ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये
University Grants Commission

Programme Proceedings

# Women Leaders: Shaping Academic Excellence for Viksit Bharat @2047

**University Grants Commission (UGC)**
**Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi**

**December 13, 2024**



# INAUGURAL SESSION

INAUGURAL SESSION











**The Women Leaders:** Shaping Academic Excellence for Viksit Bharat @2047 event, organized by the University Grants Commission (UGC), was held on December 13, 2024, at IIT Delhi.

The event brought together over 800 distinguished women leaders from academia to discuss their role in shaping India's academic future toward a developed and inclusive Bharat by 2047.

It aimed to explore strategies for empowering women leaders in academia, promoting gender equity in higher education, and ensuring academic excellence.

The session began with an Introduction of the Program by **Dr Ashima Mangla,** Joint Secretary, UGC. She welcomed all attendees to the event, highlighted the objectives of the workshop. She pointed to the legacy of women leaders throughout ancient and contemporary history of India.

***From Gargi and Maitreyi to Savitribai Phule, Sarojini Naidu, and modern icons like President Droupadi Murmu, Dr. Tessy Thomas, Mary Kom, PV Sindhu, Falguni Nayar, and Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, these leaders continue to inspire progress across fields.***







At the same time, there are ongoing challenges women face, such as societal expectations, gender stereotypes, and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Despite these obstacles, she encouraged the creation of supportive environments through inclusive policies, mentorship, and workplace equality.

***She concluded the introduction with a quote "उठे नया संकल्प हृदय में, गढ़े नया इतिहास देश का, अब ये हमारा सफ़र नया है, स्वागतम् शुभस्वागतम्!"***

# *Prof. Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar,* UGC Chairman



***The Chairman began by elaborating on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its focus on achieving access, equity, and quality in the education system. He highlighted the transformative vision of the policy, which includes experiential learning for students, integration of digital technology in academic administration, promotion of a multi-disciplinary approach in higher education, enhancing access for students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, implementation of accelerated degree programs, multi-entry and multi-exit schemes, and provision of personalized education to cater to individual student needs.***



As India advances in implementing these reforms, the role of academic leaders becomes paramount in driving these changes effectively.

The need to eradicate remnants of servitude in societal attitudes, recognize the value of Indian culture and ethos, and uphold civic responsibilities to create a sustainable, inclusive, and knowledge-driven economy. Women leaders are fundamental to achieving this vision, as they bring unique perspectives and capabilities essential for holistic growth.

All UGC initiatives, directly or indirectly, aim to encourage greater female participation in higher education. These include the Savitribai Phule Scholarship for Ph.D. programs for single girl children, the Master's Program Scholarship for single children, and the recently announced PM Vidya Laxmi Scheme, which offers collateral-free loans covering full higher education expenses. In STEM fields, the percentage of female graduates has increased from **38.4%** a decade ago to **42.6%** today, marking the highest female participation at the graduate level globally.

The Chairman expressed gratitude to the distinguished speakers from diverse domains, including technology, industry, policy-making, academia, art, and culture and encouraged participants to leverage the experiences and insights shared by the speakers.



**Shri Sanjay Kumar,**
*Secretary,*
*Higher Education,*
*Ministry of Education*

***Shri Sanjay Kumar*** *started his address by highlighting that the rich Indian tradition venerates women as embodiments of power, wealth, and knowledge-represented by Goddesses Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswati.*

*He remarked that respect for women is deeply embedded in India's collective memory and cultural psyche.*

During the historic landing of Chandrayaan on August 23, 2023, the powerful imagery of women leading the mission was inspiringly evident in the live telecast. Prominent scientists like Dr. Nandini Harinath, Monica Dutta, Tessy Thomas, and Dr. Reeta Shrivastava, who spearheaded prestigious projects, have become household names and symbols of transformative leadership.

As per the data from the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), **43.4% of students** in higher education institutions in India are women – a participation rate that is among the highest globally.

There has been a notable increase in the proportion of female teachers in recent years. In 2014, the teaching workforce was evenly split, with **48% women** and **52% men**. Today, with a total of 9.8 million teachers, the ratio has shifted: **52% of educators are women**, while **48% are men**.

This shift could be described as the 'feminization of the schooling system,' in a desired direction and progressive sense. However, there is a need for more data points and real-time dashboards to track teacher representation across schools and higher education, with a focus on female participation.

**India** has made significant progress in gender parity, with girls outperforming boys in school enrollment, college admissions, board results, and competitive examinations. However, systemic biases continue to persist in society. For example, CBSE data shows that while girls outnumber boys in government schools, boys are outnumbered in private schools. This may suggest a societal willingness to educate girls but a reluctance to invest equally in their education. A critical cultural shift is still underway.

Management thinker Peter Drucker once said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast," reflecting the importance of cultural change alongside policy initiatives. There is a need for increased awareness to speed up this transformation. **A vision for India as a developed nation by 2047**, led by women leaders who exemplify diversity, capability, and resilience.

# HON'BLE MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION, **DR. SUKANTA MAJUMDAR**



***In his address, Dr. Majumdar highlighted the pivotal role of women's leadership in achieving the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of a Viksit Bharat-2047, underscoring the importance of inclusive growth and gender equality as key drivers of national development.***

**There is great potential** for women empowerment in sectors such as Education, Science, and Technology, evident through various government initiatives like the **KIRAN Program**, **DIKSHA Platform**, and **UDAAN Scheme**, all designed to encourage active participation. The worship of Goddess Durga, especially in West Bengal, symbolizes a strong tradition in Indian culture that values women strength and leadership, emphasizing their central role in society.

The indispensable contributions of women as pillars of strength in both personal and professional spheres are evident. The need for women leadership in education becomes clear when we look at the examples of historical and contemporary women leaders who have risen to challenges and excelled in their fields. The achievements of inspirational figures such as Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Kalpana Chawla, and Sunita Williams serve as a source of motivation for us all.

While recognising the progress in women **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** in education, continued efforts are needed to enhance access and participation, ensuring that no girl or woman is left behind.

The contributions of men and women are like the two strong wings of a bird. Increased representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles, particularly in Education and Technology, is a crucial step toward realizing the vision of a developed India by 2047.



# SHRI DHARMENDRA PRADHAN

## HON'BLE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

*The Hon'ble Minister for Education, Sh. Dharmendra Pradhan, inaugurated the one-day Women Leadership Program by expressing gratitude to the University Grants Commission (UGC) for organizing this important event and warmly welcoming the women leaders from across the country.*

In achieving the vision of a developed India, or Vikshit Bharat, by 2047, women have a major role to play. They have the potential to shape academic excellence through inclusive, equitable education and contribute to health, economics, and technology. Therefore, improving their health, mental well-being, and quality of life is crucial. Government initiatives, ranging from building toilets and opening bank accounts to increasing leadership representation, demonstrate progressive societal change in this direction.

**Over the past 25 years**, technology has empowered women by breaking barriers and amplifying their voices in education, politics, business, and social activism. Increasing presence of women in STEM fields and the role of digital platforms in advancing gender equality are important pointers. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 ensures equal access to high-quality education, helping to develop a skilled and innovative workforce for the future.

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) played a key role during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing financial relief to women, especially those heading households in rural areas. By enabling direct cash transfers and financial management through Jan Dhan accounts, the scheme helped women navigate economic challenges, reflecting the government's commitment to gender-inclusive development.

As India approaches its centenary of independence, women will increasingly shape an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future. They are bringing the nation closer to its vision of **Viksit Bharat by 2047**.








# ACADEMIC SESSION

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# Dr. Shamika Ravi

**Member, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)**

## Creating Mentoring and Networking Platforms for Women in Leadership Roles

Dr. Shamika Ravi, an economist known for her data-driven approach to policy-making and academic research, presented an insightful analysis of the growing role of women in India's socio-economic development. She highlighted the transformative shifts in women's participation across political, economic, and academic spheres.

### Topic

*Dr. Ravi also detailed about the need to recognize the value of the care economy, a domain where women play central roles.*






### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Women as Agents of Change: Growing political, economic, and academic participation.
- Political Engagement: Rise in women voters and independent political choices.
- Economic Impact: Increased women's workforce participation, especially in rural areas.
- Care Economy: Importance of women's caregiving roles and evolving family dynamics.
- Challenges: Lack of leisure time affecting mental health and productivity.
- Support for Scholars: Need for better research platforms, funding, and mentorship for women.

**Over the past 15 years,** India has witnessed a surge in women voters at all levels—parliamentary, district, and assembly constituencies. This reflects a shift as women increasingly make independent political choices. They evolve as active participants in democracy and social change.

This transformation extends beyond politics to the broader economy and society, where women have become indispensable contributors. Labor force participation has seen an increase in recent years, with a 69% rise in rural areas and a 25% rise in urban areas. This is largely driven by targeted policies such as the Mudra Yojana and Awas Yojana. These initiatives have empowered women, particularly in rural regions, and fueled economic growth through enhanced workforce inclusion.

# Mr. Sanjiv Mehta

**Advisor & Head Program Development of**
**IBM Innovation Centre for Education**

## Strategies for Balancing Leadership Responsibilities with a Healthy Work-Life Balance

We need to question the traditional notion of work-life balance due to the obsolescence of a rigid nine-to-five workday. The concept of work-life integration is a practical and harmonious alternative approach to blend personal and professional spheres. Unlike the "zero-sum game" of balance, integration emphasizes an outcome-driven work culture where productivity and flexibility take precedence over physical presence.




## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Work-Life Integration: Shifting from traditional work-life balance to an outcome-driven, flexible work culture.
- Challenges for Leaders: Increased decision-making complexity, constant availability demands, and digital overload.
- Benefits of Integration: Enhances creativity, innovation, and well-being while reducing burnout.
- Leadership Focus: Emphasize results, stress management, and collaboration while fostering trust.
- Practical Insights: Set boundaries, prioritize tasks, delegate responsibilities, and manage time effectively.
- Individual Strategies: Declutter digital spaces, take regular breaks, practice mindfulness, and prevent burnout.
- Organizational Practices: Implement flexible work systems and foster a culture of collaboration and adaptability.

## Topic

*Mr. Sanjiv Mehta spoke on the evolving paradigms of leadership and the growing importance of work-life integration in professional environments.*




**Modern leaders** face numerous challenges, including increased complexity in decision-making, demands for constant availability, and managing global teams across time zones. Issues such as over-commitment, lack of managerial support, and digital overload exacerbate stress and contribute to burnout.

Rapid technological advancements have blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, fostering an “always-on” mentality.

**Work-life integration** enhances creativity, innovation, and mental well-being while mitigating burnout. This approach not only improves decision-making, team motivation, and work environments but also benefits organizations through increased productivity, better employee retention, and enhanced engagement.

# Prof. Preeti Aghalayam

Director-in-charge,
IIT Madras Zanzibar Campus

## Women Leadership in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

## Topic



*Professor Preeti spoke on leadership in STEM from an academic perspective. She discussed the diverse potential career trajectories in STEM, including making groundbreaking scientific discoveries. He threaded her talk around three role-models that she was able to resonate with. They are Rohini Godbole, a pioneer in particle physics whose leadership extended beyond her scientific contributions; Beatrice Hicks, the first woman engineer to establish her own firm and a co-founder of the Society of Women Engineers, underscoring the importance of networking among women and Rosalind Franklin, renowned for her contributions to the discovery of DNA structure.*




## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Career Pathways in STEM: Emphasized the diverse opportunities in STEM, including leadership roles, scientific discoveries, and industry contributions.
- Leaky Pipeline: Addressed the dropout rate of women in STEM due to societal pressures, unequal access to education, and lack of role models.
- Need for Mentorship: Stressed the importance of mentorship that listens to women's unique challenges and provides guidance for career success.
- Institutional Role: Advocated for higher education institutions to drive gender equity through initiatives like GATI and women's forums.
- Globalized Approach: Called for systemic changes in Indian education to support women in STEM, fostering a more inclusive and innovative future.
- Actionable Change: Urged for better education access, mentorship, and recognition of women's contributions to advance gender equity in STEM.

There is a '**leaky pipeline**' where women drop out of STEM fields at various stages due to societal pressures and insufficient support. In India, unique challenges, such as unequal access to quality education and a lack of role models, compound the problem. Despite near-equal enrolment of men and women in higher education, only 30% of engineering and technology students are female, reflecting a significant gender gap.

**Among** the ways to address it, the most important one is the critical need for mentorship that focuses on listening to and understanding the unique challenges faced by women in STEM. Early exposure to STEM, hands-on learning experiences, and access to role models are pivotal in creating successful career pathways.

By developing strategies to improve representation and leadership opportunities for women, institutions like IITs can serve as catalysts for greater gender equity in STEM. She pointed to the importance of initiatives such as the GATI (Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions) program and platforms like the Women's Forum at IIT Madras in articulating actionable strategies to foster inclusion and innovation.

# Prof. Neelima Gupta

Vice-Chancellor,
Dr Harisingh Gaur University, Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

## Envisioning the Future of Women in Higher Education Leadership for Viksit Bharat @2047

## Topic



***Prof. Neelima Gupta, delivered on the role of women leadership in academics. Prof. Gupta through the help of data pointed that Indian work force would need to add 110 million women just to reach 45% female labour force participation. Effective leadership, she argued, is essential to empowering women and driving societal transformation. She pointed to several government initiatives, such as the Mahila Samakhya Programme, Udaan Scheme, and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, as critical enablers in this direction.***




## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Government Initiatives: Highlighted programs like Mahila Samakhya, Udaan Scheme, and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana as key enablers for women's empowerment.
- E4 and PROGRES Models: Introduced the Ecologically Embedded Leadership Ecosystems model and the PROGRES model for sustainable job creation and women's leadership development.
- Progress in Academia: Celebrated the increase in women Vice Chancellors reflecting greater leadership representation.
- Challenges for Women Leaders: Addressed unconscious biases, gender pay gap, work-life balance issues, and limited access to mentorship as persistent barriers.
- Policies for Gender Equality: Promoted policies like reservations, scholarships, and secure environments to support women in education and leadership.
- Leadership Development Strategies: Advocated for early identification of leaders, mentorship programs, fostering ally ship, and supporting women in professional organizations.
- Investment in Women's Empowerment: Stressed that empowering women is essential for social justice and India's future growth and leadership.

The E4 model, which focuses on creating Ecologically Embedded Leadership Ecosystems integrates ecological principles into leadership practices to enable sustainable and resilient leadership cultures.

The PROGRES model, offers a structured approach to job creation, particularly for urban women. By integrating relevant curricula, building new capabilities, and reducing the disproportionate burden of responsibilities on women, this model serves as a roadmap for sustainable job generation and economic growth. Enabling local and home-based entrepreneurship, improving access to capital, addressing mobility challenges, and enhancing skill development to build a robust women workforce in India are important.

She cited data showing an increase in women Vice Chancellors, from 23 in 2015 to 70 in 2023, reflecting growing representation in leadership roles. Mrs. Hansa Mehta, India's first female Vice Chancellor, Savitribai Phule, Kadambini Ganguly, and Vimla Kaul are inspiring examples.

# Dr. Rajalakshmi Menon

Director General,
Aeronautical Systems (AS), DRDO

## Fostering Women-Led Research for a Developed India

### Topic

*Dr. Rajalakshmi Menon, Director General – Aeronautical Systems (AS), DRDO, in her session, focused on the opportunities, and social incentives in enabling women-led research and innovation. She emphasized that "Nari Shakti" positions women as transformative agents in shaping the future of the nation. Dr. Menon highlighted the growing participation of women in STEM fields as a positive trend, advocating for interest in STEM to be nurtured from early childhood while avoiding gender stereotyping. She stressed the importance of empowering women to make career choices in STEM "by choice, not by force.*






## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Empowering Women in STEM: Advocated for nurturing early interest in STEM and empowering women to choose STEM careers by choice, not force.
- Role of Universities: Highlighted universities as key centers for nurturing women researchers and leaders.
- Representation in Leadership: Emphasizing merit-based advancement over reservations.
- Unique Strengths of Women: Recognized women's multitasking, problem-solving, perseverance, and communication as valuable traits that enhance creativity and teamwork.
- Challenges and Support: Acknowledged the challenges of balancing personal and professional roles and called for supportive ecosystems at home and work.
- Opportunities in Aerospace & Defense: Urged women to explore multidisciplinary opportunities in fields like aerospace, contributing to national initiatives like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Vision for "Balance for Better": Envisioned 50% women leadership in all sectors, aiming for global technological leadership by 2047.

Universities serve as centers of excellence for nurturing women researchers and leaders. We can progressively set an aspirational goal of achieving 50% representation of women in boardrooms. However, breaking the glass ceiling should be based on merit rather than reservations.

We need more visible women leaders and role models in STEM to inspire younger generations, drawing inspiration from figures like Madam Curie and many others who excelled at the highest levels of scientific achievement. Celebrate the unique abilities women bring to research, including multitasking, problem-solving, logical thinking, perseverance, patience, and effective communication. These diverse perspectives strengthen teamwork, creativity, and innovation.

Women must balance personal and professional responsibilities while managing multiple roles, which requires supportive ecosystems both at home and in the workplace. Prioritization and building strong relationships are essential for sustaining long-term contributions. Government initiatives, such as child care leave, provide women with the flexibility and support to pursue research careers.









# PANEL DISCUSSION

PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel discussion session, "Leadership Journeys: Shaping the Future of Higher Education," featured inspiring narratives from accomplished women leaders across diverse fields sharing their personal experiences, highlighting the application of leadership principles in driving institutional excellence.

# Dr. Sonal Mansingh

Padma Vibhushan Awardee,
Hon'ble Former Member of Parliament,
Rajya Sabha (2018-2024)

*Dr. Sonal Mansingh, drawing from her extensive personal and professional journey, began with the observation that "Woman contains Man," emphasizing the inherent leadership qualities of women and the importance of recognizing and harnessing their potential.*






## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Empowerment and Equality: Advocating for equal opportunities for women in education, employment, leadership and beyond to drive societal change.
- Role Models: Encouraging women to mentor and inspire future generations.
- Resilience and Determination: Motivating women to remain focused and overcome challenges.
- Cultural Impact: Recognizing and preserving cultural heritage as a cornerstone of leadership and social progress.
- Collaboration: Building robust networks to foster collective growth and success.

**Dr. Mansingh** highlighted the transformative impact of empowering women through leadership roles. She pointed to the need for equal opportunities in all spheres of life - education, employment, and governance.

Drawing from Indian cultural heritage, she shared compelling stories of resilience and perseverance, such as those of Jabala and Annapurna, to illustrate the strength and determination required to overcome obstacles. Dr. Mansingh noted that such traits are hallmarks of effective leaders, urging women to stay steadfast and goal-oriented. She stressed that cultural values are integral to leadership, providing a strong foundation for social harmony and progress.

She emphasized the importance of collective action and mutual support among women, advocating for the creation of robust networks that foster growth and development. Dr. Mansingh highlighted the potential of collaboration to create environments where women can thrive and excel.

# Mrs. Geeta Singh Rathore

Director General of the National Sample Survey, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

***Mrs. Geeta Singh Rathore*** *emphasized that leadership is an evolving journey, characterized by continuous learning, with a visionary approach, and empathy. Mrs. Rathore defined leadership as the driving force behind the integration of tradition and innovation in institutions. She also highlighted the role of leaders in adapting educational institutions to meet global challenges while staying true to their core mission and values.*






## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Leadership as an Evolving Journey: Requires continuous learning, vision, and empathy.
- Balancing Tradition and Innovation: Essential for fostering creativity and societal contributions.
- Global Adaptation: Leaders must align institutions with global challenges while maintaining core values.
- Overcoming Barriers: Advocated for innovation and empathy in a male-dominated field.
- Modernizing NSO: Pioneered cutting-edge technologies and represented India on global platforms.
- Inclusive Leadership: Emphasized the importance of lasting impact through collaboration and change.
- Inspiration to Innovate: Encouraged participants to lead with purpose and shape a brighter future.

Sharing her personal journey, Mrs. Rathore recalled her beginnings at Jawaharlal Nehru University, where she realized the potential of statistics as a powerful tool for driving change. She went on to describe her career path, which led her to the Indian Statistical Service (ISS) in 1992. Her mission from the outset was to make education equitable and impactful, ensuring that it could contribute to societal growth and development.

Mrs. Rathore reflected on the challenges she faced in her early career, particularly as one of the few women in a male-dominated field. Despite encountering skepticism and resistance, she advocated for innovation, evidence-based decision-making, and a leadership approach rooted in empathy and creativity. She emphasized that overcoming these challenges was integral to her development as a leader.

In her role as the Director General of the National Statistical Office (NSO), Mrs. Rathore highlighted her efforts to modernize the statistical ecosystem in India. She discussed her commitment to introducing cutting-edge technologies and fostering accountability in statistical practices. Additionally, she shared her experiences of representing India on global platforms such as the United Nations Statistical Commission, where she championed innovative solutions to address the unique challenges faced by emerging economies.

Mrs. Rathore concluded her address by emphasizing the importance of creating a lasting and transformative impact through inclusive leadership

# Ms. Vandana Bhatnagar

## Member Board of Governors, IIM, Jammu

*Dr. Vandana Bhatnagar discussed the diverse nature of her professional journey. She highlighted her work across three distinct domains: private banking, public-private partnerships in a multilateral development agency, and NGOs. Dr. Bhatnagar framed her journey into four phases: Early Learnings, Pivot to Purpose, Scaling Impact, and Transition to Organizational Leadership. She shared how discovering her true calling in sustainable development accelerated her growth and desire to continuously learn, reflecting on the insights, struggles, and successes that shaped her multi-disciplinary career.*






## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Embrace Authenticity: Being true to oneself unlocks professional potential and leads to fulfillment.
- Encourage Women in Non-Traditional Fields: Women should explore uncharted territories to discover new paths and contribute effectively to society.
- Collaboration for Scaling Impact: Transformative change happens through shared goals and collective progress, not personal glory. Leadership is about thriving while lifting others, with mutual respect, innovation, and courage.
- Continuous Learning: Maintaining a learner's mindset fosters individual growth, team motivation, and resilience in uncertain environments.
- Building Networks: Cultivate connections with sector leaders and mentors to navigate challenges more effectively.
- Focus on Progress, Not Perfection: Striving for perfection leads to burnout; focus on growth and improvement instead.
- Seek Support: Asking for help fosters collaboration and reduces isolation, promoting better outcomes.
- Self-Care: Maintaining health and well-being is essential for long-term success and happiness.

Dr. Bhatnagar emphasized the importance of embracing one's authentic self, as doing so unlocks professional energy and potential. She shared that understanding and accepting who we truly are leads to greater personal and professional fulfilment. She encouraged women to venture into non-traditional fields, urging them to have the courage to explore uncharted territories. By doing so, women can discover new paths and unlock their potential, contributing more effectively to society.

Successful scaling can only occur through collaborative efforts driven by shared goals. Transformative change in society comes from working together, not seeking personal glory, and focusing on collective progress. In an environment marked by rapid change and uncertainty, Dr. Bhatnagar highlighted the necessity of maintaining a learner's mind-set. Constant learning not only enhances individual growth but also aligns team motivation, fostering resilience against external pressures. Creating a network of allies and mentors is essential for personal and professional transitions, helping one navigate challenges more effectively.

She advised against striving for perfection, as it can lead to burnout. Dr. Bhatnagar emphasized that perfectionism is an unattainable goal that hinders growth and productivity, urging women to focus on progress instead. Stressing the importance of seeking support when needed, Dr. Bhatnagar explained that waiting for others to offer help only breeds frustration. Asking for assistance fosters collaboration and reduces the sense of isolation.

# Mrs. Lakshmi Iyer

Joint General Manager,
Larsen & Toubro

***Mrs. Lakshmi Iyer*** *shared her journey from corporate life, highlighting the importance of diversity in professional experiences. She spoke candidly about her career and the value of sideways job shifts to increase visibility and learning within organizations. Being proactive in taking on high-profile assignments is key to gaining recognition, and she encouraged participants to seize challenging tasks to stand out. She stressed the importance of networking with former colleagues and classmates, suggesting that such connections can be more beneficial than attending industry gatherings.*






## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Diversity in Experience: Emphasized the value of sideways job shifts for visibility and learning within organizations.
- Seize Opportunities: Taking on high-profile assignments helps gain recognition and stand out in the workplace.
- Networking: Connecting with former colleagues and classmates can be more beneficial than attending industry events.
- Set Personal Boundaries: Reject the societal expectation of "having it all" and focus on personal boundaries to avoid burnout.
- Avoid Comparisons: Focus on loving your work and earning respect, rather than comparing yourself to others.
- Ageism vs. Sexism: Ageism can be a bigger barrier than sexism in the corporate world.
- Negotiate with Dignity: Advocated for negotiating salary and maintaining dignity in hiring/firing situations, emphasizing open communication.
- Teamwork and Collaboration: Success requires both individual effort and fostering collaborative relationships.
- Define Success on Your Own Terms: Success varies for everyone—whether through career achievements or personal balance, align it with your values.
- Personal Fulfillment: Prioritize individual fulfillment as the true measure of success.

Mrs. Iyer pointed to the unrealistic societal expectation of "having it all" and the necessity of setting personal boundaries. She advised against letting comparisons with others dictate one's performance, emphasizing instead the need to love one's work and earn respect within the organization. One of the more thought-provoking points she raised was the idea that ageism often presents a bigger barrier than sexism in the corporate world. She advocated for the importance of negotiating salary and maintaining dignity during hiring and firing processes, urging employees to engage in open communication with employers and treat colleagues with respect, especially during layoffs.

Mrs. Iyer elaborated on the significance of teamwork alongside individual effort, suggesting that working hard and going above and beyond should always be complemented by fostering collaborative relationships. She offered a broader view of success, explaining that it varies from person to person. Whether it's achieving a prestigious job or nurturing a balanced relationship with family, Mrs. Iyer encouraged the audience to define success on their own terms, based on their values and priorities. Her speech concluded with a focus on individuality, urging participants to prioritize personal fulfilment as the true measure of success.







# QUESTION ANSWER SESSION

Question Answer round with participants across India, addressed by panelists and Chairman, UGC











# VOTE OF THANKS

The proceedings concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Diksha Rajput, Deputy Secretary, UGC



# RECOMMENDATIONS

*Based on the deliberations, the following recommendations are proposed to guide policy formulation, institutional practices, and individual strategies:*



**Political Participation and Leadership:** To create a more inclusive society, it is vital to enhance women's political participation. Programs educating women on their voting rights and empowering them to make independent political choices should be promoted. Additionally, leadership training for aspiring women leaders in politics will help increase female representation in decision-making roles.



**Economic Empowerment:** To increase the number of women in the workforce, targeted initiatives should address barriers such as skill gaps, safety concerns, and childcare challenges. Special attention should be given to supporting women in rural areas with limited access to employment opportunities. Government schemes like Mahila Samakhya and Udaan must be leveraged and expanded to promote women's economic independence.



**Academic Empowerment and Gender Equity:** Higher education institutions must nurture women's leadership potential through mentorship programs, funding for women researchers, and supportive research platforms. Initiatives like GATI and women's forums should focus on advancing gender equity, particularly addressing the "leaky pipeline" in STEM by implementing targeted retention strategies.



**Care Economy:** Recognizing the importance of women's caregiving roles is essential. Social security measures and workplace policies should support women in balancing professional and caregiving responsibilities through flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



**Leadership Development:** Emphasizing leadership development models such as E4 and PROGRES, which focus on sustainable job creation and mentorship, will help prepare women for leadership roles. Institutions must address unconscious biases, the gender pay gap, and limited mentorship to create equitable environments.



**STEM and Non-Traditional Fields:** Encouraging young girls to pursue careers in STEM through mentorship and leadership opportunities will empower them to follow their passion. Creating pathways into fields like aerospace and defense, vital to national initiatives like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat, will allow women to contribute to innovation and national progress.



**Gender Equality Policies:** Policies should ensure women have equal opportunities in education, employment, and leadership. Merit-based advancement, along with policies like reservations and scholarships, can address barriers to women's success. Secure environments and mentorship are crucial for women to break through institutional barriers.



**Mental Health and Well-Being:** Workplaces should adopt flexible work systems that prioritize outcomes over hours worked. Policies supporting mental health, stress management, and mindfulness will help prevent burnout and enhance both personal and professional productivity.



**Organizational and Individual Strategies**: Workplaces should promote collaborative networks and flexible systems that prioritize results over rigid structures. Women should focus on personal growth strategies like task prioritization, boundary setting, and self-care to foster resilience and productivity.



**Cultural and Social Impact:** Women should be encouraged to lead initiatives that preserve cultural heritage and drive societal progress. Promoting women's leadership in all sectors will contribute to a globally competitive, inclusive, and innovative society by 2047.

# Conclusion




In conclusion, continuous learning and a focus on progress over perfection should guide women's leadership journeys. By prioritizing **collaboration**, **self-care**, and **resilience**, women can thrive personally and professionally, contributing to an equitable and flourishing society.

# Program Summary

| S. No. | Key Takeaways | Recommendations | Short-term Action Points | Long-term Action Points |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Women as Agents of Change:** Women's growing participation in politics, economy, and academia is reshaping societal progress. | **Enhance Leadership Programs:** Create structured training to prepare women for leadership roles across politics, academia, and industry. | | Design comprehensive leadership development programs for women across all sectors |
| | Increasing voter turnout, independent decision-making, and rising women workforce participation especially in rural areas | **Promote Political and Economic Inclusion:** Strengthen campaigns that encourage women's independent political participation and economic self-reliance, especially in rural areas. | Awareness campaigns, capacity-building workshops, outreach programs in rural areas | |
| | Increasing representation of women Vice Chancellors reflects positive change, while universities must actively support women leaders. | **Foster Inclusive Academic Policies:** Encourage universities to adopt gender-sensitive policies and actively support women in leadership positions. | | Institutionalize gender audits and embed gender equality into academic governance. |

# Program Summary

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| 2. | **Work-Life Integration and Personal Well-being**: Recognizing women's caregiving roles while promoting flexible, outcome-driven work cultures to balance personal and professional responsibilities.<br><br>Self-care, stress management, and resilience are essential for sustaining leadership roles.<br><br>Embrace growth and improvement, rather than perfectionism, to avoid burnout and encourage creative problem-solving. | **Support Flexible Work Cultures:** Advocate for outcome-based work environments, flexible hours, and family-friendly policies to ease work-life integration.<br><br>**Prioritize Well-being:** Institutionalize wellness programs to support physical and mental health for women leaders.<br><br>**Shift Focus to Progress Over Perfection:** Promote a culture that values continuous improvement and innovation over unrealistic perfection. | Draft flexible work policies, outcome-based work models in organizations and institutions<br><br>Introduce wellness workshops, stress management training, and mental health support programs<br><br>Conduct workshops and leadership training that emphasize iterative learning and growth mindset | |
| 3. | **Support for Women Scholars** Stronger research platforms, dedicated funding and mentorship programs are essential to nurture women scholars. | **Boost Research & Academic Support:** Provide dedicated funding, research grants, and mentorship for women scholars. | Launch mentorship programs, identify funding gaps, create immediate research grant opportunities | |
| 4. | **Empowerment in STEM** Addressing the 'leaky pipeline' in STEM fields through early exposure, systemic reforms in education, and role models to foster long-term participation. | **Strengthen Women in STEM:** Promote early STEM exposure, and systemic education reforms to retain women in STEM careers. | | Revise school & college curricula, foster role model visibility, and build industry-academia collaborations |

# Program Summary

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| 5. | **Government and Institutional Initiatives** Highlighting key programs (Mahila Samakhya, Udaan Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana) and models like E4 and PROGRES that promote women's empowerment. | **Leverage Government Schemes:** Increase awareness and accessibility of government programs supporting women's education, skilling, and entrepreneurship. | Disseminate information, conduct orientation programs for women on using schemes effectively. | |
| 6. | **Continuous Learning and Networking** A lifelong learning mindset, building strong networks with mentors, peers, and sector leaders, and valuing diverse career experiences enhance leadership effectiveness. | **Encourage Lifelong Learning & Networking:** Facilitate networking platforms and continuous learning programs for professional growth. | Host networking events, webinars, and peer learning sessions. | |
| 7. | **Global and Future-Ready Mindset** Women leaders should align institutions with global challenges while staying rooted in core values, preparing for technology-driven and cross-border leadership roles | **Global Readiness:** Equip women leaders to navigate global challenges while maintaining cultural roots and values. | | Build global collaborations, international exchange programs, and cross-cultural leadership training |



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये
University Grants Commission

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**University Grants Commission (UGC)**
**Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi**

**December 13, 2024**

