

# the POWER WOMAN'S handbook

Every generation has its share of them—the trailblazers who lead the way. *Vogue* engages five women, each a champion in her chosen field of work, for a masterclass. Whip out your notebooks

## SUDHA MURTY on THE POWER OF GIVING

Personal success isn't at odds  
with doing greater good

I'm an hour early for my meeting with Sudha Murty—all the more time to read about her accomplishments in engineering, teaching, writing and philanthropy in a coffee shop around the corner from the Infosys Foundation office in Bengaluru. When we finally meet at ten, she says I should have just come in earlier because she's usually in her office by 6am—seven days of the week. “I work everyday, but every day is a holiday for me because I enjoy my work,” she says with a broad smile.

I'm in for more surprises as I inquire about her staff. I'd supposed that an organisation that does out crores in grants every year—this year it was a staggering ₹246 crore—would have at least 40 employees. It has two, and this includes 64-year-old Murty, its founder and chairman. She personally greenlights every request and travels for

about 15 days a month to meet with beneficiaries in the rural hinterlands of Karnataka and the six other states in which the foundation's parent company, Infosys, has a presence.

Murty is an everything-she-touches-turns-to-gold sort of person one has the privilege to meet a few times in a lifetime. She was the only female student at her engineering college in Hubli. Her male classmates weren't derisive but they certainly didn't conceal their amusement at having a girl in their carpentry workshop. “I never missed a single class because I knew if I did no one would help me. It made me self-sufficient. It also made me talk to boys on equal terms,” she shares. She is known for her feisty letter to JRD Tata in reaction to a TELCO (now Tata Motors) job notice inviting applications for trainee engineers, where women were asked not to apply. She was subsequently hired as their first female engineer. It was here that she met her future husband, Narayan Murthy, one of the co-founders of Infosys. She likes to joke that in the early years of the company she worked in “all positions except that of the chairman.” Murty modestly underplays this and her contribution of the initial seed

capital of ₹10,000 for what was to become one of India's biggest corporate success stories.

At 45, sparked by a comment from her teenage daughter, she started the Infosys Foundation, which supports projects that span rural development, healthcare, education, public hygiene and culture. Women's welfare is a particular interest, from her first project on the rehabilitation of devadasis to her present interest in cervical cancer vaccinations for women.

Her Robin Hood cape aside, Murty is also India's highest-selling female author. Chiki Sarkar, publisher of Penguin Random House India, says Murty's books have an inspirational appeal. Almost all her stories, like that about her experience with a poverty-stricken family who went beyond their means to be hospitable to her (“The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk”), have a fable-like quality. Reading the true accounts of her work with the underprivileged, it is easy to understand her stoic decision to give up all forms of consumption. “No jewellery or saris for me... I have everything I need,” says Murty.

While it might be difficult to touch Murty's levels of altruism, here are her guidelines on how to be a better giver. >



She's usually in her office by 6am—seven days of the week. “I work everyday, but every day is a holiday for me because I enjoy my work” —SUDHA MURTY

SANJAY CHAWAN

## START WITH THE KNOWN

"I come from a middle-class family—my mother was a school teacher, my father was a professor—but we practised charity at home. The scope of the foundation's work was entirely different. Our budget in the first year was ₹16 lakh... I was not used to big money. The way I went about it was to start with what was familiar. We started a library project. A simple mission: every government school should have a library, and up to this day we've built 60,000 libraries. Ninety-nine per cent of these are in Karnataka so I could personally check on the progress. This way, I had a solid model to scale up."

## CHANGE YOUR DEFINITION OF GIVING

Donating ₹100 crore isn't more valuable than teaching 100 children, believes Murty. She illustrates with the story of a woman she met recently: "Vaishali is a housewife from Latur and the empty hours at home were gnawing at her. She created a module on personal hygiene and started teaching this at four government schools around her home. So every morning, when her children leave for school, she hops on a scooter to teach pro bono. It's this kind of drive that can change society. People say, 'Sudha Murty can afford to give because she has a lot of money.' But it's not only about the money. I consider Vaishali's brand of philanthropy much better than that of many people, including mine, because I have financial backing, the support of a foundation... she doesn't have much and yet she is making a difference."

## EXPECT NOTHING IN RETURN

"Never expect gratitude from the receiver you might be disappointed and demotivated," says Murty. "When I started off, I used to get upset. I believed that if you help someone, the person should have gratitude. Over a period of time, I learnt that this was true for me and my culture, not necessarily the people I was in contact with."

## PLAN THE EXIT STRATEGY

"Whenever you take on a project, there should be an exit policy. You

cannot help people forever. You can help for three or five years, depending on what you want to achieve but then you need to stop: it could be a taper stop or it could be a sudden stop. In no way should people who receive money become dependent on you."

## DON'T STOP HAVING FUN

Murty's ringtone is 'Tujhe dekha toh yeh jaana sanam' from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. Apart from having authored over 24 books, she is an ardent movie buff, who, during her days at TELCO in Pune, had accepted (and won) a challenge to watch a movie a day for 365 days! Last year, she even made her acting debut in a Marathi film called *Pitruroon*, which is based on her Kannada novel *Rhun*. She cherishes the experience. "If I wasn't an engineer, I would have been a film journalist," she says. In keeping with her no-purchases policy, film DVDs are one of the few things she buys. "I watch a movie I like thrice. When Rajesh Khanna died, I cried so much, my husband was confused," she says. "Being a do-gooder doesn't mean you have to deny yourself your hobbies and passions. Live your life as you would, and make giving an organic part of it."—Anindita Ghose

## I PLEDGE...

"To give ₹5 crore to the Adyar Cancer Institute in Chennai to fund cervical cancer vaccinations for underprivileged women for a five-year period."

## ARIANNA HUFFINGTON on THE POWER OF LEADING

The corporate powerhouse shares her secrets to being on top of her game

Arianna Huffington is comparing physical burnout to a waning iPhone battery, spouting statistics on the perils of overworking, when she pauses mid-sentence. "You are not eating anything," murmurs the striking 64-year-old, who once confessed to sharing her

Greek mother's penchant for forcing food on strangers. As she points towards a plate of green apple slices, one of the many figure-friendly snacks scattered across her sun-drenched Manhattan office, I grab a wedge and she returns to extoll the virtues of mindfulness, a central theme in her latest book, *Thrive*.

Despite being named one of the world's most powerful women by *TIME* and *Forbes*, Huffington, who helms her eponymous, Pulitzer Prize-winning news site, is disarmingly down-to-earth: "Mother, sister, flat-shoe advocate and sleep evangelist," proclaims her Twitter profile, addressing over a million followers.

Though she's currently focused on the site's international expansion (an Indian edition launches soon), Huffington is equally committed to making an impassioned plea for redefining success, thanks, in part, to a nasty fall she suffered as a result of exhaustion seven years ago. "I'm not rejecting money and power," she clarifies, referring to the accident as a personal wake-up call. "I just consider them insufficient by themselves; it's an incredibly shrunken view." In the course of her 40-year career, Huffington has embraced multiple avatars, ranging from author, syndicated columnist, radio show host and almost-politician. But she's always paired entrepreneurial instinct with a human touch.

*Vogue* urged the illustrious media mogul to wax philosophical about a series of informal edicts that steer her action-packed and glamorous—albeit, well-rested—life.

## REJECT FATIGUE

"About two centuries ago, philosophers stopped asking the big questions—like, 'What is a good life?' A lot of people running the world became disconnected from a spiritual foundation. Because they rejected organised religion, they rejected a larger perspective on life. For me, that explains why [this] collective delusion around overworking prevailed. We were left alone and defined the good life as success and defined success as money and power. Money and power are two legs of the stool, but there's a problem when you try to also make them the third leg." >

PHOTO: MARK SEIGER; FASHION/EDITOR: SE WHITE; HAIR: ARTURO SWITZE; MAKEUP: EVA REAL



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"I'm not rejecting money and power... I just consider them insufficient by themselves; it's an incredibly shrunken view" —ARIANNA HUFFINGTON



## THE MULTITASKING MYTH

“Scientific evidence is now incontrovertible that multitasking doesn’t exist—it’s just another illusion about how we can be more ‘productive’. When you try to listen to a lecture and attempt to type out an email at the same time, you’re going to be task-switching. And it’s the most stressful thing you can do to your brain.”

## MARK YOUR TERRITORY

“We’re living in a time of big corporate transition: you have employers who recognise that when they take care of their employees’ well-being, they are also doing the best for their bottom line. Yet you also have employers who maintain barbaric practices and expect their employees to be ‘on’ all the time. If you’re at a company that’s still living in the dark ages, you have to reevaluate how you’re using your discretionary time. Alternatively, you can set boundaries in a way that is not disrespectful. I have a friend’s daughter who is working at an investment bank that expects her to be plugged in round the clock. At the end of every week, she makes it clear that she’s not going to be accessible over email but always leaves her cell number. The other day, her boss singled her out as a leader. Because not only is she doing a great job, she also stands up for what works for her. I think we’re going to see more and more of that.”

## THERE IS TRUTH IN TRADITION

“My 14th book, *Thrive*, comes out in 25 languages because stress is a global epidemic. In certain countries, like India and Japan, you have young people wanting to emulate the West to be successful but you also have these incredible traditions. When we first launched *Thrive* in South Korea—it’s one of the most stressed-out countries in the world, with 40 people a day committing suicide—a lot of people I spoke with would tell me they were meditating, but they weren’t speaking publicly about it. A lot of these deep-rooted traditions can be practised in the open and don’t have to be seen as checking out from modern life. It’s why I love the *Bhagavad Gita*: its teachings are just as true now as they were then.

Dharma is an incredible concept—life isn’t just about chilling under the mango tree, it’s about being on this vertical journey. Knowing that you’re living your dharma, or life’s purpose, means that you can deal with obstacles and challenges and you’re much more resilient as you do so because you know you’re still on course.”

## RECHARGE TO RENEW

“Leaning in (à la Sheryl Sandberg) and leaning back don’t have to be mutually exclusive ideas. If you’re only leaning in, you’re going to fall over, either literally, as I did, or metaphorically, in terms of not operating at your best. Seven years ago, I was really unconscious about how depleted I was and being exhausted had become my new normal. I was much too knowledgeable about the state of my iPhone—if it was below 10 percent, I’d be rushing to find a charging shrine. When I collapsed, I was probably below zero per cent. Even cats stretch back to jump higher!”

At the *Huffington Post* offices, we have nap rooms, yoga, meditation and breathing classes and healthy, free snacks. Until governments begin to invest resources to investigate the impact that burnout has on prosperity, we have to start at the individual and corporate levels.”—Aarti Virani

## I PLEDGE...

“As a mother of two daughters, now 23 and 25, I do whatever I can to help organisations that help women. That’s why I support Ignite Good’s mission of inspiring young women like Molly Hayward to lead lives of service. While travelling the world, Molly was shocked to learn how many women lack access to sanitary pads and face health problems and humiliation as a result. So she founded Cora, a company that brings locally-made sanitary pads to women in India, not only helping those women but creating local jobs for women, too.”



“The law isn’t the deterrent; it’s our society and institutional structures that bear down on women that are the real deterrent.”—VRINDA GROVER

## VRINDA GROVER on THE POWER OF ADVOCACY

Knowing your rights is the first step to asserting them

I catch her between a conference on gender equality and an appearance on *Times Now*’s prime-time show. She spends all her weekends in office. As a human rights lawyer and women’s rights activist who often provides free

PHOTO: ADIL KHAN; STYLIST: RAKESH RUTI; HAIR AND MAKE UP: CHANDNI SINGH

threatened with expulsion. But they refused to back down. Ultimately, the institution banned the offensive practice. It was then that Grover realised that fighting for her rights was a way of life for her.

She shares with us the four pillars of Indian law that can help women fight the various kinds of violence they experience—from economic to sexual. “The law isn’t the deterrent; it’s our society and institutional structures that bear down on women that are the real deterrent,” she says.

## THE ONE LAW EVERY WOMAN MUST KNOW

“Every woman should know the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, a civil law that provides protection against all forms of violence and abuse; be it physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and/or economic. One of the reasons many women are unable to escape abusive or violent relationships is that they have no safe space to turn to—the matrimonial home is not theirs and they’re no longer welcome in their natal home. Under DV law, not only can you seek an injunction against the violence, but it also recognises the woman’s right to reside in the matrimonial or shared household, whether or not you have any rights to the concerned property. Also, marital rape is not codified as a crime in India; however, under DV law, a wife can secure an order prohibiting sexual abuse by a husband. We still have a long way to go to make our laws gender-just. In the meantime, this is your go-to law for protection.”

## THE RIGHT TO SAY ‘NO’, LEGALLY!

“Sexual assault and rape is not limited to physical brutality alone; it’s about saying, ‘I find this offensive and I do not want you to conduct yourself in this manner with me.’ The anti-rape and sexual harassment laws safeguard a woman’s right to say no—be it unwanted sexual advances or remarks. The definition of rape now includes forceful and non-consensual penetration (to any extent) of the penis, or any other body part or object into any or-

ifice of the woman’s body. Acid attacks, sexual harassment, the intent to disrobe a woman, voyeurism and stalking (including e-stalking) have all been introduced as punishable crimes.”

## ENSURING YOUR RIGHTS AT THE WORKPLACE

“Today, we have journalists taking on editors and interns taking on CEOs. A lot of companies have policies in place and, if indicted, dismissals follow. But implementation is still dismal. I recently received a call from a senior-ranking professional at a government establishment. A male colleague was caught peeping into the restroom while she was inside. She wasn’t sure if this constituted harassment, which it was, neither did she know the protocol. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2013 clearly states that it is the duty of the employer to inform all employees about their policy against sexual harassment. It has to be publicised, workshops sensitising all employees are a must, and contact details of the people on the Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee are to be accessible to all. You have the right to lodge your complaint with the committee and/or go to the police.”

## PUT AN END TO ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

“I meet many women, across class and caste, who are clueless about property, bank accounts, investments and other assets owned by their families; passports and paperwork are usually in the custody of their father or husband. We need to retain some control over our economic lives. It is important to know your property rights and the laws that you are married into. Currently, different religions have personal laws that cover property, inheritance, marriage, divorce, etc. But the laws are riddled with problems. We do not have a concept of matrimonial property (the property created during a marriage). On separation or divorce, the woman is entitled to maintenance, but has no right to her husband’s assets. We do not need a Uniform Civil Code in India, but we need laws that establish equality and justice and which recognise diverse forms of relationships. >

—Shahnaz Siganporia

### I PLEDGE...

"To continue to raise my voice in support of women seeking justice, particularly where the axis of socio-political and economic power aggravates their marginalisation. I reaffirm that regardless of the rank, stature or position of the perpetrator of violence against women, I will stand in solidarity with the victim-survivors."

## FIRUZA PARIKH on THE POWER OF YOUR BODY

A healthy body is the greatest rebuttal to the patriarchal claim that women can't have it all—work and children

"Doctors have this tendency to think they are god. We are not. It is a dangerous presumption for doctors to think that they are infallible," says Dr Firuza Parikh. But god-complex or not, the doctor inclination began early for the gynecologist extraordinaire.

Parikh is the author of the bestselling *The Complete Guide To Becoming Pregnant*; director, Department of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics, Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre; India's leading fertility expert and gynaecologist; and superhero to all the couples she's helped conceive.

A school biology teacher pushed her towards being a doctor. It was while she was interning in the US that the first test-tube baby, Louise Brown, was born and that's what inspired Parikh to work in the field herself. And while her international counterparts couldn't understand why a country with a population of one billion really needed help procreating, she simplifies it: "You can't tell a childless couple, 'You shouldn't have a child because your neighbour has three.' That's not how it works." A deeply felt desire to help women with infertility reinforced her mission to work in this field.

More than 25 years, countless babies and many challenges later, she shares

how she's balanced her personal and professional lives: "I've been able to do everything that I have because of an excellent support system, and I'm grateful to my husband, mother, aunts, friends and domestic staff."

Debates on 'can a woman really have it all?' rage around the world while the 'biological clock ticking' myths are rampant, but here, our walking, talking, beaming example, who has brought babies into the world while bringing up two of her own, tells us how women can do it all. Follow her steps on wellbeing to take control of your body and your life.

### KNOW THYSELF

Knowledge may not equal power but it's definitely the first step, says Parikh. "I've noticed adolescents who come to me are secretive and shy. They feel sex and sexuality shouldn't be discussed. I urge all young girls to be open and upfront. Know your body; ask questions to the right people—doctors, experts who are non-judgmental and bound by confidentiality. Misinformation can be even more detrimental than no information."

The next step is empowerment. "Once you understand your body, it is particularly important to protect yourself. The sexually transmitted infection human papillomavirus (HPV) is linked to cervical cancers, so it is important to take the cervical vaccine before you become sexually active. Parents should be open about this. In terms of lifestyles, we live in a world where toxins are everywhere—not using lower-grade plastic bottles, and avoiding metal-infused cosmetics and perfumes will go a long way in remaining fertile. Doing simple things like having a balanced diet, taking enough vitamins and exposing yourself to the sun can naturally help increase fertility. Exercise outdoors, do things with your body—keep it moving, keep it healthy," says Parikh.

### CONTROL CONTRACEPTION

Oral contraceptives often get a bad rap (so much so that they've been linked with causing breast cancer) but, contrary to popular belief, Parikh says, "It's better to prevent a pregnancy

than to abort a baby and it's essential for women to take control of their bodies—oral contraceptives are safe and when prescribed by a doctor they are the smartest way to protect yourself."

### EMBRACE YOUR CURVES

Women have a love-hate relationship with their bodies—a little unsightly bulge can send most of us into fits of panic. But the doctor gives us a great reason to love them: they help in making babies! She says, "Fat is very important for the reproductive system; we need it to metabolise estrogen. Women should embrace their curves as that protects the reproductive system. Women who are very devoid of fat can have problems with ovulation—of course, either extreme should be avoided. Obesity causes problems as well."

### MANAGE THE CLOCK

While your ageing grandmother asking you to focus on having children in your "childbearing years" sounds archaic, the fact remains that there is a specific time at which you're at your most fertile. Says Parikh, "The peak reproductive age range for women is 24-34. And it's during this age that most women are in the thick of their careers—they have social, personal and professional responsibilities. But it's key not to get bogged down by it all and spend time focusing on yourself. Sleep well, eat healthy and if you're trying but not conceiving, don't waste time on home remedies; consult a specialist who can put you on the right track. And remember, just like greying hair, a reduction in eggs is a byproduct of ageing—not a myth. So if you're too busy to have a child within these years, freeze your eggs before you're 36."

### CRACK A SMILE

It's not hippie wisdom—Parikh says positivity has scientific results. "When a person's mental frame is positive, they produce more eggs. There's a scientific explanation for it—when one is in a negative frame of mind, or stressed, our body releases stress hormones, like prolactin or cortisol, and these can have a negative impact on the reproductive cycle; they may bring down the number of eggs."

—Chandni Sehgal



"You can't tell a childless couple, 'You shouldn't have a child because your neighbour has three.' That's not how it works"—DR FIRUZA PARIKH

PHOTO: NEVILLE SURINA/HAIR AND MAKE-UP: ZINGHANG/ASAAR

### I PLEDGE...

"To increase the reach of fertility services to those who cannot afford it—over the past 10 years we have treated more than 5,000 economically disadvantaged couples in Kashmir, and at Jaslok we do our best to subsidise treatment for those who cannot afford it. Sometimes, our wealthy patients pay for those who cannot afford it. Indian women have a high tolerance for pain—their desire for a child trumps everything. I will continue working towards making fertility treatments accessible to the underprivileged."

## EVE ENSLER on THE POWER OF YOUR SEXUALITY

Knowing yourself as a sexual being goes a long way in asserting your womanhood

"I've always loved the expression 'turn your poison into medicine'," playwright and activist Eve Ensler confides to me over a cheese omelette at a bar in

Mallorca, a tropical island off the coast of Spain, where she is holidaying. "Because if I look back at my life, where have I really grown? Surviving sexual abuse by my father, surviving cancer. It's the place of hardest conflict where you grow the most, where you come to find yourself, find your muscles and your voice. So I love that expression."

Energetic and youthful at the age of 61, Ensler's body of work embodies this philosophy. From her award-winning play *The Vagina Monologues* to her most recent book, *In The Body Of The World*, Ensler transforms her personal tragedies into fodder for art, exploring feminist topics that make societies squirm—from women describing their relationship with their vaginas, to rape and sexual violence.

She isn't satisfied with simply making good art, however. Out of *The Vagina Monologues* came V-Day, a global social movement that draws on performance and theatre to end violence against women and girls. In 2012, V-Day evolved into One Billion Rising (*Onebillionrising.org*), in which survivors of sexual violence gathered in front of courthouses, police stations, schools and places of worship in 207 countries around the world to dance in a show of collective strength.

One Billion Rising has taken India by storm, as women's groups in Mumbai, Chennai, Dharamshala, Kolkata and Delhi drew on performance as a way for victims of sexual abuse to release their trauma. Groups also conducted workshops training rickshaw drivers on the issue of sexual violence. Now more than one lakh rickshaw drivers across India have the sticker 'My religion is respecting women' displayed on the back of their vehicles.

Ensler shares with *Vogue* her perspectives on improving our relationships with our bodies.

**In India, sexual violence is a very big issue right now. As someone who has experienced sexual violence yourself, what advice do you have for women who have been abused?**

My experience of travelling the world is that the percentages are the same—it's just that there are a billion people in >

“When you are sexual, you are free. And society doesn’t want women to be free. Patriarchy doesn’t want women to be free; that’s the most dangerous thing in the world to patriarchy—for women to be running around enjoying their sexuality”—EVE ENSLER



India. I’ve spent a lot of time in the US, Africa and Europe, and I have yet to come to a place where the statistics are not astronomical.

One of the things that happens for most of us who have been abused, either early on or at different points of our lives, is a kind of sequester of shame. You are unable to talk about it, you are unable to admit it to yourself. And that isolation is really where a lot of self-harm is created. So many cultures shame the victim. It’s always about what you could have done rather than holding men responsible for what they’re doing. One of the things that V-Day and One Billion Rising have been doing is supporting survivors in understanding that what happened to them is not their shame. The shame belongs to their perpetrator.

#### **How do you begin to heal?**

The most crucial part is breaking the silence and admitting to yourself what has happened. In telling your story, you begin the process of releasing it. You know, once women are raped they are told that they will be destroyed forever, and I don’t believe that’s true. My experience is that if you work on it and you find ways to tell your story, to release it, you can get over it. That doesn’t mean that there isn’t a scar, but it doesn’t have to be the core determinant of your life. It means you do have to work on it, and you have to be in community with women who have been through similar experiences.

#### **How can women—and not just women who have experienced sexual violence, but women in general—be more in their bodies?**

What happens when you are raped, or harassed, or beaten, is you leave your body at the moment it’s occurring because the experience is too unbearable. Your body becomes a landscape of terror, because it holds the trauma. So we get progressively disassociated from ourselves. So how do you get back into your body? How do you get back into being an embodied person who is having a felt experience of reality? I think there are many ways to get back into your body. I think sex is a really great way to get back into your body. I think dance is fundamental, because when

you are dancing you are not in your mind; you are in your body. And, ironically, for me, cancer really brought me back into my body, because I woke up after that nine-hour surgery and I was [in my] body. And, as horrible as the experience was, it was like ‘Wow! I’m back! I’m in this body!’

#### **What are some practical strategies that women can use to get back into their bodies?**

The best way is to get involved with social justice action. I look at all the women around the world who got involved in One Billion Rising. Organising for it, coming together for it, got so many women into their bodies. Then, on an individual level, yoga helps. Walking around naked helps. Swimming in the ocean helps. I think masturbation helps. Knowing what turns you on helps.

#### **A lot of societies shame women who are sexual and, as a result, many women don’t feel that it’s okay for them to be sexual beings. How can women reclaim their sexual agency?**

I think you should get really great texts about sexuality. Get Anais Nin, get tantric books, get books that really talk about sexual pleasure. And the other thing to consider is, if sexuality is so bad, then why do we have a clitoris, an organ in the body that is purely for sexual pleasure? It doesn’t make sense. One thing I’ve noticed is that women have been forced to study how to give men pleasure, but men have no idea what women need—and part of that is because women haven’t taken the time to discover their own sexuality. I would strongly recommend discovering what pleases you. Also understand that you have a right to pleasure, and that sexuality is actually reciprocal.

#### **Why do you think so many societies are threatened by women’s sexuality?**

When you are sexual, you are free. And society doesn’t want women to be free. Patriarchy doesn’t want women to be free; that’s the most dangerous thing in the world to patriarchy—for women to be running around enjoying

their sexuality. So look at all the incredible customs they’ve devised—whether it’s genetic mutilation of girl babies, or acid burning. So what the corporate state sells is mirage sexuality, which makes people think that they are free. But look, when I started doing *The Vagina Monologues* in places like Paris, they didn’t want to publish the title—in such a supposedly liberated Western city. But meanwhile, if you were objectifying a woman or doing shows that were trashy, there was no problem.

#### **On a social level, how do we deal with the issue of violence against women?**

If you had my idea of how we end violence against women, it would be that we start with children at a very young age, and we teach them about their bodies, about consent, we teach them how to look at their bodies and know their bodies. We teach boys how to respect girls’ bodies. We would do that at a very young age—maybe eight or nine—and not make it shameful, but make sex a part of life, where we don’t scare people with it, and we don’t talk about it inappropriately, so that people grow up with a healthy understanding of sexuality. You know, in Holland, which is one of the only places that has early sexual education, they have the lowest rate of sexual violence in the world? And I know that this is the reason. We teach biology. We teach literature. Why aren’t we also teaching sexuality?—*Malia Politzer*

#### **I PLEDGE...**

“I am incredibly proud to support AIDMAM (All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch), which is working to demand justice for Dalit women survivors of violence across six states of Northern India. The Dalit Mahila Swabhiman Yatra tackled the caste system head-on with a multi-state tour led by hundreds of Dalit women that identified women leaders in their communities, sought accountability of state officials, and provided legal awareness and support to Dalit communities. As my friend Asha Kowtal, lead organiser for AIDMAM, says, ‘Dalit women are not flowers, we are the flames of resistance.’” ■