

Report on the Panel Discussion: “Women in Politics”



FOUNTAINHEAD OF EXCELLENCE

Partners:

**Live Event on Zoom/MMA Facebook/
Live IBC/YouTube**

**Panel Discussion on the theme
Women in Politics**

Panellists:

Ms Khushbu Sundar

Spokesperson, Indian National Congress

Ms Nupur Sharma

National Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janata Party

Ms Rehana Ameer

Elected Member of Common Council
City of London Corporation

In Conversation With:

Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

Actor, Film-Maker, Activist

held on **Thursday, 18 June 2020 at 6.00 pm**

Partners:

Women in Politics

Thursday, 18 June 2020

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Zoom/MMA Facebook/Live IBC/YouTube
Panel Discussion on the theme**

Women in Politics

Panelists:

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Spokesperson, Indian National Congress

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Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

Actor, Film-Maker, Activist

at 6.00 pm Thursday, 18 June 2020

Event Partners:



From the freedom movement to the present, the role of women in politics and public life has been a see-saw. We have had a woman Prime Minister, powerful women Chief Ministers and successful party bosses. Yet, 70 years after Indian Independence, woman empowerment in politics has been an exception rather than a rule. The 33% reservations for women are still confined to the local bodies.

In this backdrop, a virtual seminar on the theme, “Women in Politics” was organised by MMA and KAS while partnering with NGPL and ORF, to deliberate on the issues given below:

- ♣ What is the current scenario of women in politics?
- ♣ Can politics be a career option for women?
- ♣ Is there a need for a godfather for women to succeed in politics?
- ♣ How can we neutralise the negative perception of women entering politics?
- ♣ Can women from economically weak background succeed in politics?
- ♣ When will 33% reservation for women in Parliament become a reality?
- ♣ Will more youngsters in the parliament, help women’s cause in politics?
- ♣ What should the society do to promote gender equality?
- ♣ How do our young women politicians see the future?

Programme Overview

Madras Management Association (MMA) and the India Office of the **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung** (KAS) presented a panel discussion on the theme, “**Women in Politics**” through virtual seminar at 6 pm on Thursday, **18 June 2020**. ORF and NGPL were the event partners. The women political representatives on the panel were:

- ♣ **Ms Khushbhu Sundar**, Spokesperson, Indian National Congress
- ♣ **Ms Nupur Sharma**, National Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janata Party
- ♣ **Ms Rehana Ameer**, Elected Member of Common Council, City of London Corporation

Group Captain R Vijayakumar (Retd), ED, MMA initiated the online meeting and introduced all the speakers. **Ms Kavitha D Chitturi**, Joint Managing Director, The KCP Limited delivered the welcome address and opening remarks. **Mr Peter Rimmele**, Resident Representative to India of KAS delivered the introductory remarks. **Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan**, Actor, Film-Maker and Activist moderated the panel discussion.

A Q & A session was scheduled where viewers could send in their questions through SMS/WhatsApp/Zoom. This was moderated by Group Captain R Vijayakumar (Retd), ED, MMA and the panellists answered all the questions during the programme. At the end of the Q&A session, Group Captain R Vijayakumar (Retd) proposed the Vote of Thanks and the event concluded at 8.00 PM.

In view of the social distancing restrictions due to COVID – 19 and keeping in view the safety and well-being of our members, the event was conducted live on ZOOM and also livestreamed on MMA Webcast, YouTube and Facebook. The proceedings were watched live by 1,493 viewers.

Profile of the Speakers

Khushbu Sundar

Khushbu Sundar is an Indian film actress, producer and television presenter who has acted in more than 200 movies. She is predominantly known for her work in the South Indian film industry. She has received two Tamil Nadu State Film Awards for Best Actress and one Kerala State Film Award.

She joined the Indian National Congress party in 2014 and is currently the national spokesperson for the party.



Nupur Sharma

Nupur Sharma is a national spokesperson of BJP and a practising lawyer in the Supreme Court of India. She was Students' Union President of Delhi University in 2008. Nupur Sharma was born in New Delhi. She pursued her education from Delhi Public School (DPS) and went on to do B.A. Economics (Hons.) from Hindu College of University of Delhi. She also attained a Law degree (LL.B.) from Faculty of Law, Delhi University and went on to do LLM from the London School of Economics. Nupur Sharma has been active in politics since her days in the college and also went on to become the President of the Delhi University Student's Union (DUSU) on the ticket of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad.



Rehana Ameer

Rehana Ameer is an elected member of Common Council, City of London Corporation. She is a British entrepreneur of Chennai (India) origin. She is the Founder and Director of Prosap Technologies Limited, an IT and Engineering consulting firm which she established in 2011 in London. She also



trades in the wholesale and retail of Halal Meat and Foods in West London. She is an MBA in International Business from UK and she holds several IT global certifications.

She has an immense passion for politics and is the Fundraising Officer of the Hounslow Central Labour Party Branch. She is actively engaged in several social activities / political campaigns in London around Cyber-bullying, Women Equalities and their rights, Brexit and Women economy, Save the NHS, Education not Segregation and digital government.

She is leading a project in launching the West London Fawcett Society Local Group. She is an active member of UKTNCC. She contested as an Independent candidate for the Councillor elections in The City of London Corporation in March 2017 and won becoming the first Indian born woman to achieve this feat. Rehana believes in 'Women Empowerment through Education, Business and Technology.'

Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

Lakshmy Ramakrishnan is an Indian actress and director. She made her debut in the Malayalam film *Chakkara Muthu* (2006), and has since appeared primarily in supporting roles in Tamil films.

Fashion designer by qualification and event manager by profession, Lakshmy Ramakrishnan is an entrepreneur. She ran her event management business in Muscat, Oman from 1992 to 2001, before returning to India and acting and directing films.

She has worked in television shows. She hosted 1500 episodes of the reality show *Solvathellam Unmai* in Zee Tamil. She has featured in more than 25 TV Commercials.

In 2012, she completed her first feature film, *Aarohanam*, acclaimed for the sensitive portrayal of mental illness, which received a Special Jury award at the 7th Vijay Awards. Her fourth directorial venture, *House Owner*, was selected as one of the two Tamil movies screened at the flagship component of the IFFI, Indian Panorama (Goa, 2019).



Kavitha D Chitturi

Kavitha D. Chitturi is a Business Management Graduate from Cedar Crest College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, USA and hails from a well-known industrial house in South India – The KCP Limited. She is currently the Joint Managing Director.



KCP is involved in the manufacture of Cement, Heavy Industrial Machinery for sugar plants, steel and sophisticated high tech equipment for Defence, Space & Nuclear Projects. KCP has presence in Power Generation. KCP also has a Joint Venture with Fives Cail of France, Fives Cail KCP Ltd., for design, procurement, project management, delivery and servicing of process plants for production of sugar including erection and commissioning.

KCP operates a Sugar Plant in Vietnam for manufacture of Refined Sugar. KCP has now ventured into hospitality industry with a prestigious star hotel project at Hyderabad which was executed under Kavitha's stewardship. As Joint Managing Director of The KCP Limited, Kavitha, among other responsibilities, also holds full charge of Human Resource functions of the Group.

Kavitha, is the Vice Chairperson of SCWEC, India. SCWEC is a Sub Sector Council of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry established with the objective of developing and promoting women entrepreneurs in the South Asian region.

She is a member of Young Presidents' Organization (YPO), Tamilnadu Chapter.

She is a member of the General Council of National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped, Hyderabad. She is the Vice President of World Telugu Federation (WTF) was established with the chief objective of promoting and perpetuating not only the language, culture, art, heritage, traditions but also business of the Telugu people.

Earlier Kavitha was National President of FICCI-FLO, the ladies wing of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, New Delhi during 2009-10.

Kavitha, as the Joint Managing Director of The KCP Limited is in the forefront in administering all the educational institutions set up and being run by the group at all the regions that they operate. Kavitha is a Director on the boards of various prestigious corporations.

An organizer par excellence, she has successfully incorporated and implemented a wide variety of programs and objectives for FLO, MMA, YPO, WTF and other institutions she has been associated with.

Kavitha D. Chitturi was the President of Madras Management Association for the year 2017-18.

Peter Rimmele

Peter Rimmele is currently the Resident Representative to India of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

He has a First Law Degree from Freiburg University, as well as a Second Law Degree from the Ministry of Justice Baden-Württemberg, Germany and a M.A. in Geography.



After working as a jurist, judge and lecturer, he took public office as Ministerialrat, Head of Division at the State Ministry of the Interior in Saxony, Germany, from November 1991 on until 2000. There he first served in the Police and Security and later in the Local Government Department. On behalf of the German Foreign Ministry he served in East Timor as Registrar General, Head of Civil Registry and Notary Services (UNTAET), and became later the principal Advisor for Governance Reform for GIZ (German International Cooperation) to the Ministry of Administrative Reform and the Anti-Corruption-Commission of the Republic of Indonesia, where he served for 7 years. He then moved to Rwanda, also as Principal Advisor Good Governance/Justice Program. Earlier he was Resident Representative Lebanon, Director of Rule of Law Program Middle East North Africa, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Report on the Panel Discussion on “Women in Politics”

Key Statements



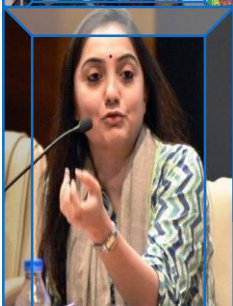
- Though women participate in political activities in significant numbers, there are several quantitative ways in which they need to be politically included - **Kavitha D. Chitturi** - Joint Managing Director, The KCP Limited



- Behind every successful woman in politics, there are ten who never made it. The history of powerful women is a history of great courage and exceptional strength - **Peter Rimmel**, Resident Representative to India of KAS



- The patriarchal mindset is the problem. The day men start thinking that men and women are equal and women can take care of the family as well as the society, then things will change - **Khushbu Sundar**, Spokesperson, Indian National Congress



- Parliamentarians in their 50s and 60s have been very supportive to me rather than those in their 40s. So age is not really a problem - **Nupur Sharma**, National Spokesperson, BJP



- The parties should place women in winnable seats and not just for tokenism to tick a few boxes. The results are important - **Rehana Ameer**, Elected Member of Common Council, City of London Corporation

Key Takeaways

Mr Peter Rimmele's Address:

- ♣ The change of role for women is nothing less than a societal revolution, to quote Rita Süßmuth, the first female to preside over the German parliament, the Bundestag.
- ♣ In the light of the pandemic and its occupying all our focus, issues such as women's rights should not become any less important.
- ♣ The Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation has the interests of women worldwide at its heart; through scholarship programmes, KAS promotes promising young women from all walks of life to empower them to take part in shaping their societies.
- ♣ In Germany, since 1919 when women got the right to vote, a tradition of strong Christian democratic women has taken root, though slowly in the beginning.
- ♣ Women leaders like Christine Teusch, who became the first woman minister in a German state, Rita Süßmuth, the former president of the Bundestag, Ursula von der Leyen currently the first female head of the European commission and Germany's first female minister of defense from 2013 onwards, her successor Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and Angela Merkel, the first female chancellor of Germany have all made an indelible impression in German history.
- ♣ It has been a '*male-only-club*' for long periods of German history. Even Angela Merkel's rise was met with stiff opposition from her party colleagues. Her nomination for Chancellorship was turned down in 2002 and accepted only in 2005.
- ♣ Behind every successful woman in politics, there are ten who never made it. The history of powerful women is a history of great courage and exceptional strength.
- ♣ Germany as well as India can take pride for having brought forth some truly remarkable female politicians.
- ♣ Together, we have a responsibility to shape the women-led processes in politics.

Ms Kavitha Chithuri's Address:

- ♣ Though women participate in political activities in significant numbers, there are several quantitative ways in which they need to be politically included.

Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan's Address:

- ♣ Women leaders around the world- from Germany to Kerala - have delivered efficient, effective and empathetic responses to the pandemic. The reason for this is that women are natural care givers, open to expert opinions and team players.
- ♣ Though Indian politics has produced strong woman leaders, 'women in politics' is still an exception and not a rule.
- ♣ It is the right time NOW for women to enter politics.

Ms Khushbu Sundar's Address:

- ♣ If a woman with a solid platform could be rattled by mushrooming political parties, then what would be the plight of a common woman, if she decides to speak her mind?
- ♣ Mentoring by senior politicians really helps in moulding young women politicians.
- ♣ One doesn't need a godfather to succeed in politics.
- ♣ Politics should not be misconstrued as a business proposition. Politicians are public servants who have to work for the people.
- ♣ Women politicians have to be courageous and need the support system from their families.
- ♣ It will be better to restrict the politicians from contesting an election to not more than two winning terms so as to encourage youngsters in politics.
- ♣ Powerful women's presence in party forums rattles the men-club and they may resort to manipulative politics to halt their growth. But women have to be patient, thick-skinned and courageous.
- ♣ Age and education are not barriers to entry in politics. The fire and zest in the politician are the criteria for success.
- ♣ Politics is a long journey but if a woman wants to make a difference, she must take the plunge.
- ♣ Parties prefer to field male to female candidates in elections. The patriarchal mindset is the problem. The day men start thinking that men and women are equal, things will change.

Ms Nupur Sharma's Address

- ♣ Global learning experience helps an aspiring politician immensely.
- ♣ It is better to have domain experts in the government machinery
- ♣ The present UPSC system needs restructuring.
- ♣ Mentoring by seniors helps a lot. The mentors need not be men.
- ♣ Recourse to social media is a cost-effective means to reach out to the public. Prime Minister Modi is a great example and an inspiration for this.
- ♣ Financial stability and education are very important for politicians.
- ♣ To counter gender inequality, women have to put in double the normal effort. They have to talk less and do more.
- ♣ Women politicians must have well calculated, well thought out moves. If they have the passion, the light in them, the calling to give back, then they should go for it, right away.
- ♣ 33% reservation for women in parliament needs checks and balances.

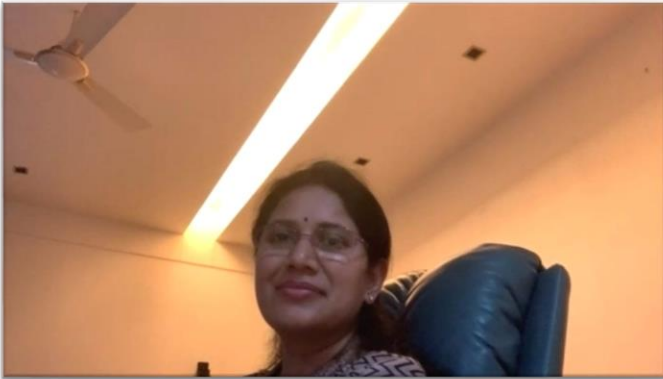
Ms Rehana Ameer's Address

- ♣ Education creates a meaning in people's lives and it plays a vital role in the path of women who want to enter politics.
- ♣ People tend to stereo-type women and more so, Muslim women.
- ♣ Democracy is the biggest weapon to correct historic wrongs.
- ♣ Instead of becoming somebody, it is better to do something and give back to the society.
- ♣ A good mentoring programme helps aspiring politicians.
- ♣ There is no need for a god-father or a male mentor in politics.
- ♣ The harder the challenge, the higher the reward one gets in politics.
- ♣ In politics, the outcome is social and we can give back to community. It gives the satisfaction that we are able to make a difference and leave a legacy.
- ♣ One has to be oneself and maintain one's individuality.
- ♣ The ecosystem in London recognises individual talents and competency.
- ♣ Men in power who decide on policies concerning women should be qualified to take such decisions and they should have adequate data before framing such policies.

- ♣ Take accountability of what you want to do - to the environment and to the world. Leave this planet a better place for our future generation.
- ♣ Hand in hand with men, women can strive for gender parity.
- ♣ Financial independence is needed for entrants to politics.
- ♣ Social media if used in the right way can be a cost-effective way to manage campaigns and election expenses. One can also opt for fund raising and crowdfunding.
- ♣ The parties should place women in winnable seats and not just for tokenism. The results are important.

Welcome Address and Opening Remarks

Ms Kavitha D Chitturi, Joint Managing Director, The KCP Ltd



Ms Kavitha D Chitturi welcomed the panellists, members of MMA, KAS, ORF and NGPL and the online viewers. She pointed out that post Covid-19, online programs have become the new culture, integrating schools and colleges, even weddings and birthdays and that people are getting used to it. She explained about MMA and its contribution to the management movement in India.

She said that women leaders in Germany, Scotland, New Zealand and Norway fare very well in politics and in handling the current situation in their countries. In India, she mentioned that about 14% of the MPs in Lok Sabha and 8% of the MPs in Rajya Sabha are women. “Though women participate in political activities in significant numbers, there are several quantitative ways in which they need to be politically included,” she expressed her opinion.

She hoped that given the profile of the speakers, it would be interesting to hear from them hailing from India and the UK and the challenges faced by them.

Introductory Remarks

Mr. Peter Rimmele, Resident Representative to India of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)



Mr Peter Rimmele began his address quoting Rita Süßmuth, the first female to preside over the German parliament, the Bundestag: “The change of role for women is nothing less than a societal revolution”. He said that the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation keeps the interests of women worldwide at the institutional heart. “Through scholarship programs, KAS promotes promising young people from all walks of life to empower them to take part in shaping their societies. This is especially true for young women. Our commitment to this stems from a long tradition of remarkable female German politicians in the Christian democratic tradition,” he added.

Christian Democratic women

He touched upon the role of Christian Democratic Women in German politics starting from 1919 when women got the right to vote in the wake of a revolution. Since then, a tradition of strong Christian democratic women has taken root, if slowly in the beginning, he noted.

He highlighted the contribution of women leaders: **Christine Teusch**, a catholic politician, who served as a member of the federal parliament until the Nazis seized power and who, after the Second World War, became the first woman minister in a German state and received Germany’s highest civil honor; **Rita Süßmuth**, the former president of the Bundestag who despite being in her 80s now, is still actively involved in a plethora of fields, including promoting human rights in Iran; **Ursula von der**

Leyen, Germany's first female minister of defense from 2013 onwards and who went on to become the first female head of the European commission late last year; her successor **Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer** who holds the distinction of being the fourth female chief minister of a German state, the second female president of the Christian Democratic Union and second female minister of defense and **Angela Merkel**, the first female chancellor of Germany, one of the longest serving heads of government in the western world and sometimes called the most powerful woman on earth.

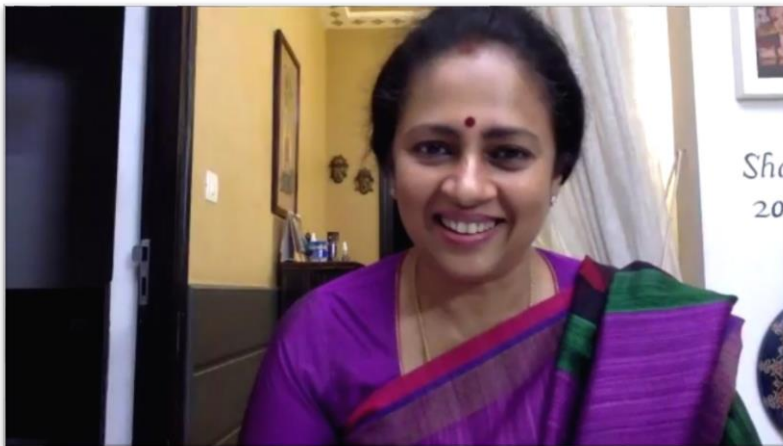
A Male Bastion

He regretted that in spite of all these examples, German politics has been a male-only-club for long periods of its history and some of those men have fought hard to hold back the progress of women in their time. "Even Angela Merkel's rise was met with stiff opposition from her male party grandees. She was even ridiculed for her appearance. She was nominated for the chancellorship only in 2005 and an earlier attempt in 2002 had been opposed by powerful men within her party, despite her being the leader of the largest opposition party," he noted.

"If one woman succeeds in politics, there are about ten who are unable to make it," he said with an air of concern. He concluded saying that the society has a strong responsibility to support women in politics.

Opening Remarks of Moderator: Ms Lakshmi Ramakrishnan

Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan, Actor, Film-Maker, Activist



Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan opened the discussion drawing reference to a recent newspaper article titled, “**When women lead, the virus loses.**” The article elaborated how women leaders around the world- Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Arden, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-Wen, Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin, Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg, Iceland's Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir and Kerala's Health Minister K Shailaja have delivered efficient, effective and empathetic responses to the pandemic. “The reasons for their exemplary performance are easy to comprehend,” she said. “Women are natural care givers, open to expert opinions and team players.”

She pointed out that despite Indian politics having produced a strong woman Prime Minister, powerful women Chief Ministers and party leaders, it is still not a rosy path for women to enter politics. She quizzed the panel members on various issues as detailed below and elicited their responses:

- ♣ What makes women as leaders?
- ♣ What is the current scenario of women in politics? How can we bridge the gap?
- ♣ Why did they take up politics? How was the transition?
- ♣ Is good education a pre-requisite for women to succeed in politics?

- ♣ Is Politics a career option for women?
- ♣ Is there a need for a godfather or a male mentor, for women to succeed in politics?
- ♣ Why is it that 'women in politics' are exceptions?
- ♣ How can we encourage women to enter politics?
- ♣ Can women from economically weak background succeed in politics?

All the panellists were passionate in their responses suggesting their complete embracement of their political path and commitment to the cause of women empowerment.

Summing up, **Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan** brought out the commonality in all the three panellists –of finding their calling in politics, to be the change agent, the urge to give back to the society, never to give up, to promote diversity and come up with innovative ways of operation. She concluded that the right time for women to enter politics is –NOW.

Extract of the Panel Discussion

Ms Khushbu Sundar, Spokesperson, Indian National Congress



Trigger to join Politics:

Ms Khushbu Sundar said that she entered politics not for name, fame or money as she already had all of them. A series of cases filed by parties in 2005, to corner her for an opinion she expressed, provoked her. She single handedly fought the cases without any political support. She wondered if a person like her with a successful record in film industry and having a solid platform could be rattled by mushrooming political parties, then what would be the plight of a common woman, if she decides to speak her mind. That hit her hard and she decided to raise her voice for women by joining politics; she was very clear that she would enter politics only after she was cleared of the cases.

Mentoring by Grand Old Man

In April 2010, the Supreme Court ruled in her favour. In May that year, she joined the DMK to voice her opinion and since then she has maintained the image of a strong and courageous woman. DMK gave her a launch pad. She praised the role of late Chief Minister and DMK's veteran leader Mr Karunanidhi in moulding her and teaching the nuances of politics like stage ethics and giving respect to people. After a five-year stint in DMK, due to unforeseen circumstances, she quit the party and joined the Congress.

While she maintained that she has huge respect towards the entire DMK fold, she has no regrets too on leaving the party.

Her political journey has been a pleasant one, she said, in spite of having a roller coaster ride and it has taught her a lot of things. She was frank in admitting that at times she oversteps the Lakshman Rekha or the party line fixed by her party when she continues to speak her mind.

Be Courageous

She warned aspiring politicians against considering politics as a business proposition. “We are public servants and have to work for the people,” she said and added that women politicians have to be courageous and need the support system from their families.

“Do not give more than two terms to any politician,” she suggested and batted for more youngsters in politics and 50% reservation for women in parliament, to promote gender equality. She confessed that many politicians felt intimidated by her presence. “They will feel insecure. But I like my persona and I am glad people cannot take me for granted.”

As her closing comments to aspiring women politicians, Ms Khushbu Sundar said, “Age should not be a barrier. Do not play out the caste card. Be courageous to face anything that may come your way. Education too is not a barrier. I just did eighth standard. The fire and zest in you should be the criteria. Do not think of politics as a money making tool or a career. It is not. Be financially self- reliant. Politics is a long journey but if you want to make a difference, take the plunge.”

Ms Nupur Sharma, National Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janata Party



On Joining Politics:

Nupur Sharma said that politics was her ‘calling’ and she was 23 and a second-year law student at the University of Delhi when she took to politics. “Some of my undergraduate college mates from Hindu College who saw my political inclination thought I would be a good candidate in the Delhi University election which is the largest election in the world of students union where over 100,000 students vote. Being a student in the faculty of law, they estimated that I had great chance of winning. They knew me as an outspoken, argumentative and a studious person. So they pursued me and my parents to grant me permission to contest the elections. I contested on an ABVP ticket and won the elections,” she said and continued, “I have been around for 12 years now and politics is my destiny.”

A Global Experience

After her graduation in Delhi, her parents sent her for higher education to London where she got the experience of living independently, making friends with people from 140 countries and comprehending what India meant to others abroad. She came back and took a job in a law firm where it was a 7 days-in-a-week job. She was also supporting the legal cell of BJP’s youth wing.

Finding it tough to balance her lucrative profession and her role in the party's legal cell, she gave up her job and became a full-time politician. "To be in politics, one has to have a good education and make oneself known," Nupur said. She said that in 2014, she decided to do independent practice and is now a lawyer practicing in courts including the Supreme Court. In 2015, she took on Arvind Kejriwal, the incumbent Chief Minister, in the Delhi elections and lost. She stated that she is now writing an academic book which is legal in nature.

She acknowledged that the late BJP leader Sushma Swaraj inspired her for her people skills, extraordinary memory and affable nature. She recommended domain experts in the government machinery and for restructuring the UPSC system.

She agreed she was mentored by seniors in the party in her early days in politics and that stood her in good stead. "Thanks to this and my experience, I am now able to mentor many women members in the party's youth wing," she said.

PM, an Inspiration:

Ms Nupur Sharma advised aspiring politicians to make judicious use of social media through which one can brand oneself at no cost. It helps in countering lack of support from the mainstream media, she said while taking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's example as a tale of great inspiration. She pointed out that in 2014, the entire mainstream media was against Mr Modi, yet he reached out to people through social media, connected with them on a one-to-one basis and stunned everyone by leading the party to a grand win.

On TV Debates:

Nupur Sharma said that as a spokesperson of the BJP, she has to appear in TV and participate in many debates. "Seeing me argue forcefully and driving my points across, some of the male members on the panel have asked me how my family members tolerate me. They have nothing to fault my arguments with, so they start leveling personal attacks," she said and ascribed this to the perception in the society on women's role. To counter this and come up in politics, women have to put in double the normal effort, she advised. "Talk less, do more," was her counsel to aspiring politicians.

As her closing comments to aspiring women politicians, she said, “Don’t let anything scare you. Have well calculated, well thought out moves. Education is very important. Don’t let anything bog you down. If you have the passion, the light in you, the calling to give back, then go for it, right away.”

Ms Rehana Ameer, Elected Member of Common Council, City of London Corporation



Ms Rehana Ameer of London Corporation said that though she hails from a traditional background, her parents gave her good education and plenty of freedom, so she could become a highly qualified IT professional and a business woman. Education, she said, creates a meaning in people’s lives and it has played a vital role in her life.

MBA in London

She said that after her marriage and having children, in 2003 she got permission from her family and went from India to the UK to pursue her MBA. After completing her MBA, she became a program director in the UK. At many places, people had asked her how a migrant Muslim woman had managed to qualify herself to such an extent and this stereo-typing had set her thinking.

“Instead of becoming somebody, I wanted to do something and give back to the society. I wanted to break the stereotypes, while retaining my individuality and conviction. I asked myself - in which field, can I make a difference? I had leadership and questioning skills. In 2016, I took the plunge into politics and joined the Labour party. I did not have any political back up. I had set myself a one-year time frame to progress in politics,” she said.

Mentoring

She said that she underwent a mentoring program and enrolled herself in the Fabian Women's Mentoring Program (FWMP). In the Labour Party, she was mentored by party MP Ruth Cadbury. Once a month, her mentor would guide her on how she could use her skills for public good.

Reward for the Tough Grind

Realising that harder the challenge, the higher the reward would be, Ms Rehana Ameer contested for the 2017 Common Council in the City of London against big names and won, becoming the first Indian born woman to achieve the feat. "In politics, the outcome is social and you can give back to the community. It gives the satisfaction that you are able to make a difference and leave a legacy," expressed Ms Rehana Ameer passionately.

Be Yourself

Her secret to success, according to her, lies in her individuality. "I speak like an Indian without foreign accent and I wear sarees as my power dressing. I carry my convictions," confided Ms Rehana Ameer.

She acknowledged that the ecosystem in London recognises individual talents and competency. She suggested that men in power should be qualified and must have adequate data before framing policies concerning women.

As her closing comments to aspiring women politicians, she said, "I see democracy as a means of correcting historic wrongs. This webinar is a very good first step. Be who you are. Take accountability of what you want to do - to the environment and to the world. Leave this planet a better place for our future generation. Time is NOW to act. Take things as they come along. Hand in hand with men, we can achieve gender parity."

Q & A Session (Answers by Panellists)

Question by Peter Rimmele, KAS



Q: What should people do to change the gender inequality?

A (Nupur Sharma): In any debate on women, we have normally women members. Why should we restrict to only women? We must have men also in the panel to find out their thinking and response.

A (Rehana Ameer): We come across new waves of working and how governance takes place in the AI driven world. We should encourage diversity of ideas. The most important thing is that the men who make the decisions about women should ask themselves: “Are we equipped to decide? Do we have real data to decide on women?” A collaborative approach is the need of the hour.

Question by Mr Pankaj Madan, KAS



Q: If our parliament got younger, could the women’s reservation bill have become a reality?

A (Khushbu Sundar): Definitely yes. Most of our politicians think that the minute they have power, it is theirs’ for generations to come and everybody in the family should enjoy. They don’t want to let go. We should have restrictions like one should not get more than two terms in any position, if they get elected. That’s how you can bring younger people on board. So many youngsters are waiting. Gen next should be given a larger platform to change the face of Indian politics.

A (Nupur Sharma): Younger parliament is good. But personally, parliamentarians in their 50s and 60s have been very supportive to me rather than those in their 40s. So age is not really a problem.

Question by Ms Priyadarshini Rahul, NGPL



Q: There is a perception that politics is not for women? How do you overcome this?

A (Khushbu Sundar): I don't think politics is sort of a taboo for women. It depends on how much support you get from your family and it matters a lot. The main issue lies elsewhere. If a woman is in politics for 10 years, when it comes to elections, she may get a ticket. But the party prefers to field her husband, brother, father-in-law or father as the candidate as they don't want a woman to give them instructions. The patriarchal mindset is the problem. The day men start thinking that men and women are equal and women can take care of the family as well as the society, then things will change.

A (Nupur Sharma): You are right. The opinion is skewed about women. The way I speak on TV debates, people ask me, "If you talk like this on TV, what will you do at home?" They have nothing else to counter me. They can't digest women having an opinion on an issue.

A (Rehana Ameer): Talking of gender parity, people ask me, "How do you manage at home?" The narrative should be reversed and men should be asked, "How do you manage at home and your political life?"

Q: If you were made a Prime Minister for one day, what will be your priorities?

A (Khushbu Sundar): These things are very cinematic. There are times when we disagree with what the PM says and times when we agree with him too. In recent times, we have seen him very aggressive in the Ladakh border issue with China. There are occasions when we felt that he could have acted faster. But I don't think you can bring changes within a day, in any country. It is not like answering a similar question posed at the Miss World or Miss Universe contest. Reform is a long term process. It is not easy to be a Prime Minister. I completely respect and appreciate our PM Narendra Modi for continuing the work he has been doing.

A (Nupur Sharma): This is wishful thinking and I will make many enemies for answering this. But if I were to make a call, I would recommend domain experts running the government machinery rather than people who are educated in one

area, trained in another area and who do something else tangential. I will rebuild the UPSC and government bureaucracy system a bit.

Q: You all come from affluent backgrounds. If someone from a middle class or a lower middle class family wants to enter politics and give back to the society as her inner calling, is it possible? Does it require investment or back-up to brand and promote you? What does it take?

A (Khushbu Sundar): I don't want to sugar-coat my words. Politics is not an easy place to be in with too many men around. You have to be mentally very strong. You have to be not just thick skinned but rhinoceros skinned. Patience really pays. There will be people who will talk behind you and do character assassination. You have to be strong and do a lot of hard work. You have to be seen. You can't shy away from doing work. As a woman, you can't say, "I can't go out to the street; I can't participate in the dharna in the scorching sun and so on. You have to do all kinds of odd jobs. At times, you have to raise the voice. At any point of time, do not lose your individuality and that's your winning point. You need to learn a few nuances about politics. Fear is not an option. Courage has to be your first name.

A (Rehana Ameer): Financial independence is needed. You have your living expenses and bills to pay. I used social media extensively in the right way and my expense was very less. You can also opt for fund raising and crowdfunding.

A (Nupur Sharma): My parents used to tell me that an educated person would never go on empty stomach. If I were only practising law, I would make ten times more money. But in politics, you have to make sacrifices. If it's a calling, it's a calling. I am educated and I can even write a good book. A family which can support you financially is ideal. Social media is important. Your identity is equally important. Our PM is a great example. In 2014, the entire media was against him. He communicated directly with the voters through social media and won.

We cannot afford to have someone for your PR work. Today, there are so many careers in digital media and social media. A social media influencer makes more money than a trained advocate or an actress. Look out for how you can feed you and how your family can support you. But don't let anything stop you.

Q : Do you think that 33% reservation will become a reality in your lifetime?

A (Nupur Sharma): I believe it will happen but it needs checks and balances. A parliamentary seat should not be a birth right. You have to earn it.

A (Khushbu Sundar) : Why only 33%? We talk about equality. Let's look at 50%. In fact, 33% reservation should have been a reality by now. Unfortunately, it is not. Things like people's connections and their reluctance have delayed the equality process. Women have only 14% representation in parliament today.

A (Rehana Ameer): 33% is a good starter. The parties should place women in winnable seats and not just for tokenism to tick a few boxes. The results are important.

Q: Which woman politician do you want to emulate?

A (Khushbu Sundar): I have admired many women leaders right from Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi to Jayalalitha, I have respected them but I don't want to emulate anyone of them. Let me try and leave a mark for myself. I want people to say: 'There was one leader who worked on her terms, for the betterment of the people and society.'

A (Nupur Sharma): I don't want to emulate anyone. But I admired Sushma Swaraj for her people management skills, photographic memory and affable nature.

A (Rehana Ameer): There are not enough role models to look up to. Individuals come with strengths and weaknesses. But I would like to take their learnings and their aspirations. Everyone is unique. Even today, I learnt from all the women in this panel. I learn from everyone.

Q: Don't you think you could have become the second line leader in the DMK had you been in that party?

A (Khushbu Sundar): No. My mom said that if you don't find respect, move away. Self-esteem is important to me. I don't think, things would have been different. I am glad I quit at the right time.

Vote of Thanks

Group Captain R Vijayakumar (Retd), VSM



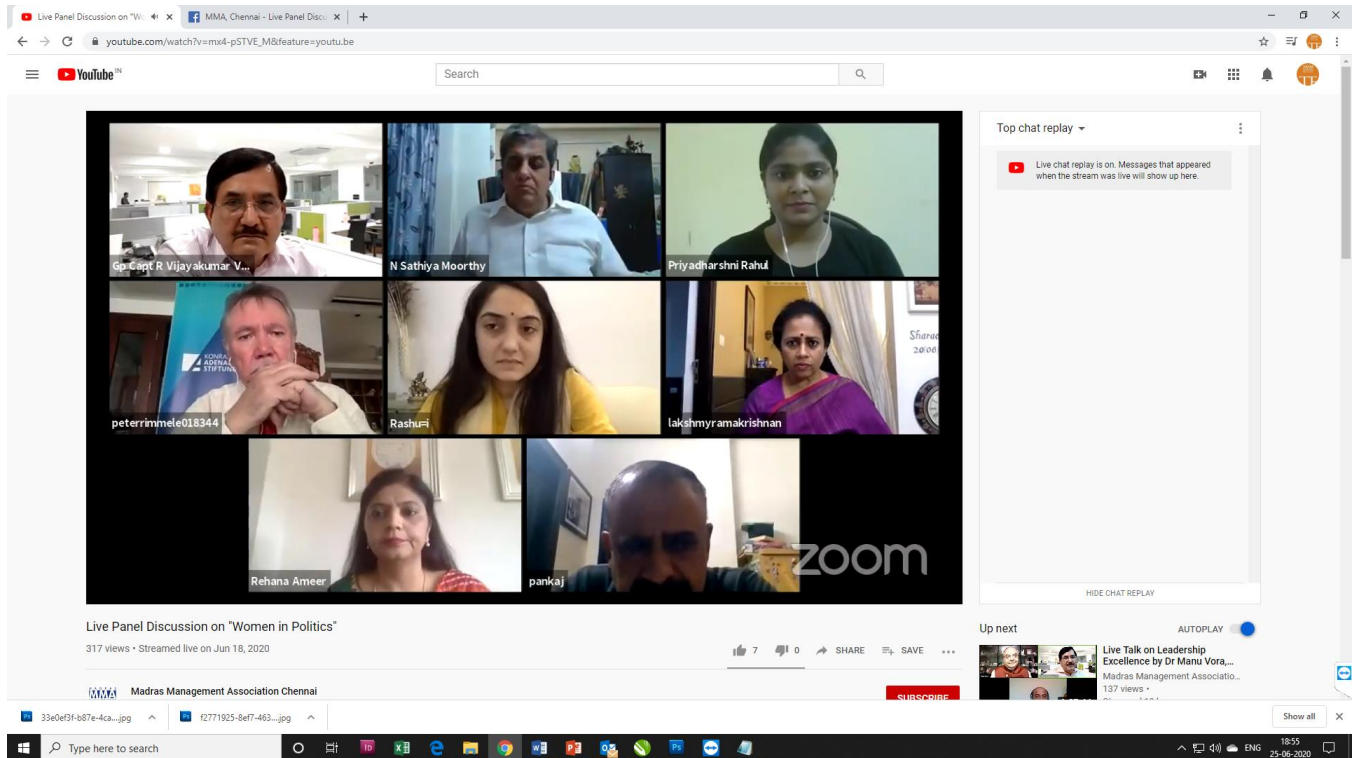
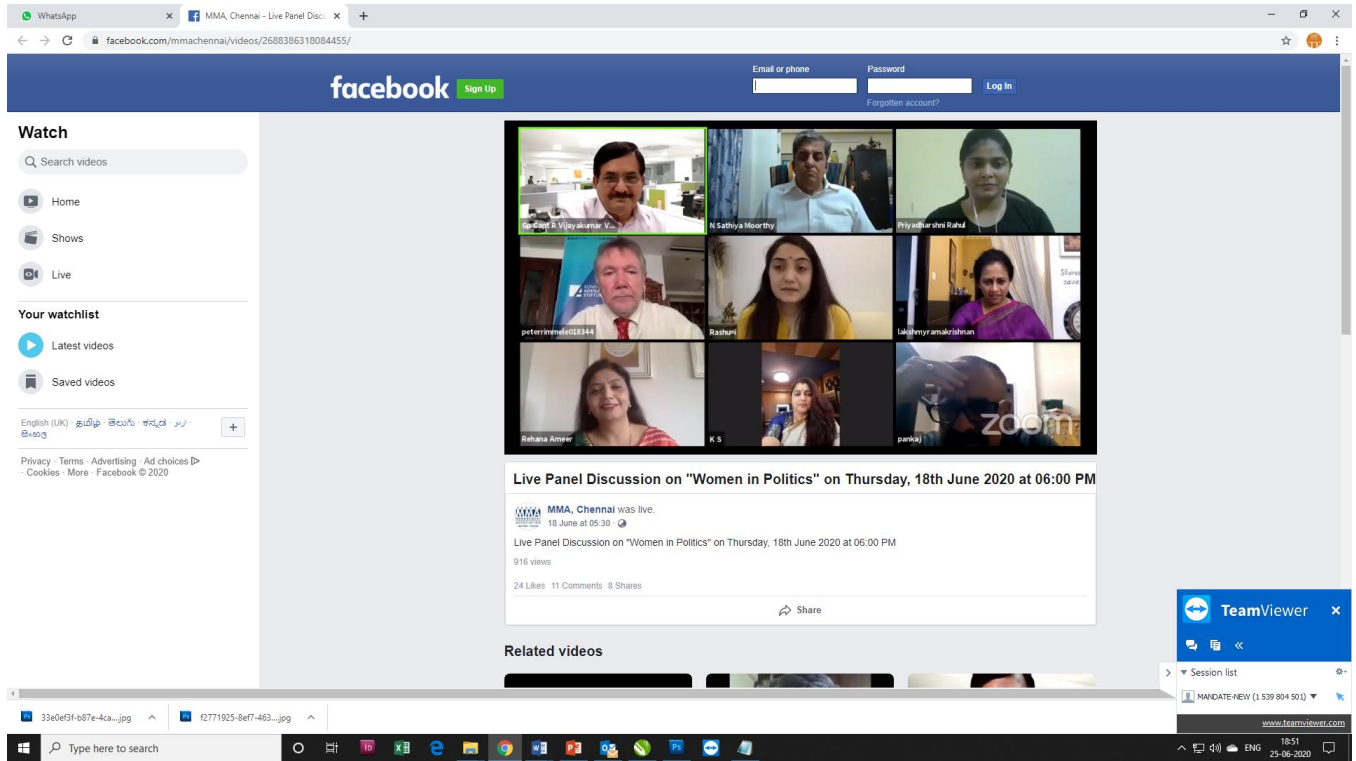
Group Captain R Vijayakumar (Retd), VSM, Executive Director, MMA thanked the panellists for their lively articulation of their views and providing inspiration to many women to look at politics as an option. He thanked the moderator **Ms Lakshmy Ramakrishnan** for bringing out the best from the panellists.

He thanked **Ms Kavitha Chitturi** for her welcome address. He thanked **Mr Peter Rimmele**, Resident Representative to India of KAS for his introductory remarks and the great support extended to MMA. He thanked **Mr Pankaj Madan** of KAS, members of MMA, ORF and NGPL and all the online viewers before signing off.

The event concluded at 8.00 PM.

Photos

Photographs taken during the Live Panel Discussion on the theme: "Women in Politics"



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Saluri Revathi S	Amrutha Lakshmi	Sowmya Karanam	BARANI	Gnanasekaran
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Narasimhan	Saif	RV ARAKKONAM	Kubendran	Kavitha Dutt
Pooja Lakshmi	T. PUNITHA	Lakshmanan	Rajaram	Vaigha DAVIDKUMAR

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Links for the Recording

Women in Politics

We are pleased to share that the recording of the event is available for viewing pleasure through the links indicated below:

Website:

www.liveibc.com/mma/

YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mx4-pSTVE_M

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/mmachennai/videos/2688386318084455/>



The response to the event was excellent. A larger number of viewers logged in live through Zoom, MMA Live webinar, YouTube and Facebook.

Total Number of Participants:

Zoom: 90

YouTube: 317

Facebook: 916

MMA Webinar: 170

Total number of participants at the event - 1493



The Partners – MMA, KAS and ORF

About Madras Management Association (MMA)

Madras Management Association (MMA) was established in 1956 with the prime objective of promoting management education, training and development activities in this part of the country. The vision of MMA is “To be the Fountainhead of World class Management Excellence in India”.

Over the past six decades, MMA has striven for development and nurturing management expertise, combining Indian ethos with International Management thoughts and practices. MMA has contributed immensely to the enhancement of management capability in this part of the country, and in particular Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. MMA has over 7000 corporate houses, industries, professionals, academics and executives on its rolls as members. MMA annually organizes about 725 executive development activities, including seminars for top management with a total participation of fifty nine thousand executives and entrepreneurs.

MMA is the largest affiliate association of All India Management Association (AIMA) in the country and has been adjudged as the Best Management Association in India by AIMA for ten times in a row including the “National Excellence Award” for the year 2017-18.

The activities of MMA are planned to achieve managerial excellence in the functioning of industries and professional managers in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. In this direction, MMA chapters have been established at various towns in Tamil Nadu mainly to cater to the needs of SMEs. Nine such MMA Local Chapters at Ambur, Attur, Erode, Hosur, Namakkal, Salem, Sri City, Trichy and Puducherry are functioning effectively.

Apart from corporate leaders, MMA has, in its Managing Committee, the Vice Chancellors of Madras University & Anna University, the Directors of IIT Madras and IFMR and the Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, as members.

OUR VISION

To be the Fountainhead of World Class Management Excellence in India

OUR MISSION

- Synthesise Indian Ethos with international management thought
- Be a reservoir of expertise in management
- Inspire individuals to actualise their potential
- Nurture creativity and originality

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About Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a German political foundation, with a strong presence throughout Germany and all over the world. Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic underlying principles of the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

With more than 100 offices abroad and projects in over 120 countries, it makes a unique contribution to the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and social market economy. To foster peace and freedom KAS encourages a continuous dialogue at the national and international levels.

Human beings in their distinctive dignity and with their rights and responsibilities are at the heart of its work. KAS is guided by the conviction that human beings are the starting point in the effort to bring about social justice and democratic freedom while promoting sustainable economic activity. By bringing people together who embrace their responsibilities in society, KAS develops active networks in the political and economic spheres as well as in society itself. The guidance it provides on the basis of political know-how and knowledge helps to shape the globalisation process along more socially equitable, ecologically sustainable and economically efficient lines.

KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, we seek to intensify political cooperation at the national and international levels on the foundations of our objectives and values. Together with our partners we contribute to the creation of an international order that enables every country to develop in freedom and under its own responsibility.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has organised its program priorities in India into the following working areas:

1. Foreign and Security Policy
2. Economic and Energy Policy
3. Rule of Law and local Self-Government
4. Social and Political Training and Development
5. Indo-German Parliamentary Dialogue programmes

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's India office takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner organisations who implement jointly curated projects and programmes.

About Observer Research Foundation (ORF)

The Beginning

ORF began its journey in 1990 at the juncture of ideation tempered by pragmatism. During the period of India's transition to a new engagement with the international economic order, several challenges emerged, evoking a need for an independent forum that could critically examine the problems facing the country and help develop coherent policy responses. ORF was thus formed, and brought together, for the first time, leading Indian economists and policymakers to present the agenda for India's economic reforms.

What We Are Today

Propelled by the process of reforms initiated in the 1990s, ORF, over the past 30 years of its existence, has effectively narrated and participated in India's story as the country has acquired an unmistakable global footprint. From primarily looking inward and engaging with domestic reforms, to gradually forging global partnerships, ORF today plays a seminal role in building political and policy consensus that enables India to interact with the world.

As new powers re-emerge onto the global stage, existing systems face challenges of agreeing on a new set of rules to control and regulate the new frontiers of space, the oceans, the internet and the human mind. The world continues, also, to navigate persisting concerns related to security and strategy, economy and development, energy and resources. As India begins to play a larger role in the 21st century, ORF continues to push normative boundaries, bring new ideas into the policy discourse and provide a platform to a new generation of thinkers. It is supported in its mission by leading intellectuals, academicians, policymakers, business leaders, institutions and civil society actors.

ORF's aim is to encourage voices from all quarters, geographies and gender, both those that fall in and those that question dominant narratives. It is this plurality of thought and voice — in a country of over a billion individuals — that ORF seeks to carry abroad, while simultaneously bringing contemporary global debates to India.

The Mandate

ORF seeks to lead and aid policy thinking towards building a strong and prosperous India in a fair and equitable world. It sees India as a country poised to play a leading role in the knowledge age — a role in which it shall be increasingly called upon to proactively ideate in order to shape global conversations, even as it sets course along its own trajectory of long-term sustainable growth.

ORF helps discover and inform India's choices. It carries Indian voices and ideas to forums shaping global debates. It provides non-partisan, independent, well-researched analyses and inputs to diverse decision-makers in governments, business communities, and academia and to civil society around the world.

Our mandate is to conduct in-depth research, provide inclusive platforms and invest in tomorrow's thought leaders today.

