

a BITSian! Yes, Chandni was the Country Head of MTV India, and was instrumental in launching it in India. She has also worked with Prithvi Nandy Communications as the CEO and was a key driver in establishing the company. She led a complete turnaround of Times FM, Cyanamid India, Novartis and Eicher Motors and has been instrumental in establishing the operations of Cyanamid, Novartis and Eicher Motors in various markets. Chandni, an MMS graduate from the 1981 batch, is today the founder and Managing Proprietor of D'Essence Consulting, a Management Consulting, Business Advisory and Talent Management Consulting Boutique firm. Chandni, who believes that learning is a continuous process, was awarded the prestigious Graduate Gordon Fisher Fellowship at the University of Toronto in 1993-94. But she didn't stop there. She landed at the London School of Economics in 2001 for the Leadership Program.

**Anita Balasubramanian** is an entrepreneur of a different kind –she has started two NGOs. We have profiled her in the section on Community Leaders.

**Rashmi Datt**, author of 'Managing your Boss' runs Dialog, a Learning Services delivery consultancy. And there is **Neetu Khilnani** ('87, MMS) who started a web services firm called NetResult Co. in Mumbai, before moving to the US. Each of these women has broken stereotypes and stand testament to the amazing opportunities that lie before us. Go girl!

## Business Leaders

Perhaps the greatest testimony to a well-rounded education program is the multifaceted leaders it is able to nurture and supply to the world. In that respect, the Integrated Program at BITS certainly seems to have well justified its intent. As we thread together the achievements of several of our women alumni under the Corporate Leadership head, we tread paths set ablaze with outstanding work, be it in Information Technology, Quality Assurance or Marketing; glass ceilings lie shattered by the way side as new horizons are scaled, and repeatedly, we are awed and overwhelmed by some awesome grit and determination on display.

The first time I recall contemplating the definition of a leader was in a test in the Principles of Management course (popularly termed PoM), where we were asked to write an essay on "Are leaders born or made?" I don't quite know the answer to that one yet, but I definitely believe being a leader in today's corporate jungle places huge demands – you need to lead by example, be a team



**Srividhya Rajesh,  
Fund Manager,  
Sundaram Mutual  
Fund**

player, make quick, sensible decisions and zoom past a stream of success milestones. These women have done it all – be it **Akhila Krishnakumar** ('89) who is today CEO of SCT Software Solutions India Pvt. Ltd. while chairing the AMCHAM Bangalore chapter or, **Renu Muralidharan** ('77) who holds dual roles as Corporate Quality Head and Delivery Head with Datamatics Ltd., Mumbai. Taking the world of finance by storm are **Srividhya Rajesh** ('90, MMS) and **Yashodhara Mishra**. While the former is a leading Fund Manager of the country managing Mutual Funds at Sundaram, Yashodhara supervises IPAC Singapore's operations as Vice President.

While the characteristic corporate leader of the present is probably backed by a Masters in Business Administration or an equivalent, another remarkable feature about these women is that many have made a successful transition from the technical to the managerial side, sans the extra degree. Steering the technical side at CSLTECH is **Mitra Priya**, currently Director, with more than 13 years in the Software Industry and a rich body of work behind her, at various companies.

**Prachi Garg** is another shining example. This spirited kid, from the Class of 1986, EEE, is now Deputy General Manager at VSNL. Having established her credentials in R&D, she has ascended the managerial ladder and is known for her sheer command in the field and unique insights on several issues.

The list is endless. It captures the spirit **Sheena Verma** imbibed into a venture she started along with her husband, built and nurtured through an

entire life cycle, and the spunk of **Anu Khendry** Assistant Vice President, Quality at Satyam Computer Services Ltd. in Hyderabad. Each is a story of courage, purpose, and indefatigable drive.

Let's begin with **Anupama Narayanan**, a B4A7 graduate who is currently an Executive with Bank of America at Charlotte, North Carolina. Multifaceted at BITS, with a flair for Tamil Drama, Music and Math, she even volunteered for the Chemical Assoc, while still a Computer Science student. An accomplished certified Six Sigma Black Belt and distinguished Master Black Belt, she sure is the apostle of a quality professional! (Master Black Belts are Six Sigma Quality experts that are responsible for the strategic implementations within an organization). Anu has Masters and PhD degrees in Operations Research. Before joining Bank of America, she has held various positions from Senior Research Statistician and Senior Consultant to Director of Finance and Director of Quality. A strong advocate of the home-school philosophy, she teaches her daughter along with her husband at home, apart from finding the time to sew, read and play chess. The key mantra to success in her very own words is to get right back on your feet when you fall, and know always that many others fell before you. And finally the much needed shot in the arm – "Think (quickly) before you speak, but do speak up! Your opinion may be the very thing people needed to hear at that moment..." Touche!

Also among the first few to make a mark is **Anita Gupta** ('81, EEE) who is currently heading the Wireless and

Convergence Business Unit at Flextronics Software Systems (FSS). FSS is part of the \$19 Billion Flextronics corporate, and is focused in Telecommunication software. Not only is Anita's business unit the fastest growing business at FSS, she has also been responsible for creating IPRs in the Wireless domain, which have been successfully licensed to Telecom OEMs. Anita believes that the software industry is a great place for women as it offers an excellent environment, provides opportunities to travel places to broaden one's perspective, and a huge amount of technical and management challenges! She advises budding leaders to be involved in cross-functional roles, as one can learn a lot about what goes into running a corporation. "Of course", she adds, "while you work, don't neglect the family – be it your parents, grandparents, husband and kids. Whether you like it or not, a woman is an integral part of all families – and has to shoulder and plan for everything at both ends."



Revati Advaiti

Unusual for a woman back then, **Revati Advaiti** chose to pursue mechanical engineering when she joined BITS in 1986. Today Revathi holds dual roles as Vice President and General Manager –IM&C at Honeywell International. She has

successfully led the turnaround of manufacturing facilities in Europe in post acquisition environment and has driven strategy development and execution in a variety of environments and functions – sales through operations.

Revathi advises young budding leaders not to get carried away with trying to achieve the so called "work-life balance" in the near term, as long as they balance in the long term. "Stay grounded and have fun!" she says.



Usha Subramanian

"Be passionate about whatever you aspire to be and excellence will just follow you!" she recommends with characteristic enthusiasm. Many amongst us would recall the excellent reviews **Usha Subramanian's** classes in Computer Programming received. Her



Padma Reddy

handbook on an introduction to Computers and programming was an absolute treasure. Usha began her courses in the MVS program after her daughter was born and went on to ace all of them while Chief Coordinator, Center for Software Development, BITS, Pilani. She is credited with introducing online evaluation for the programming courses, later extended to many others. To those of us present during the transition, the significance is tremendous. She currently is President, Learning Solutions at Ascendum Systems, Bangalore.

**Padma Reddy** ('81) is two decades into the software industry and going strong. She is the Head of the India Development Center, webMethods Inc. and has been responsible for setting it up from ground up. Everything about her is versatile, right from the several managerial positions she has held across organizations and functions, to her varied interests in baking, reading and playing music. Her message for the BITSian woman strikes a unique chord. "Let's remind ourselves that we women have been gifted with amazing potential to achieve higher goals in life. All we need to do is surge ahead with hard work, perseverance, high standards of personal integrity and a positive "Can do & Will do" attitude.



Mythreyee Ganapathy

Personally, all these traits have greatly helped me in my professional life", she says. Well nurtured and stoked by education and upbringing, integrity and a positive attitude are indispensable to this technology leader.



Swati Satapathy

Corporate leadership may involve enormous multi tasking, taxing work hours, enormous job stress and pressure, and continuously updating oneself on the professional front. But above all, it requires meeting with people – motivating them constantly; chiding, appreciating, commending their every effort; simply making yourself worthy of being at their helm. Women undoubtedly bring to this rather demanding dimension an incomparable sensitive facet that is at once exciting and calming.

**Swati Satapathy** ('94), was one of the few women to land a prestigious Unilever job straight out of campus. After doing very well in her roles with Unilever in India and abroad and recently winning the *BITS 30 Under 30* awards – Swati is, along

with Chitra Balireddi ('96), among the first two BITSian women to be offered admission to the MBA program at the Harvard Business School. She nurtures dreams of starting a for-profit social enterprise that will promote her home state Orissa's traditional art and craft. With will written all over, successful realization of this dream can't be far behind now, can it?

Adventurous **Mythreyee Ganapathy** enjoys tinkering with new software products or devices, hiking, white-water rafting, reading, embroidery and cooking that is when she's not managing the External Research and Programs at Microsoft Research India. In this role, she focuses on building research collaborations between Microsoft Research and external researchers, building the PhD student community, laying foundations for curriculum and pedagogical improvements in CS as well as conducting market research to get a baseline understanding of the research community in India. Prior to this, Mythreyee was at Microsoft (Redmond, Washington, USA) working as a product manager in the Visual Studio Academic group.

**Prasanna Krishnan's** ('96) resume screams outstanding



Prasanna Krishnan

through and through. At Microsoft, where she worked most recently, she was named one of 15 Fast Track employees with potential to be future company leaders. At UIUC,

In theory, women should find few obstacles in pursuing a career in academia where they are more sheltered from external social and political stigma. Yet

Pilani in 1971. She has her B.Sc, M.Sc(Math), M.Tech(CS), and Ph.D.(CS) degrees from BITS, Pilani. Dr Jyothi Mathur was an Assistant Lecturer and later a Research Associate at BITS. She

## Discrimination in Academia?

- Women represent 41% of the nearly 1 million faculty members in the U.S.
- In 2-year institutions, women account for 42% of full professors.
- In 4-year liberal arts colleges, women account for 23% of full professors.
- In research universities, women account for 17% of full professors.
- For each year after securing a tenure-track job, male assistant professors are 23% more likely to earn tenure.
- For each year after earning tenure, male professors are 35% more likely to be named full professors.

\* Source: University of Chicago

while pursuing her Masters in Computer Science, she won the C W Gear outstanding graduate award, and her thesis was nominated for the David J Kuck outstanding award. At Microsoft, Prasanna was responsible for co-designing two patented technologies, and was among only five Siebel Scholars, selected for academic excellence and leadership. Now what did we tell you in the beginning!

Each story inspires in different ways, and promises more achievement in the future. And then there are some more who are just making a foray into the Corporate World, like **Indira Raman** who started with Colgate Palmolive in Sales and Marketing, having topped the Business Management Program at XLRI, and **Sushma Vasudevan**, an MMS graduate from BITS who is with Boston Consulting Group now after a successful two years at IIM Kolkata.

**Academia**

it remains a concern that women continue to face the glass ceiling syndrome, have limited networking due to the lack of an “old girls club” and face inadequate legislation to empower the working mother.

In developing countries, women face increased challenges, where higher education is limited and sometimes restricted to women depending on the socio-religious fabric of that country. Economic and family constraints many times limit women from dreaming beyond their own borders to pursue their dreams.

In spite of the challenges faced and the sad but true fact on discrimination, women have progressed in the academic profession at various levels accounting for many success stories.

**Dr. Jyothi Mathur** is currently the Educational Programs Coordinator for Interdisciplinary Computational Graduate Specializations at Purdue University. She joined BITS,

was awarded the Fulbright Fellowship in 1985 and was a postdoctoral research at the Georgia Institute of Technology. From 1987 to 1992, she was a Visiting faculty, Computer Science Department at Purdue University. She now lives in West Lafayette (USA) with her husband who is a BITS alumnus. Dr. Jyothi Mathur teaches Sitar at the studio she established in 2002. She is very involved with her local community and has had several Sitar recitals for fundraising. **Dr. Reena Aggarwal** (nee Garg) is currently a Visiting



Dr. Jyothi Mathur