



Fortune India's Most Powerful Women listers with the Fortune India team

# CELEBRATING THE POWER OF WOMEN

Is India Inc really gender-neutral, are harassment laws effective? India's Most Powerful Women discuss these and more at the *Fortune India* event

The third edition of the *Fortune India* Most Powerful Women summit came in the midst of a reignited conversation on women's rights. Various events brought the women's movement to the fore in 2017, like the Women's March post the Trump election, the #MeToo movement, the Harvey Weinstein saga, and the Larry Nasser case. And, at home, a crowdsourced list with

names of Indian academics who have allegedly exhibited predatory behaviour or sexually harassed women was released on Facebook. All of these brought to light the fact that the world is far from achieving gender parity, or even addressing women's issues efficiently. The list of Indian academics on Facebook had people up in arms debating whether naming and shaming on social media is the right way to deal with such serious

allegations, and on the other side, does the lack of a sound redressal system compel women to resort to social media for reparation? There has been pushback, of course, with some people arguing that harassment norms can be misused simply to bring down those in power. We took the issue to *Fortune India*'s Most Powerful Women, and asked some of the leading lights of the corporate world whether sexual harassment laws in the workplace are misused. Here's what we learned from the debate:

**It is not easy for women to file a complaint**  
 "In the U.S., 75% of women who complained against being harassed in the workspace were retaliated against. They got into trouble because they were reporting back to the same bosses, went back to the same company, had to deal with the same HR, therefore this is not a situation which is pleasurable to anybody," said Ameera Shah, managing director, Metropolis Healthcare.



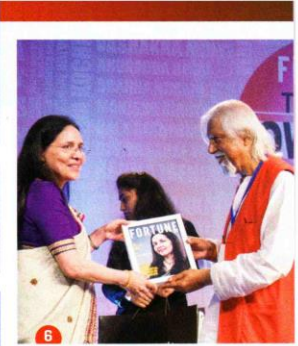
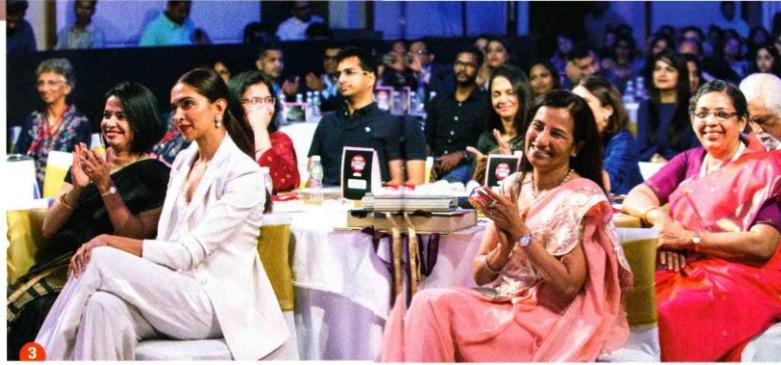
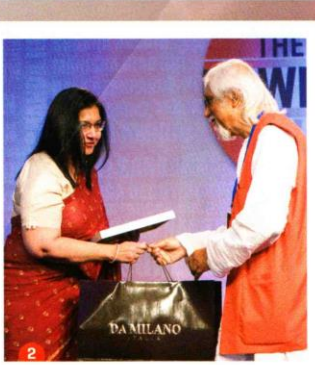
1. Mariazeena Johnson and D.N. Mukerjee felicitate Chanda Kochhar and Deepika Padukone, present them with mementos from Ahujasons.



**FORTUNE  
THE MOST  
POWERFUL  
WOMEN**

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**SATHYABAMA**

- 2. Padmaja Ruparel and Aweek Sarkar
- 3. (L-R): Jyoti Deshpande, Deepika Padukone, Chanda Kochhar, Alice Vaidyan



- 5. Harshbeena Zaveri
- 6. Zarin Daruwala and Aweek Sarkar
- 7. Alice Vaidyan and Aweek Sarkar
- 8. Yami Kola
- 9. Breaking Barriers: D.N. Mukerjee in conversation with Chanda Kochhar and Deepika Padukone
- 10. Aisha de Sequeira
- 11. The Ardmore zone



4. The debate panel: (From L-R): Meena Ganesh, Ameera Shah, Zia Mody, Govindraj Ethiraj, R.M. Vishakha, Archana Hingorani, and Jyoti Deshpande



**Victim shaming is real**  
Victim shaming is not a figment of the imagination. "In a country like India, when a woman walks on the street and a man catcalls her, often she is told at her home: 'Your skirt was too short, you must have done something, you must have left your hair open!'" said Shah.

**India Inc is a boys' club**  
On opposite sides of the debate, one thing that everyone agreed upon was that men still hold the most power in corporates. "There are certain sectors where men actually want to protect their turf, they don't want women to come into that sector, so they create more and more barriers," said Meena Ganesh, co-founder & CEO, Portea Medical.

Yes, laws can be misused, but it's no case for them to not exist  
There have been cases where dowry laws have been

misused by women. But that does not mean that the law should not exist.

"I think that rather than concentrate on the relatively smaller number of women who could be taking advantage of this statute to further an agenda, you really have to empower women through the statute even further," said Zia Mody, founder and managing partner, AZB & Partners.

**BREAKING BARRIERS**

This year, we also put two women from vastly different worlds together on stage, Bollywood actor Deepika Padukone and ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar, and asked them how they got to the top of their game.

For a bank CEO, Kochhar was unusually candid and open about her upbringing and the struggles she faced juggling motherhood and a career. She said things have changed for women, compared to what they were when she embarked on her career.

"When I started my career, my job was to do project appraisal, and go and visit factories and do an inspection. I don't think 35 years ago anybody expected girls to visit factories and actually do the inspection," she said. Kochhar said a woman has to have three Cs: conviction, capability, and confidence.

Padukone's mantra is three Ds—determination, dedication, and discipline. Both women emphasised that no amount of personal determination and confidence would have helped them had it not been for the support of their families.

"In my home, we are two girls: my sister and I, and at no point, I was made to feel different just because I am a girl. I was never made to feel any less for being a girl," Padukone said. "It is time women stop feeling guilty about doing things for themselves," she summed up. We couldn't agree more.

