

THE BANGALOR



BANGALOREBYTES

**BEHIND
THE IT
REVOLUTION**

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New computer geeks
all in
the family

A cartoon illustration of a person with dark hair sitting at a desk with a computer. They are holding a sign that says "DO'S & DONT'S". The person is looking at the sign. The desk has a keyboard and a mouse. The background is a simple line drawing of a computer monitor and a chair.

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BEHIND THE IT REVOLUTION

Rohini Nilekani is the chairperson of Akshara Foundation, a public charitable trust which focuses on children between three and 10 years. A former journalist and freelance documentary scriptwriter, Rohini is also the author of Still Born, a medical thriller. She and her husband Nandan Nilekani of Infosys made Bangalore their home 15 years ago and in her very own words, "there's no chance of fully gentrifying and sanitising my city into just another metro."

KAVITHA SRINIVASA catches up with the multi-faceted personality who traces the city's growth as an IT centre

Changing infrastructure:

"The city has evolved. It has grown madly in every direction, planned and unplanned, grown with granite and glass, with bricks and mud and tin as well," says Rohini and adds that it never seems to be bursting at the seams like the other metros. The roads are definitely better, street lighting and the signages are improving.

According to her, communities seem to be coming together for the local upkeep of the city and as a result, there is less garbage dumped about. The green cover and the parks are growing. "The city looks "international," with all its glossy architecture combined with flyovers and airport upgradation. Yet, definitely, thanks to all the village-like habitats still thriving in the heart of the city, thanks to the *santhe's* in each local-

ty, the *darshinis* and the *dosa* camps, *Rajyotsava* rallies and the *Rama Mandalis*, there's no chance of fully gentrifying and sanitising my city into "just another metro," she says.

First impressions of Bangalore:

Rohini rewinds to 1987, when the couple settled down in the city. She describes it as a beautiful city which still remains beautiful, though the character is changing.

"I thought, having lived all my life in Mumbai that I would not be able to adjust to a city that seemed rather leisurely in its approach to life and work. My apprehensions were unfounded," she reveals and adds that she would not like to live anywhere else in India. "Being in Bangalore feels like having a ringside seat at an unfolding spectacle," smiles Rohini.

Coming to IT development, she says that they there weren't too many IT companies then and Infosys settled down in a small middle class bungalow in the heart of Jayanagar. She recalls a time when anything further from the present Infosys city was really hard to imagine.

The IT factor:

"IT companies may bring in their wake a certain culture of work and play which may veer away sharply from Bangalore's pre-IT days, but the city is trying hard to keep its integrity," she observes.

"Though it isn't very different from having other growth industries at various times, the whole IT culture does bring in more of a cosmopolitan culture and probably reduces the average age of the population drastically," she goes on. The IT industry has brought money indirectly into the city's economy, though I know people would like to

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pounce on the idea and say, 'But they do not pay enough in taxes.' You don't judge the contribution to a city merely by the amount of citizen's taxes, but also by citizen participation in all spheres of the city's culture," she explains.

The city's growing image:

"I think Bangalore is the centre of the universe and I feel more and more people are sharing and will share my rather whimsical belief. There is a lot to Bangalore according to the world. It's of course the IT capital, a city on the make, an Asia success story

and a tourist gateway. But there's more to share. So many exciting public-private initiatives are being birthed here that I think the city will be known as much for its socio-political work in the years to come as for its silicon status," Rohini says.

The initial years:

"When I first lived here for a few weeks in 1984, I was a journalist then and wrote on the riots over Cauvery water, electricity and water tariff hikes, among others. Even then, everyone thought that this city would soon reach its