



Pradnya Niketan Education Society's  
**THE ORCHID SCHOOL**

**UNEARTHING  
THE POWER OF  
WOMEN**

*A nine day project by The Orchid School students to  
celebrate the force of SHAKTI in women.*



## Introduction

*This book 'Unearthing the Power of Women' gives a glimpse into the nine day project undertaken by The Orchid School students. During the festival of Navratri, the school breathes, practices and shares stories unearthing the 'Shakti' in women.*

*Women hold an important position in society and if given their due can make a positive impact in any area they delve into...then be that in the world of Science, Education, Politics, Business, Finance, Entertainment, etc.*

*Through this year's Nine Days Nine Stories Project, the students across the classes in The Orchid School acknowledged and lauded the efforts and indomitable strength of women scientists, educationists and the Afghan women.*

*These women from India and beyond did not let adversities hold them back and kept striving relentlessly to achieve their extensive goals - goals that focused on the general welfare of the women who were the victims of dominating patriarchy.*

*As you move on to the pages that follow, you will be intrigued by the stories of powerful women like Anandibai Joshi, Jessy Thomas, Savitribai Phule, Indra Nooyi, Fauzia Koofi, Grace Hopper and many more. So, without any further delay, do immerse yourself into the inspiring stories of these timeless women of substance.*





## **Nine Days – Nine Stories is The Orchid School way of celebrating Dusshera**

**Dedicating the project compendium to the human endeavor that strives for gender equity.**

It is TOS way of **drawing the essence** of women power celebrated in Hindu traditions through nine days of festivals.

It is a way of **including ‘sacred narrative’**, to the historical and cultural context that forms the part of expanding the knowledge horizon.

It is a way of **leveraging the local traditions** and festivals to pedagogical functions of teaching and learning, a way of connecting to language, history, culture metaphysics, art, religion and folklore.

It is a way of **historicizing the myth** and at the same time in appreciating cultures and developing the essential skill of cultural competency.

It is a way of **understanding** that these traditions aren't about gods, or monsters, or whatever, but about human beings; and that if we observe a myth closely, we'll discover clues on how we can live.

It is a way of **identifying similarities and differences** in the interpretation of the world within the framework of gender perspectives and connecting to the current realities in our everyday life.





It is a way of **guiding** students become aware that festivals, traditions and mythologies have a symbolic and ritualistic function, which help younger members critically explore acceptable practices and values of their community.

It is a way of **facilitating learning** through the analysis of human behaviour by introducing the schema of cause and effect (mythical discourse is connected to scientific discourse) by exploring real life “Sheroes” who have broken the gender stereotypes / prejudices and adversities of life to become the role model for us all.

It is TOS way of **enriching learning** by giving ownership to students – researching, identifying, selecting and presenting stories of inspiring women who personified the power of shakti / kali / Lakshmi / Sarasvati / Devi.....thus providing meaningful models action (examples) our students can identify with.

It is a way of **inspiring** our girls, women the possibilities of empowerment and our boys, men on liberating self from patriarchal clutches.

It is about **collectively committing** for humans!

**Dr. Lakshmi Kumar**  
**Founder Director, The Orchid School**





The power of learning is when it is beyond curriculum, contextual and when it is relatable with real life. Education opens the possibility and widens the horizon to learn from each other and from every incident in life. Learning is not restricted to the text book only.

Nine Days Nine Stories is planned every year during Navratri keeping in mind the vast learning possibilities for the students. These nine days of listening, narrating and writing of stories includes many skills. In these nine days, the students get to learn about nine different personalities and in a very informal way get some enriching experiences and learnings for life.

These nine days enrich the students when they-

- Go through a lot of information and make a decision on choosing a personality to narrate a story.
- Do a research and pick up relevant details about the personality from the pool of information available.
- Summarise the information in the context and in proper sequence.
- Narrate a story with proper pronunciation, diction and expression.
- Write the story about using language proficiency.
- Assist in creating the compendium by adding illustrations and by proof reading.

Along with these skills students do get the idea about the existence of women in different roles in different strata of life and the journey of their empowerment.

The ultimate aim of us as a school is to give the exposure to our students where they equipped their personalities with various skills and grow as a citizen who is aware of the society, its culture and trends.

**Sangeeta Kapoor**  
**Principal, The Orchid School**





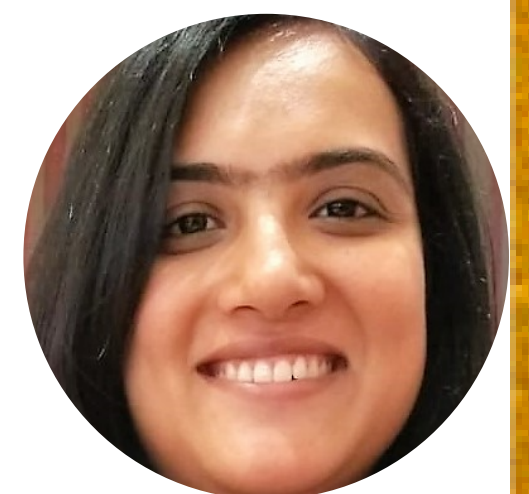
Globally, the number of women in science is disproportionate (average of 28% across STEM jobs). India fares particularly poorly in comparison with the global average, with only 18% women in STEM jobs; despite women constituting 40% of all Science PhDs.

The 'biological clock' being in constant conflict with the 'career clock' is often cited as the only reason; but the problem runs deeper in the Indian social context. Traditional expectations about family responsibility, unequal contribution of partners to household and parenting responsibilities, lack of systemic support at the workplace, lack of female role models while growing up are some of the reasons for this high dropout rate of women in the STEM workforce.

The pivotal question is, "How can we change this for our children, in the years to come?" We need to reflect on our actions. As a society, we enforce gender stereotypes on children right since toddlerhood. Girls are expected to play games that improve their emotional and social skills while boys are encouraged to play games that encourage logical, visual-spatial, and problem-solving skills.

Encouraging more gender-neutral play early among children will help them develop more balanced skills, equipping them to take on both roles with ease as adults. Including children in household chores and decision-making activities, irrespective of gender; will also be helpful for both boys and girls to excel in their chosen paths.

**Dr Nital Tatkalkar**  
**Research Associate, Wissenkraft Labs Pvt Ltd.**  
**NCL Innovation Park, Pune**





## **Women from the field of Science:**

- Asima Chatterjee
- Tessy Thomas
- Jocelyn Bell Burnell
- Anandibai Joshi
- Janaki Ammal
- Ritu Karidhal
- Grace Hopper
- Bimla Buti
- Helen Taussig
- Kamala Sohonie





## Asima Chatterjee

On September 23rd, Asima Chatterjee was born. Being the eldest child raised in a middle-class household in Calcutta, she was always encouraged to pursue a career in academia. Her father was enthralled by botany, and Asima shared his enthusiasm.

Through her research, she developed anti-epileptic, anti-convulsive, and chemotherapy drugs to treat patients. The anti-epileptic drug - 'Ayush-56'- which she developed from *Marsilia minuta* is her most successful work and till date, it is used commercially. From different types of plants she developed anti-malarial drugs with her team.

She also dedicated forty years of her time to research on cancer and anti-cancer growth drugs. She studied a class of compounds called 'alkaloids' which were used effectively in chemotherapy for cancer patients, which was a dead end for patients back then.

As she was the first Indian female to receive a doctorate in Science and even started a chemistry department in the Lady Brabourne College of the University of Calcutta she inspired a lot of women in that time of India to pursue their dreams and work as innovators and specialists.

She's also the author of over 400 papers that have been published both nationally and internationally.

**- Presented by**

**Krish Varma, V Aster; Praney Taneja, V Blush**

**Mihir Apte, VII Pearl; Pratyusha M, VI Honeydew**

**Abhyuday Swami, V Fawn**







## Tessy Thomas

Tessy Thomas, proudly known as the Missile Woman of India, became the first ever woman scientist to lead a missile project in India.

She grew up near Thumba Rocket Launching Station and says her fascination with rockets and missiles began then. She was stimulated even by the wonderment of aircraft flying. This spirit of inquiry allowed Tessy to move ahead in her life and do what she really loved.

Thomas credited her home town and mother for her personal development. “I grew up with the pretty backwaters of Kerala as my backyard. I guess nature gives you strength and good thoughts. The power of nature cannot be undermined in one’s development.” Of her mother she has said, “It must have been tough for my mother — who was not allowed to work — to look after us on her own. Yet she made sure each of her five daughters and one son had a good education.... I’ve inherited her strong will for sure. I am equally persevering and determined like my mother

Thomas received the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Award for her contribution for making India self-reliant in the field of missile technology.

Tessy Thomas is an inspiration to women to pursue science in a male dominated field and excel in it.

**- Presented by**

**Avantika Saini, VI Auburn; Ishan Pingalkar, VI Ebony**

**Bhuvan Pillai, VII Honeydew**





## Jocelyn Bell Burnell

Jocelyn Bell was born in Northern Ireland on July 15, 1943. She was born and raised in Lurgan, and she attended Lurgan College from 1948 to 1956.

She discovered Pulsars; which appear to be blinking lights as they emit radiation into their surroundings. When a red giant star bursts, everything except the core survives. This is a **pulsar core**.

Jocelyn Bell, as a graduate student in astronomy, observed an odd 'bit of scruff' in the data arriving from her radio telescope in 1967. She and her professor Anthony Hewish assumed they had discovered a signal from an extraterrestrial civilization.

They eventually discovered that it was a piece of space debris emitting a lot of radiation. Pulsars have been recognized by astronomers as critical to understanding the nature of stars, particularly unusual stars like black holes, since their discovery.

Bell Burnell's finding was a source of motivation for female scientists. Rarely had a female scientist achieved such widespread acclaim for a scientific breakthrough.

- Presented by  
Abhijay Mirajkar, VI Auburn





## Anandibai Joshi

Anandi Gopal Joshi was the first woman from the erstwhile Bombay Presidency of India to study and graduate with a two-year degree in western medicine in the United States.

Anandi Joshi secured a degree in medicine at the age of twenty one from Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania at a time where women weren't encouraged to study.

After getting married at the age of nine, her husband Gopalrao Joshi took a leading role to educate his wife. He inspired Anandi to pursue a degree in Western Medicine but no medical colleges in America agreed to give a chance to an orthodox Brahmin.

At the age of fourteen, Anandibai gave birth to a boy, but the child lived only for a total of ten days due to lack of medical care. This proved to be a turning point in Anandi's life and inspired her to become a physician. After Gopalrao tried to enroll her in missionary schools and not working out, they moved to Calcutta. There she learned to read and speak Sanskrit and English.

The courage Anandi showed by going against her caste and her friends to help the poor suffering women with medical aid they desperately needed.

She had said, "My soul is moved to help the many who cannot help themselves."

**- Presented by**

**Sarrveshkumar Tambe, VII Honeydew**

**Bindu D, VII Pearl; Gia Pinge, VI Ebony**





## Janaki Ammal

Janaki Ammal Edavalath Kakkat was the first female botanist in India. Ammal, who was born in Kerala and received her Ph.D. in botany from the University of Michigan in 1931, is one of the few Asian women to have received a D.Sc. (honoris causa) from her alma university.

Janaki returned to India after completing her doctorate to work as a Professor of Botany at the Maharaja's College of Science in Trivandrum, where she taught from 1932 to 1934. She worked as a geneticist at the Sugarcane Breeding Institute in Coimbatore alongside Charles Alfred Barber from 1934 until 1939.

She left her mark in the pages of history being a talented plant scientist who developed several hybrid crop species still grown today, including varieties of sweet sugarcane that India could grow on its own lands instead of importing from abroad. She also worked on the cytogenetics of a range of plants and co-authored the Chromosome Atlas of Cultivated Plants (1945) with C.D. Darlington. She took an interest in ethnobotany and in plants of medicinal and economic value from the rain forests of Kerala, India. She was awarded a Padma Shri by the Indian government in 1977

She became a powerful advocate for the significance and preservation of India's native plants in her later years, receiving distinction as a pioneer of indigenous environmental initiatives.

**- Presented by**  
**Mrunal Phalak, VII Honeydew;**  
**Raahi Chhajed, VII Pearl**





## Ritu Karidhal

Dr. Ritu Karidhal Srivastava is an Indian scientist working with the Indian Space Research Organization. Now she might seem like any other woman scientist working in the ISRO but here's what's special about her.

She was a Deputy Operations Director to India's Mars orbital mission, Mangalyaan. She has been referred to as a "Rocket Woman " of India.

As a child, she knew that her interest was in the space science. In her teens, she started collecting newspaper cuttings about any space-related activity and kept track of the activities of ISRO and NASA.

This childhood inquisitiveness led her to follow her dreams and achieve them. Ritu Karidhal has also been the recipient of many awards like the ISRO Young Scientist Award in 2007 from A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, then President of India. Mangalyaan was one of the greatest achievements of ISRO. It made India the fourth country in the world to reach Mars. It was done in 18 months time and at a far lesser cost to the taxpayers - ₹450 crores only. Her job was to conceptualize and execute the craft's onward autonomy system, which operated the satellite's functions independently in space and responded appropriately to malfunctions.

Ritu Karidhal is an inspiration and a paragon of science for all the young ladies out there who one day aspire to make a career in science.

**- Presented by  
Pranshu Shah, VI Auburn**





## Grace Hopper

Amazing Grace! Or Grace Hopper, at age 7 decided to take apart her alarm clock. Gears and cogs flew out of the clock, but she couldn't understand how it worked. With blooming curiosity, she took apart every clock she could find and figured out how it worked.

With curiosity that lasted life long, she went on to invent the first computer compiler, a program that translates written instructions into codes that computers read directly. She was an American computer scientist and United States Navy rear admiral. One of the first programmers of the Harvard Mark I computer, she was a pioneer of computer programming who invented one of the first linkers.

Hopper was the first to devise the theory of machine-independent programming languages, and the FLOW-MATIC programming language she created using this theory was later extended to create COBOL, an early high-level programming language still in use today. She was involved in the creation of UNIVAC, the first all-electronic digital computer.

"The most important thing I've accomplished, other than building the compiler," she said, "is training young people. They come to me, you know, and say, 'Do you think we can do this?' I say, 'Try it.' And I back 'em up. They need that. I keep track of them as they get older and I stir 'em up at intervals so they don't forget to take chances."

Throughout much of her later career, Hopper was much in demand as a speaker at various computer-related events. She was well known for her lively and irreverent speaking style, as well as a rich treasury of early war stories. She also received the nickname "Grandma COBOL".

- Presented by  
Rohan Patankar, V Blush





## Bimla Buti

Bimla Buti was born on September 19, 1933 in Multan, India to Bodh Raj and Jamuna Devi Buti. She is an Indian physicist and specializes in the field of plasma physics. She was the first Indian woman Physicist Fellow of Indian National Science Academy(INSA).

She worked for two years at Goddard flight center USA. In 1986 Buti came back to India and worked in IIT, Delhi. Buti was offered work at Physical research laboratory (PRB).

Bimla Buti has been awarded the Vikram Sarabhai Award for Planetary Sciences (1977), INSA-Vainu Bappu Award for Astrophysics in 1994 and US Medal for Fundamental Contributions in the Physics of Nonlinear Waves and Chaos in 2010. Bimla Buti has been listed as a noteworthy Physicist, researcher by Marquis Who's Who.

Her hard work and efforts put into her research is commendable and admirable. Her fascination with plasma physics has led to further advances in the field. Her work has helped the science field a lot.

**- Presented by  
Agastya Soni, VII Pearl**





## Helen Taussig

Dr. Helen Brooke Taussig was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts on May 24, 1898. Helen was inspired by her mother and father, who were both intellectuals.

In her medical practice, Helen saw a lot of newborns that were blue during and immediately after birth. The ductus arteriosus, a unique conduit, drew her attention.

She reasoned that keeping the shunt patent would prevent this. She offered it to Dr. Gross, who is known for successfully sealing the ductus arteriosus.

Her plan, however, was rejected. Helen then sought the advice of Dr. Blalock, a cardiac surgeon. Helen asked if he could make an artificial shunt for her 'blue kids' so that they could live.

After trying the methods out, they decided to test this on a blue baby. Dr. Blalock and Helen published their findings after the third successful operation. Overnight, the Blalock-Taussig shunt became famous all over the world.

Helen was dubbed '*the mother of pediatric cardiology*' later on.

**- Presented by  
Surabhi Marathe. VIII Khaki**







## Kamala Sohonie

Kamala Sohonie was born in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh in 1912. Narayanarao Bhagvat, her father, was a chemist. Kamala graduated from Bombay University with a B.Sc in chemistry (principal) and physics (subsidiary) in 1933.

She then applied for a research grant at the Indian Institute of Science, but her application was turned down by the then-Director, Prof. C V Raman, on the grounds that women were not capable of pursuing research.

She worked on proteins in milk, pulses and legumes, which in fact had important implications for nutritional practices in India. In 1936, Kamala, then only a graduate student, was the first person to work on pulse proteins. Her research consisted only of 40 type-written pages, yet it was remarkable in many ways. She also developed a protocol that prevented the curdling of milk.

After receiving her PhD, Kamala returned to India in 1939. As a supporter of Mahatma Gandhi, she wanted to come back to her country and contribute to the nationalist struggle. She was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Biochemistry at Lady Hardinge Medical College in New Delhi. Later, she worked at the Nutrition Research Laboratory, Coonoor as Assistant Director, focusing on the effects of vitamins.

**- Presented by**  
**Nikita Singh, V Aster;**  
**Avani Joshi, VII Ivory**





# **Afghani Women who dared to speak for their brethen:**

- Zarlisht Wali
- Salima Mazari
- Dr. Nilofar Ibrahimimi
- Fawzia Koofi
- Kawkaba Nowruzi
- Malalai Kakar
- Khalida Popal
- Hasina Jalal
- Qamar Gul
- Saleema Rehman





## Zarlasht Wali

Zarlasht Wali is one of those brave Afghans still hoping for a better Kabul and is fighting the Taliban, resisting its oppressive measures. Asked if the thought of leaving Afghanistan crossed her mind when thousands thronged the airport to flee, she said: “No. I am a teacher and a social activist. I am hope to several people. When people left for safety reasons, I sat back and thought I could not abandon the people who are in the country, and they were looking up to me”.

The 26-year-old Afghan educator and social activist narrated how she did not feel safe in her homeland, scrambling for a hijab to step out of her home once the Taliban took over. Originally from the Ghazni province, Zarlasht Wali stays in Kabul because of her work. She is associated with the Pen Path foundation, led by Matiullah Wesa, educating nearly 60,000 students across Afghanistan. Being brought up in a post-Taliban Afghanistan with a US-backed government, Wali said she was not used to the hijab. She did not even have one when the Taliban took control.

Moving around the country without a male guardian, the freedom to work and to stand for elections are some of the rights that women in Afghanistan are fighting for. Despite the increasing threats to women in Afghanistan, especially working women, Wali is determined to keep doing their work at Pen Path a NGO which campaigns for girls’ education in rural Afghanistan.

Having majored in English at Kabul University, she decided to teach the language while also conducting door-to-door campaigns to convince parents to enroll their daughters in schools. Many Afghan parents, particularly in rural areas, are hesitant to send their daughters to school. “In Afghanistan, the men take decisions for us,” Wali says, “I have accepted that, as long as they don’t obstruct our education. To enroll our girls in the schools, we have to pass through their parents, brothers, the tribal leaders, and religious scholars.”

**-Presented by**

**Tamanna Sinha, Herlin Rathor, X Peach**

**Sara Chincholkar, Ria Vinod , XI A**





## Salima Mazari

Born in 1980 to a family of Afghanistani refugees, Salima Mazaar grew up in Iran. She graduated from the University of Tehran and was quite successful in her work. But falling leaves return to their roots, and Mazaar chose to return to her roots as well - back to Afghanistan.

At 38, she became the District Governor of Charkint in Balkh Province. Here, she was to achieve things beyond what anyone anticipated.

She began recruiting people to fight against the Taliban, forming a security commission to do so more effectively. In 2020, over 100 Taliban soldiers in Balkh surrendered because of her.

Mazaar refused to flee as so many others did, holding her own against the Taliban in 2021. Her district was one of the few which wasn't occupied by the soldiers until after the Fall of Kabul.

People were worried that she may have been captured after no news of her was heard. However, an article published later on revealed that after Balkh surrendered and Mazar-i-Sharif fell, Salima Mazaar closed the fight and escaped to an undisclosed location in the U.S.

Her determination and refusal to knuckle down under tough situations will be recalled and inspire others for centuries to come.

**-Presented by**  
**Aadi Agarwal, XI B**  
**Ananya Malik, X Peach**





## Dr. Nilofar Ibrahimi

Nilofar Ibrahimi's journey began at the tender age of five when she left her home in Badakhshan province to go stay in Kabul. She stayed with her uncle - a military general - over there. It was around this time that a great tragedy tested her entire family.

When Nilofar was only two years old, her father was killed. Her mother was 18, with two small children to raise alone. But she worked as hard as she could, ensuring that her daughters could succeed and grow to be whatever they wanted. Nilofar would later say that her mother was her greatest inspiration and always motivated her to do well.

She became a gynecologist in her village. She reflects - 'During this time, I saw how women are only recognized as a wife or mother who only does the housework. I wanted to take the voices of those women out of their houses.'

She ran for parliament at her mother's advice. She had to work twice as hard to overcome her struggles. Politics, as most fields are, was male-dominated and hard for a woman to get into. But despite everything else, she prevailed and became a member of Parliament in 2010.

Nilofar Ibrahimi's story shows us that our struggles and losses are something we need to carry, but they do not have to weigh us down. It is possible to live with our grief and achieve great things, no matter how hard it seems at the time.

**-Presented by  
Aniya Mhalas, XII C**





## Fawzia Koofi

Gender inequality is one of the many atrocities women face as they grow and go out into the world. For Fawzia Koofi, this inequality began from the very moment she was born.

Her father was clear that he wanted sons. However, our protagonist's mother, one of many wives, had given birth to a daughter. Before she was even a day old, Koofi was left out in the sun to die.

Her parents were extremely skeptical about sending her to school. But in the end, she managed to convince them. Her rebellion against inequality began back then when she was the first girl in the family to attend school.

The Taliban banned women's education before she could pursue a medical degree.

After the Taliban's fall in 2001, she completed her education. She was married to a man named Hamid, who was arrested ten days after their marriage. He passed away only a short while after his release.

Today, Fawzia Koofi lives in Kabul with her two daughters. She is a strong advocate for women's rights and is working towards gender equality. Women should have proper living conditions, be able to complete their education, and work wherever they want.

**-Presented by**

**Mihir Bhatlawande, IX Plum**

**Vishwa Adapawar, Medha Bhat, Srishti Rathi, Aditi Saraswat, XI C**

**Rahul Lincoln, XII C**





## Kawkaba Nowruzi

For many, struggles begin before they're even born. So this is the story of Kawkaba Nowruzi, a midwife who has come to the aid of hundreds of women and children.

The situation of women where Nowruzi works is dismal. Aside from the atrocities faced with regard to marriage and inheritance, women are not allowed to visit clinics when they're pregnant.

For everyday work, Nowruzi battles with adamant husbands and families and braves Taliban-controlled areas to help deliver children who could otherwise be born under terrible conditions.

Not everyone approves of the work she does. Once, while visiting a household in a village, she realized the family wanted to hand her over to the Taliban. Nowruzi escaped over the back wall of the house and ran to the nearest police station for protection.

Despite her struggles, Nowruzi is determined to continue her work. These efforts should not go unappreciated, or be considered small next to the other stories we hear.

As the great poet, Rahim said in his poems, "Jahan kaam aave sui, kaha kare tarvari." A sword can do many great things, but it cannot carry out the work of a needle.

**-Presented by**

**Poorvi Jiwatramani, X Saffron**

**Sadhika Kumar, XII C**





## Malalai Kakar

Hatred for mankind can be born from many things, but perhaps nothing so powerful as fear. Born in 1967, Lt. Colonel Malalai Kakar was the first woman to ever graduate from Kandahar Police Academy.

Later, she was also the first woman to work as an investigator with the Kandahar Police Department.

In a male-dominated society, Kakar did everything she could to help women and worked tirelessly for their welfare. She was involved in many shootouts and apprehended thieves and murderers on multiple occasions.

She insisted that rape, assault, and beating should be defined as crimes under the law.

In 2008, the societal shock and disturbance caused by a female officer boiled over. The Taliban believed that women should be hidden away in houses, away from the public eye. At the age of 41, Malalai Kakar was assassinated by the Taliban.

But she has inspired thousands of people and showed girls across the world that their gender cannot stop them from achieving whatever they put their minds to.

**-Presented by  
Arunima Rath, XIA**







## Khalida Popal

During the war of Middle East and Taliban was born the discrimination and oppression of teenage playing Football. Born in 1987, as the war continued there was a ban for women to play sports, in the midst of this Khalida's mother taught her football and she started to play in an isolated yard to have some safety and not be seen by men.

Even though it was forbidden, more and more girls joined and she soon had to move to a public field. Playing sports by women was seen as a political act of defiance against the Taliban.

In 2021 history repeated itself and she found herself to be in a stressful event, the Taliban were knocking on people's doors. The players had to hide and stay on the move. She took her brother's gun, while sitting in front of her window, watching outside.

When the Taliban knocked on her door she decided to shoot herself in the head because she preferred to kill herself rather than be caught by the Taliban. Her teammates worked like fingers on one hand, with different roles, came together as a "big strong punch," and pulled off the mission to evacuate 100-200 Afghan athletes and a number of individuals connected to them from the Hamid Karzai international airport in Kabul.

Currently living in Denmark with her family, Popal continues to fight for women's rights and equality in sport. She continues her work with the Afghanistan Women's National Football Team as their Program and Event Director.[]

**-Presented by  
Anshita Vaidya, IX Iris**





## Hasina Jalal

One of the many women fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan, Hasina Jalal.

Her journey begins with her mother, Dr. Massouda Jalal, who has been a mentor to her. She majored in women and gender studies, and now teaches the youth about their rights and the importance of their voice.

She is the founding director of NAACS and co-founder of the South Asian Women's Coalition. Her goals are promoting democracy, enhancing the participation of young women in political processes and making the voice of Afghan youth recognized.

Hasina efforts and activism for gender equality, human rights, women empowerment, and democracy in Afghanistan has been recognized by several regional and international awards and honors.

She has won many prestigious awards like "Honoring 100 Asian Women Award", "N-Peace Award" from the UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Office and the UN Secretary General's Special Advisor on the University for Peace, the "Global Women Leadership Award" by the CSR and the "World Super Achiever Award" by World Human Rights Congress to name a few.

**-Presented by**

**Ishani Choudhari, X Saffron**





## Qamar Gul

Qamar Gul, 15, killed the militants when they stormed her home, in a remote village in the central province of Ghor. "I no longer fear them and I'm ready to fight them again," Gul told AFP by telephone from a relative's home, where she was being watched by guards.

"It was about midnight when the Taliban arrived", Gul said, recounting the events of that night. She was asleep in her room with her 12-year-old brother when she heard the sound of men pushing at the door of their house." My mother ran to stop them but by then they had already broken the door," Gul said.

"They took my father and mother outside and shot them several times. I was terrified". But moments later, anger took over. " I picked up the gun we had at home, went to the door and shot them," said Gul, who was taught by her father how to fire an AK-47 assault rifle.

Her brother stepped in when one of the insurgents, who appeared to be the group's leader, tried to return fire. "My brother took the gun from me and hit (shot) him. The fighter ran away injured, only to return later," Gul said, ' By then, several villagers and pro-government militia had arrived at the house. The Taliban eventually fled following a lengthy firefight.

**-Presented by  
Siya Gangoli, X Coral**





## Saleema Rehman

Coming into this world was hard itself. Her mother gave birth to her in a refuge. "My mother needed an urgent surgery to deliver me, but there were no facilities or resources to go to", said Saleema.

Her father would sell fruits during the day and make carpet designs until late in the night to provide for the family and pay for her education.

Even with her parents' encouragement, growing up as a refugee with big ambitions was not always easy. Rehman's family escaped the Soviet War in Afghanistan in 1979 to the refugee camps in Swabi in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where Rehman was born and raised.

Because of her status, she faced bureaucratic challenges and fewer opportunities, says Rehman. And she realized "there was no one to guide me because there were not many Afghan refugee women who had done this before."

She's a trailblazer. She's beaten the odds by becoming the first female doctor in her community, achieving her dream of offering health care to the most vulnerable – refugees and Pakistanis alike.

Saleema is a living testament to how women can contribute to the socioeconomic development of their communities.

**-Presented by  
Aahana Devikar, X Saffron**





**Women from other walks of life whose grit and gumption has been an inspiration to many women:**

- Indra Nooyi
- Savitri Bai Phule
- Kiran Bedi
- Geeta Phogat
- Sudha Chandran





## Indra Nooyi

Indra Krishnamurthy Nooyi was born on 28th October 1955 to Tamil parents. Following her schooling from AIHSS Chennai, Indra went on to get a BSc from Madras Christian College. During the last leg of her academic life in India, she moved to Kolkata to pursue her master's in finance and marketing from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Calcutta.

Indra started her career with ABB and then went on to work for Johnson & Johnson. By this time Indra had become a symbol of women's empowerment in the country. However, this ambitious girl wanted to achieve way more than that. That is why she decided to go for a master's degree in public and private management from the prestigious Yale Management School in the US.

Starting small, she made her way to the board of directors of PepsiCo. It was her hard work and steady determination that made people notice her. In 2001 she was named president and chief financial officer of the company.

Nooyi assumed the title of CEO in October 2006 and the next year became chairman of the board as well. The fifth chairman and CEO in PepsiCo's 42-year history, Nooyi was the first woman to lead the soft-drink and snack-food giant and one of only 11 female chief executives of Fortune 500 companies.

Under her leadership, PepsiCo's revenues increased from \$35 billion in 2006 to \$63.5 billion in 2017.

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## Savitri Bai Phule

Savitribai Phule was born on 3 January 1831 in Naigaon from Maharashtra's Satara district. She was the eldest daughter of Lakshmi and Khandoji Neveshe Patil.

At the tender age of 9, she was married off to Jyotirao Phule who himself was no older than 13 years old. Savitribai was not educated at the time of her marriage, as she was from a backward caste and a woman.

From a tender age Savitribai showed interest in educating herself, which for a woman during those times was nothing less than a revolution. Jyotiba was Savitribai's first teacher. He taught her to read and write even though it was not allowed for women to read in those days.

Savitribai did not let the patriarchal and casteist social system stop her from getting herself educated. Savitribai went on to become India's first female teacher and headmistress. It is her struggle and story that marks the beginning of the women's struggle for the right to education in India.

She became the first female teacher in India when she set up the first school for girls on 1 January 1848 in Bhide Wada in Pune, Maharashtra. Her first batch consisted of 8 girls.

She was a shining ray of hope for women all over India in times of patriarchal oppression.

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# Kiran Bedi

Kiran was born in Amritsar, Punjab, to Prakash and Prem Peshawaria and is the second of three daughters.

Growing up, Kiran was part of the National Cadet Corps while attending Sacred Heart Convent in Amritsar. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in English, she completed her MA in Political Science, went on to take the Indian Administrative Service's test, and finally joined the police task force.

She joined the IPS in 1972 and went on to serve a variety of roles, including narcotics officer, antiterrorist specialist, and administrator.

Bedi earned recognition for the work she did as inspector general of prisons, beginning in 1994. In that capacity, she reshaped one of the largest prisons in the world—the Tihar prison complex, in Delhi—by addressing the corruption and human rights abuses she found there. She targeted sanitation and nutrition problems at Tihar and also implemented new literacy and health care programs there.

Kiran Bedi also introduced meditation in the jails to make everyone peaceful. In fact, she has brought many reforms in the prisons to show the right path of life to the criminals. She had helped many women and men to overcome their fear. Kiran Bedi gave the best guidance and assistance to the people who were ruining their lives due to bad habits. She was the first woman police officer in India to join the police department.

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## Geeta Phogat

On 15 December 1988, Geeta was born in the Jat family to Mahavir Phogat and Daya Kaur in the Balali village of Haryana's Bhiwani district.

Geeta grew up in a family where people give more preference to a male child as compared to daughters. For this reason, her mother Daya wanted to have a boy, not a girl.

Mahavir Singh Phogat, a former wrestler, trained Geeta Phogat for wrestling with his one basic formula 'train as hard as you can'. Geeta says that her initial training was very tough and demanding as "my father wanted both me and my sister, Babita, to wake up at 3:30 AM and practice in the akhada for three hours."

Her father trained his own daughters in a sport that is traditionally male-dominated, that too in a state which is renowned for gender inequality and a low sex ratio.

Geeta and Babita used to practice with boys since there were no other girls to practice with. But they did not budge. Deprived of proper facilities in his village where his daughters wrestled against boys, Mahavir enrolled Geeta and Babita into the Sports Authority of India center in Sonipat.

Geeta came to the headlines when she won India's first-ever gold medal in 55-kg women's wrestling at the 2010 Commonwealth Games held in New Delhi. She also represented India at the 2012 London Olympics. But as of now, she is appointed as a deputy superintendent of Police (DSP) in Haryana.

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## Sudha Chandran

Many know Sudha Chandran as the woman who dances on one artificial leg called the Jaipur Foot who revolutionized Indian Television. However, apart from that, her life has been an inspiration.

Sudha began learning how to dance when she was three years old. She would go to school, then go for her dance training and be back home only by 9:30 pm.

In her 10th exams, she stood first with 80% , and chose arts for her further studies. By this time she had performed at several events and done hundreds of stage shows. She was just about beginning when life took a terrible turn.

When traveling from Trichy by bus, she met with a major accident that left without her right foot. Despite people saying that she wouldn't be able to dance anymore, she stuck with her dream to perform on an international level. She began to learn how to walk again and it took her four months to even walk straight.

It took her three years of physiotherapy to recover and feel normal again. She then decided to re-learn what she had known her entire life - to dance. It was a slow and painful process but with every step she learnt she knew that this is what she wanted.

She is now a world-class dancer! She started her acting career with the Telugu biographical dance film Mayuri, which was based on her own life.

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