leaving her family to become an entrepreneur. She shared her experience of earning money through various skills that she learned from her roommates for her survival. She said, "When you have nothing to lose, you only gain". She believes that detachment comes from the position of having nothing. It is important not to create great companies but great minds to run those companies. She learned the Vedas and realised that it is important to know where you come from. It was her open mind and the readiness to accept all forms of knowledge that helped her to form four companies and get patents in her name. Empowerment comes through inter-communication and collaboration. Her third company 'Digital Leadership Institute' is the only educational company in Bharat that works with universities to create a skill-based curriculum to ensure that students can identify their talents and earn a livelihood from a young age.



## Smt Lakshmi Kanta Chawla

Former Minister

Punjab Govt, Bharat

**Politician, Mentor**

Smt Lakshmi Kanta Chawla said she was discriminated against even at birth as she was a girl. It was her father who stood up for her. She shared an experience of not being allowed to touch the temple deity because she was a woman and the temple was cleansed with milk and Ganga Jal. She challenged Pundits and emphasised that women are mothers, daughters, and sisters. She shared various struggles in Punjab with respect to the Emergency period. The current two struggles in Punjab are female foeticide and the use of alcohol and drugs. She encouraged

women to enter the legal profession to help the community. She shared Swami Vivekananda's saying that one is a true Hindu only when one helps another Hindu in suffering. She spoke of Westernization: for example, blowing the candle during birthdays is against what lighting of the lamp signifies. The British could not break our tradition and culture but we have made it weak. She said we have to persist till the aim is fulfilled.

**Chairperson:****Prof Uma Vaidya**

Former VC, Kavikulguru Kalidas Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, Bharat

**Introductory Remarks**

Prof Uma Vaidya described the earlier sessions as the five Upanishads. Economic prosperity is the source of strength for the nation, so the financial literacy of women is important. A Hindu woman not only invests in coins but also in values and culture. She explained the importance of parental attitude towards society and value-based education from childhood to facilitate positive thinking. Media and art need to be used to empower women and showcase Hindu Dharma. She recapped the topics of the role of Hindu women in shaping society and on inspiring women in sports, politics, and social work. While concluding, Prof Uma Vaidya said a generation of citizens who are academically sound, financially strong, socially conscious, spiritually well-trained, and morally upright need to be created. For this, in every city and village, a group of five to six literate women should learn the core ideas of Hindu Dharma and conduct lectures for children. Bharat should be the richest nation in morality. She suggested that a directory for resourceful Hindu women across the globe should be prepared to start a movement.

**Dr Sai Patil**

Director, Mylan Pharma, USA

**Group Workshop Instructions**

Four groups were made and each group was to discuss a particular topic - economy, education, the role of women in social issues, and art and media. Speakers were assigned to those groups. Moderators had the responsibility of sharing any action plans arrived at. The sessions were moderated by Smt Yashaswini Desai, Smt Manga Anantamula, Sushri Shilpa Chheda, and Smt Jaya Asthana.



## Sushri Priya Tandon

Plan of Action

An Entrepreneur

Sushri Priya Tandon summarized the various action plans arrived at by the various groups. With respect to shaping the society, she pointed out the inequality in the workplace, domestic abuse and raising families in western societies with Bharatiya values. The media and arts group had spoken about raising awareness about the Aranmula village, developing the village, and using social media to shift mindsets. The education group suggested free weekly tuition classes on Bharatiya Sanskar and a Hindu values online discussion forum. The economy group suggested Hindu women's business directory, networking, and support for financial education, planning, and management for Hindu women as short-term plans of action. The long-term goals are a women's finance forum, newsletter, celebration of success stories, and sharing of knowledge and financial resources.

