



8<sup>th</sup> March 2020 was an exciting day for us, the AMSUK Women's Forum (WF) committee. Our first ever celebration of the monumental occasion, International Women's Day. Given its history, this important day caught our imagination as women, representing women and women's issues and aspirations in our community today.

Our preparatory stage included one face to face meeting as a committee; the rest was planned and prepared for remotely, thanks to modern technology and the all important unity towards achieving our objective. Events such as these help us to grow as a team and as individuals. We recognise and value each other's strengths and tasks are delegated accordingly. Added to this is an abundance of enthusiasm and positivity. We had a core event group that oversaw the careful planning and development of the event and the 'fine tuning' of matters, as we aimed for a truly memorable and thought provoking day at Sitara Hall, Wolverhampton.

We wanted to bring inspirational women together to motivate and inspire each other and to also have some individuals share their personal journeys. These were ordinary women with extraordinary achievements. Achievements that were possible because they each had a dream, a goal that spurred them on. Their stories to which we can somehow relate and realise that success is our perception of that very word, believing that "there is no limit to what we as women can accomplish".

There was a hiccup before the day in the form of uncertainty whether the event should indeed take place. This was the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic. After much discussion it was agreed that we go ahead with our event as the lockdown had not yet been imposed. We ensured that people were reminded of their responsibilities towards one another and reiterated that they follow the all important hand hygiene process. There were visual displays of this message too.

The programme began with a prayer and a moment's silence in memory of loved ones. This was followed by a warm welcome by our exuberant chairperson Roshniben. She also paid tribute to the inspirational past chairperson of the WF, late Rekhaben Shivam, who will be remembered with fondness for her substantial contribution to AMSUK WF.

Our ever supportive AMSUK President, Hasmukhbhai addressed us and wished us a successful event.



This was followed by talks from our guest speakers, all of whom had varied backgrounds and experiences, offering us a broad spectrum of information.

During the first of these, **Dinah Patel**, a Yoga teacher, led an interactive meditation session, reminding us of the need to focus, relax and make time for ourselves in today's busy world. She also informed us of the in-depth training that is required for her to practice and teach Yoga, which she is so passionate about because practicing it has a positive impact on lives.

**Nitisha Patel**, an award winning young chef and rising star in the food industry, inspired us with her enthusiasm for what she does. It takes continued dedication, determination and self-belief to achieve; was her message which was delivered through her quirky presentation. Nitisha's accomplishments include writing her own cookbook.

There was a poignant reminder of the fragility of life when we heard about a most inspirational lady from our community, the **late Dr Hasu Patel**. Her brother, Pravinbhai gave a presentation which perfectly portrayed the positivity that Dr Hasu brought to the world, as a leading Orthopaedic surgeon. Her dedication and resilience came to the fore when selflessly treating patients who were injured during the London bombings in 2005. She took her work home with her would be an understatement, as she made herself available to patients whenever they needed her, whatever the hour.

A respected elder of our samaj and past president of MYCA Wembley **Chandrakalaben N Patel** addressed us, sharing her 'pearls of wisdom'. She encouraged us to be united in moving forward and embracing change whilst keeping our rich culture at its heart. Her interest in the motivation and progress of our society and of women in particular, drives her to constantly strive to introduce things that reflect this. Chandrakalaben, is the epitome of dedication and selfless service to the community, a wonderful role model.

A lead nurse in the NHS, **Sandra Mutseyekwa** talked about her humble beginnings in Zimbabwe and her journey to success, portrayed via an uplifting PowerPoint presentation. Through life's ups and downs Sandra followed her dream to advance academically and professionally. She reminded us that despite progress we must endeavour not to lose sight of our roots; for that is what defines us. Be proud of who you are was one of her key points.



We had a professional beautician, **Jaineesha Patel** who took us through her journey of success which was spurred on by her incredibly supportive family. Feeling positive about ourselves is the important message she gave us and this is the mantra she follows.

We stopped for lunch, had a delicious meal prepared and served by the Wolverhampton Catering Team and had the opportunity of chatting to friends and acquaintances old and new.

Before long we reconvened, hearing from the final guest speaker of the day, **Bharti Patel** who is a respected child rights and social justice advocate. CE of a UK based children's charity, campaigning against child trafficking Bharti also campaigned for equal pay for women. Her hard hitting presentation was food for thought, making us sit up and want to make a difference in society.

Following this, we had a panel led discussion on the topic of 'Can Women Have It All'. The panellists for the discussion had varied life experiences.

**Hamel Patel** – a well known community member, Hamel was the youngest AMSUK President to date, a testament to his passion for our samaj. He is an ever supportive and enthusiastic member. With his commitment to progressing our young members he founded AMSUK Youth Forum. Having been EC Walsall youth leader, he is currently trustee of Walsall Youth.

**Sita Vinodkumar Patel** – a learning Support Assistant who has Spina Bifida and is wheelchair bound. Sita's disability has been no barrier and her inspirational achievements are many, including a degree in Business information Technology. She enjoys helping charities and getting involved in fund raising. Being ever supportive, her parents are a big part of her life. Her faith gives her strength. Sita's dream is to be a Paralympian.

**Kamaljit Kaur** – a self made business woman, host of a regular holistic TV show (Zee TV) sharing therapeutic stories, promoting emotional healing and wellbeing. Kamaljit received the Millemium Award for teaching Yoga and Meditation at The Beacon Centre for the Blind. She strongly believes that resilience and inner strength are what can help to overcome difficulties.



**Ruxmaniben Patel BEM** – a past President and well respected member of Mandhata Samaj Bolton. A tireless and passionate charity worker, Ruxmaniben is a valued member of the Community Voluntary Services. She is a recipient of the prestigious British Empire Medal for her services to charity. The community is extremely proud of her for this well deserved accolade.

**Champaben Chhitubhai Patel** – her passion for wanting others to learn and do their very best led her to teach Gujarati in our samaj as well as being a support teacher in mainstream schools. With an interest in art and culture she introduced rangoli to MYCA Wembley where she has been a member since its formation. A mother to five daughters, one of whom is disabled, Champaben is a positive, forward looking individual who believes in the potential of women.

The panellists gave their views on the topic and the discussion was opened to the floor. There was enthusiastic audience participation with interesting and varied opinions. Translation, where needed, was given. We do need a smoother approach to this, as it is important to be mindful of catering for and maintaining a balance between dual languages. In general, the audience believed that women had to work harder to achieve their potential, but 'women can have it all'. This however depended upon what women thought 'having it all' means.

Our finale of the day was a truly fun filled Bollywood session with **Jaimini Patel**. Most of us took to the floor as Jaimini enthusiastically demonstrated her professional moves and had us all dancing to lively tunes. The beats of the dhol, expertly played by **Shreya Patel**, added rhythm and further enjoyment to our new best pastime!

We have taken on board feedback put up on our 'Comments Tree' as we strongly believe that the input of our attendees is the stepping stone **of** progress. We look forward to planning our next event as soon as we are able to and implementing some of these comments.

We are extremely grateful to the President Fatehbhai and members of GA Wolverhampton whose valuable input, from technology set up by Nareshbhai, hall décor by Sunita and Manisha to those who patiently and willingly gave us the help and guidance required, leading up to the day and on the day itself. Thank you one and all.



The day proved popular with up to 400 attendees and in conclusion, Roshniben thanked everyone for their support and for the important part they played in the success of our celebration of International Women's Day 2020.

We are ever grateful for the continued support and encouragement given to us by the AMSUK Executive Committee. It is extremely gratifying to see you our members attend our events. This spurs us on to do more for women in our community. Thank you so much to all the wonderful, supportive men in our lives too.

Let us celebrate women as we echo the words "The world needs strong women. Women who will lift and build others, who will love and be loved. Women who live bravely, both tender and fierce. Women of indomitable will."