

VOLUME 4: JUNE 2022

## TANA BANA

Newsletter of Population First

### From the editor's desk

June marks the sixth month of the year and sees perhaps the highest number of special days as observed by the United Nations, including the International Day of Parliamentarism. Parliaments are an important pillar of functioning democracies and this day urges us to take a look at just how transparent, accountable, and inclusive our parliamentary system is. Have we kept pace with the global technological trends, and included more women as well as young parliamentarians? In this issue, we interview Mahashweta Jani to understand just where India stands about women's representation in politics. We also present the work of Shevika Tiwari to demystify politics for young girls.

June also marks Pride Month and our film review takes a look at queer love and human emotions as presented, in the Netflix release, Cobalt Blue.

We also present a book review of Sudha Arora's Yahan Kahin Thha Ghar that looks at the life of Indian women through the eyes of Vishakha and Chitra as they search for their own space in a crowded society amidst suffocating dogmas.

We participated at the Indian Communication Summit 2022 organised by Brand Equity as a cause partner on June 2nd. A fitting start indeed to Laadli's 17th birthday which was celebrated on the 9th. Yes, we have traveled a long distance, and achieved several milestones, but is it the time to sit on our laurels? We think, we still have a long way to go and move forward with renewed vigor.

Happy reading!

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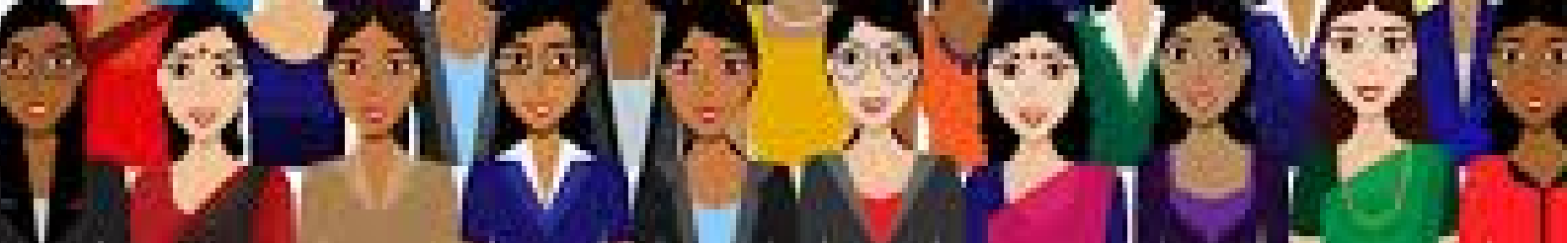
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## Interview of the Month:

# Women and Politics, changing trends and emerging patterns.

On June 30, 2018, United Nations General Assembly sanctioned The International Day of Parliamentarism to emphasize the role of parliaments in strengthening democracies. Tana Bana interviews Mahashweta Jani on women's participation in politics in India. She is associated as a State co-ordinator, Gujarat with Lokniti CSDS, Delhi for the last 15 years. Her special interest lies in the voting behaviour of women, caste, and gender in the political dynamics of Gujarat.



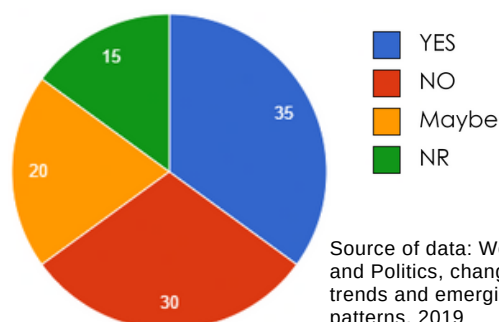
**1. What are the trends in the participation of women in politics across the nation? Are there some states which see higher participation rates? Could you provide some examples of progressive states and the approach adopted?**

**A.** The 73rd and 74th amendments of the constitution changed the political scenario in Urban and Local self-governments as it involved thousands of women as part of the decision-making process. But unfortunately the same has failed as far as the central and state government is concerned. Representation of women in Loksabha has increased at a very slow pace till now. In the 1952 elections the representation was 4.4% and today it has reached merely 14.4%. Today the global index of parliamentarians has crossed 25% and India ranks 142nd among all the nations. That is below many of its neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. At the state level in Legislative assemblies too the scenario is almost the same as still there is a poor representation of women. West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar are a few states which have a better women's representation.

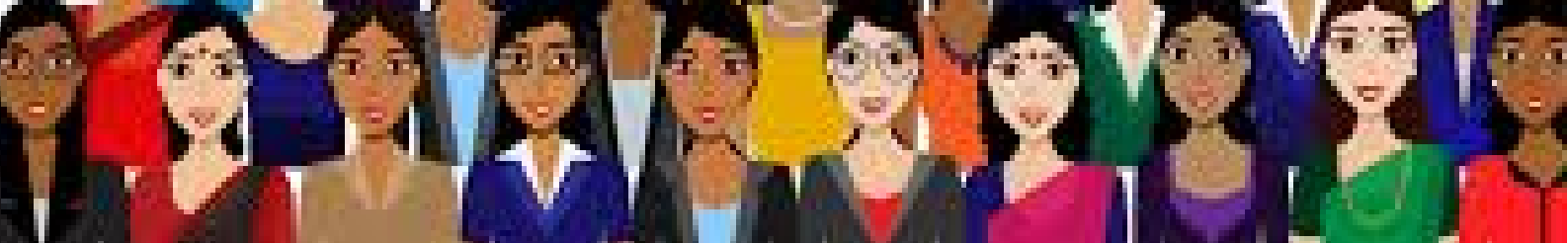
**2. What are the major roadblocks to women's participation in National politics?**

**A.** There are many factors that play a major role. One of them is a patriarchal decision-making system of political parties and the complete control of male political leaders over the economic resources of the party and the elections. Internalization of patriarchal values in women politicians who are unable to create a pressure group to get an equal opportunity and to be a part of the decision-making process is another reason. CSDS-Lokniti data shows there is apathy at the level of the family towards women's participation in Public affairs too, which is also a major hurdle for women. More women leaders from local self Governments who are already groomed at the grassroots should be encouraged to the power ladder towards State Assemblies. Once the middle layer becomes numerically strong it will automatically lead to more representation in the Centre.

***Only one-third say their family would be supportive if they want to be active in public affairs in their locality.***



Source of data: Women and Politics, changing trends and emerging patterns. 2019

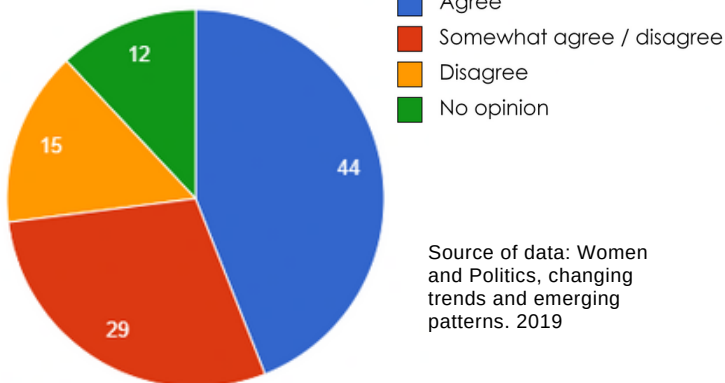


## Interview of the Month:

**3. How sensitive are the political parties to creating a supportive ecosystem for women politicians, e.g., having POSH committees in party offices, and dedicated restrooms for women political workers, among others?**

A. The structure of political parties reflects our patriarchal society. Creating a sensitive ecosystem is a far-fetched dream because if we see the latest Judgement of the Kerala High court in March 2022, it says the political parties are not required to have an Internal Complaint Committee under POSH due to the absence of an employer-employee relationship among their members. Here the fact is still a political party is not considered an organisation though thousands of women are dedicatedly themselves working for it for years and decades as workers and leaders without any safeguards against abuses. In fact, a political party is as such the most vulnerable structure for sexual harassment when we talk about women, especially as workers. It is one of the reasons why fewer women pursue politics as a career. POSH will make political parties more sensitive and safe and will attract women to be part of it without fear of exploitation.

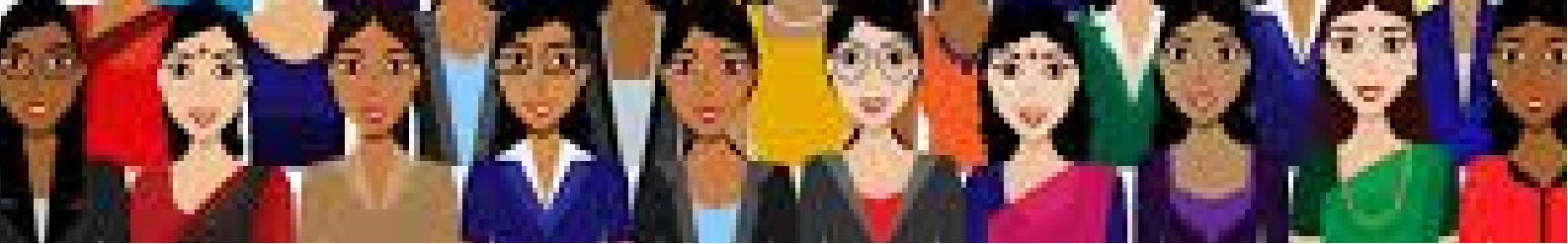
***Even when a man and a woman are equally good candidates, political parties always prefer a man over women while giving tickets***



source: -IGC

**4. How do you view the media's role in portraying women in Politics? What issues concerning women in politics could be covered by media, other than reporting on well-known leaders and scams?**

There is still a vacuum in coverage of women in politics both in local as well as National Media. Very few stories, mostly of well-known political faces can be seen during the election period. More and more women from grassroots politics should be covered. Sometime back I was doing an ethnographic study of the election campaign of urban self-government and met a very interesting young woman corporator who was known as 108 emergency service of her area because she helped women immediately whenever there were cases of sexual harassment and domestic violence in her area. Such stories should reach people as in society still there is a notion that women can't do much in this masculine field of politics. Lokniti's survey on women and politics shows that still "television is the main source of news for the majority of women. Exposure to news media increases one's probability of participation in politics." If the media shows more stories of the success of women politicians and more women see such stories, it will inspire them to come forward and actively participate in the political process.



## Interview of the Month:

### 5. What are the impediments to passing the women's reservation bill in parliament? What needs to be done to ensure that it is enacted at the earliest?

A. Women's Reservation Bill has to move forward to make the process of governance gender-sensitive. Several UN reports also suggest that the political quota system is one of the important tools to increase women's political participation. Political parties are still hesitant to give tickets to women candidates because the fact is day by day elections in India are becoming money and muscle power centric and women typically don't possess them, in most cases. This fact resonates in a recent survey by Lokniti on women and politics

which shows close to half of the women respondents agreed with the statement that "when a man and a woman are equally good candidates, political parties always prefer a man over a woman while giving tickets."

The major roadblock to the Bill is the patriarchal mindset of the political parties and lack of priority, and zeal of women parliamentarians towards seeing it through. Most importantly, the fear in male leaders is that they will lose the chances of getting tickets from their forte if the quota for women gets a green signal.

### Exposure to news and its impact on interest in politics

News media exposure	No interest at all	Low interest	Moderate/ High interest in politics
No news media exposure	36	33	31
Low	29	34	37
Moderate	17	27	56
High news media exposure	16	22	62

Source of data: Women and Politics, changing trends and emerging patterns. 2019



# Catching them Young- Opening a dialogue on Politics with the pre-teens and teens girls.

Shevika is the founder of Kuviraa, a non-partisan initiative that aims to build political engagement and leadership in girls across India. Prior to this, Shevika managed Ashoka's Changemaker Schools programme in South Asia and worked at the Directorate of Education in Delhi on capacity building for government teachers. Shevika serves as a consultant at the India Climate Collaborative and has earned a master's in Public Policy from the University of Oxford as a Chevening Scholar.

**Q.Could you tell us about your project? What were your thoughts behind it? What makes it unique?**

**A.** India currently has only 78 (out of 543) women parliamentarians. At 14.3 percent, this is the highest representation of women we have seen since 1947. Although both men and women in India now vote in equal numbers, India is yet to make significant progress to increase women's political participation beyond voting. Politics is often considered "dirty" and not an aspirational career choice for most young girls across India.

Kuviraa a non-partisan initiative hopes to address this gap by building political engagement and leadership among young girls between the ages of 14-20. The goal is to break down narratives about young girls and political power and help them recognise politics and policymaking as a means to change-making.

In the West, we see several examples of civil society organizations such as Teach a Girl to Lead and IGNITE National that prepare the next generation of women voters who are interested in becoming political leaders. Unfortunately, there aren't organizations in India that aim to work with this age group.



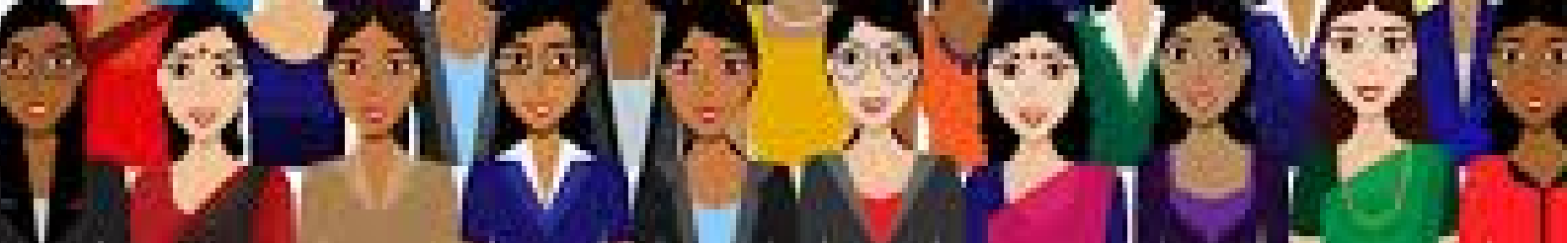
Kuviraa hopes to achieve this goal by working on:

1. Engaging young girls (directly and indirectly) across India through workshops and simulations to further understand politics and policymaking, local governance, and interact with local leaders. The goal is to build a community of young girls engaged in political dialogue and support each other if one decides to run for office.
2. Building a positive narrative around politics for young girls by making it more accessible through strategic communications and showcasing positive role models.

**Q.You have recently conducted a study on what young people think of politics. Could share some details?**

**A.** Our study 'Political perceptions among children and young adults'; received 419 responses from young people between the ages of 11 – 24 across India. Some trends include:

1. Male respondents reported more familiarity with political processes and leaders than their female counterparts: More than half of the young men surveyed (51 percent) said they were familiar with India's political processes and institutions while only 40 percent of the female respondents expressed familiarity with India's political processes,
2. Young men and women are equally likely to vote but political aspiration has a gender gap:



## Spotlight

Although 84% of both male and female respondents said they were likely to vote, when asked if they were likely to get involved in politics in the future, only 19 percent of young women expressed a high likelihood as compared to 32 percent of the young men.

3. Political interest and cynicism increase with age: While 15% of 11-17-year-olds reported interest in politics, 49% of 21-24-year-olds reported interest, At the same time 49% of 11-17-year-olds thought politicians were effective or very effective as compared to only 29% of 21 - 24-year-olds.

This report provides a great summary of the study: <https://bit.ly/3Nydgl2>

For details please click here: <https://bit.ly/3OTdxq8>

**Q.What according to you needs to be done to make politics a mainstream conversation amongst the younger generation?**

**A.**The following needs to make politics a mainstream conversation for young people:

1. Demystify politics and make it more accessible for young people. Young people need to be able to relate to political leaders, right now very few young people feel that way.

2. Initiate dialogue between young people and politicians, especially female politicians

3. Break down how they can contribute to politics as active citizens, and what role they can play. They can reach out to their local representatives with their issues and follow-through

4. Lastly, highlight how politics is a means for change-making. For example, Climate change is a threat multiplier and one of the biggest issues young people will have to address. This will be impossible without political will and effective governance.



## COBALT BLUE

By Ritu Motial  
Programme Director, Laadli Media Initiatives

From Deepa Mehta's fire to the present-day smorgasbord of films on the LGBTQAI community, the industry has come a long way in tackling such delicate issues. Fire depicted the same-sex romance between two women who were caught in oppressive marriages to men and was released in the late 90s when gay and lesbian sex was criminalized under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. One rarely spoke of such relationships, most of them were either not acknowledged or were still conducted behind closed doors. Set in the same period, Cobalt Blue explores the two different relationships between a man who romances Tanay, a young college-going man, and his sister, Anuja. The narrative journeys with them through their emotional upheavals, revelations, and eventual realization of who they truly are.

Tanay (Neelay Mehendale) lives in Cochin with his traditional Maharashtrian Brahmin family. His father has a thriving spice business and a sprawling bungalow. Tanay is a quiet reticent young person who writes poetry and spends his time by the pond-side. He is the younger sibling of Anuja (Anjali Sivaraman) a boisterous hockey player who is an anti-thesis of her brother. Cobalt Blue juxtaposes the desires of youth with the disillusionment of disappointed love and paves the way for the two main characters' realization of their aspirations, and an understanding that relationships traverse the paths of solitude, estrangement, and loss. The siblings are drawn to a paying guest (Prateik Babbar) who lives in the room that once belonged to their grandparents.

The film reveals nothing more than the few belongings that the paying guest brings with him, and the fact that he is an orphan. He has a total disregard for convention and requires no one to fill his world, almost a solitary nomadic existence that cherishes the now and lives it fully,

whether it is art, photography, or love-making. He is caring but expects nothing in return. It is perhaps this detached, yet deeply empowering demeanor, which is in sharp contrast to dominating, the patriarchal personality of their father, that attracts the two towards him.

Cobalt blue is used deftly to portray deeper shades of the film; for instance, the paying guest dips his palm in cobalt blue paint and imprints his presence on the wall of his room. Later in the film, paints the wall blue lost in his own solitude and does not want any intrusion, Tanay has to leave him alone. Yet again, it is there as a beaker of cobalt blue water that sways violently to the rhythms of Tanay and the paying guest's lovemaking. The color makes its appearance in Tanay's dream, just before Anuja elopes with the PG when he smears Tanay's neck with the color. And then when the paying guest's room is being washed following his disappearance, cobalt blue water streams down the staircase. Tanay recites a poem that captures letting go of everything and everyone, just as the PG had done.

The film touches upon the frustrations of a homosexual man in the early 90s, through Tanay's Professor at the college (Neel Bhootlingam) as he shares the loneliness of being a closeted gay and not having the freedom or the societal sanction to express his sexuality.

He eventually provides momentary solace to a grieving Tanay after the PG leaves with Anuja. The two eventually leave the city to explore their own paths, he to become a writer, and she to join as a hockey coach. They remain joined in their pain and their own unfulfilled desire to be with their chosen partner, and in the feeling of being cheated by each other, but are free to explore their own identity and choices.

The film touches on several sensitive issues but does it provide a deeper look into what it sets out to do, or does it leave the audiences with a question about relationships that they will explore or discard at their own will, it is for you to find out.



# Yahin Kahin tha Ghar

Reviewed by Dr. Arundhati Dasgupta  
Associate Professor, at the Department of Physics  
and anatomy, University of Lethbridge, Canada



'Yahin Kahin tha Ghar', Sudha Arora's first published novel, is a collection of two novelettes. The author Sudha Arora, born in the pre-independence period in Lahore – now in Pakistan, and brought up in Kolkata, is an experienced writer; her first short story got published in a leading monthly – 'Gyanodaya' in 1965.

Sudha Arora's portrayal of the life of a teenage girl, and the theme of a destroyed young marriage is not an attempt to take life beyond reality, but a very true description of reality that takes mundane day-to-day events and situates them in the march of time and changing value system of the Indian society.

'Yahin Kahin Tha Ghar' deals with the life of a middle-class Punjabi family -- the Tanejas in Kolkata as witnessed by Vishakha, a teenager growing up amidst the tension of the traditional value system giving way to the new era of emancipation and rationality. Vishakha is a rebel questioning her family's attitude towards child abuse, healthcare, day-to-day functioning of the household, education of the girl, marriage, and childbirth. She is in conflict with backwardness, modernism appears logical to her, perhaps as she is also a brilliant student.

The power equations are well defined as the patriarchy rules and the women are relegated to the 'other' as they accept the repeated cycle of childbirth and child care as their life. Vishakha wants to be different. The characters are very real, from the blind 'guru' who runs the family by giving advice sacrosanct to Vishakha's struggling businessman father and exploits the family's overgenerous hospitality, to the landlady Guptain who complains about Vishakha's elder sisters' tete-a-tete with the Bengali boy next door and Nathu the daily laborer who cruelly abuses the vulnerable Vishakha in the dark alley entrance to the house.



# Yeh rasta usi aspatal ko jata hai

Reviewed by Dr. Arundhati Dasgupta  
Associate Professor, at the Department of Physics  
and anatomy, University of Lethbridge, Canada



The second novelette - 'Yeh rasta usi aspatal ko jata hai' is another example of the author's ability to observe the reality of the human condition and describe it with great clarity. This is a graphic description of the brutality of a father's abuse, the break-up of the parent's marriage, and its effect on a child's mental condition. The description is stark but brims over with pathos for the child and his terrible destiny, the eventuality of meaningless abuse

In both the novelettes a background theme appears very subtly the search for a 'room of one's own' for Vishakha in her father's house

and Chitra the wife and mother in 'Yeh rasta usi aspatal ko jata hai' who is reduced to a shadow in her own house.

The young and innocent Vishakha's journey has a fresh quality of youth. The dulled pain of Chitra as she witnesses her own child's destruction without being able to break out of the situation moves the reader. The novels are not bare sketches of reality, but detailed paintings filled with the colors of human emotions.

Sudha Arora's Hindi is lucid and intense, the chapters flow naturally. If you start reading the book you are likely to keep reading as the events grip your interest right from start.

The use of Punjabi idioms and songs gives the novel a sweet endearing narration. The story never gets beyond the personal, confined to the four walls of the Taneja residence. Occasionally there is the 'Bengali mohalla addabaji' or the 'Binaca geet mala' on the radio appearing as glimpses of the outside world. But this is perhaps Sudha Arora's intention: the creation of a microcosm of the Indian family's experience of the journey from the tradition to the modern values of the twentieth century.

Sudha Arora's novel has the promise of classics, as true and insightful descriptions of life and its transient structures and values. The author's voice against the suffocation of the suppressed, be it the women of 'Yahin kahin tha ghar' or the abused child of 'Yeh rasta usi aspatal ko jata hain' give the novels a special significance. Her novel sparkles with excellence due to the finesse and subtlety of the descriptions and the way the emotions and situations resonate with the readers.



## Happenings

### LAADLI TURNS 17

We celebrated Laadli Day on June 9th as an online event. Changemakers who have dedicated their energies to furthering the cause of ushering in a gender-just society joined us from across the country and shared their thoughts and felicitations. Starting from a fledging initiative located in Mumbai, our Laadli has grown to soar national as well as international skies and bring gender sensitivity center stage whether it is in journalism, advertisements, films, and more. Dr. A.L. Sharada, Director, Population First welcomed everyone while Malathi Kembhavi, Program Coordinator, Laadli navigated the proceedings deftly.

Mr. SV Sista, Founder of Population First, welcomed and thanked all the friends of Laadli for their support. "Women are as much a part of society as men and if we can achieve that, then we have done what we set out to do. It is only possible with the unwavering support of all of you." An array of poetry and prose reading, songs, and more followed at the celebratory party filling it with an enchanting revelry.

Dolly Thakore, National Coordinator, Laadli, and a very staunch supporter of the initiative, read a passage "I was there in the room" from the award-winning play Vagina Monologues. This passage was from her last reading at the play. Suneeta Rao, who has been an ambassador for Laadli's cause right from its inception, presented a medley of her songs that capture various nuances of being a woman.

Kumud Singh has changed the way we celebrate the birth of our girl child and has penned numerous songs which welcome the newborn girl. Yashashvi Kumud, her daughter enthralled the audience with one such song.

From Lucknow, Jyotsna Habibullah, a change maker with many firsts to her name and a jury for the Laadli Media Awards, joined us and shared her story of change.

Dr. Shahida Murtaza, Director for Centre for Women's Study, MAANUU congratulated Laadli's Team and read a poem by Pallavi Mahajan, while Sajaya Karkala, one of the members of the jury for the Laadli Media Awards read a poem by the famous Telugu poet, Late Professor Yendluri Sudhakar. Dr. Malti Mehta, read a poem by Karan Johar on the occasion.

LMA winners Rakhi Ghosh and Vasanthi Vasanthi Hariprakash acknowledged the role that receiving the Laadli Media Award as well as the association with Laadli, has played in shaping their outlook. Sulekha Bajpai, a friend of Laadli now for many years, joined us and recited one of her poems,

The team of Population First, Dr. A.L. Sharada, Malathi Kembhavi, Ritu Motial, Pooja Nagdev, Swathy Chaganty, Sangeeta Waje, Sangita Tribhuvan, and Fazal Pathan joined the invitees with their presentations of what this association means to each one of them.

The celebrations may be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3RGKeJj>



## Snippets



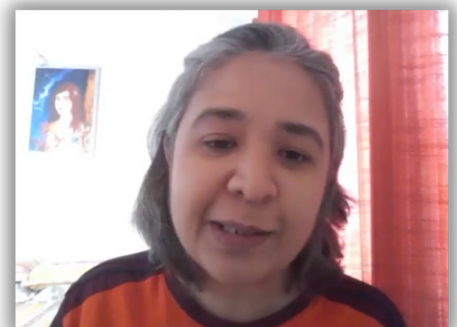
Satya Saran, author, and acclaimed journalist joined us and read a short story, 'Coracle Ride'

Young Os Mishra mesmerized the audience with her flute recital. She is the daughter of Santoshee Mishra, an LMA winner and a staunch advocate for a gender-just society.



Anuja Gulati, Program Specialist, UNFPA, India spoke of her association with Laadli

Double celebration! Asiya Shervani, the diversity, and inclusion specialist and a Jury member for Laadli Media Awards joined us from Hyderabad. It was also her birthday

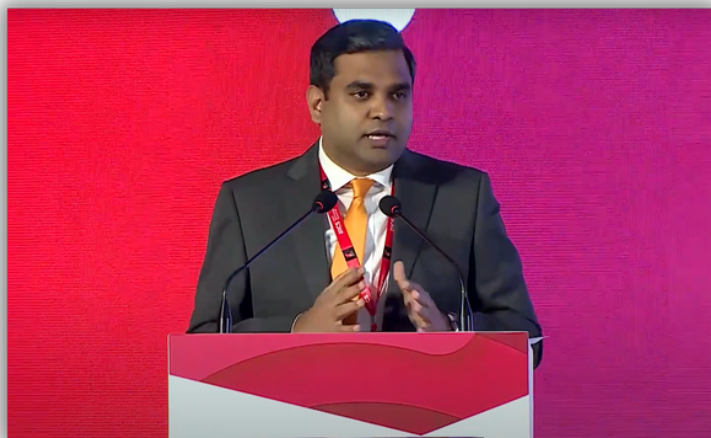




# Happenings

## Laadli Partners Brand Equity as a Cause Partner for India Communication Summit 2022

Laadli registered its presence at the fourth India Communication Summit held at Hyatt Regency New Delhi on June 2nd as a Cause Partner. Mr. Sriram Haridass, Deputy Representative, UNFPA India addressed the ICS 2022 gathering around the relevance of inclusive policies and appreciating diversity at a special address that formed a part of the association



In attendance were 489 public relations and corporate communication professionals from across the nation. While emphasizing the need for companies to be more inclusive and embrace diversity he said, "Promoting inclusiveness and diversity in the organisation empowers employees and improves profits. To ensure a more inclusive workplace it is pertinent to implement regulatory policies that are in place. They need to frame inclusive policies to accommodate diverse sets including gender, differently-abled people," he said.



A panel discussion of top women leaders from the communication industry followed Mr. Haridass's address. Moderated by Baishakhi Dutta, Principal Digital Content Producer, The Economic Times, the panel consisted of six women from different sectors. Dr. AL Sharada, Director, Population First, Apeksha Mishra, Head Of Corporate Communications, Policybazaar; Nivedeeta Moirangthem, Country Communication Manager, IKEA India; Divya Kumar, Director Public Relations, Cleartrip; Saumya Bhushan, Lead-Corporate Communications, Reckitt India; and Vidisha Chatterjee, Communications Director - India, WhatsApp. The deliberations stressed the need for a sensitive communication strategy, as breaking stereotypes in the industry to become inclusive is crucial for gender discourse.

The panellists noted that brands have to be responsible and follow best practices to support sustainable development goals (SDG). It was imperative that the organizations recognize the impact of promoting diversity and inclusivity and make a dedicated effort to do so. The panel was unanimous in recognizing that PR practitioners need to be keenly attuned to what their brands' strategies are and how their campaigns can be perceived by stakeholders and a broader audience. To do so it was important that they become more diverse and inclusive themselves. They also noted that the racial and gender representation in the industry remains skewed.

- The special address may be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3uMh9IR>
- The panel discussion may be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3Of1a6J>





# Population First



Laadli

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

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