

07

MONOPOLY ON IDEAS



**rohini
NILEKANI**

More an explorer than a strategist, the Net-economy woman is teaching business how to do the job

These are snapshots of four women from Bangalore, perhaps the fastest evolving city in India. I have chosen them because I like to believe these women are part of our mentor capital. I like to believe that we need to know more about them and about women like them. How we use that capital is up to each one of us. But we are going to feel richer just for knowing it's there.

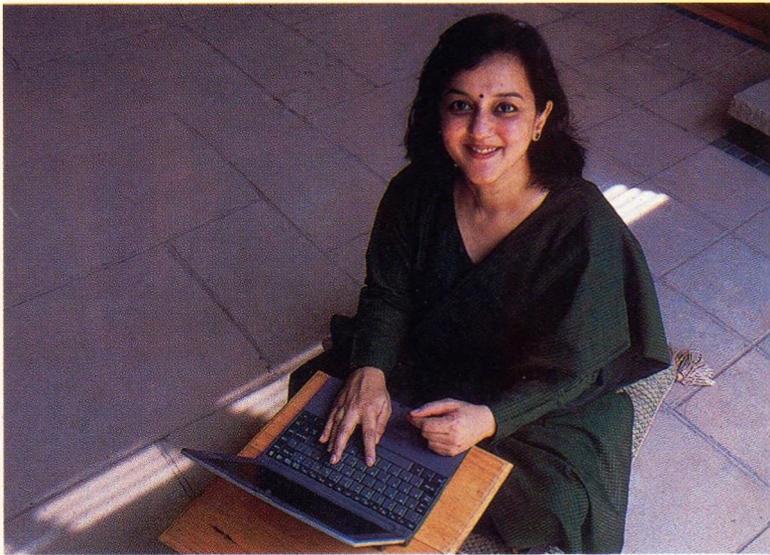
When you look at these women's lives from the outside, it appears as though they have it all. And do it all. The tired old superwoman bit, isn't it supposed to be a myth? Nobody can be that perfect. Maybe not, but she can come real close.

Each of these women refuses to set limits on herself. Nor does she allow herself to be limited by society's definitions and demands of her. There are always new territories to explore, there is always more to do. Is this

poornima JAIRAJ *Risk is her second nature, innovation her USP. This banker-turned-researcher Sivan Securities bends structures if corporate rigidity stonewalls progress in the ICE economy.*

Photographs by S. SATISH KUMAR





anuradha HEGDE
Consultant

*She's the best—
and the brightest,
having accounts
like Infy and H-P
in her kitty. For
her, a career is no
isolated goal; it's
built around her
holistic view of life.*

learnable? Surely it is. None of these four women were born like that. They evolved into this state and obviously it takes time. But can we take shortcuts to that wisdom? Surely we can.

The Internet has changed the ideas of time, distance and learning. That's why I have chosen women from the so-called new economy. It is fuelled largely by ideas. And men have no monopoly on those. The digital economy is also driven by technology and speed. And the market has no gender bias. Especially when there is such a shortage of 'manpower'. This is a great chance to put a glass-slipped foot in the door—and find an unexplored niche kingdom.

Rekha Menon

Rekha Menon, 41, leaves her mark at the very first meeting. Slim, obviously athletic, her mobile phone always attached to her body, Rekha is always active, doing several things at the same time. Perhaps it's because, as she says, "I have one life to live, and I want to live it to the fullest".

Rekha is a gold medallist from XLRI, Jamshedpur ('81 batch). Since then, she has worked for more than 15 years as a consultant in human resources development. She was doing fine, the work easy, the money great. So what happened? Rekha's restlessness gene nudged her sharply in the ribs. 'Hey, this work's not challenging enough!'

So Rekha threw up the security and the money of her partnership practice. She joined a company with the dream to make Indian software products for the global market. Sure, Aditi Technologies needed an HRD manager. In Rekha, they got much more than they had expected. They got a Country Manager. Rekha has built a work environment that's creative, rewarding and gender-neutral. Not only women, men too are allowed as much flexibility as they need, in terms of family time and other commitments, so long as they get the job done. She leads by example. She can work 24-hour days when required, yet normally she tries to come home in time for the kids. Rekha relaxes by taking her kids out for a Sunday afternoon run or joining friends for a 25-km bike ride at 5 am. Not for her the lazy mornings in bed.

"For me, the motivation is not bigger, brighter, better. That the company should grow and I should grow. That doesn't challenge me. For me, it has to be something new, different. It has to be different."

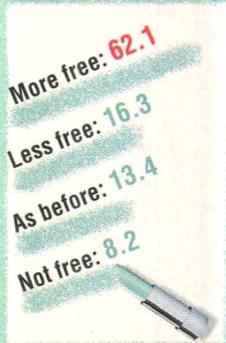
Different? But isn't that difficult? New? Isn't that frightening? Not for Rekha, or for any of the others I have chosen to write about. Rekha does not fear change. She is ready to learn, to make mistakes and move on. Where will she be three years from now? Well, wherever that restless gene leads her. With no regrets.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw

Look at Kiran. Just look at Kiran. The 47-year-old CMD of Biocon India. Feted with every entrepreneurial award ever devised. Known to be a vocal supporter of civic action groups. Known to be an excellent host to international visitors such as Nobel laureate James Watson. Three years ago, married John Shaw, just when friends and family had accepted that she was always going to remain single. You should never try to predict what this dynamo is going to do next. Her penchant for practical jokes is legendary. Come April 1st and friends won't believe in the tornado she warns them about—until it hits them in the face. "Yes, intrinsi-



How free is Indian woman from familial and societal pressures to live, behave, love and work?



OVERALL	Rural	Urban
More free	52.0	65.6
Less free	19.6	15.1

REGION	North	East
More free	50.0	83.8
Less free	21.5	2.0

AGE (yrs)	18-22	28-32
More free	73.3	53.2
Less free	10.9	20.5

Figures in percentage Rest others

Who has played a greater role in making India what it is today?

Women 17.9

Men 8.9

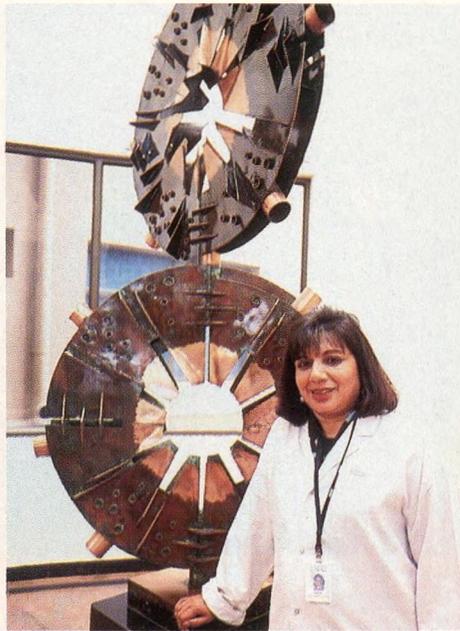
Both 73.2

OVERALL	Rural	Urban
Men	16.2	6.4
Women	12.3	19.8

AGE (yrs)	18-22	32-36
Men	7.4	11.4
Women	12.4	18.9

Figures in percentage Rest others

02-2



kiran MAZUMDAR
CMD, Biocon India

The lady with the Midas touch, the reigning biotech queen is now trying her luck with the web. Kiran's mantra for corporate success: have loads of fun.

cally I'm a fun-loving person. Why should I give up fun-loving ways just because I'm in a serious business?"

Don't let the gregarious exterior fool you. Kiran's various ventures are going great guns. Biocon India develops and markets enzymes for the pharmaceutical and food industries. Her other collaborations such as Syngene International are into cutting-edge research in biotechnology. She just launched a new bio-informatics company.

Enough? That does not seem to be a word in Kiran's vocabulary of work. Recently, she helped ideate a web start-up—Shadi Online.com—which promises to be the complete Indian wedding portal. If that works, who knows what will come next? These are the new women, after all.

"We are unconventional, I guess. We don't follow rules, we evolve rules that we feel comfortable with. It gives us a sense of satisfaction. It's a boundary-less environment you exist in. Because of that, you let your mind think laterally. That's what it's all about. Being unconventional."

Poornima Jairaj

Poornima, 48, works for Sivan Securities, a group that used to be largely a brokerage and investment firm. But in the new economy, with financial services expanding all over the map, there was bound to be change. So Poornima changed. She is now on the board of Global Technology Venture, the group's venture capital/incubator services group. At an age where many women are beginning to make early retirement plans, Poornima has discovered one more internal treasure—she seems to have a nose for great little business ideas.

When you investigate, it does not seem surprising at all. Throughout her career, Poornima has been seeking new opportunities and honing new skills. And this in a 20-year-long stint at a public sector bank, where opportunities to excel—and to experiment—are hard to come by.

Armed with an MA from the Delhi School of Economics and a degree in education, Poornima "strayed" into banking, though she had wanted to teach. But she didn't allow that choice to stagnate her. Using a trip to Washington, she studied financial norms at an American bank. Back home, she quickly moved into the international banking section. When the first home computer came out on the Indian market, she invested in one. Soon enough, she moved to the computer policy and planning department. And so 20 years went by. Finally, Poornima broke out of her self-imposed stint at the bank. "I always had this feeling that I must do something outside of a structured atmosphere." Things came together when she fell back on her core competency—research. "For me, it has always been important to arm myself with knowledge. It helps me to cope." This need for collecting information fitted right into her employer's needs. And with her



Whom would you like to have as your role model?



Mother Teresa
29.1



Indira Gandhi
24.1



Kiran Bedi
16.0



Sushma Swaraj
7.3

OTHERS

Aishwarya Rai 6.1

Arundhati Roy 5.6

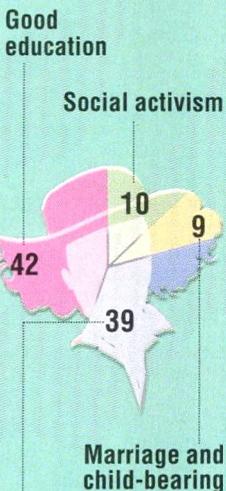
Mamata Banerjee 4.5

Sonia Gandhi 3.6

Medha Patkar 1.6

Figures in percentage

What should be the primary objective of women today?



Figures in percentage



rekha MENON *What's corporate success? To this XLRI alumni, it's being different.*
Aditi Technologies *A superb man manager, she has transformed HR into a fine art.*

true potential unleashed, there may be no stopping Poornima now.

Poornima has made the mid-career transition into the new economy with enviable ease. She believes this knowledge economy is friendly to women. "It's creating new ways of doing things. You don't have to be in the old structure, you can create a new structure. Talking about my own experience, I find I get better at it day by day!"

Anuradha Hegde

Meet Anuradha Hegde, 39, an M.Tech from France, the proprietor of her own software process engineering consultancy. You would never think it to look at this pretty, slight, simply dressed woman. Yet here's someone who's succeeded in doing what many women, wherever they may be on the ladder of success/economic independence, would love to do. Achieve. Stasis. Balance. Anuradha seems to have got it right. As consultant to companies like Hewlett-Packard and Infosys Technologies, her career is doing fine, thank you. Routinely, she turns away offers for more projects. She's making more money than ever before and has more time than ever before. Time for her two active boys; time for investing in young entrepreneurs; time for the farm she's developing on the Konkan coast; time for Reiki; time for Yoga. And time for keeping herself updated in this ever-changing world of software. Internet time.

"I believe in excellence in everything I do. That's my goal in anything that I take up. But I also have a holistic dimension, a balance dimension. I will not do something at the cost of something else. I've designed my career around other things. It is not my highest priority. I have balanced it by design."

The result? At this point, Anuradha is stress-free, guilt-free, enjoying freedom and fun. But would she have made a different choice if she had not been so financially successful? Maybe.

"Financial independence is the ultimate, it's very critical to me. If I want to do what I want, it is possible only with money. If you are dependent on someone for money, you can't come out of that. It'll come in the way."

Anuradha has achieved clarity on this vexatious issue early in the game. "I will not do anything for charity. I'm expensive. I charge a lot. Of course, later I may give it away. But I deliver excellence, and I want to be paid excellently."

Like our other women, Anuradha is astonished when you ask about her achievements. "I really don't think this is anything extraordinary. We've just made good use of our education, our family background and all the opportunities the economy is creating. But I think I have a long way to go. What I've done today is nowhere near what I want to do!" ●

