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INTERVIEW

Kiran Majumdar Shaw

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FEMME DE FORCE



▲ **ROHINI NILEKANI**
The face behind Arghyam

**DAUGHTER,
WIFE,
MOTHER -
INDIAN
WOMAN
TODAY IS SO
MUCH MORE
THAN THIS.
SHE IS THE
FORCE THAT'S
INSPIRING
THE NATION
AND THE
WORLD SAYS
INDU PRASAD**

FEMINIE DE FORCE

The woman you see here is Rohini Nilekani, wife of Infosys CEO, Nandan Nilekani. But more important, she is a woman with strong beliefs about how one can "give back to the society in small measure what one receives in such abundance". A former journalist and author of probably India's first medical thriller on the lines of Robin Cook, *Stillborn*, she heads an organization Arghyam, which is doing path-breaking work in water management and most of it can be attributed to her vision.

When we decided to do a special woman's issue our research surprisingly threw up a long list of women like Rohini - who are doing outstanding work which is making the world a better place to live - that we had whittle them down to a few without whom we just could not do without.

These pages carry the footprints of the unflinching spirit of these women who have come of age, about their decision of not keeping their sexuality closeted, their ways of taking charge of their finances, and making their mind known - be it on their choice of picking the right wardrobe, their personal fashion statement or even a gadget - giving serious competition to men on the corporate ladder.

Its no wonder that Forbes magazine has introduced a separate list of India's Most Powerful Women - an acceptance of the women power across different fields in India. While Sonia Gandhi tops the list, you have Kiran Mazumdar Shaw of Biocon who has been acknowledged as India's richest woman while Indu Jain of Bennett Coleman and Simone Tata of Lakme remain the natural entrants to the list. Other notables worth mentioning are Priya Paul of Apeejay Surrendra Group, who took over the mantle at the age of 24 post her father's assassination, Sulajja Firodia Motwani who has given Kinetic Motors a new future and Neelam Dhawan, managing director of Microsoft India who has helped it grow by 35%. And then you have Pepsico's Indira Nooyi. And these are only the women who appear in the Forbes list.

Then there are women who have used their personal resources to bring positive changes within the Indian fabric like Infosys Foundation's Sudha Murthy and BATF's Kalpana Kar. Some have gone beyond their means to lead other women to economic and social empowerment like Shrujan's Chandaben Shroff and SEWA's Ela Bhatt.

Moreover, you have others who have ventured into fields that are outside the women comfort zone like wildlife, mountaineering, car rallies, film direction and the armed forces. What follows now is our salute to these Indian women who are impacting our daily lives in some way or the other.

VISIONARIES A BREED APART

Women who are making a difference where it matters most

SUDHA MURTY - INFOSYS FOUNDATION

India's premier IT giant believes in contributing to the society that nurtures it. Infosys Foundation, headed by Sudha Murthy, wife of Infosys' founder N R Narayana Murthy, offers "the promise of a better tomorrow through funding worthy projects."

The beginnings of the Foundation are rooted in the Murthy household when her daughter asked Sudha one day, "Amma, isn't it your responsibility to give back something?" Geared by that and the vision of her husband for a better India, Sudha started the Foundation that is today one of the best examples of corporate citizenship.

"We rarely give any funding for free, because we have found that when we do, people don't value what we are giving. If a person's education will cost Rs 25,000, we give Rs 20,000. That way the person has to still earn the remaining money," says Sudha Murthy.

Education, health care, the arts, infrastructure, rehabilitation, there are few worthy causes that the Foundation contribute to. "We don't support causes that are political, religious, communal or regional in nature," she states. Other than these, any person or organization that merits funding can approach the Foundation.

The one bias that she does admit to is towards women, "because let's face it, it's still a man's world out there and women need the extra push."

Website: http://www.infosys.com/infosys_foundation/index.htm



SUDHA MURTY

**Infosys Foundation -
the promise of a better
tomorrow through
funding worthy projects.**

ROHINI NILEKANI - ARGHYAM

She might be the wife of one of India's top most tech company head. But what sets her apart is the change she is bringing about through Arghyam (meaning, an offering, in Sanskrit), an organization that is doing path-breaking work in water management in Karnataka.

Started in 2001, with a personal endowment by Rohini, it was in 2005 that she zeroed in water management. "It was a kind of sudden grace by which it became blindingly obvious in April 2005 that water was a critical space where I could give back in small measure what I have received in such great measure," says Rohini.

With a vision of "safe water, sufficient water, always and for all", Rohini's task is not easy. But ever the optimist, she says, "Our job is to be enablers. We hunt for the more credible non-profit organisations working to improve water access, especially in the backward rural areas. We also are working closely with the government, as we believe in the power of long-term partnerships with the biggest player."

A former journalist, she says that her experience as a reporter helps her to ask the right questions and not be biased by any one point of view.

Apart from Arghyam, culture and arts is another beneficiary of Rohini's interest. Like Arundhati Nag of Bangalore's Ranga Shankara Theatre mentions, "Ranga Shankara would not have been possible without the generous and unquestioning support of Rohini."

Website: <http://www.arghyam.org>