

From the Board

Women and Water Have More in Common Than the Letter W!

Water is a woe and a misery to more than 50 percent of the Indian population, and women bear the brunt of it more than men—especially in rural India where women must walk miles together to fetch just 20 litres (two pots full) of water for their family!

Having shared the grim reality, and because International Women's Day (March 8) was held this month, let me draw out a silver lining and bring in a pinch of optimism by sharing a few stories of water women (wonder women) who have made a difference in their world and the world of water in India!

MEET SWETHA (SOUTH INDIA)



Though small-framed at 5 ft, 3 in tall, Swetha packs 39 years of energy and passion into everything she does. An environmental engineer by education, Swetha oversees environmental health and safety at Akzo Nobel. Swetha is passionate about bikes, and she rides a Royal Enfield Thunderbird. She has covered 7,000 km (4,350 miles) across India in just four years. She is proud to have driven across the highest motorable road in the world!

What's unique about Swetha is that while she and her friends engage in speed and distance challenges, they ensure they contribute to society. Her rides take her to faraway places and rural India. Swetha has reached out and contributed immensely in terms of educating girls and women on environmental health and safety, better water practices, and how people can be self-sufficient by considering and reusing water. She also takes pride in providing relief to the poor.

Working with a multinational company; managing a home, husband, and two kids (twins); and living her life biking in India makes Swetha the iron lady she is!

MEET MANASPITA DALAI (EAST INDIA)



Manaspita is diminutive but only in size. She is a dynamo—an electrical engineer and an expert in instrumentation and supervisory control and data acquisition system operation.

Manaspita started her career as an electrical engineer at Degremont, and she has dedicated herself to operating and maintaining water facilities for the last 15 years. Currently she works with Marubeni, heading the electrical and instrumentation team for a water utility in Doha, Qatar.

Managing water utilities while raising a family and working in adverse—even hostile—circumstances (it isn't easy for women to be appreciated in the Middle East) is what makes Manaspita the wonder woman she is!

MEET MRUDULA DESHPANDE (WEST INDIA)



Mrudula is a civil engineer from a family of doctors, and she was determined to provide public health solutions. She has worked on rural water distribution schemes funded by the World Bank in India.

Then she moved to the United States, where she modeled urban water supply for Canton, Ohio, and got a master's degree in environmental engineering from the University of Akron. Her job at a large consulting firm got her involved in designing water/wastewater plants and land disposal projects in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. She was instrumental in assessing plants that were more than 100 years old!

Mrudula spent 13 years in the United States before moving back to India, where she continued her good work in association with several companies like Thames Water, Severn Trent Water, and Scottish Water. She felt the need in India was to maximize the potential of existing treatment plants, so she started doing environmental audits to improve the efficiency of water assets. She

has been addressing water scarcity challenges and advocating water reuse.

Apart from all this, Mrudula teaches environmental engineering and environmental impact assessment to environmental engineers and scientists in her home city of Pune, India. She also reaches out to schools and children in addition to volunteering with AWWA, the Water Environment Federation, and Water for People, all of which make her the wonder woman she is!

MEET AMITA BHATNAGAR (NORTH INDIA)



Amita is a fiery north Indian who has dedicated her life to water consulting. She is presently working with Fitchner Consultants and has more than 25 years of experience in water management. What makes

Amita stand out is her equal dedication to her family and the water community. She has been instrumental in launching AWWA-India and is now on a sabbatical from volunteering because of family commitments. Her passion and energy to the water world make her the water woman she is!

MEET THE AUTHOR



And lastly (and not so humbly), I'd like to introduce myself, Shilpa Sudheendra, this column's author. I'm proud to be a woman, a single mom, and a dedicated water professional for the last 20 years.

I hold a bachelor's degree in environmental engineering and am a working water professional and on the AWWAIndia board. What makes me special is my passion for water and the people of India. I have been working in business development and sales and marketing in India's water sector for the last 15 years, so I know there are few women working in this sector. I encourage more women to come forth and contribute to AWWAIndia's mission to make a better India through better water!