

# women top50<sup>®</sup>

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## **Kanimozhi Karunanidhi**

Member of  
Parliament India  
Representing  
Thoothukkudi  
constituency in the  
Lok Sabha



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My tenure  
perhaps was  
during the  
most difficult time  
in the history of  
the organization



# women top50<sup>TM</sup>

## PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER WOMEN

GLOBAL CONFERENCE  
18TH JUNE 2022  
Le Méridien Dubai



**Mayanthi Fernando**  
Hon. ExCo Secretary  
Top50 Conference Chair



"Women Leadership  
and Women in Boards"  
**Shehara De Silva**  
An International Communication  
Specialist and Brand builder



"Bilateral Trade between  
Sri Lanka & UAE"  
**Mr. Muhammed Riza**  
Chairman  
Sri Lanka Business Council  
Dubai & North Emirates



**Anjali Goonetilake**  
Top50 Conference  
Deputy Chair

### "Superpower Shift – Women in Politics & Diplomacy"



**Hon. Kanimozhi  
Karunanidhi**  
Member of Parliament,  
Representing Thoothukkudi  
constituency in the  
Lok Sabha India



**Dr. Edita Tahiri**  
Leader of the independence  
of Kosovo. Former Deputy  
Prime Minister and Minister  
of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo.  
Chief Peace Negotiator



**Hon. Dr. Sudarshani  
Fernandopulle**  
Member of Parliament



**Dr. Mariyam Shakeela**  
Honorary Consul of Belgium in Maldives;  
Former Cabinet Minister in Maldives,  
CEO SIMDI



**Dr. Sulochana Segera**  
Founder/Chairperson  
Panel Chair

### "How Great Leaders Deal with Challenging People"



**Esra Kivrak**  
Vice Chair of WILAT/ Turkey  
Senior Consultant/ IFC  
CEO / PL Food



**Kasturi Chellaraja Wilson**  
Executive Director Group CEO  
Hejmas Holdings PLC



**Pramila Acharya Rijal**  
Founder President-  
South Asian Women  
Development Forum



**Shamira Mitha**  
Founder and Managing Director,  
VERVE Marketing & Communications



**Venkatesh Mahadevan**  
Tech Evangelist,  
Peak Performance Coach,  
Mentorist, & Lifestyle Coach  
Panel Chair

### "Diversity, Inclusion & Gender Fluidity"



**Dr. Mohan Kaul**  
Founder & Chairman  
Global Equality Alliance (UK)



**Hon. Eran Wickramaratne**  
Member of the Parliament  
Sri Lanka  
& Former CEO NDB Bank  
Chairman ICTA



**Janecke Aarnaes**  
International Educator



**Ngozi Oyewole M.IoD**  
Founder NOXIE Limited  
President  
Strategic Women and Youth Institute  
Nigeria



**Aparna Bajpai**  
BeingShe | Founder & CEO  
Panel Chair



My past and  
my present is  
my  
inspiration

**Dr. Sulochana Segera**

Founder & Chairperson Women in Management

**S**he is the Founder and Chairperson of Women in Management (Sri Lanka, Maldives, Canada and Australia). She is the Founder of the Women in Management, Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards (Sri Lanka and Maldives). She is the Founder of the Next Gen Awards Sri Lanka. She makes it her mission in life to travel to the most rural villages across the island and discover who she calls ‘Diamonds in the Rough.’ She polishes these diamonds till they become successful entrepreneurs; she trains them, she grooms them, she opens new doors for them and she helps them grow their businesses beyond their village borders. Her efforts have single-handedly encouraged organizations in the country to follow a more inclusive leadership in their top tier management. She is a certified Personality Development Trainer in Asia and is also a trainer for IFC, a World Bank subsidiary, on ‘Sustainable Private Sector Investment.’ She is also the official Trainer for ‘5 by 20’ an initiative by Coca Cola to empower five million women across Sri Lanka. She is also

a Trainer for the British Council initiative, ‘Active Citizen.’ She is the Host of the popular Online Talk Show, ‘Plain T with Sulo’ aired on Lankadeepa Online and Daily Mirror Online. She is the Managing Director of Deep International (PVT) LTD and she also has a PHD in Women Empowerment from the Global University of California, USA. She is the Patron of Project T.E.A, a UK based initiative aimed at empowering Sri Lankan children. She is also a Member of the Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Skills Development, Employment and Labor, Sri Lanka. She is the first entrepreneur in the country to open a free food-kitchen across multiple locations in Colombo, serving healthy free breakfast for underprivileged citizens from 6:00 am to 8:00am. Her goal in life is to empower women and children across the world starting from Sri Lanka. Her days are spent motivating and guiding women in all aspects of their lives. Changing their lives and seeing them succeed brings a smile to her face. Her entire life has been dedicated to helping women succeed in their careers.

**Passionate, astute, innovative, observant, courageous, diligent and empathetic; her heart rules over her mind. She knows ‘She Can’ and all ‘Women Can’ and hence her sole purpose in life is to make all women believe that ‘They Can.’ My guest this week is Dr. Sulochana Segera, a Sri Lankan Superhero!**

**What are the most important attributes of successful entrepreneurs and leaders today?**

Motivation: You need to bring love, passion and enthusiasm to everything you do. Creativity: Professional or Entrepreneur, if you are not willing and able to bring new thinking to the table, you are not going to be successful. Persuasiveness: You need to master the art of negotiation and be able to convince your superiors, clients and society. Vision: Successful professionals and entrepreneurs always keep one eye on the big picture. Versatility: Be prepared

to go beyond your qualifications and be ready to go beyond your job description. Risk Tolerance: There is no success without risk. Be prepared to take risks and be ready to be held accountable for its success and failures too. Flexibility: Be receptive to other people’s need, opinions, and ideas and be open to feedback from others.

**Where do you see Women In**



**Management, in the next five years?**

In the next five years WIM will expand in to being an entity that advocates and promotes new career opportunities and international entrepreneurship for both men and women.

**How did you move forward when everyone kept telling you that your suggestions or ideas won’t work?**

I think we should first remember that only ten percent have the power to make us feel that we have failed or will be failing in our ideas, ninety percent of that power remains within us. I focus more on that ninety percent, and start believing in my ability to make anything a success. I have never had any second plans in my life. Second options mean that we doubt our first option and we have no faith in our first option.

**How do you differentiate yourself?**

I don’t. I think everyone is special and unique. My only special ability is that I can maintain a smile on my face even when I am in pain and I can keep moving forward despite being hurt. I never keep hate or anger in my heart. I prefer to forgive and move on.

### What is your 'why'?

I found my purpose as a young, single mother. My why is my children and they are the sole reason I am motivated to change lives and empower other women.

### Who do you look up to for inspiration or mentorship?

My past and my present is my inspiration, and my mentors are the people who criticize me and my work; they unknowingly act as guide to show me where I need improvement. When I need inspiration, I simply interact with rural, hardworking women; they inspire me to keep moving forward.

### Your biggest regret?

Taking a WIM member and considering her to be a part of my family, and allowing her to use me and betray me for the second time in my life.

### One mistake you have made in life?

Loving someone unconditionally without knowing the consequences.

### How do you keep your team motivated despite conflicts and obstacles?

Accepting them as they are and respecting them for who they are. Every human being needs to be accepted and respected, and if a team leader practices that, a team will be self-motivated and will deliver the desired results.

### What has been the highlight of your career so far?

Being able to make a positive change in the lives of many Sri Lankan women and being able to take a Sri Lankan brand international within a decade.

If you could go back and tell yourself one thing before beginning your career what would it be? Money matters and hence never feel shy to ask for your worth.

### What was the biggest rookie mistake you made when just starting out?

Thought women should only choose Secretary positions and hence got myself qualified as a Secretary.

### Where do you see yourself ten years from now?

Hosting an International Awards Ceremony for Women across the globe!

### How did you balance being a mother and professional?



What have you sacrificed (both personally and professionally) at each stage of your career? I don't believe in labeling it as a 'balancing act.' To me it's a matter of empowerment; I empower myself and my children. I always made sure my children were given their own responsibilities to manage. They understand my work and they have become a part of my work. I never sacrificed on any important days in my children's lives or schooling careers. I, nevertheless, sacrificed my youth and my hobbies for them, and I have zero regrets.

### What is the best and worst decision you've ever made?

My best and worst are the same; getting divorced and choosing to be a single mother.

### What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership and entrepreneurship?

Lack of support from her own gender and family. This needs to be addressed and discussed more openly at forums.

### What woman inspires you and why?

My daughter, Malintha inspires me. She grew up in a single parent household without a father and yet she never looked upon that as a reason to be miserable. She never complained and never allowed other people to judge her or make her feel any less. She instead chose to work hard and carve a niche for herself. She is determined to make a mark in the world, and she continues to chase after her goals. She was also always a great pillar

of strength to her brother, Malinda. From a young age she balanced her studies, her start-up business and her dancing. She is my biggest strength and source of inspiration.

### What will be the biggest challenge for the generation of women behind you?

More women are getting themselves educated and are fast becoming more qualified than men. Hence, in the near future we will have women earning more money than men and if men don't shift their attitudes and egos this could result in jealousy and an increase in domestic violence.

### How do you want to be remembered one day?

A woman who lived her life according to her own rules.

### What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

Don't look for individual success, instead focus on team success, and you will achieve long-term sustainable success.

### What does success mean to you?

For me success is being happy and going to bed without any regrets.

**Source :**  
"She Can" Daily Mirror  
Interview by Rishini Weeraratne



**Mr. Muhammed Riza**  
Chairman



**Mr. Ravi Varma**  
Vice Chairman



**Mr. Tariq Qureshi**  
Director Business  
Development

# The Board of the Sri Lanka Business Council in Dubai & Northern Emirates



**Mr. Kethiswaram  
Singaravel**  
Director Events



**Mr. Ranil De Silva**  
Director Finance



**Mr. Kapila Karunarathne**  
Director Public Relations



**Mr. Dunstan Rozairo**  
Director Memberships



**Ms. Hashini Kannangara**  
Director Secretary



**Mr. Ram Mohan Pillai**  
Director External Affairs



The Sri Lankan Business Council (SLBC) in Dubai and the Northern Emirates considers it a privilege to team up with Women in Management (WIM) in showcasing this global event in Dubai. We trust this event will motivate and encourage the participants as well as the organizing team. We wish for an eventful conference and an awards evening to celebrate talent, accomplishment, resilience, and reinvention.

Women in Management, since its inception in 2009, has been growing not just in numbers but also in terms of global reach. Having recognized over 520 women for their outstanding accomplishments in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Canada and now in Dubai, the WIM Top50 Global Conference and Awards is truly an international event.

On the global stage, today, Dubai is a fusion of multiple cultures, where more than 190 nationalities from across the globe gather to do business and enjoy

great living. Against this backdrop, the decision by the organizers to host the event in Dubai, which has now become a truly global city, is commendable. We, at SLBC, sincerely hope that WIM has found yet another home in Dubai that will certainly be beneficial for the organization as well as for Dubai and the United Arab Emirates in the years to come.

It all started way back in 2015 when SLBC hosted the visiting delegation of the WIM team along with Dr. Sulochana Segera. During this time, the idea of hosting the event in Dubai was discussed. The following year, our immediate past Chairman Mr. Suren Swaminathan along with WIM finalized the idea of bringing the celebrations to Dubai. Today, we are witnessing those plans becoming a reality.

We are pleased to see that the theme chosen for this inaugural event is Resilience and Reinvention. It is a fitting one not just for women, but for all and especially for Dubai, UAE, and Sri Lanka. Both these nations have continued to demonstrate their ability to be resilient and bounce back from adversity through the years. We believe, events like this will inspire in us resilience not just for individual success but also for economies and nations.

We are gathering to recognize, nurture,

appreciate and encourage talent and accomplishments. Here, the primary focus is on women. For most, life has taught us that some of the most accomplished people we meet are mostly women either in our professional or personal lives. It is just that, at times, the tangible recognition for them, comes a bit later in life. Initiatives such as this will ensure that those who demonstrate exemplary attributes will receive timely recognition.

Like many, we too at SLBC have been eagerly awaiting the conference and the awards night. I, on behalf of the Board and the members of the Sri Lankan Business Council, wish WIM, its chairperson, and the organizing team every success. Going forward, we sincerely hope, we will find yet another home for WIM for this initiative in the UAE.

We take this opportunity to appreciate the participants, congratulate the winners, and thank the speakers, panel of judges, and the organizing team.

Good luck and thank you.

**Muhammed Riza**

Chairman

Sri Lankan Business Council – Dubai  
and the Northern Emirates

## Message from the Sri Lankan Business Council



# Media Launch of the Top50 Global Awards at the Hotel Pullman Dubai Creek City Centre





11 Women Top 50



# Easpethi

Daspethi is a Sri Lankan product designed by an island girl for women who are interested in wellness, **local crafts** and **natural healing** methods.

Daspethi is popular for staying off-beat with a twist of **modernism**. All designs are locally crafted, and personalized. It's an independent concept infused of Sri Lankan **indigenous medicine** and local craft business who works to their core values, who supports home gardening and planting trees.



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It was indeed my privilege to serve as the Chair of the Panel of Judges of the Top50 Professional Women Global Awards being held in Dubai on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

The Top50 Awards which originated in Sri Lanka and now operational in a few other countries goes global with this event and endeavours to recognize women, men and organisations that have championed diversity in their daily lives and have achieved much despite the biases prevalent in the environment today.

The winners today have achieved truly remarkable heights in their chosen fields and have contributed much towards the communities in which they operate and through that to the global society. They have paved the way for many and cleared many barriers the future generations would have otherwise faced.

The purpose of these Awards is not only to recognize what they have done and have achieved, but also to provide a platform to inspire the younger generation and guide them to do and be better – something the world is in need of. Therefore, I invite all who are being recognized tonight to please continue the good work and be and be seen as a beacon of hope to the young.

**Congratulations to all winners – you truly are special!**

Congratulations to the applicants, nominees and the shortlisted – thank you for all the good work you do daily. The world is a better place because of you!

**Many blessing to all!  
Roshanie  
Jayasundera-Moares**



## Message from the Chair of the Panel of Judges



The Global Banking & Finance Awards® UK announced Dr. Sulochana Segera as the winner of 'Business Woman of the Year Sri Lanka'. 2020 marks the first time a Sri Lankan female entrepreneur has been recognized as a winner of the Awarded and listed on the Global Banking & Finance Review website. Dr. Segera was listed as one of the ten most Influential People in Sri Lanka 2020 by the LNW website.

One of Sri Lanka's top social entrepreneurs, trainers and motivational speakers with over 24 years of experience, Dr. Segera is the Chairperson of the global brand Women in Management (WIM). The umbrella brand is mother to projects like 'Professional Career Woman Awards' and the 'WIM Single Mother' which has been instrumental in changing the national mindset towards recognizing, celebrating and motivating female entrepreneurship.

She is mostly known in the industry as a corporate trainer for multinationals with a passion towards rural and urban upliftment of standards of living, education and skill development. Her personal trajectory is very much linked to the growth of the brand WIM which started as a female empowerment initiative and gradually progressed into a global platform. In the arena of MSME and SME sector Dr. Sulochana Segera is considered a mentor, counsellor and an investor of good will, as she most often becomes the one to travel to rural areas and

discovers what she calls "diamonds in the rough". Her efforts have encouraged boards to follow a more inclusive leadership in their top tier management structures. She claims that all recipients of the Wim Top50 award in Sri Lanka are inspirational and astute corporate leaders who have endured many challenges and continue to be examples to so many in their roles as leaders with a work-life balance. She is a certified on IFC-LPI Trainer Performance Monitoring & Assessment (TPMA) and Trainer on IFC-LPI TPMA. A certified Personality Development Trainer in Asia, Dr. Segera is a trainer for the World Bank entity IFC on the area 'Sustainable Private Sector Investment' whilst in the private sector for the top Global multinational- Coca Cola the official trainer for the brand '5 by 20' which is an initiative for the development of 5 million women by way of empowerment and Economic Development. She is also a trainer for British Council 'Active Citizen' project. She is the Patron of the T.E.A Project, (UK Based Project in Sri Lanka empowering Children) and she also sits in the Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Skill Development, Employment and Labour Relations. She launched the First Sri Lankan Inspirational Women Calendar for year 2022 featuring 12 women leaders representing business, politics, careers, professions, social activities etc., Dr. Segera was recently appointed to the Advisory Committee of the Global Equality Standard developed by GEA in United Kingdom. She also heads the Sri Lankan project of Her Majesty the Queen's seventy years of service and leadership.



**R**oshanie counts close to 40 years in the corporate sector in Sri Lanka and has worked across some of the large conglomerates in the country; Browns Group, Aitken Spence and John Keells Holdings (JKH), with over 30 years at JKH and at the time of retirement was an Executive Vice President of the John Keells Group.

She has extensive experience in travel, tourism, airline representation, loyalty/rewards programmes, quick service restaurants, retail, malls and property development.

She is currently the CEO of Link Natural Products Pvt Ltd of the CIC Group, an independent non-executive director of Kelsey Developments Ltd of the Janashakthi Group and of Child Action Lanka, a charity organization.

She holds an MBA from the Post Graduate Institute of Management of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and is a Fellow member of both, CIM and CIMA (UK).

**Roshanie Jayasundera Moraes**  
Chair of Panel of Judges



**F**ounder and Chairman of Global Equality Alliance, Dr Mohan Kaul is a champion of international trade, investment, and emerging markets, as well as a recognised policy advisor, business leader, social entrepreneur, and academic. His achievements include being a member of the UN Secretary-General's Management Efficiency Group, conducting as the World Bank adviser the first evaluation of Nobel Laureate Mohammed Yunus' world famous Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. He had the honour to address a special session of the UN General Assembly on Public Management.

Dr. Kaul was a professor and later Dean at the prestigious Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad. He previously held the position of United Nations Adviser and Senior diplomat and Director of management Development at the commonwealth Secretariat and the founder Director-General and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth Business Council. He has also been member of board of directors of ICICI Bank (UK), UK India Business Council (UKIBC), World Bank Africa Virtual University and Royal Overseas League. He is also currently President of the Indian Partnership Forum, a leading UK think tank formed in the aftermath of Brexit, a member of Board of directors of Crown Agents Foundation, Liveryman of city Of London and Chairman of Promake Ltd. His detailed profile is on [www.kaul.co.uk](http://www.kaul.co.uk).

**Dr Mohan Kaul**  
Founder and Chairman of Global Equality Alliance



**S**uren Swaminathan a 30-year veteran Insurance professional. UAE Resident.

A Life and qualifying Member of the Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT) The Premier Association of Financial Professionals and Qualified Member of the Top of The Table (The highest Tier of Qualification) A Certified Hotel Administrator, An entrepreneur in the UAE, Suren is the immediate past Chairman of the Sri Lanka Business Council in the UAE

Suren Swaminathan



**H**.E. Dr. Edna Joyce Santos is presently the Head of the Department of Ophthalmology at Union Medical and Dental Center in Ras AL Khaimah, United Arab Emirates. She is currently Chairperson and M.D. of Intratribal Healthcare at Sirach Health & Wellness Ministry in Tucson, Arizona. H.E. Dr. Edna Joyce Santos is an accomplished and dedicated ophthalmologist for the past 29 years. She pioneered the establishment of the Southern Tagalog Society of Ophthalmology where she received numerous citations and awards for various eye missions during her term as President. She is a Psychologist at Sirach Health & Wellness, also an active student of the Ancient Laws of Life, ever seeking, ever evolving. HE Dr. Edna Joyce Santos She was also the Past President of the Philippine Medical Women’s Association, Lucena-Quezon Chapter for four years. She has published a book entitled “Are You Crazy?”. She also co-authored a book with Jack Canfield entitled “Success Mastery”. Both are available in Amazon. She has 2 new books ready to be launched, entitled “Dearly Beloved” and “Sohni”, a biography of Wolfgang Christoph, life coach. She is an international reviewer for various journals in ophthalmology including the Journal of Ocular Therapeutics and Pharmacology. She is official mandate and brand Ambassador for the UAE, Middle East, Africa and Asia for various corporations.

Dr. Joyce is involved in humanitarian projects as Global Goodwill Ambassador and is the project fund coordinator for the ICT and Coding Initiatives for Africa and Adult Literacy Program in Africa. She is also into a lot of research and is very supportive of the new tele- ophthalmology project and Bulbi Web which she has integrated in her clinic, the first ever disruptive technology of its kind in the world in the field of Ophthalmology. She is collaborating with Dr. James Socks in bringing the research on bioengineered Cornea to the UAE as well. 2021 and going forward HE Dr. Edna Joyce Santos has been appointed as the Ambassador of Islamic Affairs & State additionally appointed as Senior Advisor to the Royal Crown Council Antiquities Imperial Kingdom Nation of YHWH-Tribe of YHDH/YQN.

H.E. Dr. Edna Joyce Santos



**P**rof. Ravi Dissanayake is a Senior Lecturer attached to the Department of Marketing Management, Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies, University of Kelaniya. He obtained his first degree in Marketing Management from the University of Kelaniya and subsequently completed his MBA at Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM), University of Sri Jayawardanepura. He obtained his first doctorate, Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), from European University Business School, Switzerland. He completed his 2nd doctoral study (PhD) in Taylor's University, Malaysia in the field of strategic brand management. His major teaching areas for undergraduate and postgraduate programs are Marketing Management, Brand Management, Strategic Management and Services Marketing. He is a visiting faculty for many local and international university programmes conducted in Sri Lanka and offshores. Currently, he serves as the Director to Centre for Brand Image Development of University of Kelaniya as well. He has published more than 95 research papers in international and local journals whilst served as a research scholar and editorial members for 6 international journals. Dr. Ravi Dissanayake is a corporate trainer, and he has served for nearly 35 companies in Sri Lanka as a trainer and consultant for different assignments.

His national level contributions include the service he rendered as the Chairman to Strategic ThinkTank of "Brand Sri Lanka Project" (2017-2018) coordinated by Export Development Board (EDB) of Sri Lanka. Additionally, he contributes his service to Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM) as a member of the Panel of Judges in EFFIE Award from 2017 up to date. He is a member of the jury of "NCE Export Awards" organized by National Chamber of Exporters of Sri Lanka up to date.



**Prof. Ravi Dissanayake**

**D**unston, COO to the private office of HH Shiekh Ahamed Bin Saisal Al Qassimi is a well versed and versatile personality who was in corporate leadership roles with multinationals for almost 30 years.

With a vast experience in business excellence he became an entrepreneur at the age of 46 and had been on a successful journey since then. He received the national award for business excellence in 2018 and state award in 2019.

With his vast experience in global relationship, he has taken up this challenging assignment, with the private office to make it one of the most acclaimed and accepted business organization in the world.

He is also a god humanitarian is serving as an ambassador to 10 NGO organizations across the world.



**Dunston Periera**



**S**hehara is an international Communications and branding specialist with over 30 years experience in media, marketing, strategic planning, advocacy and competitiveness consultancy. She has several years experience in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and East Asian markets with a proven record in high impact re-imaging and communications strategies. She has, C suite / senior advisory level posts in private, multinational, government and I/NGO environments. She has strong change management and CSR experience. She is currently on the board of several Trusts and Companies.

**Shehara De Silva**

**V**enkatesh Mahadevan has extensive and progressive work experience in leadership positions with top Fortune 100 companies such as Motorola, Coca-Cola, and Procter & Gamble. He has led Digital Transformation programs at global corporations and been a part of the Transformation leadership team. His background includes extensive exposure in managing Strategic initiatives, Planning, Establishing, Directing technology programs and leading IT functions spanning multiple geographies. During his professional career across several industries, including FMCG, Telecom & Retail, he has held several leadership positions and been a member of the Executive Committee, serving on Leadership Boards. Prior to joining Dubai Investments, Venkatesh was in a Technology leadership position @Motorola where he was instrumental in implementing key strategic technology initiatives across the APAC Region and a Key member of the Global Supplier Management Leadership Team, accountable for driving Strategic Relationships with Global / Strategic vendors/Partners out of India. An MBA and a Research Scholar, he is the recipient of 'CXO 50' and several CIO leadership awards. He is also a recipient of the "Peter Drucker Award" for outstanding achievements in the field of Management. He is an accomplished "ENERGY and Peak Performance" Speaker, and a "Premier Skills Coach". In addition to holding several prestigious certifications from accomplished international organizations, Venkatesh is also a Mentor at the "Columbia University" New York - Center for Technology and Management. He is an Internationally Qualified Counsellor and a distinguished Guest Faculty at leading Management institutes, where he mentors Engineering and Management students. Venkatesh has his own Podcast called "ZenPod", where he features from different talks of life, with a purpose to build an empowered ecosystem. He also anchors an online show, "Titan Talks", which is hosted on global tech forums.



**Venkatesh Mahadevan**

**P**rofessor Dr Selvaraj Oyyan Pillay received his PhD in Biochemical Genetics from the Department of Genetics and Cellular Biology, University of Malaya in 1977. He is a trained scientist in the field of animal and population genetics, has worked closely with the Australian Centre for Agricultural Research from 1988 to 2002, and has represented Malaysia in the Steering Committee of the International Network for Genetics and Aquaculture from 1994 to 2004. Professor Selvaraj was one of the team members to the South Pole Scientific Expedition mission in 1992. The Expedition was organised by Akademi Sains Malaysia and the Australian Antarctic Mission. Professor Selvaraj joined Open University Malaysia in May 2005 to spearhead Institute of Professional Development (IPD-OUM) and the School of Lifelong Learning (SOLL). Since then IPD-OUM and SOLL revenues have grown two folds annually, Professor Selvaraj has led the group on its major strategic initiative to expand into extensive network nation-wide and overseas. Prior joining Open University Malaysia, Professor Selvaraj was the Deputy Director in University Malaya spearheading Centre of Continuing Education from 1990 to April 2005. As the Vice-President at the Centre for Continuing Professional Education, Taylor's University (Taylor's CPE) in 2014, he has been responsible in transforming the outlook of Taylor's CPE and re-positioning CPE in the corporate world.

#### Current Positions :

He is currently the Chief Executive Officer of IMEC EDUCATION and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) Learning Centre Kuala Lumpur. Representing TTT New Zealand in the coordinating Asian Development Bank (ADB) / World Bank (WB) funded Capacity Development training and study visit programmes for public sectors from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Cambodia. Council Member of Education Board, Master Builders Association of Malaysia (From 2014 to 2018) Deputy Mission Leader – British High Commission Study Visit to Scotland & England. A Mission on studying Technical Vocational Training Programmes from November 2017 to March 2018. President - St. Anthony's School Old Boys Association from 2018 to 2022 Promoting STEMSEL Education in Indonesia and Malaysia (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, Social Enterprise Learning). Vice President (Education) –One Belt One Road South East Asian NGO's Alliance (OBORSEANA) 2018-2021 Distinguish Professor and International Academic Consultant, Hengxing University, Shandong Province, China – October 2020 -2022 Representing Klaspad Plc UK and Futarium Blockchain UK for Malaysia. Chairman Astana Damansara Management Council 2019-2021



**Prof. Dr. Selvaraj Oyyan**

She's from Ogun State in Nigeria. She's a trained Accountant from LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA. She had 12 years of banking experience with former OCEANIC BANK PLC NIGERIA (Now ECO BANK PLC) and FIRST CITY MONUMENT BANK PLC NIGERIA. She's a mother, Wife, Child of God and a very Hardworking business woman. She's a Serial preneur with her own companies in both LAGOS, Nigeria and Dubai, UAE. She's currently the: \*MD/CEO SHOLSKONCEPT EVENT MANAGEMENT., \*FOUNDER OF BUSINESS INNOVATION ACADEMY., \*VICE-PRESIDENT LUXURYFLATS APARTMENT, FOUNDER/PUBLISHER LADIES IN BUSINESS MAGAZINE GLOBAL. \*FOUNDER AFRICA CHANGE MOVEMENT UAE

On the part of the magazine publication, Adeshola has distinguished the magazine vision and mission that is meant for both ladies and women in business Globally. And also for entrepreneurs, business starters, intending business owners, laid-off workers, housewives, undergraduates, young female leaders and upcoming ladies in the business. The Ladies in Business Magazine Global has a huge difference when compared amongst other women publications. Apart from the great content, it is very creative, colourfull and inspiring. It comes with great positive impact on the readers. It also provides freelance opportunities for business promotions to average young female business owners around the world. The magazine also create necessary avenues and platforms for them to be SEEN, HEARD and RECOGNIZED. She initiated S.H.E AWARDS AFRICA from Nigeria in 2019. The award is meant to recognize, appreciate and reward female entrepreneurs globally. Even those in the corporate world are not left out. And now, she has started S.H.E AWARDS in UAE. Her Academy, Business Innovation Academy initiative is in collaboration with the Business Research and Development (BRAD)U.K. It is a training academy in the UK that equips business starters and entrepreneurs with the right tools and certification required to survive the tough business climate. Therefore, for every candidates that attends the Academy will get certified from BRAD and also such candidates are members automatically. She's the Founder/Pioneer of AFRICA CHANGE MOVEMENT in UAE. First of it's kind in UAE. Setting up the platform for Africans in UAE to find their balance upon arriving or living in UAE. Through several activities and initiatives Ideas to protect and project Africa positively in UAE. Especially the vulnerable young girls who are displaced and involved with Sex Trafficking, Modern Slavery and Prostitution. All these and many more she intend to make right through AFRICA CHANGE MOVEMENT. By initiating MISS/MRS AFRICA IN UAE.



**D**inesh Weerakkody is Chairman of Cornucopia Sri Lanka and Director of several companies including GlaxoSmithKline (Consumer) Sri Lanka . He is a former Chairman of Hatton National Bank PLC , Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC, the Employees' Trust Fund Board of Sri Lanka, the International Chamber of Commerce Sri Lanka, the National Human Resource Development Council of Sri Lanka. He was also an Advisor to the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs and the Minister of Tourism Development . He was also the Chairman of the Government -appointed Committee to review the Banking Sector and NBFIs consolidation and the Committee appointed to review the budgetary allocation for Education. He is also a former Director of DFCC Bank , Hemas Holdings PLC and Ceylon Tobacco PLC. Mr. Weerakkody is a Graduate in Business Administration ( Advanced Diploma) from ABE UK, a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (UK) and the Certified Management Accountants of (Sri Lanka), and a Professional Member of the Singapore Human Resource Institute and holds an MBA from the University of Leicester, United Kingdom.

He is also a IPM HR senior Certified professional (USA) . He was conferred an honorary membership by the Institute of Personnel Management of Sri Lanka in 2008 for contribution to HR. Dinesh was also conferred a Doctorate in Business Administration ( honoris causa) from the American National Business University USA. Mr. Weerakkody is a Council Member of the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, Immediate Past Chairman International Chamber of Commerce and the Vice President of the Sri Lanka Institute of Directors of Sri Lanka and was a Member of the CIMA Asia Pac Industry Advisory Board and Vice President of Sri Lanka Tennis and is a member of the Sri Lanka Cricket Financial Advisory Body. He is a recipient of many national awards and an Author of six books and is a business commentator . He is a recipient of Sri Lanka National Honours - in 2019.



**Dinesh Weerakkody**

John T. Baier entered the insurance business while still attending Seton Hall University. Following graduation he continued to work as an agent for New York Life. After serving military duty as an Artillery Officer in the Army, John re-entered his career in the insurance business and became an Assistant Manager. During this time, he hosted a weekly television show covering insurance and investments. He also taught CLU courses in investments, income tax and finance.

After several years as a national leader in second-line management, John was appointed General Manager of the Albany General Office, July 1, 1981. In his first four years in Albany, the office First Year Commissions were tripled and the profitability increased by 150. On May 1, 1995, he returned to New Jersey as the Managing Partner.

He has won almost every National Trophy with New York Life.

John became a lifetime member of the New York Life Partners Round Table in 2002 and was named the New Jersey Life Underwriter of the Year. He has promoted seven managers out to their own agencies. With over \$11 million in First Year Commissions in 2014 and 243 agents, the New Jersey G.O. was one of the biggest, fastest growing and most profitable offices in the Country. He is past Chairman of the MDRT/GAMA International Joint Mentoring Council, and was the President of GAMA International.

In March of 2006, John was elected by his peers to Chair the Managing Partner's Advisory Council for New York Life. John was inducted into the GAMA International Hall of

Fame in March of 2013, the highest honor in the Financial Services Industry. In February of 2015 he was appointed Executive Director of Seguros Monterrey New York Life. In this role he was charged with coaching the top executives of the company. He also assumed the task of leading Project Retention and The MDRT Program. In 2015 he increased 3rd prior retention by 75 percent and grew MDRT Agents and Aspirants from 432 to 624, advancing SMNYL from the 33 position to 14 Internationally in MDRT Membership. In December of 2015 John took charge of the Agency Distribution Channel. In one year he increased sales by 33% and proactive agents by 37%. In September of 2016 John established Baier Consulting International LLC. To foster "Exponential Growth Through Proven Systems." He is also the Co-founder of 25 Point Systems Inc, featuring a mobile app of his 25 Point System



**John T. Baier**

The journey so far for WIM has not been an easy path but the achievements are beyond imagination. A testament to the great strides WIM has made in its journey is the annual conference that it organizes with tremendous commitment. And so, for the fifth consecutive year, Women in Management Sri Lanka is conducting the Top50 Conference. This year the conference is special as it is being held on a grand scale on a global platform.

I am glad and honored to chair the Top50 Global Conference being held in Dubai on 18 June 2022. This year is quite a challenging year for Sri Lanka following COVID – 19 as the country's economy goes through one of its worst downturns since independence. Under such circumstances, I believe, we have taken the best decision to take Sri Lanka to the world for it to shine on the global stage which we need to do at all costs in order to help our tourism industry grow. The Conference and the Top50 Global Awards are scheduled on the same day with the latter being held on a grand scale in the evening.

This year's themes are relateable and relevant to the requirements of today's global reality. They include Superpower Shift – Women in Politics and Diplomacy, How Great Leaders Deal with Challenging People, Diversity, Inclusion, and Gender Fluidity.

## Message from the Conference Chair

There will be 20 speakers representing nine countries including global political and business leaders. They include the Parliament of India Lok Sabha Thoothukkudi Constituency Representative Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, and Kosovo Leader of the Independence and former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chief Peace Negotiator Dr. Edita Tahiri. Other distinguished speakers include WiLAT/ Turkey Vice-Chair and IFC Senior Consultant and PL Food CEO Esra Kivrak, VERVE Managing Director Shamira Mitha, CEO and Founder of Empathy Everywhere and Bestselling Author of Softening the Edge from Italy Mimi Nicklin, and Dr. Mohan Kaul who is a champion of international trade, investment, and emerging markets, as well as a recognized policy advisor, business leader, social entrepreneur, academic and former diplomat.

We are grateful to our sponsors, and partners for believing in us. Their support has enabled us to make this great event a reality. There is immense power when a group of people with similar interests get together to work toward the same goals, as the team behind me. Together we have conquered the highs and the lows to make this annual event a roaring success.

“Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.” – Joshua J. Marine



**Mayanthi Fernando.**  
Top50 Global Conference  
Chair 2022 Women in  
Management

# WIM Top50 Global Conference & Awards Committee 2022



**Nilam Samsudeen**  
Director Administration  
Women in Management



**Mayanthi Fernando**  
WIM EXCO Secretary, Top50 Conference Chair  
Director - Zeilan Agro Plantations Pvt Ltd.



**Minha Faiz**  
Women in Management Maldives President,  
Chairperson One Online



**Amali Mudunkotuwa Mendis**  
Top50 Awards Deputy Chair General Manager Operations  
Regency Teas (Pvt) Ltd



**Anjali Goonetilake**  
Top50 Conference Deputy Chair  
Senior Manager- Operations - Sampath Bank PLC



**Vijitha Samarakkodige**  
Founder, Corporate Trainer & Mentor  
(VMS Academy of Selling Art's)





**Waruni Algama**

Senior General Manager User Experience  
Design & People Development , Dialog Axiata PLC



**Summaiya Macan Markar**

Chief Legal , Compliance and Data Protection Officer,  
Allianz insurance Sri Lanka



**Aparna Tilakaratne**

Chief Law Officer - Sri Lanka Ports Authority



**Dr. Himalee de Silva**

Senior Lecturer, Institute of Indigenous Medicine  
University of Colombo



**Dr. Thushari Koralage**

Principal/ Managing Directress,  
Asian Grammar School/  
Giggles International  
Montessori



**Fazeela Dharmaratne**

Proprietor, CeeBees Preschool ,  
Child Care &  
Corporate Creches



**Dilsha Ruwanpathirana**

Director - Brands In Style (Pvt) Ltd

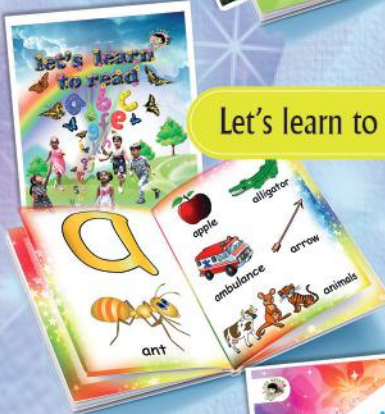
# BOOKSHELF



Let's learn to write



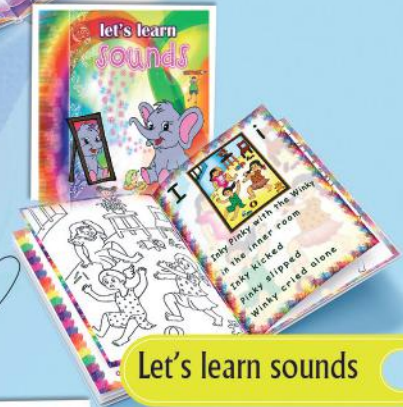
Let's learn numbers



Let's learn to read



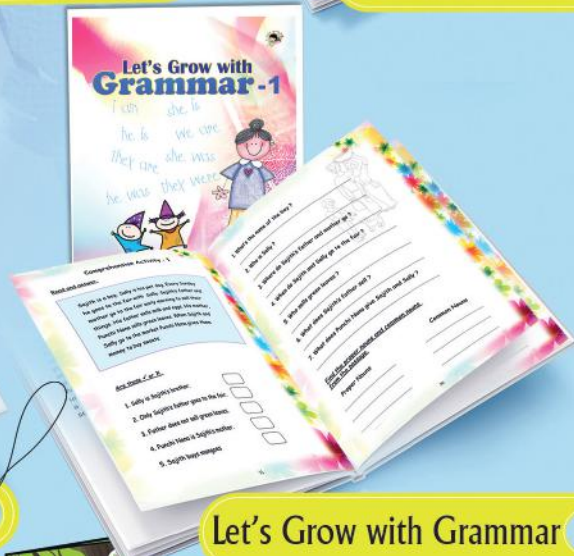
Let's start with pencils



Let's learn sounds



Primary Comprehension



Let's Grow with Grammar



1

My First Library



2



women  
top50

Winner:  
Upcoming Woman Entrepreneur 2019 - 2020

Author: Dr. Thushari Koralage (Ph.D)  
Principal/Managing Directress  
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Australian  
Aid



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Creating Markets.

**I am** a person  
**who loves a  
challenge and  
enjoys  
learning**



**Summaiya**

**Macan Markar**

Chief Legal,  
Compliance, and Data  
Protection Officer,  
Allianz Insurance Lanka



With a career spanning over 25 years in banking, Attorney-at-Law Summaiya Macan Markar has served in private, State, and global financial institutions, learning tremendously, some the hard way while pushing boundaries to be the best wherever she served. Through her many career milestones, she has remained true to her values, never once compromising on doing the right thing, which she attributes as central to her success. In an interview with WIM Top50, Summaiya spoke candidly on several interesting topics and her vision for Sri Lanka. As she continues to work with a career switch to insurance as the Chief Legal, Compliance, and Data Protection Officer, Allianz Insurance Lanka, Summaiya wants to be a role model for other women – to show them what can be achieved and that they could have it all through hard work and dedication.

**You have had an expansive career as a lawyer. Starting your career at the Attorney General’s Department, which many young attorneys would dream of, what were the key takeaways from serving under the Chief Legal Officer of the State?**

I passed out in 1994, and at that

time if you performed exceptionally well in the final year of Law College exams you got the option to complete your mandatory apprenticeship at the Attorney Generals’ Department. So, when this opportunity arose it was something I grabbed with both hands. The experience for the six to eight-month period was fabulous, as we got the opportunity to work in the different areas of work of the AG’s Department,

**On your question about any issues as a woman, I must honestly tell you I have never felt discriminated whether for a job evaluation, promotion, or anything else. However, in anything I did, I worked and continue to work hard, and if you do that, and you do your job well I do not think gender matters. It is how you perceive it and how you judge yourself which brings most people down.**

such as Civil and Commercial, State Attorneys, and Criminal sections. We had to do a lot of research-based work in preparation for cases of the senior lawyers we were assigned to. I also got the opportunity to attend the courtrooms with them. All in all, it was an amazing period of apprenticing and learning. It was eventually with mixed feelings that I decided to pursue a career as a Commercial Lawyer working in the private sector.

**Give us a window to your extensive work locally and globally in Legal, Compliance, Investigations, Audits, Operational Risk Management, Monitoring, and Testing? As a woman professional what was the space that you occupied in carrying out the tasks therein? Were there any specific challenges that you encountered because you were a woman operating in that space?**

I did start initially in the banking sector starting from the Management Trainee grade. This involved having to learn about all areas of an entity you worked for, and then at the end of the training period moving into your area of specialization, which in my case was the legal field and commercial legal work. Over 25 years in the banking sector, I

did get my opportunities and career progressions and promotions without any issues. The turning point came in 2000 when the then CEO of the National Development Bank asked whether I would be willing to take on a role as the Compliance Officer of the bank. I had no idea about this job or what it entailed or the credentials. However, by nature, I am a person who loves a challenge and enjoys learning, so without overthinking I said an immediate yes, even to his surprise. The rest, as they say, is history and this paved the way for me to move out to other banks as well including a State bank and an international bank, where I learned and was pushed beyond what I thought were my boundaries. I learned a lot at times, the hard way, even at the cost of losing my job. But one thing I never compromised was doing the right thing. In that, I always believe that my yardstick is every decision I take or action I do, and at the end of the day, I should be able to sleep at night without an atom of guilt or fear. This I attribute to my core success.

On your question about any issues as a woman, I must honestly tell you I have never felt discriminated whether for a job evaluation, promotion, or anything else. However, in anything I did, I worked and continue to work hard, and if you do that, and you do your job well I do not think gender matters. It is how you perceive it and how you judge yourself which brings most people down.

I have set very high personal standards for myself and I judge myself by that and not generally by what others say, so sometimes this can work well provided you can be true to yourself.

**It is said that the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) that has governed Muslim marriage and divorce discriminates against Muslim women. Hence, in 2021 a decision by the Cabinet of Ministers to amend the Civil Procedure Code allowing Muslims the option to marry under the Sri Lankan Marriage Registration Ordinance (the common law governing marriages and divorces) was considered a landmark. Additionally, then Justice Minister Ali**

**It was an amazing feeling and sense of accomplishment to receive an award at the WIM Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards. It came as a surprise. I for one never really appreciated myself and what I have achieved in my career. But when I did receive it and I look back at the 29 years of my career it then dawned upon me that it was something to be proud of, and something I deserved. Many women like me never value themselves. We take each of our achievements for granted and don't acknowledge and celebrate success enough. So, getting this was also a learning opportunity for me as to what I can do better going forward. I do know now that it meant and continues to mean a lot to my family, my community, my school and my places of work, and my colleagues, as success in a career, is a combination of several people in the whole 29 years who have each played some part in my journey.**

**Sabry had proposed legislation to raise the minimum age for marriage under the MMDA to 18. As an individual representing the legal profession and a Muslim community member, how would you describe these two reforms in addressing some of the issues faced by women in your community? As a proposed amendment when does it become law? What more do you think needs to be done?**

I believe these changes are long overdue. However, what I find disappointing is that we have been discussing these for years, but still there is no implementation. Every government

and minister will talk, and get Cabinet approval. However, no one has the courage of conviction to see it through and legislate. We hear of a lot of injustice to women coming as a result of the existing laws, and without the legal framework in place, it's difficult to get the culture changed to ensure the rights of Muslim women are recognized.

**Sri Lanka has a high percentage of women pursuing a university education. Contrary to common notions that people often have, it is significant that many women in your community pursue higher education and professional careers. Growing up, what was the encouragement/inspiration that you received from your family to break barriers and pursue higher goals? As a woman what is your story?**

I grew up in an affluent background and home and went to a leading Anglican girls' school in Colombo where I got an all-round education that was not only focused on studies. I was determined from a young age to academically do well, enter university and have a career for myself. The culture in our Muslim community at the time was more focused on the male child being educated and taking on the family business, etc. while it was normal for the girls to be married at a young age. It was rare at the time for females of my social standing in our community living in Sri Lanka to have academic success and have careers as well as earn for themselves.

And in keeping with the culture that prevailed, I was married through the arranged marriage family network at the young age of 20. In hindsight, it was probably the best thing that happened to me. My husband was and is still my number one supporter. He gave me all the encouragement to study, further continue studying, and have a career. My parents and in-laws were equally encouraging and supportive of my decisions and were also my cheerleaders. I entered Law College after marriage and did my Master's degree and further studies after having my two children.

I am a mother to two adult children, a daughter who is 26 and a son who is 20,

and I want to be a role model for them as to what can be achieved and how with hard work and dedication you can have it all, a family and a career. It should not have to be a choice of either.

**I read in an article that Dr. M C M Kaleel, who supported Muslim women's education, had stated in 1923, "As long as we keep our sisters in the dark, we are depriving ourselves of over 50 percent of the benefits that education brings to each family and the community." In light of that statement, what can you tell women, especially women in your community about the value of education, not just to be economically independent, but as a tool for emancipation/empowerment that would allow women to make choices and live to their highest potential?**

Education of the Muslim girl child is key, and while this has not happened in Sri Lanka historically, we see a significant improvement today. Many Muslim girls, be it from Colombo or even from the outer cities and villages are taking education seriously and I am sure if you look at the university admissions, that it has improved as well. All this is a journey and it is only through all of us talking about the value of education, etc. can we see it progressing. It is also the role of the parents, both mothers and fathers to ensure that the girl child is given the equal opportunities as the boy, and they need to be seen as an asset and not a burden. However, I would like to see more Muslim girls and women in employment, careers, and business. While they do get educated, there is a need to ensure that they make use of the same and get a return for the investment of time and money they put into it. Women in general I believe can have it all, a career and a family. There does not need to be a compromise, and as long as you can time manage and have the right attitude, the world is full of opportunity.



**You have been recognized for your distinguished career at the WIM Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards. What has meant to you personally? What has it meant to win an award in recognition of your career achievements? What good has it done afterward? Do you think it is significant for a woman to be bestowed with recognition for her career achievements and contributions to positions of leadership in the workplace?**

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As I said earlier, the achievements of men or women need to be celebrated, recognized, and the WIM Top50 award is one such event that recognizes women from various fields and careers, with a very strict judging process. As I said if you take someone like me, this was the first time I have ever been recognized and felicitated. I for one am generally shy and would not have applied myself for any award. So, what is great about the WIM awards is that other people can also nominate you. I was nominated and awarded without

my knowledge and if this was not the case, many women who for whatever reason don't have the confidence and courage to apply also get the opportunity through awards like this.

**Tell us what you have gained or learned since becoming a member of Women in Management?**

I joined WIM in 2018 and it has been an amazing journey. When I did apply to be a member it was mainly with the intention of networking and meeting like-minded people. The experience I have gotten over the last four years from doing work outside my career has been a fantastic opportunity and learning. Dr. Sulochana has this amazing skill of identifying people, putting them in the deep end from day one and there is no saying no to her. She was and is instrumental in molding a rounder personality in me. I have had the privilege of serving on the WIM Executive Committee, chairing the WIM Top50 conference, giving the vote of thanks, and moderating sessions at the various WIM events. All those have made me unleash some of the other hidden skills and abilities I had, which if not pushed I may have never found.

**Right now, we can say that Sri Lanka is at a crossroads (in history). Out there, there is an overwhelming call for change in Sri Lanka's political culture. On the other hand, Sri Lanka is also going through one of the worst economic crises in its independent history. What is the type of Sri Lanka you envisage out of this struggle?**

As I answer this the situation is fluid, and literally and in every way at the crossroads. What we need at this critical juncture is proper leadership, understanding of the rule of law, listening to the people, doing right by the people, the leadership and politicians understanding and accepting that we need systemic changes to our policies, laws, and the way we have done things in the past. We need the judiciary and law enforcement to do their part, and we as citizens have to do the right thing always. Sri Lanka has also got to move away from subsidies except maybe for health and in return give our 100% effort in everything we do.

**We are  
more than just a  
business**

**Adhisha  
Dahanayake  
Founder Double XL**



She broke the “glass ceiling” in Sri Lanka’s skewed fashion market by intrepidly launching a line of clothing for plus-size individuals, a segment sorely neglected by the industry. Challenges were part of the journey that began in 2010 when Adhisha Dahanayake launched Double XL exclusively for plus-size women and men, which had its teething years before being embraced for its avant-gardism in promoting body diversity and inclusiveness. Today, her label has stamped its mark in Sri Lanka’s fashion landscape. Exuding self-belief by embracing her individuality as a plus-size individual, Adhisha doesn’t allow stereotyping to prescribe her outlook on life. She has made great strides in pursuing powerlifting as a sport, excelling in it, and emerging as the National Powerlifting Champion at the national competition for 2021-2022. The passion to make a difference is the lifeblood of both the personal and professional aspects of her life. Her story is a great inspiration to any individual struggling to find self-worth in a society that is yet to realize the importance of body positivity.

**Your business Double XL entered a market segment in Sri Lanka that was not focused upon, but globally the need to steer fashion from the conventional smaller sizes to be more inclusive of plus sizes had been gaining momentum for a while. What inspired you to venture into a business that specifically targets plus-size people?**

My own experience and encounters led me to create a fashion brand that solely targets plus-size individuals. I have had to put up with negative comments about my body and my weight all my life. It got worse every time I went shopping. There were no clothes that were of my size, and the few available garments were not at all stylish. They were designed to rob us of our beauty. It came to a point where I avoided social gatherings as much as possible because I did not have any suitable clothes to wear; clothes that should have made me happy.

One day I went shopping to buy myself a pair of jeans. I was already feeling quite insecure about my size, and it did not help when the salesperson remarked on the shape of my body. I felt so uncomfortable and hurt that I hid behind a lie, “The jeans

are not for me”. It was both the final straw and the worst experience I had had while shopping. At that precise moment, I promised to have faith in myself despite how society treats me. I wanted to give every plus-size individual a memorable experience while shopping simply because they deserve it. At the same time, I wanted to convey the message that body shape is not a size. It should not in any way be discriminated against but rather loved and treated with respect. These ideas became the backbone of Double XL. We are more than just a business. We are a fashion brand that embraces body diversity and provides equal wear to a group of people who were once forgotten in the world of fashion.

At present, Double XL provides a diverse range of women’s and men’s clothing options for our customers. Each item of clothing is designed to be on par with the trends, and not once have we compromised on comfort. Fashion was never our villain, and I intend to keep it that way.

**What was the reaction from the public to your business offering? What were the challenges you had to face taking your business model to the Sri Lankan market?**

Like any other, the Sri Lankan market is not quick to embrace new or rather unconventional products. We struggled to attract many customers during the initial stages because they were skeptical of a fashion brand that caters only to plus-size people. It was unheard of at the time. I founded Double XL on a set of guidelines; one, we would never make our customers feel bad about themselves. We wanted to ensure that they would have a comfortable and joyful shopping experience. Two, we would not include sizes below Large. This was to prioritize our customers as well as to normalize plus-size clothes.

However, it took about two years for our customers to walk into the store and purchase items for themselves. Initially, our customers remained in their vehicles while our salespeople brought a couple of clothing options for them to choose from. It is so rewarding to see how much has changed since then. We currently own two stores and have gained loyal customers.

I am glad that we did not get discouraged. We found a niche in the market and we pride ourselves in being able to provide the best product, solution, and style for our customers.

Of course, we know that the challenges would only keep on coming. During the height of the pandemic, we struggled as a business because we could not rely on online sales. Our customers preferred visiting the store because fitting on clothes and buying the right size is important for a plus-size individual. However, with the lockdown and travel restrictions in place, our customers were not able to visit the store. Therefore, we introduced a strategy through which our customers could make an appointment and pick up their clothes through a video call. They could judge the right size by looking at the mannequins that were on display.

Since we are catering to a niche market, we have to face unique challenges. Personally, I and our team enjoy coming up with innovative solutions. It is a great way to test one’s creativity.

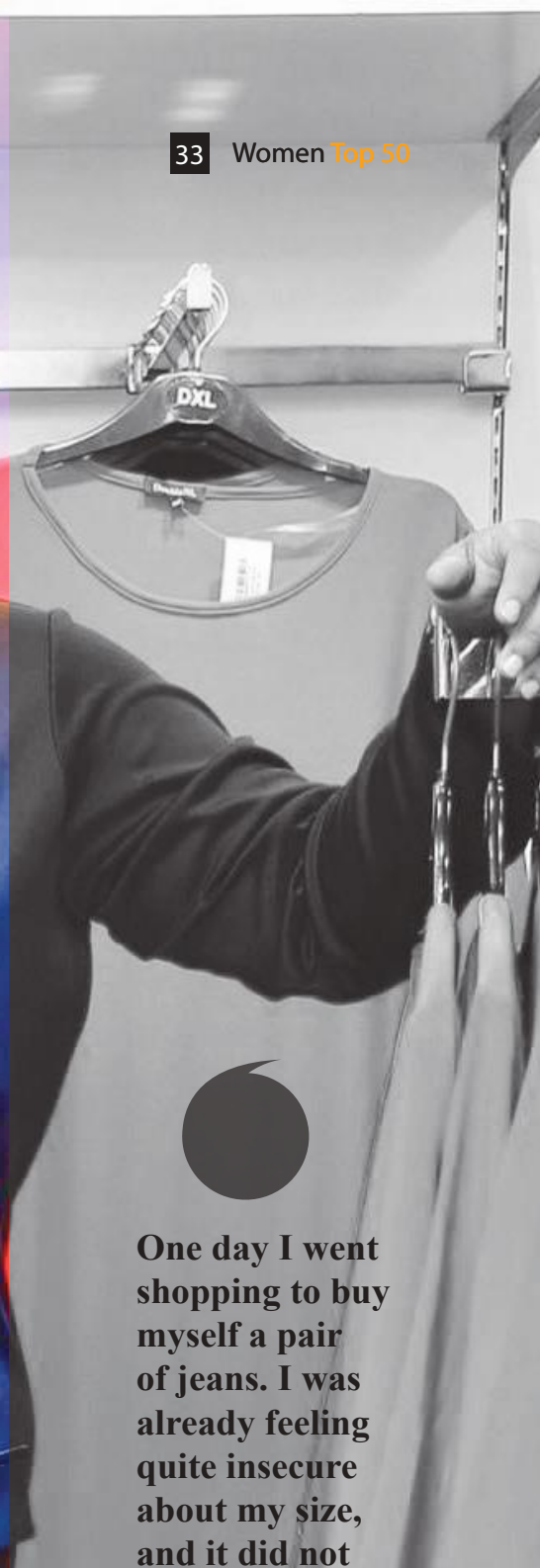
**Is the fashion industry in Sri Lanka inclusive? Or are we so small that we have no space to focus on a segment like plus sizes?**

Over the past few years, there has been a remarkable change in the fashion industry in Sri Lanka. A majority of clothing stores have included plus-size clothes. Double XL also had the privilege of introducing plus-size models to our fashion industry. It is heartwarming to see them being bold and beautiful in clothes that are now designed to make them look radiant and confident. In fashion, they have found freedom. Of course, we have a long way to go in terms of normalizing body diversity in fashion, but I am confident that with the right mindset and attitude, the fashion industry will continue to be all-inclusive.

**What are some of the wrong/misguided/biased/conservative notions that people in Sri Lanka have about people of different sizes/ plus sizes being bold in embracing fashion? Do you see a different attitude in how people look at fashion and people’s right to follow fashion choices in western countries?**

Body shaming is a universal issue which





One day I went shopping to buy myself a pair of jeans. I was already feeling quite insecure about my size, and it did not help when the salesperson remarked on the shape of my body. I felt so uncomfortable and hurt that I hid behind a lie.

is why I consider body positivity to be a movement in reaction to it. Western countries have more progressive markets and are therefore quicker to embrace body positivity. When I was studying in Australia in 2006, I encountered many plus-size fashion brands which at the time was novel to me.

It is disheartening to admit that Sri Lankans are prejudiced against plus-size people. They tend to comment on one's physical appearance without considering how it would affect the other person. For a long time, we have tried to make everyone fit into one size. The main

difference between western countries and Sri Lanka is the mindset. By embracing body diversity, Double XL hopes that the people of Sri Lanka would become more learned about different body shapes and structures and be willing to break stereotypes. Everyone should have the right to follow fashion choices and it is up to us to provide them with that. Plus-size individuals have the right to wear stylish clothes without having to worry about what other people think. They have the right to style themselves with whatever item of clothing that makes them feel good and look good.

**Tell us how you got into powerlifting? What is so good about that sport? What is it that you gain from engaging in such a sport?**

My father was my anchor. I was always his little girl and the bond we shared was rooted in love and strength. It was such a shock when he passed away suddenly. It was a shock that took me a long time to recover from. I was devastated and not at all myself. I did everything I could to avoid the reality in which my father was not there anymore. It was a time I truly struggled and my lifestyle was far from healthy. I participated in meditation programs and yoga retreats in hope of finding solace. It came to me in the form of a few encouraging words from a fellow participant who said that I am a strong person and that my happiness is within me. It gave me enough strength to face reality and take control of my life again.

To help me get through this period of grief, I decided to rejoin my gym. However, I explained to my trainer that my goal was to get fit and healthy as opposed to losing weight. I was at a stage in my life where I understood that I am a big girl and I was learning to love and respect myself. I was not going to be ashamed of who I am, rather I was going to embrace the very parts of myself that society taught me to despise.

While I was training, a fellow powerlifter encouraged me to try out powerlifting. For the first time since my father passed away, I found my peace. Powerlifting is not just a sport, it is a state of mind. The weight category that I compete in is under 84-kilograms. I competed at the Sri Lanka Bench Press Competition in February 2019 where I set a National Record of 62.5-kilograms and came in first winning the Gold Medal. I was also qualified

to compete at the 2019 Commonwealth Games. I did not think I would become a National Athlete for the life of me, especially at the age of 36. I proceeded to compete in the 2021-2022 competition as well where I set a record and earned the title of National Champion. The sense of accomplishment I feel is unparalleled.

Powerlifting helped me in the long run and guided me to be a better person. I invested in myself and my life changed for the better. I am more disciplined and totally in control of my life. In addition,

powerlifting has done wonders for my mental health. It is a form of meditation that enables me to focus on myself and not get distracted by anything else. It is rewarding to be recognized as a National Powerlifting champion. It made me realize that being plus-size is not a problem but a strength. Powerlifting gave me a renewed sense of purpose.

**In Sri Lanka, what is the potential for women to take to powerlifting and showcase their prowess in the sport internationally? Is there recognition for the sport to develop in the future?**

The problem in Sri Lanka is that most people believe that women should not take up powerlifting as a sport solely because it is not a traditional sport for women to participate in. Powerlifting like any other aspect of life needs to be prioritized, and sadly, we rarely come across women who prioritize themselves. It is a bitter truth. They are often expected to sacrifice themselves to please others, and a woman who challenges the status quo of what a woman should be is heavily criticized. There are so many capable women in Sri Lanka who have the potential for powerlifting. I have had the privilege of meeting incredible female powerlifters from Jaffna. There was so much passion in their eyes and it made me wonder if there are other women out there who wish to participate in powerlifting but rejection from society has prevented them from doing so.

I suppose to a large extent that it has. Many women have reached out to me and have said that they would love to try powerlifting but are too afraid of what society will think of them. It is here that I believe we as a society must change, and that change starts at the grassroots. Parents should encourage their daughters to participate in sports. Schools on





why when it comes to my personal life, I put my happiness and needs first. As for my professional life, my business would always come first. There I listen to the majority because it is their voices that matter. My team is the reason why our business is successful and they are important in the decision-making process. However, in my personal life, I call the shots.

The passion to make a difference is the lifeblood of both the personal and professional aspects of my life. I founded Double XL in 2010 with the hope that it would break stereotypes and make fashion inclusive, and I continue powerlifting because it made a difference in my personal life. I enjoy facing challenges because not only does it make life more exciting but you also get to learn and grow as a person. Challenges teach you and making a difference rewards you.

**What can you say about the WIM recognition that you received for Outstanding Woman Entrepreneur (Small)? Is the award an endorsement that you deserve for venturing into a business that many had feared to tread?**

Being recognized by Women In Management is one of the greatest

the other hand should create opportunities for girls to be involved in different types of sports and not discriminate against them based on gender. If they choose to pursue a career in sport, the organizations involved should create a safe environment in which security is ensured, and their financial needs met. The Sri Lanka Powerlifting Federation which governs powerlifting has the potential to develop the sport if there is the right system and policies in place.

**How would you encourage other women to come on board to pursue the sport and make an impact?**

Do not be afraid to try it out. Powerlifting is a wonderful sport that brings value to your life. As I mentioned earlier, powerlifting has positively impacted my

life and it will continue to do so. If I had let society discourage me from trying it out, my life would not have been the same. I would not have been the same. I believe that the secret to building resilience is doing sports. It does not necessarily have to be powerlifting, it could be any sport you wish to participate in. If you continue to let society and its culture dictate your choices in life, you would not be able to grow as an individual. You can do anything you want to, the world is your oyster.

**As an individual what dictates your choices in life? Business and personal? To what extent does the passion to make a difference dictate your choices?**

I have come to realize that no one knows me better than myself which is

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# DXL



achievements in my life, and to receive the Outstanding Woman Entrepreneur award feels like I have reached a major milestone in my professional life. I am extremely grateful to WIM and the committee because they encourage women in business to reach new heights of success.

It gave me the strength to pursue my dreams and encouraged me to help other women entrepreneurs. The event itself is designed to help businesses increase their professional networks, so they can create opportunities and partnerships. Being commended by such a prestigious organization is both rewarding and empowering.

### **What are your plans for Double XL (and beyond)?**

The vision of Double XL is to be a global fashion brand. During the initial stages, we conducted thorough research on the market, and we realized that there are two body structures; the tall, broad structure of the westerners and the more round and thick body of Asians. We had neither reference nor a guideline to begin with because we were navigating through uncharted territory. Even though we had to build everything from scratch, it was all worth it in the end, because not only is Double XL inclusive but we also give the right product in the right size to all our customers.

Double XL primarily caters to the Asian market and has a wide range of cultural attire, including Batik sarongs and shirts, and Kaftans. DXL on the other hand is for the western market because it follows the western size guide. It includes everything from athleisure to teen wear. Thus, we can give our customers a holistic shopping experience. We would also continue to create awareness of body diversity with the hope that society embraces different body types and respects every “body”. We have planted the seed of change in the Sri Lankan market, and we cannot wait to see it bloom.

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# Women in Management Top50 Professional & Career Women Awards in Canada





**H**ighlights of the Women in Management Top50 Professional & Career Women Awards in Canada held on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022 - Toronto Canada. The event was organized by WIM Canada Chapter the awards were graced by Hon. Harsha Kumara Nawaratne - High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Canada and Hon. Thushara Rodrigo - Consulate General of Sri Lanka to Canada.



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# To Live Healthily and Happily

**Shanthini Ahangama**

Founder/CEO,  
Coconut Miracle Organics

**Shanthini Ahangama is the Founder/CEO, Coconut Miracle Organics Pvt Ltd, a company manufacturing premium Sri Lankan coconut products. It was founded on the principles of being ethical, original, and organic. In a somewhat crowded space where the buzzword is organic, it is unique that Shanthini embraced and promoted the concept through a range of coconut products when the phrase was barely mainstream. Guided by a set of values that are reflected in her products, where passion comes first to profit, she is grateful for the opportunity to nurture and grow a healthy organic food brand that bolsters longevity. Speaking with WIM Top50, Shani, as she is known among many, explained her journey in building a brand that is valued for its consistency and credibility.**

Many people like to glorify their country's heritage and package it beautifully to sell it to a global consumer base that is enamored by the organic label. In such a reality, what makes your range of products authentic, and what has been the differentiating factor that has allowed Coconut Miracle to come so far and grow in the process?

Well, this is a popular question that is thrown my way. Our organic offering has always followed the concept of 'Ethical – Original – Organic', in a strong Sri Lankan sense.

So, our label, branding, and image are very organic in outlook, green and white from the inception which stood out at the start of the 2000s wherein 'embracing organic' was not in the mainstream. We communicated our tagline effectively on all communication mediums and we truly make an effort to live the brand.

What inspired me to venture out as an entrepreneur was the simple truth that Sri Lanka exported organic coconut produce to the world market and being part of the massive paradigm shift was exciting and rewarding as I had anticipated.

Our differentiating factors were that we are blessed to be one of 'the initial organic catch' and have been able to attract and capture as many like-minded networks and platforms as possible

in 2010. Moreover, offering a premium Sri Lankan organic product consistently grew our credibility and customer base. In a nutshell, this, coupled with the warm Sri Lankan hospitality and a genuine desire to support, succeed and contribute added the winning ingredients. My opening catchphrase 'Shani from Sri Lanka' became my signature line.

There are many local players engaged in similar businesses, some with big investments and influence. What were some of the challenges that you had to face in the process?

Globally and locally many challenges were faced. The legal challenges, operations, international marketing, obtaining certification and quality control as well as competing with the 'big boys' was not easy. However, locally we were able to retain and grow our market share due to our identity as the pioneer local organic coconut brand and we kept our promise while realizing our vision.

What were some of the best lessons that you have learned growing your business from scratch, especially in terms of ethics and ethical sourcing, and fair trade/pay?

Our vision and values are based on the many lessons learned from diverse cultures in my corporate life which my team and I live by. We embrace a servant culture in our organization and

an open-door policy.

We source ingredients from organic farmers and certified organic coconut estates at fair rates.

One of the best lessons I've learned is never to compromise on quality. We do not lower our values and standards under any circumstance. We have espoused a set of unwavering values from the beginning, which is to live healthily and happily, inspire people around us, appreciate nature, reduce our carbon footprint, continuously evolve and learn new habits, adopt new healthy ideas, and create and sustain. At the heart of our business is respect. I strongly subscribe to the notion that miracles happen when you believe in yourself.

Your company website provides the following description of you as the Founder and CEO of Coconut Miracle. "Sri Lanka born Shani aspires to give something back to her homeland by introducing you to premium Sri Lankan coconut

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**products.” What are you giving back to your motherland to make it a better place for at least some of its citizens?**

We adopt a two-prong strategy.

We at Coconut Miracle give back a significant amount to underprivileged children, factory and office staff, and people from our village. My husband Deepal supports Sri Lanka Cricket voluntarily as he is deemed an expert in this field and a positive influencer.

Moreover, we promote healthy food products which are certified organic and 100 percent natural with no harmful substances added. Many customers have personally called to thank me for making these products accessible in the local market. Coconut Miracle Organics’ is a family favorite from VCO, MCT, Coconut Nectar, Coconut Butter, Coconut Water, Coconut Vinegar, Coconut Amino Seasoning, Coconut Flakes, DC, Coconut Sugar, Kithul Sugar, gluten-free Coconut Flour, Coconut Milk Powder, Coconut Milk and Cream, Coconut Jelly Spreads and Sesame Oil.

It is a very rewarding project that I enjoy immensely.

I am grateful for this opportunity to nurture and grow a healthy organic food brand as health is key to many things and mostly to happiness and long life.

**As you receive the WIM Top50 award for the first time, what does this award mean to you personally and to your business/brand?**

Having not ever applied for an award or been interested in one, I was intrigued when my brother’s colleague had proposed it, and being convinced of my eligibility sent me a plea to explore.

So, I did. I am delighted to have been chosen as one of the top fifty, and so are my family, and network of people as they are aware of my passion, focus, and commitment to this project. I do stress, that it is always passion before profit.

I feel honored and humbled by this award and I feel a new surge of energy and a greater sense of purpose and gratefulness as I become someone with a title overnight.

I salute WIM for being able to spearhead such a much-needed cause and being able to sustain the momentum as well as going global with this project.

I for one work without any hope of being rewarded or recognized and to be recognized on such a big platform is a dream come true. So, a heartfelt thank you to Dr. Sulochana and her team.

**As Sri Lanka is thrust into one of the most challenging times in its post-independent history, where the dominant narrative is for a change in the old order of doing things and usher in a real ‘system change’, What is it that you envision for your country of birth from which you have built a fantastic business?**

What I would want for my fellow countrymen and women is their daily wants and needs met, security for our people, hope for attitude changes with the system change, and be geared to face challenges to make things right again. Let us cultivate loving-kindness and lasting spirituality. Resilience and reinvention are key.

I feel that the change must come from within us as we can control only



ourselves. There should be less finger-pointing and more accountability.

Much more than all of this, let us appreciate this beautiful and blessed island we live in. Here’s to hope and harmony, love, and light.

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**WIM in partnership with British Council's Platinum Jubilee Women in Leadership programme is celebrating International Women's Day 2022 #BreakTheBias – SHE'OS Leadership Session.**

**The theme for International Women's Day, 8 March, 2022 (IWD 2022) is, 'Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow', recognising the contribution of women and girls around the world, who are leading the charge on climate change adaptation, mitigation, and response, to build a more sustainable future for all.**





**My tenure perhaps was during the most difficult time in the history of the organization**

**Suren swaminathan**

Immediate Past-Chairperson of the Sri Lanka Business Council (SLBC) in the UAE

**F**or the first time, Women in Management Sri Lanka is holding its annual conference and award ceremony in Dubai with the active participation of the Sri Lanka Business Council (SLBC) in the UAE. Suren Swaminathan, the immediate past chairperson of the SLBC has been playing an active role in collaborating with WIM Sri Lanka to organize the events to fruition. Speaking with WIM Top50, Suren, a long-term UAE resident, insurance professional, and entrepreneur, elaborated on the enormous opportunities available for businesses, exporters, professionals, and skilled individuals to thrive in a nation, that within five decades has grown exponentially. According to Suren, for Sri Lanka to grow as big as the UAE, the crucial ingredient is leadership with a vision, integrity, and skills. Amid the ongoing turbulent times in his motherland, Suren is upbeat that Sri Lanka would get back on its feet with a new generation of Sri Lankans at the helm.



**What is the role of the Sri Lanka Business Council (SLBC) in the UAE? What are the mutual benefits to the two countries and their stakeholders?**

The SLBC is a 30-year-old organization set up with two main objectives. To promote awareness with the UAE on Sri Lanka's capabilities from a commercial standpoint and to encourage business houses and potential investors from Sri Lanka to come into the UAE and take advantage of the great opportunities that the UAE has to offer.

**As the immediate past chairperson of the Sri Lanka Business Council can you tell us some of the significant milestones achieved during your tenure, especially about promoting business/investment between the countries?**

My tenure perhaps was during the most difficult time in the history of the organization. For two of the three years, we went through the global COVID pandemic, however, I must admit, this was a period where we managed to consolidate ourselves by doubling the membership. In addition, we conducted several online presentations. The feather in the cap was organizing the exporters of Sri Lanka through the Export Development Board of Sri Lanka to showcase their products and services as a side presentation at the EXPO arena in Feb 2022. This was well received and gave an insight to several exporters in Sri Lanka as to what the UAE was capable of offering to these business houses. Following this event, we have seen several such organizations from Sri Lanka discussing the possibility of

setting up a business house here in the UAE.

**What have been some of the challenges to business in the last two years of the pandemic?**

It was very challenging, to say the least. But I thrive when a challenge is imposed upon me. Life takes on meaning when you become motivated, set goals, and charge after them aggressively. As explained earlier, the pandemic that we all encountered was a serious challenge for all of us, but it simultaneously created an opportunity to take advantage of the modern communication systems by conducting Zoom conferences and presentations which allowed us to also build a closer fraternity with the members as we kept increasing the membership. The level

of interest and participation was very encouraging and this made me believe that it was choice, not chance that determines one's destiny.

**As many Sri Lankans work in the UAE in diverse areas of work, often thriving in their positions, they also experience the ax during periods of economic downturn. Is there a support network to help such individuals reconnect with the job market lest they are left high and dry, having contributed previously to Sri Lanka's cache of foreign reserves?**

Being axed from work is a phenomenon that is not within our control. However, I am proud to say, that we as SLBC, galvanized all our resources and capabilities and with the support of our community organizations ensured that most of the Sri Lankan diaspora were not left on the streets until they were repatriated or offered alternative jobs within the country. We also firmly believed that these people like all fellow Sri Lankans were the main contributors to our nation's cache of foreign reserves.

**As an individual who has lived in the UAE for a considerable period what have been the best personal lessons/key takeaways and what can Sri Lanka with an abundance of resources do differently / emulate to grow as big as the UAE?**

For Sri Lanka to grow as big as the UAE, the first and primary step is to have a leadership with a vision, integrity, skills, and capabilities to manage your nation like any institution. Then follows the supporting staff with skills in different fields of professionalism to implement the vision of the leader. People need to be accountable. The UAE is a magnificent example to not only Sri Lanka, but to many nations around the world where, within five decades they are today, amongst the top 10 nations in all spheres. During my four decades in the UAE, I have personally seen this nation's transformation and would quote Robin Sharma, "The best among us are not more gifted than the rest. They just take little steps each day as they march toward their life. And the days slip into weeks, the weeks into months



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and before they know it, they arrive at a place called 'Extraordinary'".

**As you actively organize the WIM Global Conference and the Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards in Dubai, what is the potential you see in this collaboration?**

Women's emancipation in the UAE is one of the cornerstones of this nation.

Women have contributed tremendously in every field of activity. Women hold two-thirds of public sector jobs in the UAE, while 30 percent are in leadership roles and 15 percent are in technical and academic roles. The UAE has implemented reforms prohibiting discrimination based on sex and gender in the nation's anti-discrimination law. Literacy amongst the Emiratis is around 95 percent and Emirati women make up nearly 70 percent of graduates in the UAE. A phenomenal achievement indeed. The UAE today is no doubt a very advanced nation and we believe that by playing an active role in organizing the WIM Global Conference and awards and bringing in our successful women from Sri Lanka, we could with our association, mutually share our experiences and gain insight into the contribution that the women have made towards this nation's dynamic rise.

**Going forward how do you intend to nurture the relationship with WIM?**

Going forward, and to nurture this relationship, I believe we should have these events regularly and possibly also look at one-on-one exchanges between our two countries.

**As you witness the events unfolding in your country of birth and the calls for a positive change and direction to get Sri Lanka out of its current morass, what are your hopes for your motherland?**

What is happening in Sri Lanka today is a manifestation of wrong leadership for over 60 years, leaders who had more personal interests than the interest of the nation at heart. Despite all these adversities, we as a nation still managed to maintain a middle-income nation status until last year. Hence, there is no reason why we cannot get back to this status. With the new generation in Sri Lanka backed by social media that has played a very active role, I have high hope for my motherland to get back to better days and achieve a status that will be envied by countries in South East Asia. Life is too ironic; it takes adversities to know what good times are and this is something one learns as one matures.



# Top50 Professional & Career Women Awards Sri Lanka & Maldives 2021











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