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Pad Seva

The Newsletter.

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Marguerite Annie Johnson was born on 4th April, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. She was the youngest of two children. Her older brother, Bailey Jr., nicknamed Marguerite 'Maya' from 'My' or 'My sister'.



When Manushi Chhillar won Miss World 2017, she didn't just win a title — she embraced a mission to serve society. She used her platform to promote women's health, especially menstrual hygiene. Born in Rohtak, Haryana, Manushi was a bright student with a dream of becoming a doctor.

ABOUT US

About PadSeva

PadSeva is an initiative dedicated to combating period poverty in rural southern India. It was launched as part of the founder's 10th-grade IB MYP personal project, with a mission to provide affordable, biodegradable sanitary pads made from bamboo and raise awareness about menstrual hygiene. The project began with a hands-on approach, as the founder personally visited rural villages, engaging directly with women and girls to discuss the challenges they faced due to a lack of access to menstrual products. During these visits, she not only distributed the biodegradable pads but also conducted sessions on how to use them safely and effectively. Through these interactions, she helped reduce the stigma associated with menstruation, empowering the women in these communities with both knowledge and resources.

Since then, PadSeva has produced 10,000 pads, reaching over 9,500 individuals, and has raised \$6,500 to further expand its efforts. The founder now leads a growing team that works on increasing production capacity, raising funds, and establishing partnerships with local organizations to distribute more sanitary products and continue menstrual hygiene education. Looking ahead, PadSeva aims to scale its impact, reaching more communities, refining its biodegradable product designs, and promoting sustainable menstrual health solutions on a larger scale.

Our Team

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Note From Editor-in-Chief

It is with renewed purpose that we present this edition of our newsletter, centered on the theme of **“Empowering Women: Catalysts of Change Across Communities.”** Building on our previous explorations of gender equity and social inclusion, this issue turns its attention to the transformative power of women's leadership, agency, and collective action. Across fields and frontiers, women continue to redefine what empowerment means—challenging barriers, reshaping narratives, and driving progress toward a more equitable world.

Women's empowerment is not a singular achievement but a continuous process—rooted in education, economic independence, political participation, and social recognition. Yet, it thrives most vibrantly when nurtured through solidarity, innovation, and inclusive systems. From grassroots cooperatives that sustain rural livelihoods to digital initiatives that amplify women's voices in technology and governance, the stories within this edition reveal empowerment as both deeply personal and profoundly structural.

This issue seeks to highlight these journeys not merely as success stories but as blueprints for systemic transformation. We spotlight the intersectional movements, policy reforms, and everyday acts of courage that collectively advance gender justice. In doing so, we honor the resilience and vision of women who are shaping the future from classrooms to boardrooms, from local communities to global platforms.

We envision this edition as both a reflection and a rallying call—a space to celebrate progress while acknowledging the road still ahead. True empowerment demands sustained commitment, shared responsibility, and an unwavering belief in women's potential to lead change. May these narratives inspire continued dialogue, partnership, and purposeful action. For in empowering women, we empower humanity itself—laying the foundation for a more just, inclusive, and compassionate world.

Regards,



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Michelle Obama: Women's Empowerment and Girls' Development

Michelle Obama transcends the normal First-Lady mold; she is a trailblazer who has forever entrenched into the consciousness of considering women's rights, leadership, and education as a unit. It was a different layer that reached out to international-level projects, grassroots level activism, and gripping narratives.

From the given, those endeavors have created space for a story and empowered millions in the following ways:

1. Let Girls Learn: Education as an Empowerment Opportunity

Starting in 2015, Let Girls Learn made the bold statement that 62 million girls should be attending school—and that they can do so if poverty, safety concerns, and stigma are not obstacles to their path. Michelle Obama went on to say that education is more than just a resource; it is a complete upheaval in how societies perceive the mind of a girl in contrast to her body.

"These girls are our girls. Every last one of them. If half the population cannot read, write, or count, meaningful, sustainable development simply will not be possible."

I would say this was more than a campaign, it was a fundamental shift in values. Michelle forced us to confront a deep-set bias in the name of culture, traditions and

stereotypes, ingrained into the policy itself, that associates education with gender merit.

2. Global Partnerships & Funding Mobilisation

Beyond the White House speeches, Michelle swung into action, mobilizing \$2.5 billion from the World Bank while coordinating partners like USAID, Peace Corps, UNESCO, and the private sector. She was very much for local leadership for grassroots projects—girls camps, mentorships, and even simple things like accessible bathrooms and transport. In my opinion, by pairing global funding with local agencies, she ensured that the solutions were both powerful and sustainable.

3. Girls Opportunity Alliance: Sustained Empowerment

Through the Obama Foundation, Michelle extended her vision. The Girls Opportunity Alliance supports over 4,000 grassroots leaders and has heavily impacted 120,000+ girls globally with 140+ funded projects across 33 countries.

I believe this initiative shows depth—transforming one-time resources into a global network that empowers young female leaders and communities long-term.

4. Advocacy on Critical Issues

Michelle's attention was not limited to schoolrooms; she sought action in times of crises. Following Boko Haram's abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls, she spoke out against the trauma and pleaded for U.S. support, adding a personal touch by saying, "In these girls, Barack and I see our own daughters". She brought these concerns to global forums—such as the World Innovation Summit—pointing out the real threats girls face: violence, extremely early marriage, and huge lack of sanitation, which make education something of a gamble and sporadic.

I think Michelle turned tragic headlines into rallying cries; her empathy stamped the data with a human face and spurred collective action.

5. Role Model and Storyteller

Her memoir *Becoming* and her speeches ("when they go low, we go high") offer realness and guidance. She gave examples of her own experiences with class, race, and educational barriers, becoming a role model for resilience and self-belief.

In my opinion, Michelle's aspirational yet deeply human way of communicating places her among the very best of contemporary social change. She inspires not just through policy but also by emphasizing a shared humanity.

Michelle Obama represents a legacy that goes beyond her years in the White House. She was someone who combined moral reasoning with action: she invested in high-impact philanthropy, engaged community leadership, intensified advocacy in moments of crises, and showed how individual stories can engage millions and change the lives of thousands of young women.



Writer
Sirima Reddy



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Wrapped In Pink, Armed With Purpose (and sticks)

Welcome to the Banda district of Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh; a dusty heartland dominated by chauvinistic men and dictated by caste.

Human rights are a luxury few can afford, and women don't even know they have rights. Most girls can't read or write - after all, why would a girl need to be able to make her own decisions? She'll have a husband for that. Just teach her how to shut her mouth and mop the floors, then marry her off to whoever demands less dowry the second she begins menstruating. So what if the groom is violent and abusive - she should just keep quiet and take it.

Welcome to the Banda district of Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh; a dusty heartland dominated by chauvinistic men and dictated by caste. Human rights are a luxury few can afford, and women don't even know they have rights. Most girls can't read or write - after all, why would a girl need to be able to make her own decisions? She'll have a husband for that. Just teach her how to shut her mouth and mop the floors, then marry her off to whoever demands less dowry the second she begins menstruating. So what if the groom is violent and abusive - she should just keep quiet and take it.

Sampat Pal Devi was no stranger to hardship. She taught herself how to read and write, and only attended school for a few years. She married an ice cream vendor at the age of 12 and became a mother of 5 by the time she was 15.

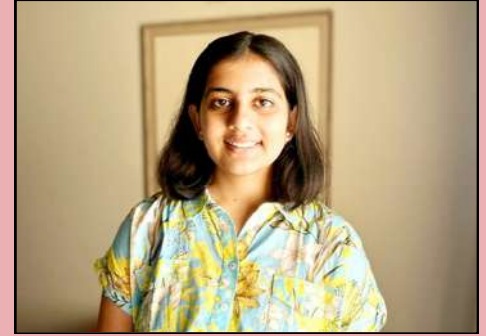
So when she saw another woman being beaten by her husband and the police refusing to intervene, she took matters into her own hands. Armed with thick sticks of bamboo, she and her five friends stormed to his house and gave him a taste of his own medicine.

That act of defiance and vengeance sparked something larger, a wildfire that spread across Uttar Pradesh. More women joined in — poor, marginalized, often voiceless women — and the Gulabi Gang rose from the ashes. Their targets are usually rural areas but their message is universal: **dignity, justice, and empowerment** for women.

Over the years, the Gulabi Gang has tackled abusive husbands, corrupt officials, and indifferent police officers. They've stormed government offices demanding pensions for widows, girls' education, and justice for victims of caste and gender-based violence. Beyond activism, they've also become community builders. They run self-help and support groups, provide basic self-defense training for women, campaigns for education and equality, and even opened a school. In rural areas where government support is patchy at best, the Gulabi Gang fills the gaps.

In a country where women's safety, especially in rural areas, remains a serious concern, the Gulabi Gang offers an alternative model of empowerment — one where women protect one another, hold systems accountable, and refuse to stay silent.

Their story isn't just about rebellion. It's about creating a world where women can walk without fear, speak without hesitation, and live without shame.



Writer
Manasvi Choudhary



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Empowering Women

Maya Angelou

Who was Maya Angelou?

Marguerite Annie Johnson was born on 4th April, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. She was the youngest of two children. Her older brother, Bailey Jr., nicknamed Marguerite 'Maya' from 'My' or 'My sister'.

Aged 3 years old, she and brother were sent to live with their paternal grandmother after their parents split up. Despite the harsh economics of African Americans of the time, Angelou's grandmother prospered financially during the Great Depression and World War II, because the general store she owned sold basic and needed commodities and because "she made wise and honest investments".

Four years later, Angelou decided to go mute because of the death of her mother's ex-boyfriend (who had harassed her). He was killed for his actions (likely by her uncles) and Angelou felt guilty saying, "I thought, my voice killed him; I killed that man, because I told his name. And then I thought I would never speak again, because my voice would kill anyone." It was during this period of time when Maya developed extraordinary memory, and discovered her love for books and literature, and her ability to observe the world around her.

At the age of 8 years old, Mrs. Bertha Flowers (a teacher and family-friend of Maya's) helped her with speaking again. She said "You do not love poetry, not until you speak it. Flowers introduced her to Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson, authors who would affect Angelou's life and career, as well as Black female artists such as Frances Harper, Anne Spencer, and Jessie Fauset.

What did she do?

Maya's early career began in San Francisco after she graduated high school. She became a single mother, working various jobs including as a streetcar conductor, cook, and dancer. She also performed in nightclubs and in a touring production of Porgy and Bess. In the late 1950s,

she joined the Harlem Writers Guild and became active in the civil rights movement, influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message. She later moved to New York and continued her stage career, including a role in Jean Genet's play, The Blacks, and earned a Tony Award nomination for her role in Look Away.

In 1972, Angelou produced the first screenplay by a Black woman, Georgia, Georgia. She married Welsh carpenter Paul du Feu in 1973 and went on to achieve numerous accomplishments, including being a composer, writer, and professor. She was nominated for a Tony Award in 1973 for her role in Look Away and a theater director in 1988. Angelou appeared in Roots in 1977 and received numerous awards. In 1981, she returned to the US and accepted the lifetime Reynolds Professorship of American Studies at Wake Forest University. She taught various subjects, including philosophy, ethics, theology, science, theater, and writing. Angelou also taught at the University of California, the University of Kansas, and the University of Ghana. In 1993, she recited her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at Bill Clinton's inauguration, becoming the first poet to do so since Robert Frost. Her recitation won a Grammy Award.

Angelou directed a feature film in 1996, Down in the Delta, featuring actors like Alfre Woodard and Wesley Snipes. She collaborated with Ashford & Simpson on their album Been Found, which made three Billboard chart appearances. In 2000, she created Hallmark products, focusing on her role as 'the people's poet'. Angelou completed her sixth autobiography, A Song Flung Up to Heaven, in 2002. She campaigned for Hillary Clinton in 2008, but Barack Obama won the South Carolina primary.

In 2010, Angelou donated her personal papers and career memorabilia to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. She served as a consultant for Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in 2011, opposing a paraphrase of a King quote. In 2013, she published her seventh autobiography, Mom & Me & Mom, focusing on her mother.

What happened to her?

Angelou passed away at 86 on May 28, 2014. Despite poor health and canceled appearances, she was working on an autobiography about her experiences with national and world leaders. She wrote four books during her last ten years. Tributes and condolences were paid by artists, entertainers, and world leaders, including President Obama and Bill Clinton. Harold Augenbraum from the National Book Foundation praised Angelou's legacy.

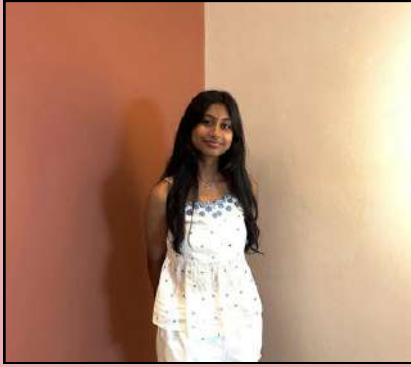


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Writer
Ikshitha

Empowering Women in Science: Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw's Vision for Women's Leadership

"Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation. When women are empowered, society with stability is assured."

— Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, as quoted by Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw (kiranshaw.blog)

Dr. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, the founder of Biocon, has been a trailblazer in both biotechnology and women's empowerment. Her transformation from a young woman dealing with skepticism and prominent doubt in a male-dominated industry, to leading one of India's most prosperous biopharmaceutical companies, truly represents a testament to her resilience and vision. She has consistently advocated for the economic empowerment of women with the motive of bridging together the two sides of gender inequality and societal advancement.

In order to alleviate gender gaps, Dr. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw emphasizes on her belief that women's economic empowerment is essential when it comes to addressing gender disparities. She

believes that women that are financially independent gain the opportunity to make their own decisions that further affects their lives and communities in the future. This empowerment - she argues - leads to a more stable and prosperous society (Business Standard).

Coming to the realm of science and technology, Dr. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw is indeed a vocal promoter for the representation of women in these fields. She notes that even though women have historically contributed a fair share of their knowledge in scientific advancements and breakthroughs, they oddly remain underrepresented in leadership roles within the field. "Isn't it time we asked ourselves why half the world's population is still underutilized in shaping our scientific future?" she questions. To alter this, she advocates in creating environments that support women scientists by providing them with mentorship, resources, and opportunities to excel for success. Not only has she motivated others, but has also opened gates for reluctant voices (The Print).

At Biocon, Mazumdar-Shaw has also implemented policies that promote gender equality. Her dedication to creating an inclusive workplace is further demonstrated by the fact that women make upto 40-45% of the company's scientific personnel, according to statistics. She strongly believes that diverse teams produces more innovative solutions and better decision-making (The Print).

Through her initiatives and leadership, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw continues to help countless women gain their voices and inspire them to pursue careers in science and entrepreneurship. Her work accentuates the

importance of providing women with the tools and opportunities to succeed - not just for their benefits, but for the advancement of society as a whole. As she competently puts it, "The glass ceiling disappears when you start demonstrating credible success"



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Falguni Nayar: The Billion Dollar Dreamer Behind Nykaa

At 49, when most people begin slowing down, Falguni Nayar hit the accelerator.

Her journey from a seasoned investment banker to the founder of one of India's most successful and beloved beauty brands, Nykaa, isn't just a tale of entrepreneurship — it's a testament to courage, reinvention, and the refusal to be limited by time or convention.

Falguni's story reminds us that dreams don't come with an expiry date. While many might have doubted her — a woman with no background in technology or beauty — she transformed that very doubt into determination. Every step of Nykaa's rise was built on meticulous research, relentless passion, and a deep understanding of Indian consumers who had long been underserved by global beauty giants. She didn't just create a company; she created a culture.

A culture that celebrated confidence over comparison, individuality over imitation. She built a space where women didn't just buy products — they found their voice. Nykaa became more than a marketplace; it became a movement that made self-expression accessible to everyone, not just a privileged few.



Writer
Dakshaa Vadaga

From curating authentic products to empowering women through knowledge, she built trust brick by brick. Nykaa wasn't just an e-commerce site — it was a movement that celebrated real beauty. It told women that beauty isn't about imitation, but about self-expression. It wasn't about conforming to global standards, but about creating our own.

Her vision gave rise to a generation of women who felt seen, represented, and understood. The dusty aisles of local stores were replaced by vibrant digital shelves filled with possibilities — for every skin tone, every budget, every story. From the small towns of India to the global stage, Nykaa became a symbol of empowerment and choice.

And while the brand grew, so did her legacy. Falguni Nayar didn't measure success in sales or shares, but in impact. She showed that leadership can be both empathetic and ambitious, that innovation can bloom at any age, and that success isn't defined by how early you start — but by how fiercely you believe.

In a world obsessed with speed and youth, her journey stands as a quiet revolution. It tells us that it's okay if you haven't figured everything out yet. It's okay if your timeline doesn't match someone else's. Because potential doesn't expire — it evolves.

Falguni Nayar's story is a reminder that every phase of life brings its own kind of power. At 49, she didn't reinvent herself because she was lost; she did it because she was ready. She carried with her years of experience, resilience, and an unshakable sense of clarity that only time can teach. She proved that maturity isn't a weakness — it's a secret advantage.

In an era where success is often measured by how early you achieve it, she redefined success as how authentically you achieve it. She showed that you don't need to rush to fit into someone else's definition of achievement. You can take your time, build at your own pace, and still create something extraordinary. Because when your dreams are built on purpose, not pressure, they last longer.

Her journey encourages us to slow down, not out of fear, but out of faith — faith that growth doesn't always happen in the spotlight, and that sometimes, the best things take time to bloom. Nykaa wasn't an overnight success, but a result of consistent effort, conviction, and care. It reminds us that patience is not the opposite of ambition — it's a part of it.

Remember that it's never too late to begin again, never too late to dream differently, and never too late to rise. Because true success isn't about being the first — it's about lasting the longest.

Her story isn't just about building a brand — it's about building belief.



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The Woman Who redefined Equality: Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was not just committed to serving as a justice on the Supreme Court, she was a representation of tenacity, wisdom, and an unwavering dedication to justice. Ginsburg was born into a middle-class household in Brooklyn, New York, in 1933. At the time, women were expected to keep quiet, raise families, and avoid being in boardrooms and courtrooms. However, she had other ideas.

After graduating first in her class from Columbia Law School, Ginsburg was repeatedly rejected by law firms based merely on the fact that she was a woman and a mother. She became enraged by this type of overt discrimination. She aspired to open doors for all the women who followed in her footsteps, not just to succeed for herself.

Ruth was a founding member of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project in the 1970s. There, she fought against laws that discriminated against women and won case after case. But, she had a clever strategy: she frequently took on cases involving gender-role discrimination against men because she knew that an all-male Supreme Court would be more sympathetic. In the well-known case of *Weinberger v. Wiesenfeld*, a

widowed father, was refused Social Security benefits intended exclusively for mothers. By defending him, she made a broader point—gender discrimination hurts everyone.

When she became a Supreme Court Justice in 1993, she brought this same wisdom and subtlety to the nation's highest bench. She was a quiet powerhouse, often choosing her words carefully but effectively. Her dissents—especially in cases like *Ledbetter v. Goodyear*, about fair pay—were fiery and unforgettable. She once said, "Dissents speak to a future age," and she was right: her words often inspired real-world changes, like the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act.

Outside the courtroom, Ginsburg defied expectations in other ways. She was a fitness enthusiast in her 80s, working out with a personal trainer. She became a pop culture icon, nicknamed "The Notorious RBG," with her face on mugs, T-shirts, and even Halloween costumes. But more than her fame, it was her advocacy for rights that mattered. She showed young women that they could be brilliant, kind, and fearless all at once.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg didn't just fight for equality—she changed what people believed was possible. Her legacy lives on in every woman who speaks up, every law student who dreams big, and every citizen who believes in justice.

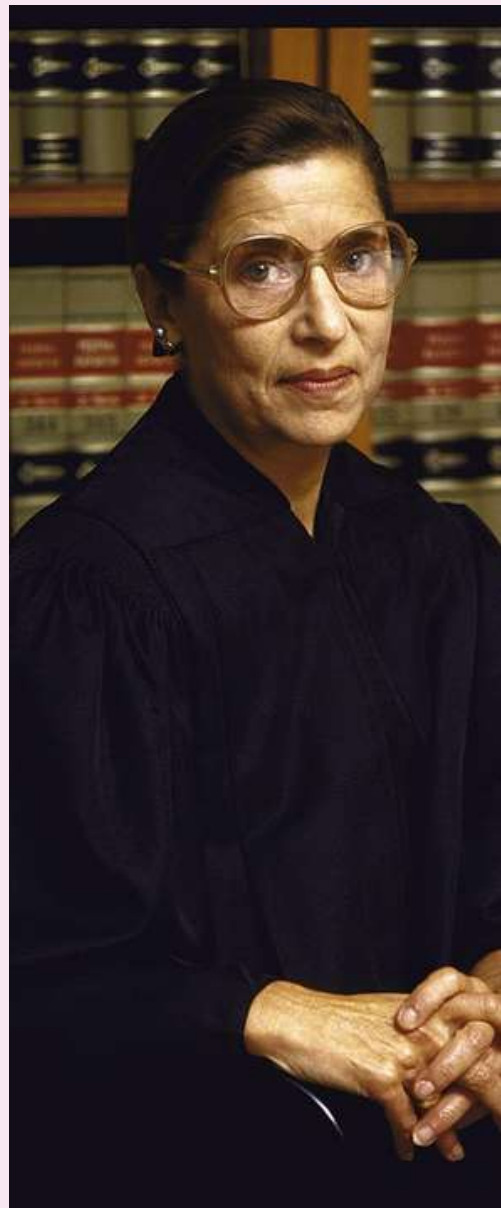
Ruth Bader Ginsburg didn't just fight for equality—she redefined it.

Transforming the way the world viewed gender, justice, and power. Through quiet strength and unwavering conviction, she proved that change isn't always loud—it's consistent, courageous, and relentless.

Her legacy lives on in every woman who refuses to be silenced, in every student who dares to dream of a fairer world, and in every citizen who stands up for justice, equality, and truth.



Writer
Dhanika Narang



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Crown with a Cause

"I wanted to use my medical knowledge to help women make healthier choices. I believe even a small voice can start a big conversation."

— **Manushi Chhillar**

When Manushi Chhillar won Miss World 2017, she didn't just win a title — she embraced a mission to serve society. She used her platform to promote women's health, especially menstrual hygiene. Born in Rohtak, Haryana, Manushi was a bright student with a dream of becoming a doctor. She studied MBBS at Bhagat Phool Singh Medical College, but her journey took a turn when she entered and won the Miss World pageant. Instead of moving away from her medical background, she decided to use her newfound voice to promote menstrual hygiene, a highly ignored topic in India.

Manushi's most impactful contribution was Project Shakti, a nationwide campaign she launched, creating awareness of menstrual hygiene and also highlighting the use of sanitary pads among unprivileged women and girls. Starting even before she won Miss World, Project Shakti focused on breaking taboos, educating young girls, and advocating for healthcare access for women in rural India. Through her initiative, she:

- Reached over 100,000 women in over 20 states
- Conducted awareness workshops in schools and villages
- Partnered with NGOs and local health workers to distribute sanitary pads and promote sustainable menstrual practices
- Her efforts gained international recognition when she was awarded the prestigious 'Beauty with a Purpose' title — an honor given to Miss World contestants for outstanding contributions to social causes.

Continuing her mission beyond the pageant, Manushi launched her brand Dweep, which mixes sustainable fashion with social impact by empowering women through opportunities in the fashion industry.

Apart from her social work, Manushi is also stepping into the world of acting. She made her Bollywood debut in "Samrat Prithviraj" in 2022. However, she continues to use her popularity for a purpose, regularly posting about health awareness, mental well-being, and body positivity.

Manushi Chhillar shows young people everywhere that standing up for what's right matters — because real beauty isn't just about how you look, it's about what you do.



Writer
Vanshika Kotha



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