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# Dr. Sunita Pereira Receives 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award for Transforming Lives, Advancing Maternal/ Neonatal Health, & Enriching the Arts



## Dr. Sunita Pereira

*Associate Professor of Pediatrics*  
Tufts University School of Medicine

Dr. Sunita Pereira is honored with the 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award for her remarkable contributions to medicine, philanthropy, and the arts. After 30 years as a Neonatal Specialist at Tufts Medical Center, she retired last year to focus on her passions of cultural leadership and global maternal and neonatal health.

She is a trustee of the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) and the American India Foundation (AIF), where she is Chair of the Maternal and Neonatal Survival Initiative (MANSI)—a flagship program to improve care for mothers and newborns in marginalized communities across India.

Dr. Pereira has been an advocate for the most vulnerable, advancing neonatal care, mentoring physicians, and shaping the health outcomes of countless families. Outside work, she has strengthened communities

through philanthropy, art, and public service.

“Sunita Pereira’s leadership, generosity of spirit, and deep commitment to the arts have made a lasting impact on the Peabody Essex Museum and the broader cultural community,” said Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, PEM’s Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo Executive Director and CEO. “We are absolutely delighted to see her recognized with this award. It is richly deserved, and it reflects the thoughtfulness, integrity, and vision she brings to everything she does. We are proud to count her as a member of our board and thrilled to celebrate this moment with her.”

Reflecting on the honor, Dr. Pereira said, “I am deeply humbled and grateful to be chosen by INDIA New England News for the Lifetime Achievement Award. This recognition belongs to the families that I have had the privilege to serve, the mentors who shaped me, and the colleagues who stood beside me every day. Caring for the most vulnerable newborns and their mothers has not been just my profession, it has been my life’s passion and a calling.”

She continued, “My work in neonatal and maternal health is rooted in personal experience and a deep sense of responsibility to give back.”

She said India carries the world’s highest burden of maternal and neonatal loss, and a sustainable and substantive change only comes when medicine, advocacy, and community leadership come together.

“I dedicate this award to the countless unrecognized ASHA workers

(community health workers), who work tirelessly, with pride, diligence and compassion, to help pregnant young mothers, in the poorest and marginalized communities in rural India, have healthy pregnancies and healthy newborns,” she said. “The programs that I have been associated with have provided a passport for health to the young children, ensuring an opportunity to thrive physically, intellectually and emotionally. These women, who rarely receive the spotlight, are the true pillars of society and nurture the mothers and infants who will be the leaders of tomorrow.”

Dr. Pereira added that their dedicated service to ‘one mother and one child at a time’ are true community achievements and are scalable and replicable.

“Women like these, who never receive the spotlight, who quietly support society, through their dedicated service, hold greater weight than the celebrated achievements of people like me,” said Dr. Pereira. “We as humanity have a responsibility to make our world safer, kinder and more just. I hope that we will use our collective power to strengthen lives around us with compassion, kindness, sharing and giving.”

Dr. Manju Sheth, Director and Host of the Woman of the Year Awards Gala, said, “It was an honor for me to create the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Woman of the Year event, and each year we look forward to honoring an extraordinary woman. This year is especially meaningful for me as a physician, as we are honoring Dr. Sunita Pereira—an exceptional doctor—for her professional legacy



# Srinivasan Family Congratulates Dr. Sunita Pereira on Her Lifetime Achievement Award

Pratima and Venkat Srinivasan extend their heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Sunita Pereira on receiving the prestigious 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award.

Dr. Pereira is being honored for her remarkable contributions to medicine, philanthropy, and the arts—an inspiring legacy of service, compassion, and leadership.

We also warmly congratulate the Ten Outstanding Women of 2026, whose leadership, dedication, and impact continue to strengthen our communities.

With admiration and best wishes to all the honorees on this well-deserved recognition.



as well as her contributions to the community.”

Colleagues and friends also celebrated Dr. Pereira’s achievements.

AIF board member Raj Sharma and his wife Nalini Sharma, who have worked with Dr. Pereira, said, “We are delighted that Sunita Pereira is getting the Lifetime Achievement Award. As a neonatologist, she has worked all her life improving the well-being of children.”

The Sharmas said that Dr. Pereira was the primary catalyst behind AIF’s highly successful MANSI program that has made significant progress in reducing infant and maternal mortality in underprivileged and marginalized communities in India.

“Sunita’s enthusiasm and involvement in causes, particularly if they are about maternal health and children in underserved populations is truly inspiring,” they said. “She pulls out

all stops, pulls up her shirtsleeves and is ready to plunge in to make a difference. She balances her philanthropy with a keen interest in gardening, art, travel and entertaining. We cherish our friendship and extend our heartfelt congratulations to Sunita on this recognition.”

AIF Board Member Venkat Srinivasan and his wife Pratima Srinivasan added, “Sunita is such a wonderfully accomplished individual with a lifetime of contributions to healthcare and specifically neonatal care. Her passion for the arts is noteworthy. She and Brian are exemplary philanthropists who care deeply for the underserved across all sections of society. We admire her selfless support of so many causes and are so lucky to have her in our midst. This recognition is overdue and richly deserved.”

Upendra Mishra, publisher of INDIA New England News, added, “This year marks the 23rd Annual Woman

of the Year Awards Gala, produced by The Mishra Group, and we are thrilled to honor Dr. Sunita Pereira with the Lifetime Achievement Award 2026. The Gala, to be held on March 14, 2024, at the Burlington Marriott Hotel, brings together approximately 400 community and business leaders, philanthropists, academicians, and professionals. Dr. Pereira exemplifies the spirit of this award through her outstanding contributions to medicine, philanthropy, and the community, and it is our honor to celebrate her achievements.”

The Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes not only Dr. Pereira’s career as a physician but also her continuing contributions to society. Through her work with MANSI, PEM, and other initiatives, she has created a legacy of service, leadership, and impact—reminding all that true achievement lies in transforming lives, uplifting communities, and extending hope to the most vulnerable.

# Pubali Banerjee: Scientist, Cultural Leader, and Community Bridge-Builder



Pubali Banerjee believes leadership begins with listening and flourishes through integrity. A senior biopharmaceutical scientist and nonprofit leader, Banerjee has built her career and community work on bridging worlds: science and service, tradition and innovation, generations and cultures.

As President of Prabasi of New England, one of the region's largest Bengali cultural organizations, Banerjee has guided the nonprofit into a vibrant, inclusive, and financially stable 501(c)(3) institution. Under her leadership, Prabasi has expanded its cultural, educational, and youth-focused programming while strengthening governance and long-term sustainability.

Professionally, Banerjee serves as Senior Staff Engineer in CMC Bioprocess Development at Takeda, where she provides leadership for drug substance and bioprocess development programs supporting clinical/late-stage therapeutics. With a Ph.D. in Molecular Biology and Microbiology from Tufts University School of Medicine and postdoctoral training at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, her scientific career spans academic research, science, and innovation.

**Pubali Banerjee**  
*President, Prabasi of New England*  
*Senior Staff Process Development Engineer,*  
*Takeda*

Her presidency at Prabasi has been marked by cultural renewal and institutional growth. Signature events such as Durga Puja, Saraswati Puja, and Kobi Jayanti have flourished, welcoming families across cultures and faiths. Notably, Prabasi's Durga Puja has grown to unprecedented scale, drawing nearly 2,000 attendees over three days of programming. A landmark achievement during her tenure was commissioning a new Durga Prathima from renowned artist Kumar Tuli, the first in over 30 years, symbolizing both cultural stewardship and renewal.

Beyond programming, Banerjee has prioritized youth engagement, scholarships, STEM mentorship, and leadership development—ensuring that Prabasi remains not only a cultural home, but a launchpad for future generations.

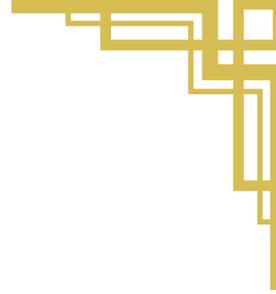
Below, Banerjee reflects on her journey, her values, and the principles that guide her leadership.

*INDIA New England News: How would you describe the work you do in your own words—and what part of it gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

**Pubali Banerjee:** At its heart, my work is about building bridges—between people, generations, cultures, and ideas. Professionally, I work at the intersection of science, medicine, and innovation, helping translate complex research into real-world impact. In the community, my work has focused on creating spaces where people feel seen, included, and empowered to contribute.

The greatest joy comes from moments when those worlds overlap—when mentorship sparks confidence, when collaboration turns into collective pride, or when someone feels they truly belong. Seeing people step

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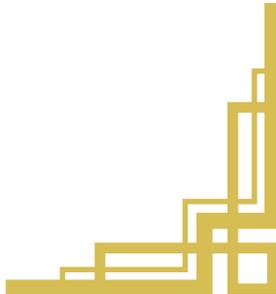
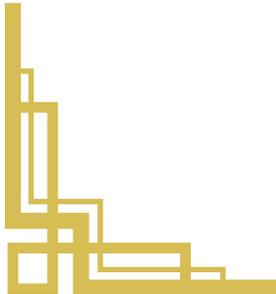
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forward, especially those who once felt unheard, is deeply meaningful to me.

*INE: Is there a cause, charity, or community initiative close to your heart? What drew you to it, and how are you personally involved?*

**PB:** Prabasi of New England is very close to my heart. What drew me in was its potential—not just as a cultural organization, but as a living, evolving community that could nurture leadership, creativity, service, and inclusion across generations.

Over the years, I've been involved as a volunteer, Executive Committee member, and now President. My focus has been on strengthening governance, expanding youth and educational initiatives, increasing accessibility, and ensuring that the organization remains welcoming and relevant to a diverse membership. It has been incredibly rewarding to help shape an institution that honors tradition while embracing change.

*INE: Outside of your professional life, what activities or interests help you recharge and stay grounded?*

**PB:** Spending time with my family grounds me more than anything else. I also find deep joy in mentoring

young people, whether through STEM initiatives, robotics, or community projects. Creative pursuits—dance, music, cultural programming, and even planning community events—help me recharge because they remind me that leadership can also be joyful and expressive.

Quiet moments matter too: reading, reflecting, and simply being present. Balance, for me, comes from staying connected to both purpose and people.

*INE: Looking back, what impact are you most proud of making—whether in your community, your organization, or your professional field?*

**PB:** I'm most proud of helping create systems that outlast any one individual—whether that's building strong, transparent processes in a nonprofit, mentoring future leaders, or contributing to scientific work that improves patient outcomes.

In the community, seeing Prabasi grow in participation, trust, and inclusivity has been especially meaningful. Professionally, contributing to translational research that bridges science and medicine reminds me why I chose this path in the first place.

*INE: What is a skill, strength, or talent people may not immediately associate with you,*

*but one that has shaped your journey in important ways?*

**PB:** Listening. Not just hearing, but truly listening—especially when conversations are difficult or perspectives differ. This skill has helped me navigate leadership roles, resolve conflicts, and build consensus without losing integrity. It has taught me that strength doesn't always need to be loud to be effective.

*INE: Is there a book (or a few) that has stayed with you or influenced how you think, lead, or live?*

**PB:** Bengali literature has shaped how I think about leadership and life. Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay's work has stayed with me, particularly Srikanta, which reflects leadership through humility, lived experience, and empathy rather than authority. His writing reminds me that moral clarity often comes from observing, listening, and understanding human complexity. I'm also deeply influenced by Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali, which emphasizes service, introspection, and quiet strength. Together, these works reinforce my belief that meaningful progress is built through patience, compassion, and quiet resilience—not quick victories or dominance.

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**INE:** *Are there words, quotes, or ideas that you often return to during challenging or defining moments?*

**PB:** I often return to the idea that how we act matters as much as what we achieve. Integrity, patience, and compassion are not optional—they are foundational. During difficult moments, I remind myself to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

**INE:** *Who has inspired or influenced you most in your life, and what lessons from them continue to guide you today?*

**PB:** I've been shaped by many influences—family members, mentors, teachers, and colleagues—who modeled quiet strength and ethical leadership. The lesson that stays with me most is that leadership is a responsibility, not a privilege, and that trust is built through consistency and fairness over time.

**INE:** *What core value or principle do you consciously try to live by, both personally and professionally?*

**PB:** Integrity. Doing the right thing even when it's difficult, inconvenient, or unseen. It's the principle that anchors my decisions and gives me clarity during uncertainty.

**INE:** *If you could spend time in conversation with one person—past or present—who would it be, and what would you hope to learn from them?*

**PB:** I would love to spend time with someone who bridged science, service, and humanity—someone who understood that progress without compassion is incomplete. I would hope to learn how they balanced conviction with humility, especially during times of resistance or change.

**INE:** *What is one lesson life has taught you that you wish you had learned earlier?*

**PB:** That it's okay to pause. Growth doesn't always come from doing more—it often comes from reflecting, recalibrating, and trusting yourself.

**INE:** *How do you define success at this stage of your life?*

**PB:** Success now means impact with balance—creating meaningful change while staying grounded, present, and aligned with my values. It's about leaving things better than I found them.

**INE:** *What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to make a difference in their own way?*

**PB:** Don't wait for permission to lead. Your voice matters, even when it shakes. Stay curious, stay principled, and surround yourself with people who challenge and support you. And remember—you don't have to fit a mold to make an impact.

# Jigna and Yash Shah

## CONGRATULATE THE OUTSTANDING WOMEN OF 2026

Jigna and Yash Shah proudly congratulate the Outstanding Women of 2026 whose leadership, service, innovation, and resilience are shaping our communities and inspiring future generations.

Your achievements reflect vision, courage, and an unwavering commitment to making a difference. We celebrate your impact and the powerful example you set for women and girls everywhere.

With admiration and  
best wishes for continued success.



# Deepali Gulati — Leading with Hope, Heart, and Unwavering Purpose

For Deepali Gulati, leadership is not defined by title, but by presence. As Executive Director of Saheli Boston, one of the region's most vital organizations serving South Asian and Arab survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, she brings both clarity and empathy to her role. Her work centers on safety, dignity, and empowerment—ensuring that women navigating abuse, immigration fears, financial control, and cultural pressures know they are not alone.

Gulati's journey with Saheli began on the front lines as a domestic violence advocate. She sat with survivors in courtrooms, answered late-night calls, and helped women navigate complex systems that can feel overwhelming and isolating. Even as her role expanded into outreach, prevention, and now executive leadership, she says showing up and making sure survivors don't feel they alone remain her core purpose.

Since joining the organization in 2020—and serving in 2025 as Interim Executive Director—Gulati has strengthened survivor-centered programs including immigration advocacy, legal support, housing stabilization, and economic empowerment. She streamlined operational processes, reinforced compliance, and expanded partnerships with public agencies and funders. Under her leadership, Saheli secured significant federal and foundation funding, including a major award from the Cummings



**Deepali Gulati**  
*Executive Director, Saheli Boston*

Foundation, ensuring sustainability and expanded reach. She also spearheaded the growth of Saheli's Outreach and Prevention initiatives, forging partnerships with schools and universities and founding the organization's annual Domestic Violence Awareness Walk—now a powerful community tradition focused on awareness, healing, and solidarity.

Yet for Gulati, the most meaningful victories are often quiet ones. "It might be a survivor walking into court a little steadier than before, opening her first bank account, or saying, 'I didn't know I had choices.' Those moments stay with me because they're about more than a service—we're talking about someone starting to trust themselves again."

In a Q&A, Gulati reflects on resilience, gratitude, authenticity, and the quiet power of hope.

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe the work you do in your own words—and what part of it gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

**Deepali Gulati:** My work at Saheli has been the most meaningful, for it has always been about walking alongside survivors as they find their way back to safety and self-belief. I started as a DV advocate, sitting with survivors at some of the hardest moments of their lives—when they were scared, unsure, and often carrying so much emotional weight on their own. Simply listening, explaining options, and helping them navigate systems that are complex and intimidating, especially when one is dealing with language barriers, immigration fears, or cultural and family pressure, brings great satisfaction. Even though my role has grown into outreach, prevention, and now leadership, that core purpose has never changed — showing up and making sure survivors don't feel they are alone in this journey.

The most meaningful moments for me are often the quiet ones. It might be a survivor walking into court a little steadier than before, opening her first bank account, or saying, "I didn't know I had choices." Those moments stay with me because they're about more than a service—we're talking about someone starting to trust themselves again.

I also really value the community side of the work. Through prevention and youth engagement, we're able to have honest conversations before violence happens and create spaces where people can talk openly about safety, boundaries, and healing. Knowing that

this work can ripple outward—helping not just one person, but families and future generations—is what keeps me motivated, even on the hardest of days.

*INE: Is there a cause, charity, or community initiative close to your heart? What drew you to it, and how are you personally involved?*

**Deepali Gulati:** Saheli is very close to my heart because it reflects the kind of support I wish every woman knew she had access to. What drew me to this work—and what keeps me here—is seeing how powerful it is when women are reminded that they do have choices. Many of the survivors we work with have spent years being told what they can't do, or that their voice doesn't matter—especially when it comes to finances, immigration, or their children. Saheli exists to challenge that narrative.

I have been involved in this work in very real ways—from direct advocacy and supporting survivors through difficult decisions, to outreach and prevention efforts that help break silence in our communities. The most meaningful part for me is watching women begin to believe in themselves again—make decisions without fear, or advocate for their children's wellbeing. That sense of confidence and independence is powerful, and being part of that journey is what makes this work so deeply personal to me.

*INE: Outside of your professional life, what activities or interests help you recharge and stay grounded?*

**Deepali Gulati:** Outside of work, I recharge by spending time with my family and close friends. That space allows me to slow down. Some of my most meaningful moments are the simplest ones — cooking meals together with my family, unwinding with a good Bollywood film, and spending quiet time with my little old dog, Chiquita.

Maintaining a consistent workout routine is also essential for me; exercise clears my mind and sharpens my focus. Staying connected to these routines and the people I love helps me maintain balance in my daily life.

*INE: Looking back, what impact are you most proud of making—whether in your*

*community, your organization, or your professional field?*

**Deepali Gulati:** What I'm most proud of is not a title or a single achievement, but the trust we've built with survivors and the community. Saheli has become a place where women feel safe to share their truth, often for the first time, and to be heard without judgment—that alone can be life-changing.

On a personal level, I'm proud of how much I've grown alongside this work. I began as a DV advocate, being with survivors in moments of fear, confusion, and pain—often just listening, holding space, and learning from their courage. In those early years, I learned what it truly means to show up for someone without trying to fix everything, and how powerful it can be simply to believe a survivor and stand beside her. Over time, my role expanded, and so did my perspective. I moved from responding to individual crises to thinking about how systems, policies, and community attitudes impact survivors every day. I've had the opportunity to help shape programs, outreach, and prevention efforts that are more compassionate, culturally responsive, and rooted in the real lived experiences of the women we serve.

What means the most to me is seeing the long arc of impact—watching women find safety and slowly rebuild their sense of self. When some of those survivors later come back to support Saheli or help other women, it feels like a full circle moment. It reminds me that this work isn't just about crisis intervention—it's about planting seeds of confidence, agency, and community that continue to grow long after the immediate crisis has passed. I recognize how fortunate I am to be entrusted with this responsibility. I carry deep gratitude for Saheli's President, Mrs. Neelam Wali, whose unwavering commitment and wisdom continue to guide me. As a leader, I try to lead with that same spirit of gratitude—grounded in humility, strengthened by collaboration, and always mindful that this work is possible because of the collective dedication of our staff, partners, supporters, and, most importantly, the

resilience of the survivors who place their trust in us.

**INE:** What is a skill, strength, or talent people may not immediately associate with you, but one that has shaped your journey in important ways?

**Deepali Gulati:** The strength that has guided my journey is a mix of perseverance and the instinct to make people feel at home. When challenges arise, I remain positive, stay grounded and keep moving forward, while showing up for others in ways that matter, even in small moments.

This combination of steady persistence and a warm, inclusive presence transforms ordinary interactions into lasting connections — helping colleagues and friends feel seen, heard, and supported. Meaningful impact doesn't always announce itself; sometimes, it grows quietly, one connection at a time.

**INE:** Is there a book (or a few) that has stayed with you or influenced how you think, lead, or live?

**Deepali Gulati:** There are many books that I am fond of, but I am grateful for Dr. Ranjay Gulati's *Deep Purpose*, which, although focused on for-profit companies, is about finding a deeper purpose to succeed. At Saheli we already have a "deep purpose"; his book succinctly lays out key tenets in our workplace that I draw inspiration from every day — leadership commitment, organizational success rooted in purpose, employee connection, and elevating people's self-worth through care and coaching.

**INE:** Are there words, quotes, or ideas that you often return to during challenging or defining moments?  
**Deepali Gulati:** In *The Shawshank Redemption*, Andy Dufresne says, "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." To me, hope is not passive optimism — it is a quiet strength. When I speak with survivors, I try to help them see that hope is already within them.

I also return to Mother Teresa's words: "In this life we cannot do great things.

We can only do small things with great love.” Meaningful impact rarely looks dramatic. More often, it’s found in consistency — a returned phone call, a follow-up that shows you care, a moment of listening without judgment. And at work, I often joke with my team: “If you don’t kick the soccer ball, you’ll never know if it will go in — so kick it hard.” The message is real: you have to try. Hope gives us the courage to act, love gives our actions meaning, and resilience keeps us moving forward.

**INE:** *Who has inspired or influenced you most in your life, and what lessons from them continue to guide you today?*

**Deepali Gulati:** The person who has influenced me most in my life is my father, who is no longer with us. He lived by Gandhian principles of service and integrity and always taught me to stand on the right side, even when it’s hard. He used to say, “Hard work never kills anyone.” He showed me that even in the toughest moments, you can dress up, show up, and keep moving forward with your head held high. My two boys are also a constant source of inspiration. Conversations with them remind me every day to try to be better than I was yesterday, to stay present, and to keep growing.

**INE:** *What core value or principle do you consciously try to live by, both personally and professionally?*

**Deepali Gulati:** The core value I try to live by—both personally and professionally—is to bring my whole self to everything I do. The quote by Dr. Seuss, “Today you are you, that is truer than true, there is no one alive who is youer than you!” reminds me to lead and live authentically. I believe honesty and authenticity are what build real trust. Leading authentically also means listening deeply, acknowledging when I don’t have all the answers, and creating spaces where people feel heard, valued, and empowered. At the end of the day, what matters most is knowing that you’ve shown up with care, integrity, and your whole heart.

**INE:** *If you could spend time in conversation*

*with one person—past or present—who would it be, and what would you hope to learn from them?*

**Deepali Gulati:** If I could have one more conversation, it would be with my mother, Mrs. Kanta Rai. I lost her when I was young, and there is much I never had the chance to ask. She was patient, resilient, and wise. At just 22 years old, as a newlywed, she moved to Afghanistan—far from her home—navigating unfamiliar cultural norms and language barriers in what must have felt like an entirely foreign world. I would want to understand how she found her footing, how she built relationships, and how she maintained her identity while adapting to a new country. In many ways, this feels especially meaningful now, as my work centers on supporting immigrant women facing similar transitions and challenges.

**INE:** *What is one lesson life has taught you that you wish you had learned earlier?*

**Deepali Gulati:** I’ve come to understand that my impatience and perfectionism have always been closely connected — and both have shaped me in powerful ways. Together, they’ve helped me accomplish a great deal.

But my work at Saheli has taught me that not everything can or should be rushed, and not everything needs to

be flawless to be meaningful. Widespread impact rarely happens overnight; it unfolds gradually, through small, imperfect, but courageous steps. Progress is still progress, even when it doesn’t look polished or immediate.

**INE:** *How do you define success at this stage of your life?*

**Deepali Gulati:** At this stage of my life, I define success not by titles or accolades, but by the impact I can make and the relationships I nurture. Success is being present—truly showing up for my family, my community, and the survivors I work with—while staying true to my values. For me, success is measured in moments of connection, trust, and quiet growth.

**INE:** *What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to make a difference in their own way?*

**Deepali Gulati:** Start from who you are, not from what you think the world expects of you. Believe in the value of your voice, your ideas, and your perspective—even when it feels small or overlooked. Don’t be afraid — action, even in small ways, creates momentum. Surround yourself with people who inspire, challenge, and support you. Stand firm when your values matter. And above all, be patient and kind to yourself—the real difference comes from persistence, empathy, and showing up with your whole heart.





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# Ekta Jain: Preserving Language & Culture Through Dance & Devotion

As Founder and Director of Ekta Dance Academy and Co-Chair of Baal Yuva Vibhag, the youth educational department of Hindi Manch, Ekta Jain has spent 20+ years shaping artistic journeys and strengthening cultural identity within the Indian diaspora. Trained in Kathak under the Jaipur Gharana tradition, along with Bollywood, Salsa, and Hip-Hop, Jain founded her academy in 2005 with a vision: to create a space where classical Indian dance could coexist with contemporary forms, and where students of all ages could find confidence through performance. Since then, about 3,000 students have trained under her guidance. Many have gone on to perform nationally and internationally, some appearing on television and major Indian platforms, while others have become instructors themselves.

Yet Jain measures impact less by accolades and more by transformation. She speaks often of watching students rediscover joy, carve out “me time” from busy lives, and step onto stage with newfound confidence.

Through her leadership role at Hindi Manch, Jain mentors children in language, anchoring, and stage presence, helping them build fluency and pride in Hindi while developing public-speaking skills. She is equally devoted to seniors, conducting dance workshops and participating in outreach initiatives that bring movement and connection to older adults.



**Ekta Jain**

*Founder & Director, Ekta Dance Academy  
Co-Chair, Baal Yuva Vibhag,  
Hindi Manch*

Grounded in respect, compassion, and patience—values she credits to her upbringing—Jain views art as service. She sees her work as part of a larger mission: preserving heritage while empowering individuals.

Below, Jain reflects on her journey, inspirations, and the principles that continue to guide her.

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe the work you do in your own words—and what part of it gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

**Ekta Jain:** I have always believed that dance is not just movement—it is emotion, storytelling, and purpose. I try to bring something unique into every performance I create. Whether it's a meaningful message, a creative twist, or a life lesson woven into the

choreography, every piece has depth behind it.

I don't think of what I do as 'work.' For me, it is pure passion. Ekta Dance Academy has students from 4 years old to 70 years old, and the greatest joy comes from watching them rediscover their love for dance. They get their 'me time,' step away from daily stress, and gain the confidence to express themselves on stage. Seeing their smiles, their pride, and their transformation into empowered individuals—that is the most rewarding part of my journey.

**INE:** *Is there a cause, charity, or community initiative close to your heart?*

**EJ:** I am Indian, and I am Indian by heart. Even living thousands of miles away, I remain deeply connected to my culture and mother tongue. That is why my work with Hindi Manch, especially Bal Yuva Manch, is very close to my heart. Their mission to promote and preserve Hindi language and culture across America resonates deeply with me.

Through my role as Co-Chair of the youth department, I help children connect with Hindi in playful, engaging ways—through storytelling, anchoring, cultural performances, and stage presence training. I want them to feel proud of their roots.

I am also passionate about supporting seniors. Respecting and caring for elders is a core Indian value. Through my involvement with Volunteering For Seniors and other community groups,

I conduct dance workshops and participate in outreach programs that bring joy and movement into their lives. Giving back to the community in whatever way I can is very important to me.

*INE: Outside of your professional life, what activities or interests help you recharge and stay grounded?*

**EJ:** Dance is my passion, so I engage with it anytime. Beyond that, I love acting. Inspired by my father's involvement in theatre, I've had the opportunity to perform in plays with SETU, which continues to inspire me creatively.

I also love writing short stories and hope one day to direct them into plays or short films. Spending time in nature, listening to music, and reflecting helps me stay grounded. Most importantly, spending quality time with my family brings me balance and reminds me of what truly matters.

*INE: Looking back, what impact are you most proud of making?*

**EJ:** When I look back at my 20-year teaching journey and over 3,000 students, what fills me with pride is the lasting impact on their lives. Some have performed on television and major Indian shows, some have become teachers themselves, and others have carried their passion for dance into college and beyond. Beyond individual achievements, I am proud that through folk dances, classical forms like Kathak, mythology-based storytelling, and colorful cultural presentations, I have helped keep Indian culture alive in our community. Even if my contribution feels small, knowing I've helped people stay connected to their roots gives me immense fulfillment.

*INE: What is a skill or strength people may not immediately associate with you, but one that has shaped your journey?*

**EJ:** I believe compassion is one of my greatest strengths. I try not to judge people quickly. Everyone reacts based on their experiences and struggles.

Because I interact with hundreds of people—students, parents, community members—I strive to understand their perspectives first.

I also strongly believe that everything happens for good. Even during challenging times, I trust that something better lies ahead. This mindset keeps me persistent and motivated.

*INE: Is there a book that has influenced how you think, lead, or live?*

**EJ:** I read often, but instead of one specific book, I believe people around us are our greatest teachers. I observe deeply—learning from situations, emotions, community experiences, films, and conversations. These real-life influences shape me far more than any single book.

*INE: Are there words or ideas you return to during challenging moments?*

**EJ:** I always remind myself: 'Do your work with love and sincerity, and everything else will fall into place.' That grounding thought carries me through busy schedules and moments of doubt.

And as I mentioned earlier, I truly believe everything happens for good. That belief keeps me calm and hopeful, even in difficult times.

*INE: Who has inspired you most?*

**EJ:** I cannot name just one person. My inspiration comes from the collective strength of the people around me—my parents, my mother-in-law, my husband, my daughters, my students, and my community. What inspires me most is resilience—how people bounce back from challenges and keep moving forward. Observing their determination and quiet strength motivates me every day.

*INE: What core value or principle do you consciously try to live by?*

**EJ:** Respect. For me, respect is everything—respect for art, for differing opinions, for nature, for community, and for family. It is a value my parents instilled in me, and it keeps me grounded.

Along with respect, I believe in helping others whenever possible. Even small acts of kindness can make a difference.

*INE: If you could spend time in conversation with one person—past or present—who would it be?*

**EJ:** From the past, I would choose Pandit Birju Maharaj. He was an ocean of knowledge in Kathak, and even a fraction of his wisdom would be invaluable.

From the present, I would choose Sudha Chandran. Her story, especially portrayed in Nache Mayuri, is deeply inspiring. Despite losing a leg, she continued to pursue dance with resilience and grace. I would love to learn how she maintained such strength and devotion to her art.

*INE: What is one lesson life has taught you that you wish you had learned earlier?*

**EJ:** Patience. Earlier in life, I wanted everything to go exactly my way. Over time, I learned that life rarely unfolds as planned. Embracing patience has transformed how I approach challenges—both personally and professionally.

*INE: How do you define success at this stage of your life?*

**EJ:** Success is relative. I feel successful as a mother when my children are happy, as a daughter when my parents are content, as a wife when my husband is happy, and as a teacher when my students grow into confident individuals. I don't measure success as one grand achievement. I find success in every moment. Above all, I hope to be remembered as a good human being and a true friend. To me, that is the truest form of success.

*INE: What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to make a difference in their own way?*

**EJ:** Be consistent. No matter how many challenges come your way, do not give up. And do something unique. Every woman has a special quality—discover it and nurture it. Stay consistent, stay unique, and trust that your moment will come.

# Neha Kaushal: Bridging Technology, Culture, & Selfless Service



For Neha Kaushal, impact is not confined to a single profession or platform. It is a throughline—connecting technology, service, culture, and community across continents.

Born in Ernakulam, India, shaped by years in New Delhi, and enriched through higher education in Canada and Boston, Kaushal’s global journey reflects a deep-rooted commitment to purpose.

Kaushal serves as Senior Marketing Manager at Acronis, a global cybersecurity firm, alongside her position as Joint Coordinator for Sewa International’s Boston Chapter, guiding initiatives focused on selfless service, women’s empowerment, youth leadership, and community upliftment.

Grounded in the philosophy of Nar Sewa, Narayan Sewa—service to humanity as service to the divine—Kaushal’s work reflects both professional excellence and heartfelt compassion.

Below, Kaushal reflects on her work, her inspiration, and the values that guide her journey.

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe the work you do — and what*



**Neha Kaushal**  
Founder & CEO, Suffolk

*part of it gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

Neha Kaushal: My work sits at the intersection of professional impact and purpose-driven service. At Acronis, I lead strategic marketing programs centered on storytelling, customer engagement, and building trust in an increasingly digital world with rampant ransomware attacks. With an engineering background, I enjoy translating complex technology into meaningful narratives that help organizations stay secure and resilient.

Alongside my professional role, I serve as Joint Coordinator for Sewa International’s Boston Chapter, where I help design and guide initiatives that address immediate community needs such as food insecurity and senior support, while also focusing on long-term upliftment through education and youth leadership. What brings me the greatest joy is seeing people

step into their potential: young volunteers discovering their voice through service, families receiving support during difficult times, and communities coming together with compassion and purpose. That tangible human impact is deeply fulfilling.”

**INE:** *Is there a cause, charity, or community initiative close to your heart?*

**NK:** Sewa International, especially its SHE program focused on Sanitation, Hygiene, and Empowerment of the girl child, and its SHE-CAF program supporting COVID-affected families, holds a special place in my heart. I was drawn to Sewa because it does not simply provide aid. It empowers individuals and communities to thrive with dignity and independence.

Through the SHE program, we have impacted nearly 55,000 adolescent girls and more than 3,000 women across India. In 2025 alone, we reached close to 5,900 school-going girls, helped build 136 toilets, supported 2,550 girls with menstrual awareness, and empowered more than 900 women through skills-based training. The recent Supreme Court ruling recognizing menstrual hygiene as a fundamental right validates the importance of this work and

reinforces that access to education and sanitation is a basic necessity. Here in Boston, I am involved in initiatives that bring communities together, including food drives, environmental stewardship efforts, senior workshops, and youth leadership programs. All these efforts are rooted in the philosophy of service before self. A dedicated core team of volunteers forms the backbone of Sewa International, and their passion makes it possible for these programs to uplift the communities we serve.”

*INE: Outside of your professional life, what activities or interests help you recharge and stay grounded?*

**NK:** Even with my deep engagement in community service and my professional role, I am intentional about creating space to recharge. Indian cultural events play a big role in that balance. I am a classically trained Bharatanatyam dancer and continue to participate in local cultural dance competitions, which keeps me connected to my art, heritage, and the discipline that has shaped me since childhood.

*INE: Is there a book that has influenced how you think, lead, or live?*

**NK:** One book that has stayed with me is *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*. Its emphasis on purpose, mindfulness, and intentional living resonated deeply with me. It reinforced the idea that success is not just about professional achievement, but about inner fulfillment, balance, and living in alignment with your values. I try to carry that into both my personal life and my work in community service.

*INE: Are there words or ideas you return to during challenging moments?*

**NK:** There is a quote my dad has always lived by and often reminds us of: ‘Live in the present and to the fullest.’ It is simple but incredibly powerful. It is also beautifully echoed in a song he loves from *Kal Ho Naa Ho*: ‘Har pal yahan ji bhar jiyo.’ That line is a constant reminder to embrace each moment with gratitude, purpose, and joy, especially during challenging times.

*INE: Who has inspired you most?*

**NK:** “My greatest inspiration has always been my family: my parents, my husband, my son, my brother, and my sister-in-law. My parents instilled in me the values of empathy, resilience, humility, and service, forming the foundation of who I am today. My husband and son are my constant pillars of support, encouragement, and perspective, reminding me of the importance of balance, presence, and leading with heart. My brother and sister-in-law inspire me through their quiet strength, generosity, and unwavering support, reinforcing the value of standing by one another and lifting others along the way. Their love and belief in me give me the strength to continue serving with purpose and gratitude.”

*INE: What core value or principle do you consciously try to live by?*

**NK:** I strive to live by integrity and selfless service, intentionally aligning actions with values every day. Whether I am leading a community initiative or mentoring someone one-on-one, I want people to feel seen, appreciated, and empowered to realize their own potential.

*INE: What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to make a difference in their own way?*

**NK:** Start where you are, with what you have, and trust that your voice matters. Meaningful impact grows from curiosity, consistency, and compassion. Seek out communities and mentors who uplift you, stay grounded in your values, and do not be afraid to step into leadership, even when it feels uncomfortable. Remember that service and success are not mutually exclusive. When you lead with purpose and heart, the difference you make will naturally follow.





# Shikha Mangalick Malhotra: Building the Future of Indian American Community in Boston—Across Generations



Shikha Malhotra  
*Co-Founder, Indian Family Network (IFNet)*

For Shikha Mangalick Malhotra, community is not accidental—it is intentional. For the past 13 years, she has dedicated herself to building exactly that in Greater Boston: a vibrant, multi-generational Indian American community where cultural pride and contemporary identity coexist seamlessly.

Raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, in a large, close-knit family and surrounded by an Indian community her grandfather helped establish, Malhotra grew up understanding how belonging shapes confidence, identity, and opportunity. When she moved to Massachusetts and settled in Brookline, she sought a similar environment for her own children—one that honored Indian heritage while embracing their American upbringing.

Finding that such a space did not yet fully exist, she helped create it. Malhotra is the co-founder of IFNet, a community organization that began as a single Diwali gathering and has since grown into one of the region's most impactful Indian American networks. Today, IFNet is overseen by a nine-member board, supported by 300+ volunteers, and reaches over 1,800 subscribers across Greater Boston and beyond.

Its signature Diwali Ball has grown from a modest celebration for 60

and families by grade level to deepen relationships across the community.

Beyond IFNet, Malhotra is a licensed real estate professional with Compass Chestnut Hill, working within the Shahani Group, and partners with fellow investors on residential development projects in Brookline, Newton, and Acton.

She holds a Master of Education and Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a bachelor's degree in economics from Northwestern University, where she remains actively involved as a Director of the Northwestern Alumni Admissions Association. Below, Malhotra reflects on her journey, the philosophy behind her work, and the values that guide her leadership.

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe the work you do in your own words—and what part of it gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

**Shikha Mangalick Malhotra:** I enjoy bringing people together in meaningful ways. I've often found myself playing that role—helping people connect and feel included—and IFNet has given me the opportunity to do that more intentionally. We know that connection and belonging matter. As Vivek Murthy notes in *Together*, human connection is closely tied to well-being, and

loneliness affects how adults show up at work and how children experience school and social life. That understanding has shaped my belief that communities don't just happen—they can be thoughtfully created so people feel welcomed and supported. The greatest joy comes from seeing those connections form. Watching children build friendships with others who share their heritage, seeing parents develop camaraderie, and witnessing a community grow into a place where people feel they belong is deeply fulfilling. As Brené Brown says, "True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are." Creating spaces where people can show up authentically brings me tremendous joy.

*INE: Is there a cause, charity, or community initiative close to your heart?*

**SMM:** The initiative closest to my heart is IFNet, which I co-founded and continue to help shape and grow. It's

where my values around community and service are most directly expressed.

I also believe in supporting organizations addressing urgent human needs at scale. One is Akshaya Patra Foundation, whose integrated approach to education, hunger, and women's employment resonates deeply with me.

Another is the International Committee of the Red Cross. Their commitment to protecting and assisting people affected by armed conflict—often far from public view—is something I profoundly respect. Where I can lead directly, I do. Where others are doing critical work beyond my reach, I support them.

**INE:** Outside of your professional life, what activities or interests help you recharge and stay grounded?

**SMM:** Dance has always been important to me, and teaching dance to kids in the community is especially

meaningful. Staying active—whether through workouts, yoga, or family pickleball—helps me reset.

I'm also an avid reader, toggling between fiction and non-fiction. But above all, time with family grounds me most. Returning to Minnesota with my husband Deepak and our children to be with my extended family—over forty cousins I grew up with—is deeply rejuvenating. Being with people who've known you your whole life puts everything in perspective.

*INE: Looking back, what impact are you most proud of making?*

**SMM:** I'm most proud of creating spaces where connection happens naturally—and then watching those connections take on a life of their own. The IFNet Sleepaway Camp stands out. It has become a formative experience for hundreds of children, blending cultural immersion with joy and pride. We approach curriculum

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## Saheli Boston Congratulates Executive Director Deepali Gulati

We proudly congratulate our Executive Director, **Deepali Gulati**, on being named an **Outstanding Woman of 2026**.

This well-deserved recognition honors Deepali's visionary leadership, unwavering commitment to survivors of domestic violence, and tireless advocacy on behalf of South Asian women and families across our community.



We celebrate her remarkable achievement and the compassion, courage, and dedication that inspires us all.

# Congratulations, Deepali!



thoughtfully—whether teaching cooking, history, or arts—so children understand not just the “how,” but the “why” behind traditions. We want them to feel proud of their heritage and see its relevance today.

Launching our mentorship programs and Grade Gatherings has also been incredibly meaningful. The numbers matter, but what matters more is knowing we’ve helped make Boston a more connected and culturally grounded place to raise children—and that our model is inspiring communities in other states to explore similar efforts.

*INE: What is a strength people may not immediately associate with you?*

**SMM:** I’m often seen as open and supportive, but what people may not immediately see is my competitive drive. As a three-season athlete in high school, I developed a strong internal standard for excellence and resilience. That competitiveness shapes how I advocate, commit, and push for meaningful outcomes.

*INE: Is there a book that has influenced how you lead or live?*

**SMM:** Several of Brené Brown’s books, especially *Dare to Lead* and *The Power of Vulnerability*, have shaped how I think about leadership. They reinforce that authenticity and vulnerability are strengths, not

weaknesses. Leadership isn’t about having all the answers—it’s about listening, reflecting, and engaging openly.

*INE: Are there ideas you return to during defining moments?*

**SMM:** Two quotes resonate deeply with me:

“Some people think they are in a community, but they are only in proximity. True community requires commitment and openness.” — David Spangler

And from Helen Keller: “Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.”

Together, they capture what I strive to live by: real connection takes intention, and collective effort multiplies impact.

*INE: Who has influenced you most?*

**SMM:** My grandfather. Watching him build and lead a strong Indian community in Minnesota left a lasting impression. He helped establish a hospital and a girls’ school in Agra, bringing doctors from Minnesota to support the effort.

What stayed with me wasn’t just what he built, but how he built it—by bringing people together around shared purpose and trust. That example continues to guide how I build and connect communities today.

*INE: What core value do you try to live by?*

**SMM:** Responsibility—to people, relationships, and the roles I take on—paired with authenticity. It’s a daily practice of showing up consistently and investing care where it matters most.

*INE: How do you define success at this stage of your life?*

**SMM:** Success starts with something simple: a good night’s sleep. From there, it’s measured in meaningful moments—an open conversation that ends with a hug from my son, laughter with my daughters, being present for a friend in need, or securing a property in a competitive bidding process.

Most of all, success is seeing children and adults build lasting friendships. Those connections endure long after individual milestones.

*INE: What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to make a difference?*

**SMM:** Explore freely at first—learn what energizes you. But once you find your focus, lean in fully. Real impact comes from sustained effort and consistency over time. Commitment turns intention into results and passion into meaningful change.



# Merrill is proud to support INE Woman of the Year.



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# Raising Good Humans First: Shama Nannapaneni's Mission to Redefine Education

When Shama Nannapaneni talks about education, she isn't focused on test scores or rankings, but instead, character, empathy, and resilience.

A purpose-driven entrepreneur and innovator, Nannapaneni is the Co-Founder/CEO of Shiminly, a global education platform dedicated to building essential personal and interpersonal life skills for K–12 students. It has grown under her leadership into a trusted, multi-market education brand serving more than 48,000 learners, parents, and educators internationally, with a 99.4% satisfaction rate.

With offices in the U.S., UAE, and India, Shiminly balances consistent, research-backed program design with culturally adaptable implementation. Before founding Shiminly, she has nearly 30 years of executive leadership experience, as well as co-founding Sigma Systems and Sienna Technologies and serving in senior roles including President, CEO, and CFO.

A scholar and former national-level athlete, Nannapaneni holds an LL.M. from Fordham University and was a gold medalist in law in India. Through vision, discipline, and measurable impact, she is helping redefine what education must look like for the future.

Below, Nannapaneni reflects on purpose, resilience, leadership, and the values that guide her journey.



**Shama Nannapaneni**  
Principal, Redgate Capital Partners

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe the work you do, and what gives you the greatest sense of meaning?*

**Shama Nannapaneni:** Shiminly exists because I believe we need to raise good humans first. Everything else is secondary. We deliver accredited life skills education to students from Grades 1 through 12, building critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and the ability to collaborate across cultures. “Shimin” means “citizen” in Japanese, and that is exactly what we are shaping: global citizens who are empathetic, resilient, and prepared to thrive in a world that looks nothing like the one we grew up in. In a world where AI is rapidly commoditizing knowledge, these deeply human skills are what will truly set the next generation apart. Seeing a child grow into someone who

is confident, kind, and self-aware is my greatest source of meaning.

**INE:** *Is there a cause, charity, or community initiative close to your heart?*

**SN:** Education—and life skills education in particular—should not be a privilege. Every child deserves the opportunity to develop resilience, empathy, and self-belief, regardless of their circumstances. Through Shiminly, we partner with NGOs to deliver free workshops and programs to children in underserved communities, and our hope is to continue scaling that work so it reaches the children who need it most.

**INE:** *Outside of your professional life, what activities help you recharge?*

**SN:** I enjoy gardening and working with plants. There is something grounding about tending to a garden and watching things grow on their own timeline. I also love interior design, which gives me a very different kind of creative satisfaction. Both remind me that the best things take patience.

**INE:** *Looking back, what impact are you most proud of making?*

**SN:** Shiminly has delivered over 320,000 hours of life skills instruction to 20,000 students across 11 countries, and we have earned full accreditation from COGNIA and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC). What makes me most proud is not the numbers alone. It is the proof that life skills education

can be rigorous, measurable, and taken seriously alongside traditional academics. That was never a given when we started.

*INE: What is a skill or strength that has shaped your journey?*

SN: A practical kind of resilience. I do not categorize things as hard or easy. If something needs to get done, I find a way to do it. That mindset carried me from studying law at Fordham, to founding Sigma Inc. with my husband, to founding Shiminly in an entirely new industry. I do not believe in waiting for conditions to be perfect. I just begin.

*INE: Is there a book that has stayed with you or influenced you?*

SN: I have always been drawn to autobiographies. I am fascinated by the real journey behind someone's success—what shaped their decisions, what they sacrificed, and what they learned along the way. One book that has stayed with me is *The Wit and Wisdom of Ratan Tata*. He grew the Tata Group from a \$1.5 billion company to over \$100 billion without ever compromising his principles. He started on the shop floor, never sought the spotlight, and led with a quiet humility that is rare in business. His values of integrity, fairness, and putting people first were not just words. Through the Tata Trusts, he poured resources into education, healthcare, and community development because he believed business should serve society, not the other way around. His life is a constant reminder that true leadership is measured not by what you accumulate, but by the lives you improve.

*INE: Are there words or quotes you return to during challenging moments?*

SN: My motto is “Move on.” Evaluate the situation, extract the lesson, and look forward. Do not linger. In those moments, I think about Churchill's words: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

*INE: Who has inspired or influenced you most in your life?*

SN: My family, without question. My father was well educated, but my mother did not have the same formal education. Despite that, both consistently instilled morals, ethics, and values into everything we did. That foundation gave me the motivation and support to come to the United States and study law. Today, my husband and my two children are my greatest advocates. They steady me, challenge me, and remind me why the work matters.

*INE: What core value or principle do you consciously try to live by?*

SN: Authenticity, and the discipline to practice it. It is easy to say you have values. It is harder to lead in a way where your actions consistently match your words—whether that is in how you run a business, how you treat people, or what you choose to build with your time. My legal training reinforced this: think in terms of principle, not convenience. When you are grounded in what you believe is right, the difficult decisions become simpler.

*INE: If you could spend time in conversation with one person, who would it be?*

SN: Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father and first Prime Minister of Singapore. I have always been fascinated by how he took a small, multiethnic nation with almost no natural resources and built it into a global powerhouse. What stands out most is how he unified diverse communities and understood that a country's greatest asset is not its infrastructure or economy, but the quality of its people. He emphasized that good systems mean nothing without good people, and he dedicated himself to identifying and developing future leaders from an early age. I would want to learn how he scaled that vision to an entire nation, and how those principles might apply to the world we live in today.

*INE: What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to make a difference in their own way?*

SN: Do not wait for permission, and do not wait for conditions to be perfect. Trust your own judgment, especially when others hesitate. Learn from every setback, but do not dwell on it. Extract the lesson and move on. Above all, stay rooted in your values. Your character will carry you further than any credential. Your path does not need to be linear. It needs to be yours.



# Monica Shah: Championing the Underdog with Conviction & Courage

“Helping people vindicate their rights in our complex legal system, no matter what challenge they are facing, is why I go to work every day.” For Monica Shah, that commitment is more than professional purpose — it is the throughline of a career built on defending the underdog.

A partner at Zalkind Duncan & Bernstein LLP, Shah is a criminal defense and civil rights attorney. She represents individuals facing serious felony charges, white-collar investigations, employment discrimination, and Title IX matters — often at the most stressful and defining moments of their lives. That courage mirrors her own path. After law school, Shah began her career at a small civil rights firm in New York before joining what was then a small Boston-based practice. Today, she is a partner at a firm that is now primarily woman-owned and expanding.

Her work has earned widespread recognition. Shah has been named Lawyer of the Year for Employment Law – Individuals (2024), consistently listed in Best Lawyers in America, recognized as a Top 50 Woman Super Lawyer in Massachusetts, and holds the AV Preeminent® rating from Martindale-Hubbell — distinctions that reflect both legal excellence and the respect of her peers.

But beyond accolades, her driving force is deeply personal. Her philosophy is rooted in fairness — and gratitude. Inspired early on by John Rawls’s theory that justice requires structuring society around the needs of the least fortunate, Shah carries that lens into every courtroom and community space she enters.

At her core, she says, she never forgets the support system that made her journey possible. “I recognize



**Monica Shah**

*Partner, Zalkind Duncan & Bernstein LLP*

that I am only where I am because of the family and friends who have supported me along the way.”

In a Q&A with INDIA New England News, Shah reflects on resilience, representation, civil rights, family, vinyl records — and why she believes justice must always make room for the least powerful voice in the room.

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe the work you do in your own words—and what part of it gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

**Monica Shah:** I am a criminal defense and civil rights attorney. I advocate for individuals who are often facing the most stressful times of their lives, either criminal charges or discrimination or other inequities at work or school. Helping people vindicate their rights in our complex legal system, no matter what challenge they are facing, is why I go to work every day. I’m extremely proud of my work representing people who have

the courage to fight against powerful institutions, be it the government, corporations, or universities.

**INE:** *Is there a cause, charity, or community initiative close to your heart? What drew you to it, and how are you personally involved?*

**MS:** I am on the Board of Lawyers for Civil Rights, which has been on the forefront of protecting immigrants’ rights, as well as economic, education, housing, and voting rights in Massachusetts and nationally. I became involved by joining the Board and doing pro bono work for the organization, including representing employees and students facing race discrimination and engaging in voter protection work. Organizations like LCR are essential to protecting our community against the rollback of rights by our government.

**INE:** *Outside of your professional life, what activities or interests help you recharge and stay grounded?*

**MS:** I keep myself busy with my husband, three kids, and our dog Clover. I love running around the Esplanade when weather permits, and we spend winter weekends p in Vermont, where my family does most of the skiing. I am currently obsessed with my new turntable and collecting vinyl. If you have an old record collection, call me!

**INE:** *Looking back, what impact are you most proud of making—whether in your community, your organization, or your professional field?*

**MS:** I am really proud of taking a different path than many others did after law school. I never worked at a big firm, and instead worked at a small civil rights firm in New York and then joined my small firm here in Boston, Zalkind Duncan & Bernstein LLP. I was lucky to be supported by my parents

and my husband in all my endeavors, and took the risk of taking a different path as a result. Now, I am a partner at my firm, which is primarily woman-owned now and is expanding and thriving.

*INE: What is a skill, strength, or talent people may not immediately associate with you, but one that has shaped your journey in important ways?*

**MS:** I think people are often surprised to see that a short Indian woman has the voice and confidence to be a trial attorney. Being underestimated, be it for my height, how I look, or the cause I represent, has driven me to do the type of work I do and represent the underdog.

*INE: Is there a book (or a few) that has stayed with you or influenced how you think, lead, or live?*

**MS:** Early in law school, I read Justice as Fairness by John Rawls, who advocated for structuring political

systems and decisions to consider the needs of the least fortunate members of society because any of us could be born in different circumstances. I often think of this book in my work and when I think of issues affecting the community around me.

*INE: Who has inspired or influenced you most in your life, and what lessons from them continue to guide you today?*

**MS:** My parents, Rama and Raju Shah, are hands down the most inspirational people in my life. It was amazing to be raised by two people who had the courage to envision a life for themselves beyond their villages in Gujarat, who broke barriers in their professions as physicians, built a community and bridges to other communities in a foreign land, and took care of their family and extended family. Whenever I am anxious, I think nothing could be more difficult than what my parents and their friends did so many decades ago, and it gives me the kick in the pants I need.

*INE: What core value or principle do you consciously try to live by, both personally and professionally?*

**MS:** I recognize that I am only where I am because of the family and friends who have supported me along the way, and try to make sure I express gratitude and appreciation for the many teammates I've had in my life, both personally and professionally.

*INE: If you could spend time in conversation with one person—past or present—who would it be, and what would you hope to learn from them?*

**MS:** Paul McCartney, the hardest working and most talented Beatle, in my humble opinion. I would want to learn about how he transitioned his career in each decade of his life, and how he is able to keep going with his passions at 80. And maybe he would bring me an original Abbey Road to put on my record player!



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# Amelia Singh: Steady Leadership in the Pursuit of Justice



In a profession often defined by headlines, high stakes, and hard choices, Amelia Singh approaches justice with something quieter—but no less powerful: steadiness.

As Deputy Chief of District and Municipal Courts at the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office, Singh oversees roughly fifty prosecutors while navigating some of the most complex challenges in the criminal legal system. Yet when asked what brings her the greatest meaning, her answer is strikingly measured: “The greatest sense of meaning and joy comes from using that discretion thoughtfully and seeing the tangible impact.”

That balance—between accountability and alternatives, rigor and compassion—threads through her leadership philosophy. During Suffolk County’s unprecedented attorney work



**Amelia Singh**  
*Deputy Chief,  
District and Municipal Courts,  
Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office*

stoppage, she was tasked with handling cases and hearings across the county amid what she describes as a public safety crisis. At the same time, she spearheaded the creation of the Suffolk County Animal Cruelty Taskforce, translating her lifelong passion for animal protection into institutional action.

Resilience, she says, is not performative. It is practiced. In this wide-ranging conversation with INDIA New England News, Singh reflects on justice, mentorship, loyalty, leadership under pressure—

and why “emotional regulation” may be the most underrated skill in her field.

**INDIA New England News:** *Are there words, quotes, or ideas that you often return to during challenging or defining moments?*

**AS:** “It always seems impossible until it’s done” – Nelson Mandela

**INE:** *Who has inspired or influenced you most in your life, and what lessons from them continue to guide you today?*

**AS:** The people who have inspired me most are my family and close friends. Watching them navigate hardship, responsibility, and change with quiet determination taught me early on that resilience is not performative—it’s practiced daily, often without recognition. From family, I learned the importance of accountability, perseverance, and doing what is right even when it is difficult or

inconvenient. From friends, I learned the value of empathy, humor, and perspective—how to stay human in moments that feel heavy or overwhelming. Those lessons continue to guide me as a prosecutor. They remind me to approach my work with humility, to listen before judging, and to measure success not just by outcomes, but by whether I acted with integrity and care.

*INE: What core value or principle do you consciously try to live by, both personally and professionally?*

**AS:** Loyalty is the core value I consciously try to live by, both personally and professionally. For me, loyalty means showing up consistently—for people, for principles, and for responsibilities—especially when doing so is difficult. It's not blind allegiance, but a commitment rooted in trust, integrity, and accountability.

*INE: If you could spend time in conversation with one person—past or present—who would it be, and what would you hope to learn from them?*

**AS:** I would choose Jane Goodall. I've long admired the way she combined intellectual rigor with deep empathy, and how she changed an entire field by insisting on patience, observation, and respect rather than domination or detachment – especially being a woman in a male dominated field. In conversation with her, I would



hope to learn how she sustained moral clarity and optimism while confronting profound evidence of harm—both to animals and to the planet. As a prosecutor, that balance feels especially relevant.

*INE: What advice would you offer to young women aspiring to make a difference in their own way?*

**AS:** I would tell young women if you want to make a difference, especially in a field like prosecution, understand that impact doesn't come from

fitting a mold, but from developing judgment, credibility, and a strong internal compass.

Equally important, protect your resilience. Seek mentors and build community. There will be moments when your voice is questioned or underestimated; let preparation and integrity be your response. You don't have to be the loudest in the room to be effective—you just have to be ethical and willing to stand by your values when it matters most.



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# Dr. Lakshmi Thalanki: Transforming Smiles & Championing Hindu Civic Leadership



**Dr. Lakshmi Thalanki**  
*Founder, Family Orthodontists  
of Cambridge & Hudson*

“A smile is powerful. It changes how you see yourself, and it changes how the world responds to you.” For Dr. Lakshmi Thalanki, that belief is not simply about orthodontics — it is about identity, confidence and transformation.

An orthodontist, community leader and more, Dr. Thalanki has spent more than 25 years helping patients rediscover their confidence. As President and Owner of Family Orthodontics of Cambridge and Hudson, she has built a practice grounded in ethical care, clinical excellence and deep personal connection.

After earning her dental degree in India, Dr. Thalanki pursued advanced studies at Boston University, graduating with high honors before completing her residency in Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics.

She later served as Associate Professor at Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine, mentored students and

advanced research that earned her international recognition, including the Hatton Award from the International Association for Dental Research.

Her work has extended beyond clinical practice and academia. She helped establish a collaborative oral cancer research initiative between the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and research centers in India. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she developed a medical device designed to mitigate aerosol exposure during dental procedures and intubation, contributing to the safety of healthcare providers and patients. For her volunteer service during that time, she received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award.

In civic and cultural life, Dr. Thalanki serves as President of the Massachusetts Chapter of Americans<sub>4</sub>Hindus and President of the New England Chapter of Global Indian Scientists and Technocrats (GIST USA). Through these and other efforts, she works to promote civic awareness, cultural dialogue and community empowerment.

At her core, she says, her work is guided by integrity, dharma and a deep sense of responsibility. “Success, for me, is alignment — when professional work, personal values and community contributions all move in the same direction,” she reflects.

In a Q&A with INDIA New England News, Dr. Thalanki reflects on transformation, resilience, service and the principles that guide her life.

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe the work you do in your own words — and what part of it gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

**Dr. Lakshmi Thalanki:** At its heart, my work involves transformation. As an orthodontist, I don’t just align teeth; I help restore confidence, health and self-esteem. There is an external transformation — straighter teeth and a balanced smile — but what truly moves me is the internal transformation that follows.

I’ve seen patients who once covered their mouths while speaking begin to smile naturally and confidently.

People start to see them as warm and approachable, but that warmth was always there. The smile simply allowed the world to see it. When patients return and say, “I smile all the time now,” that is deeply meaningful to me.

**INE:** *Is there a cause or initiative close to your heart? What drew you to it, and how are you personally involved?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** Healthcare access and prevention are very close to my heart. I firmly believe quality healthcare should never be a privilege — it must be accessible, ethical and compassionate. Prevention is one of our most powerful tools for reducing long-term healthcare burdens.

I also believe in integrative approaches to well-being, combining modern science with practices such as nutrition, yoga and mindfulness. During COVID, I volunteered extensively to support healthcare providers and vulnerable communities, which was both humbling and transformative.

Additionally, I am deeply involved in civic and community leadership, serving as President of the Massachusetts Chapter of Americans<sub>4</sub>Hindus and President of the New England Chapter of

GIST USA. Through these roles, I aim to foster dialogue, awareness and constructive civic participation.

*INE: Outside of your professional life, what activities or interests help you recharge and stay grounded?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** Nature and the arts keep me grounded. I love hiking across New England and traveling with family and friends. Being outdoors restores perspective and clarity.

Classical arts are also a deep passion. I perform Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music, which connect me to my heritage and cultivate discipline and humility. I also study Hindu scriptures, and the concept of performing one's duty without attachment to the outcome helps me remain centered in both success and challenge.

*INE: Looking back, what impact are you most proud of making?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** I am most proud of the confidence I see in my patients after treatment. A smile may seem small, but it can profoundly transform how someone presents themselves to the world. I am also proud of mentoring students during my academic career and helping establish collaborative oral cancer research initiatives that bridged institutions across countries. On a deeper level, I am proud that I have practiced my profession with integrity and a strong sense of responsibility.

*INE: What is a strength people may not immediately associate with you, but one that has shaped your journey?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** Many people see the clinical and community sides of my work, but my research and innovation mindset has shaped me deeply. I was honored early in my career with the Hatton Award, which reinforced my commitment to scientific rigor and evidence-based practice.

Resilience has also been a defining strength. Building a career across two countries required adaptability and perseverance. Behind every visible achievement are years of discipline

and quiet determination.

*INE: Is there a book or teaching that has influenced how you think and lead?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** The Bhagavad Gita has profoundly shaped my thinking, especially the principle of performing one's duty without attachment to outcomes. It reminds me to focus on effort, integrity and intention rather than external validation.

I am also inspired by modern leadership principles such as "begin with the end in mind," which guide how I approach both professional and personal decisions.

*INE: Who has inspired you most in your life?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** My children inspire me every day. They give me strength and purpose. My father, whom I lost when I was very young, has also been a guiding presence in my life. The stories of his dedication to family and community continue to motivate me.

My grandmother introduced me to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures, laying the foundation for my lifelong interest in

introspection and growth.

*INE: What core value do you consciously try to live by?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** Integrity and trustworthiness. Whether in clinical care, research or leadership, trust is built through consistent ethical conduct over time. I strive to ensure that professional success never comes at the cost of my values.

*INE: What advice would you offer young women aspiring to make a difference?*

**Dr. Thalanki:** Do not wait for permission to lead. Invest in your education and master your craft. Choose mentors wisely and stay rooted in your values. Use challenges to build resilience, and lift others as you rise. True leadership is not just about personal achievement — it is about creating opportunity and transformation for others.

For Dr. Thalanki, transformation begins with a smile — but it ultimately becomes something far greater: confidence, character and a commitment to serve with purpose.



# Monika Manocha Wadhwa: Educator, Researcher, & Community Builder



**Monika Manocha Wadhwa**  
*Researcher & Educator COA Co-Chair  
Vision-Aid*

Monika Manocha Wadhwa lives at the intersection of science, service, and human connection. A researcher, educator, and community leader, Wadhwa has spent years building bridges—between classrooms and communities, youth and seniors, and science and social responsibility. Based in Lexington, Massachusetts, Wadhwa holds a Ph.D. in HIV Mucosal Vaccine Research from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and completed postdoctoral research in Inflammatory Bowel Disease at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School. Today, she teaches at Lynn English High School, creating inclusive, supportive spaces where students and communities thrive.

A community builder, Wadhwa serves as Co-Chair of the Council of Ambassadors for Vision-Aid, Vice President for Intergenerational Engagement at Volunteering for Seniors (VFS), and founder of initiatives including LexFamily and LexWOMEN—networks that have brought together hundreds of families and women through education, cultural celebration, mentorship, and mutual support. Her advocacy played a pivotal role in including Diwali, Eid, and Lunar New Year as official holidays in Lexington Public Schools. Below, Wadhwa reflects on her journey, her purpose, and the values that guide her work.

**INDIA New England News:** *How would you describe your work, and what gives you the greatest sense of meaning or joy?*

**Monika Manocha Wadhwa:** At the core of my work, I am an educator by

passion, a researcher by training, and a community builder by calling. I view my work as a thoughtful integration of scientific mentorship and community architecture. With over 15 years of research experience—including a Ph.D. from AIIMS and postdoctoral training at Harvard Medical School—I bring a strong scientific foundation to my professional practice. Today, my primary role is as an educator at Lynn English High School, where I focus on creating inclusive, supportive spaces in which individuals and communities can truly thrive.

Having previously taught in Lexington and Newton, I have witnessed firsthand how disparities in resources affect student opportunities. This awareness has strengthened my commitment to schools that need greater community and financial support. As a National Honor Society advisor at Lynn English High School and Co-Chair of the Council of Ambassadors of Vision-Aid, I provided oversight for a clothing drive—supported by Vision-Aid’s Youth Presidents—to raise funds for

NHS student initiatives. Supporting a Title I school like Lynn through this community-driven effort brought me a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment. I also actively led a Vision-Aid Spoken English course to help visually impaired students gain conversational skills that open pathways to employment. My greatest joy comes from seeing meaningful connections form—whether it is a student mastering a challenging STEM concept, a visually impaired learner gaining confidence through the Vision-Aid Spoken English platform, or a senior and a teenager sharing stories at a VFS community picnic. I am inspired by the intersection of science and service, where learning becomes impactful and community flourishes.

**INE:** *You’re involved in many initiatives—STEM mentorship, senior engagement, women’s networks, and more. How do they intersect, and what impact do they create?*

**MMW:** For me, impact is measured in moments of transformation: a student discovering confidence in the classroom, a young girl inspired after a Women in STEM talk, a newly arrived family feeling welcomed, or seniors feeling genuinely connected to the next generation. Whether through LexWOMEN, STEM mentorship, or advocating for diverse voices in science, my guiding principle remains constant—everyone deserves a seat at the table and a voice in the conversation.

I am particularly proud of championing cultural inclusion within Lexington Public Schools. I helped secure official recognition of Diwali, Eid, and Lunar New Year as school holidays, followed by initiating the first-ever Diwali breakfast for school staff, bringing

together parents from six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Organizing Holi events for two consecutive years also helped ensure every family in our community feels seen and valued.

I am equally proud of building sustainable community platforms—including LexFamily, LexWOMEN, and the STEM Science Team—that empower families, women, and students well beyond individual events. Initiatives like LexFamily Share and Give Away promote mindful living, while LexWOMEN's community cooking events encourage healthier home practices. Our Poetry and Musical Group brings generations together, helping families find joy and connection, and even supported my father's recovery after a stroke. Through STEM initiatives, I have brought women professionals from diverse fields—doctors, engineers, therapists, and dentists—to mentor students. In Vision-Aid workshops, students learn financial literacy, investment awareness, Python programming, and more, while youth volunteers support visually impaired learners. VFS picnics and cultural programs further connect seniors and youth, honoring wisdom and fostering meaningful intergenerational bonds.

*INE: What skills or strengths have shaped your journey in ways people might not immediately see?*

**MMW:** People often see the Ph.D. and the educator first, but my journey is shaped by my ability to build massive, functional networks from scratch—like the 600-family LexFamily group with 30+ subcommittees. This requires logistics, empathy, and persistence. My talent for collaborative leadership turns small ideas into town-wide movements. Listening deeply, building trust, and creating collaborative spaces have been essential strengths in both my professional and community leadership journey.

I also practice Kaizen, the continuous way of self-improvement, by paying attention to learning from others, enjoying the present moment, giving my best, respecting people, and using love as my biggest power. I believe good vibes create a healthy tribe, and

positive energy shapes my life and relationships.

*INE: Are there books or teachings that have shaped how you think, lead, or live?*

**MMW:** Books that explore purpose, resilience, and human connection have had a deep impact. Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* brought holistic transformation by helping me focus on inner peace, purpose, self-discipline, and joy in community service. *7 Timeless Virtues of Enlightened Living* reinforced continuous self-improvement and living in the present moment with compassion.

I am also deeply inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth*, which highlights honesty, moral integrity, and the pursuit of social justice. Quotes like "Be the change that you wish to see in the world" and "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind" guide my life. *The Biography of Pythagoras* taught me to prioritize personal virtue over public opinion: "Rest satisfied with doing well and leave others to talk of you as they please."

*INE: Who has inspired or influenced you most, and what lessons guide you today?*

**MMW:** My parents and family have been my greatest guides, shaping my values of humility, perseverance, education, and selfless service. From them, I learned that leadership is about standing with others—listening, serving, and responding to real needs. Experiences at satsang and the gurudwara taught me humility, inner peace, and the importance of selfless service.

Teachers also shaped my journey, nurturing growth, patience, and mentorship. Pablo Picasso's words—"The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away"—remind me to share my strengths meaningfully for the benefit of the community.

*INE: What core values guide you personally and professionally?*

**MMW:** Integrity with Empathy: I lead with honesty, kindness, and respect,

ensuring that my actions align with my values while uplifting others. I often remind students that grades may not define their future, but honesty will guide them toward meaningful relationships, ethical careers, and lasting success.

**Inclusive Empowerment:** Success is meaningful only when it creates opportunities for others. Through LexWOMEN and STEM initiatives, I aim to open doors, giving individuals the tools, confidence, and sense of community they need to thrive.

*INE: If you could spend time with one person—past or present—who would it be?*

**MW:** I would love to meet Mother Teresa, whose philosophy of serving "the poorest of the poor" taught me the power of small acts of love, humility, and selfless service. Her words—"If you judge people, you have no time to love them"—resonate deeply in my work with Vision-Aid and VFS. I would also choose Princess Diana, whose empathy, courage, and authenticity redefined leadership. Her care for marginalized communities, including people living with HIV/AIDS, showed me that compassion is strength, and connecting directly with people creates meaningful impact.

In the present day, I would spend time with Sudha Murthy, whose life of simplicity, empathy, and philanthropy inspires me to combine education with honest service and continuous learning.

*INE: What lessons or advice guide your life and work?*

**MMW:**

- Trust the process. Impact grows steadily when intentions are sincere and consistent.
- Define success as balance and meaningful impact, influencing lives while staying connected to family, community, and purpose.
- Advice to young women: Believe in your voice, invest in learning, and don't wait for permission to lead. Small, consistent actions rooted in authenticity can create powerful change. If a space for your passion doesn't exist—create it, as I did with Lex Pickleball and Night Cricket initiatives. Lead with both heart and intellect; the world needs your specific blend of both.

# Meet the Women Behind the Women of the Year Awards This Year

## Manju Sheth, Mandy Pant, and Sheetal Acharya help lead and shape one of New England's most celebrated events honoring women's leadership.

As the 23rd Annual Women of the Year Awards Gala approaches, the spotlight will be on the remarkable honorees being celebrated. But behind the success of this long-running event are three accomplished leaders who help guide and host the evening each year: **Dr. Manju Sheth, Mandy Pant, and Sheetal Acharya.**

Produced by INDIA New England News, the Women of the Year Awards has become one of the region's most respected celebrations of women's leadership and achievement. Over the past two decades, the event has recognized trailblazing women from fields ranging from healthcare and business to arts, technology, and community service.

For the past 14 years, the gala has been directed and hosted by Dr. Manju Sheth, herself a past Woman of the Year honoree. Mandy Pant has served as the chief emcee for the last 13 years, while Sheetal Acharya—also a former Woman of the Year—joined the stage as an emcee beginning three years ago.

"The Women of the Year gala has grown into a signature event because of the incredible team behind it," said Upendra Mishra, publisher of INDIA

New England News and producer of the awards. "Dr. Manju Sheth, Mandy Pant, and Sheetal Acharya bring passion, professionalism, and a deep commitment to celebrating women's achievements.

Their leadership ensures that the evening remains meaningful, inspiring, and memorable for everyone involved."



**Dr. Manju Sheth**

Dr. Manju Sheth is a physician with Beth Israel Lahey Health and a passionate advocate for women's empowerment, community service,

and media engagement. She serves as President of India New England Multimedia, the New England Choice Awards, and director of the Women of the Year Gala.

Dr. Sheth is also the host of the popular talk series Chai with Manju, which has featured prominent leaders and changemakers including Congressman Joe Kennedy III, Senator Elizabeth Warren, former Apple CEO John Sculley, philanthropist Sudha Murthy, spiritual leader Sadhguru, Congressman Ro Khanna, and singer Sonu Nigam.

A strong advocate for women's health and empowerment, she has served in leadership roles with organizations such as the Indian Medical Association of New England (IMANE) and the nonprofit Akshaya Patra Foundation as a community ambassador. She is also co-founder of the New England Choice Awards and president of Women Who Win. Dr. Sheth has received numerous honors, including the Leadership in Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity award from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Asian and Pacific Islanders Commission. She is a TEDx speaker and co-author of the books *Women Who Win* and *Girls Who Win*.



## Mandy Pant

Mondira (Mandy) Pant, Ph.D., is a global technology leader and serves as Senior Director of Product—Foundry Interface and Pathfinding at Intel. In this role, she works at the intersection of product design and advanced semiconductor technologies, helping drive innovation in the global technology industry.

A respected authority in VLSI engineering, Dr. Pant has authored more than 20 technical papers and holds multiple patents. She has played an instrumental role in fostering academic-industry collaborations around the world and is a frequent keynote speaker at international technology conferences. Her career reflects a strong commitment to innovation, mentorship, and advancing women in STEM fields.

Through her professional and community engagement, she continues to inspire the next generation of women pursuing careers in technology and engineering.



## Sheetal Acharya

Sheetal Acharya serves as Chief of Staff to the President of National Grid Ventures and Chief U.S. External Affairs Officer. A seasoned organizational enablement and operations professional, she previously led the change program for the \$4 billion divestiture of National Grid’s Rhode Island business.

Before joining National Grid, Acharya spent more than 15 years in management consulting and led the global organizational enablement practice at Publicis Sapient. She also serves as Executive Sponsor for the Women in Network Employee Resource Group at National Grid. Sheetal Acharya

Acharya has long been an active community leader. She served as the first National President of Network of Indian Professionals of North America (NetIP) and was part of the leadership committee for the Boston Women’s March for America. She also served as president of Wayland’s Parent Teacher Organization and is currently on the

organizing committee for the Indian Family Network’s (IFNet) sleepaway camp.

She was named INDIA New England’s Woman of the Year in 2022 and has been recognized for three consecutive years in INvolve’s Top 100 Women Executive Role Models list.

She lives in Wayland, Massachusetts, with her husband Nish and their two sons.

Together, Sheth, Pant, and Acharya represent the spirit of leadership, service, and community that the Women of the Year Awards seeks to celebrate—ensuring that the event continues to inspire future generations of changemakers.

Since the beginning of the Woman of the Year awards gala 23 years ago, four other powerful women played an important role in various capacities: Stephanie Leonardi, Kavitha Mantha, Jyoti Nagia, Aditi Taylor and Jharna Madan. And the The Mishra Group staff of Emma Griffith and Anastasia Bogushevsky have always worked hard behind the scene for the Woman of the Year Awards gala.





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