

BAME International Women's Day Debate

**Held on the occasion of
International Women's Day 2019**

Hosted by Lord and Lady Popat

**In association with Rupa Ganatra Popat of FUTR Group
and Rupal Sachdev Kantaria of Oliver Wyman**

Chair: The Rt Hon. the Baroness D'Souza CMG

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday 8 March 2019

**Transcript of Marten Walsh Cherer Ltd
1st Floor, Quality House, 6-9 Quality Court
Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1HP
Tel No: 0207 067 2900**

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PRIVATE DEBATE

House of Commons

Friday 8 March 2019

Main Business

The meeting commenced at 1 pm

The Whip [Reena Ranger]: My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, please rise for Madam Speaker.

Please be seated.

Motion to take: that this House marks International Women's Day under the theme "Balance for Better".

Rupa Ganatra Popat: Madam Speaker, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my great honour to welcome this incredible group of women and men for an historic International Women's Day speaker showcase in the mother of all Parliaments. My thanks to Lord and Lady Popat for hosting this event, and for giving us all this unique opportunity to use our voices not only to talk about but to bring about change that women around the world want and deserve.

Charles Darwin once said: "It is not the strongest of species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is most adaptable to change." That has never been more true than today. The world around us is changing at an unprecedented pace. Driven by science and technology, our institutional social and cultural norms are being shaken to the core. There is no question: we live in exciting times, but also uncertain times. The only constant we can be sure of is change itself, and that should be looked on as a good thing because change demands that we adopt a new way of working and living. Change forces us out of our comfort zone and stimulates new ideas. Without change, there can be no progress.

This year's International Women's Day theme "Balance for Better" is part of the process to progress. But here today we want to go even further. If we want balance, we need inclusion; if we want equality, we must celebrate diversity; and, if we want progress, there has to be solidarity. The good news is that 2018 was one of the most transformative years yet for women.

The World Economic Forum placed the UK as the 15th most gender-equal country of the 149 assessed. We celebrated the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote. Women now make up 32% of the House of Commons, the highest number on record. The campaign on gender equality in the workforce is making good strides. Of course, we saw the #MeToo movement launch long-overdue conversations around harassment and intimidation. Positive change is happening, yet we still have a long way to go.

In the UK, only 4% of our MPs are currently ethnic minority women. The representation of women on boards in FTSE 100 companies is still less than 30%. There are double the number of male versus female entrepreneurs, and harassment and discrimination for BAME women in the workplace still continues. Amid these challenges we are finding our voice. Now we need to ramp up the volume.

Today, we will hear some amazing stories that reframe the role of all women and remind us that we have the power to push for progress and to reinvent who we are and what we want to be. I want to say a special welcome to Baroness D'Souza, who is taking the role of Speaker today; and Baroness Prashar, who will be taking the floor as one of our speakers. Baroness Prashar and Baroness D'Souza are both great champions of women's rights and have contributed so much to the discussions and debates on women's issues over the years. We are honoured to have you here.

Before we begin, I would like to share my story with you. Being the co-founder of several successful businesses, people often ask me if I had the ideas from the start. The answer is no. My career journey began in 2003 when I joined an investment banking graduate programme. What was my first job? Other than the daily coffee runs, I was creating sales pitch books for the global sales team. My colleague, a fellow graduate, and I would create the marketing collateral for all the bank's clients. It was long hours, early starts and late finishes, but it was a great learning curve.

After about a year, my male counterpart got promoted to the sales team before me. I was defeated and deflated. Why didn't they see my potential? Insecurity and self-doubt immediately set in, but then I realised that my colleague had asked for the promotion and had provided a compelling case study. When I finally plucked up the courage to ask, I too was promoted to the team within a few months. Three years on, I became the youngest person in the bank in the UK to be promoted to vice-president—not the youngest BAME female or the youngest female, but the youngest person. My lesson? If you don't ask, you don't get.

I noticed other patterns as a woman in investment banking. All the senior female leadership roles were in HR, administration and operations. They were all middle and back office roles. The sales team that I did eventually get to join was an all-male team. Our bosses were all male, and their bosses were all male. In most of the meetings I sat in, I was often the only female. Then one day they hired the first female leader in the front office, and suddenly I was inspired. That was my first taste of the power of a role model.

I left investment banking at the age of 30 to start my business. Let me tell you that it was not easy. I worried and wavered for many months. I was going from everything I knew to the absolute unknown. There was something else: for the first time in my life, I was faced with the possibility of failure. Before this point I had only known success—success in school, success in university and success in career. Now, armed with the burning desire to start my own business and explore my creative side, I knew that that could change. I remember feeling so terrified that at one point my mum called me and said: “Call your boss and tell her you made a mistake. I am sure she will take you back.” There were plenty of times when that thought came into my mind during the journey, but I kept moving forward. I knew, deep down, that no mistake could be greater than never having tried in the first place.

One of my first business ideas was an online retail business for men’s brands, which launched in 2013. We achieved some amazing milestones during the 18 months running it. We won several prestigious awards, including the social media innovation award in the same category as Marc Jacobs, and we launched our own brand of products which were ordered in 10 different countries purely through our Instagram announcement.

You often hear entrepreneurs say that their business ideas came from seeing a gap in the market or wanting to solve a problem that they had experienced. In my case, while running my online business, I could not find an event or a platform that could answer my own business questions. That is when the concept of FUTR Group was born. That great challenge provided a unique opportunity. Four years on, FUTR Group has amassed an online community of 120,000 people. It has welcomed over 24,000 professionals to our events around the world. We work with the world’s largest brands such as PepsiCo, Unilever and Johnson & Johnson, and, most recently, the Hong Kong listed company, Pico, which has acquired a stake in our company to drive growth in Asia.

What I learned through that process was that the unknown should not intimidate but should empower. It should not dampen my aspirations but drive them forward. Failure is not the opposite of success but is in fact part of the journey. This has become one of our company’s greatest strengths.

People often ask me how being a woman has impacted me as an entrepreneur. The truth is that I do not spend too much time thinking about the fact that I am Asian or female. My parents taught me that, if you believe in something and if there is something you want to go out there and do, you should just go and do it. Perhaps that is being idealistic. I prefer to think of it as being optimistic. Yes, there are challenges. Yes, certainly there are prejudices. But I truly believe that one of the greatest obstacles to our success is us, and us alone: our own fear and our own self-doubt—the imposter syndrome kicking in.

Women make up only a third of all entrepreneurs in the UK. In order to increase that, we need to understand and tackle the barriers. It is particularly important to appreciate the role of mentorship and role models, something that has helped me so much as an entrepreneur. I am grateful to my mentors; it is like having my own personal boardroom. They play different roles—the inspirer, the connector, the navigator and the firefighter; they are all integral to my journey, and I would not be where I am today without them. I encourage each of you to think about who makes up your own personal boardroom. Perhaps they work in your company or are someone you met at an industry event or on LinkedIn. They could be a family member or a friend, or perhaps your modern elder or tech-savvy younger.

I have three parting messages. If you don’t ask, you don’t get. If you don’t fail, you will never succeed. If you don’t change, you will never grow. But if we come together to support each other through the opportunities, the challenges and the setbacks, the sky really is the limit. My 2019 pledge is to do precisely that. As Mahatma Gandhi put it: “Our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world as being able to remake ourselves.” Let this conversation be the start of our reinvention.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Bayo Adelaja: Thank you for the invitation to be here this afternoon. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to speak to all of you. It is about 11 years since I first started working in this building. I worked here for about a year when I was a young, idealistic and hopeful person looking to change a world that would be bound to change with me.

Today, I want to talk to you about the work that I have been doing over the past few years, based on my indignation, frustration and sadness at the way I and my friends have been treated in the spaces where we work. I am talking about corporate work spaces, not including the House of Commons.

I find that, when you give women the power to speak, they speak for themselves and for each other. They speak about the challenges they face. They speak about the hurt they have experienced, and they give you the answer to the question before you even ask it. Over the past few years, I have seen a metamorphosis in the cultural treatment and cultural exchange that women are a part of and need. Despite the fact that we are not in leadership positions a lot of the time, within our own circles and the communities we form for ourselves we talk about how to make this world a better place and how to increase our enjoyment of it in the place where we spend about 70% of our daily lives.

When I was 16, I was so fascinated with the idea that the world could change. I know it sounds odd, but when I was a child you grew up, passed your exams, then passed your next exams and went to university or got a job. Then I read an article that said the world is going to change incredibly because the majority of the jobs that would create power positions in 2020 had not yet been created, and that

fascinated me. It meant that people and businesses had the opportunity to change the world as we had all experienced it.

I am privileged enough to speak to women of colour every day. That is my focus. Those are the women I help, and those are the women who help me. We talk about what we need to see in the world. The one thing I want to bring to you today is community: empowering women to form communities of their own that represent them; empowering women in the workplace to change the culture for themselves; and empowering them to dismantle the things that are preventing them from succeeding, from getting that promotion.

I once thought to myself, "How can I ask my superior to speak to a woman of colour without sounding offensive and without sounding like I was disregarding the work that he or she had done to advance my career in that place?" But it is necessary. Empowering women of colour to form communities for women of colour in their own organisations, willing to make a difference and make a change, will dismantle blocks, walls and barriers. That is where the world should be going. I am grateful that there is this room, and this place, and that there are these decision-makers who value the words coming from my mouth as well as from the mouths of the wonderful speakers today.

If there is one take-away that I would like everyone to have, it is that, when you go back to work, you think about what you see around you. If you see a woman of colour who looks alone, she probably is. She probably has no one to talk to about her specific struggle as a woman of colour in that space. I suggest that you talk to her and ask her what she thinks she needs. If you are in a position of power and can do so, please help.

Nour Shaker Fayed: Madam Speaker, at the dawn of history in ancient Egypt gender variant individuals always existed. One of the ancient Egyptian kings had a very feminine body yet was still king. In native American culture, gender variant individuals were always looked up to for leadership and wisdom, usually being referred to as two-spirit, yet were condemned as sodomites by the early Spanish settlers and explorers of the new world. Furthermore, in India, Hijra has long been known as a term to describe transgender and gender variant people.

In 2018, the Government Equalities Office tentatively estimated that there are between 200,000 and 500,000 trans individuals in the UK. That is quite a big range for an estimate. As a matter of fact, in 2009, the Office for National Statistics issued a position statement explaining explicitly why they do not issue an estimate for this figure.

The knowledge of being trans or of trans history completely changes how trans people are treated and can negatively impact simple matters such as access to public spaces. As shown in Stonewall's 2018 trans report, 51% hide their identity for fear of discrimination. Even worse, 12% of trans employees have been physically attacked by either a colleague or a customer. The stigmas make an accurate

estimation extremely difficult, and that is not even considering the impact of being in an ethnic minority.

It is more than a number. There are lives behind those numbers. For instance, I came to the UK three and a half years ago after being called names, prosecuted and spat on, and having my kids taken away from me. Yet I was extremely privileged as I was highly skilled in a niche technology and was supported by my employer Vodafone, and its leadership, in the UK and abroad.

Before coming to the UK, I started by studying the ecosystem of laws that would protect me as a human being: the Sex Discrimination Act, the Gender Recognition Act and the Equality Act. For me, that was a sign that I would be safe. I resumed my transition shortly after I arrived in the UK. I was widely accepted, yet, being of ethnic minority, there were a few assumptions and preconceptions made as soon as I walked through the door. At the beginning, I was not sure how I should address that. I was afraid, until I decided to question all of it by being the first to say hello and put a smile on my face.

It was not all plain sailing. There were instances when I had to debate my own identity. When getting a new biometric residence card, should it show me as male or female? It was the same when updating my bank statement. Very recently, the consulate of my home country denied me renewal of my expired passport. None the less, it was a journey during which I grew in ways I never thought possible. Today, I am growing in faith. I am growing in my career with Vodafone. I am growing in confidence every day when I wake up in the morning. Alas, not everyone is as fortunate.

Pride events are great for raising awareness and showing support, but there is more to be done. Today, I humbly stand before you to urge everyone, everybody, to make a change. If you know a trans individual, ask them questions and learn from them how they go about their daily lives. Challenge yourself. Challenge the image conveyed by the hate speech yellow tabloids. Read more and learn more. There is a plethora of questions, resources, books and blogs on the internet. Pick up one.

Diipa Khosla: Madam Speaker, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a true honour for me to stand here today: in the first place, I have never seen my mother as proud as I have seen her today; secondly, I get to speak to you all today on International Women's Day; and, thirdly, perhaps most importantly, because of where I come from.

My beginnings were humble. I was born and grew up in a small hill station in India in a world where men often decide what you do and do not do. It was a patriarchal system that at times was at odds with my character, world view and ambition. It was my mother who told me time and time again, "Keep flying as high as a bird and don't ever let your flight drop for anything." That motherly advice, education and the tool of social media gave me the liberty to speak freely to those who chose to listen.

In male-dominated societies, social media offer women a tool whereby they can speak to millions of other women without interference. That is something I witnessed in places like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Iraq, where my husband was stationed as a diplomat. I got the chance to meet several vibrant young ladies who, against all the odds, blogged, wrote and posted things that women could not normally speak of. While listening to their stories, I realised that in a country like Iraq they were indeed flying as high as a bird and never letting their flight drop for anything.

The field I work in—fashion, beauty and social media—might at first glance seem superficial, but in fact it holds one great advantage. We get to interact directly with our audience, unlike other industries that are perhaps more male dominated, without contemplating male interference.

Today, I have been asked to share with you all certain concrete tips that you can employ to bring about social change using social media. One example is my recent wedding. During my wedding, my husband and I decided to challenge an age-old Indian custom, where the bride bends down and touches her husband's feet at the completion of the wedding ceremony. As this unilateral and one-sided honouring of the man had always puzzled me, we decided to do it differently.

Against the advice of our elders and our family we decided, as a sign of mutual respect, that we would both touch each other's feet. Without us even realising, that small gesture and its unspoken implicit message resonated with my audience beyond anything anticipated. I went to bed and woke up the next morning to find that the message had gone viral, receiving 6 million impressions of one photo of my husband touching my feet. India's biggest publications even spoke of a social revolution. We received over 50,000 personal messages from young Indian girls from all over the world celebrating and applauding this change.

What can you do to make a social change? Make sure that your message is relevant. Make sure that it is authentic, and even controversial in the good sense of the word. The power of social media goes beyond a popularity contest. It goes beyond the promotion of products, beauty and travel. It is, in essence, one of the strongest tools that we young women have.

Finally, I echo what my mother said: "Keep flying as high as a bird and don't ever let your flight drop for anything."

Tracy-Ann Oberman: I am honoured to be speaking today alongside my BAME sisters to hear their voices and experiences. I am here because, as well as being an actor and a writer, I have also become an online activist, speaking out against misogyny and anti-Semitism, particularly when it is done in the name of my beloved Labour Party and in the name of socialism.

My great-grandparents and grandparents helped shape and forge the workers movement in the East End of London. When they fled pogroms and persecution in Russia, they

came to the United Kingdom brimming with hope for universal workers' rights. They defined as socialists. Now, in 2019, I do not feel welcome under that banner.

In pointing out that not all Jews are rich, that we are not all part of a cabal, and are not all Zionists being paid to bring down Jeremy Corbyn just for pointing out racism in the party we love, or as I see it, I have become a target of hate and abuse. Just the other day, I was tweeted by an anonymous, presumably white, 65-year-old man, "You wouldn't know anti-Semitism if it crawled out of your saggy middle-aged arse". Well, this middle-aged arse knows that a picture of the Jewish ex-Labour MP, Luciana Berger, with her face grafted on to a rat's body and a Star of David etched on her head with the hashtag "filthy Jew bitch" under it is anti-Semitic.

I stand with my BAME sisters, because when white supremacists marched through Charlottesville holding burning torches, they cheered: "Blacks will not replace us. Immigrants will not replace us. Muslims will not replace us. Jews will not replace us." Under the title "Banners for Better" on this International Women's Day, I would like to add a message of hope. Jews, blacks, Muslims, immigrants and women do not want to replace anyone. We know who we are by sheer definition—having to justify and explain who we are again and again. We are strong; we are vital; we are important, grounded and centred enough to have created our own space. That space is better when we bring our collective skills, knowledge and power together. If you attack one of us, you attack us all.

It takes courage to be a woman and to put your head above the parapet. It takes courage to be a BAME woman and to roar out into the world, but courage is what unites us all here today. As Anaïs Nin, the writer, said: "Life shrinks or expands according to one's courage." Today, we are women of courage, and we stand by each other and expand each other.

My pledge for change is simple, yet so elusive. Listen. In an age of social media echo chambers, we have forgotten how to listen. Listen to people's fears and concerns. Listen to their worries. Do not dismiss them as hysterical. Do not call women's voices shrill. Do not rush in trying to interpret what they are really saying. Do not add your opinions or judgment. Just listen. You will be surprised at what you learn.

Baroness Usha Prashar: Madam Speaker, Lord and Lady Popat, distinguished guests, it is a real honour to be speaking here today. It is a first for me, because I am used to speaking in the House of Lords, and this happens to be the Commons, which I think in itself is quite significant.

Having listened to the speakers so far, I am quite humbled. My speech is already redundant because, in a way, I was going to talk about change and making a difference. The stories that you have heard so far tell us that there are so many take-aways that resonate with some of the things I was going to say. We talk about the feeling of change, but we

are the change. In the fact that we are here and that women are actually together, talking and making a difference, we are the change. As Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world".

If we look back to when International Women's Day was launched in 1945 and at where we are now, I think we would say that there is a lot to do but that a lot of progress has been made. From my point of view, having had a working life of 47 or 48 years, I reflected on the things that actually bring about change and what we need to do in terms of take-aways.

The first thing I would say to you is that it is what you are. You cannot change anything unless you change your attitude. You can change your world by changing your attitude. When you are fighting for equality or against discrimination, it is important to remember that you are a person. In my life, whatever I have done, I have never been bound by the fact that I am a woman, that I am a minority woman or that I am the only one in that situation. It is you as the individual who counts. I think that message has come through from a number of the speeches we have heard so far. Be yourself and be confident. The first thing we want to do is to encourage women, whichever area of work they are in, to have self-esteem, to be confident and to be determined. Be yourself.

The second thing, which women are very good at, is coming together, collaborating and supporting each other. We give a very good message. Always look out for people you need to support. Margaret Mead said that nothing makes a difference like a few committed people coming together to do things. If we look at the history of the way we evolved anti-discrimination legislation, it has been a few people persevering and coming together to make a difference.

It is very important that we work on the things women are very good at: teamwork, collaboration and support. We have heard about the change taking place in today's world. What really matters is not the bottom line in corporations but humanity. It is how you motivate people to come together, and women can make a real difference.

Given the time, I am not going to allow myself to be whipped, so, to finish, I will say that the only way we can live is to grow, and the only way we can grow is to change. The only way we can change is to learn, and the only way we can learn is to expose ourselves to new experiences. It is very important that we expose ourselves to new situations and to being challenged. We must focus on change and making a difference. It takes patience and perseverance. It needs collaboration. That is what makes it happen.

We are very privileged today after all these years that, for the first time, we are having a debate on International Women's Day talking about BAME. We have had some inspired speeches so far. All power to your elbow. I thank Rupa and Rupal for their sterling organisation in bringing us all together.

Tracey Ford: Good afternoon, Madam Speaker and Ladies and Gentlemen. I personally have an experience that I would like to share with you, but, first, I want to say that this morning as I came in there was another incident of youth murder on the streets. That is why my message is about youth violence, which affects us more and more every day.

As a mother, a grandmother and a woman, I was running my own business 12 years ago while taking care of my two children. One day, my son left home to go ice-skating. At about 10 o'clock I got a hysterical phone call, and it was my son's girlfriend on the phone. The only word I heard was the word "shot". I made my way to Streatham ice-skating rink. My son, James Andre Godfrey Smartt-Ford, died. He was aged 17.

For the last 12 years, I have been campaigning to raise awareness of the desolation and tragedy caused to family, friends and strangers when children kill children. It has taken Jodie Chesney, who was 17 and was stabbed senselessly in a park in Harold Hill, for the media, the papers and society to recognise that this is not an issue that just happens in inner cities. It is not just an issue of young black men in gangs. It is an issue for the UK, affecting us daily. Last year, 41 children were murdered in London. Was that taken note of? I don't think it was. We had a 60% increase in child stabbings. That figure was released by the NHS two weeks ago. It included children as young as 10.

Something more needs to be done. As Javed Khan of Barnardo's said yesterday, we cannot police our way out of this situation. We have community academics; we have community people; we have grass-roots organisations working on the ground. We all need support to support the children. There is nothing harder for a mother than the loss of the life of her child.

We may not all be parents, but in some way we all have children in our family whether you are an aunt, a cousin or a carer. We all have children in our family somewhere along the line. It is our responsibility and our duty to look after children. I never had the chance to see my son, who would now be 29, be a father or a responsible adult, and carry out his duty to be a responsible person in society. I am hoping that things will change, not by over-policing stop and search, but by a multiagency response, including people who are directly affected. They should not be kept out of finding the solutions when children are killing children.

Alice Hu Wagner: Thank you very much for welcoming me today. As the mother of a 12-year-old son, I thank the previous speaker for her amazingly moving speech.

I am afraid my comments today are about something a lot less moving, but I hope it is something that will equally help to change the world. I work for the British Business Bank, which is the UK's domestic development bank. That makes us the largest investor in the UK venture capital endeavour. That is important because venture capital backs the entrepreneurs of the future in the UK; it will drive the productivity of the nation and, hopefully, change the world.

I am here to talk to you about a piece of research that we did last year about who in the UK gets venture capital, who does not and why. In essence, we investigated teams of entrepreneurs or founders who were applying for venture capital. We put them into all-female teams, all-male teams and a mixed gender team. The figures were somewhat depressing. For every £1 of investment in venture capital in the UK last year, all-female founder teams got less than 1p. To put that into absolute terms, all-female teams got about £32 million, whereas all-male teams got about £5 billion.

Why? We have heard that only about a third of entrepreneurs in the UK are women, but that does not match up to less than 1p on the pound. We took a look into it, and it comes down to three hurdles, and they have resonance with some of the things previous speakers have brought up. After all, finance and entrepreneurialism are within a broad society.

The first thing relates to sectors. Which sectors are of interest to venture capitalists? We heard about peak sectors—those that were only female dominated being less interesting—as opposed to others in digital, which had a very tech approach. If we look at digital, only 26% of digital workers are women. Even if you get past that and go into navigating networks, in essence what happens is that female entrepreneurs are less likely to ask for venture capital. Only 5% of the inbound pitches that go to venture capitalists are from all-female teams; 75% come from all-male teams, and about 20% from mixed gender.

There is also some interplay with how one asks for things. Venture capital is about who you know. If you come in with a warm introduction, or if somebody introduces you, you are 13 times more likely to secure funding. If you come in X Factor-style, randomly putting your ask in, you are a lot less likely to get it. If you do not have a warm introduction, you are not likely to be considered, and women are less likely to utilise networks.

Finally, you have to navigate decision-makers. Remember that 5% of the pitches for venture capital come from all-female teams and about 4% of all investment goes to all-female teams, so that drop-off is not so bad, but 81% of all the funds go to all-male teams. More importantly, 25% of venture capitalists did not see a single woman at investment committee last year; not in a mixed gender team and not in an all-female team—not one woman.

What does that do? It basically affects what people think is safe or typical; what an actual successful entrepreneur looks like. That affects everyone who does not necessarily conform to the right race, gender, class, sexuality, faith or ability. One of the things that we learnt to talk about was how we can make this better. We say get informed. Do not reinvent the wheel. Get involved because we are better together if there are lots of allies. Finally, get specific. Pick something to do, measure your impact and try to make things a bit better.

Sabyasachi Mukherji: Good afternoon Madam Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me to speak before you all today.

Twenty years ago, I started a clothing brand in India that began its operation in the luxury ethnic wear space. At the time, the fashion industry in India was very young and the ready-to-wear market was predominantly ethnic. What we did not realise was how lucrative the market would be for Western clothing brands with an ambition for global domination.

In 2019, the Indian ethnic wear market is expected to stand at a whopping £13 billion, with womenswear dominating 83% of the market share. Obviously, the West took cognisance of such a lucrative market and there was a serious and sustained effort to influence the Indian purchasing habit. The beauty and clothing giants came plundering from the West, riding on fashion magazines and the press that worked around the clock to alter and polarise consumer tastes and behaviour, aiming to monopolise the market to their advantage. The damage inflicted was colossal. India started suffering from a massive cultural identity crisis, and women were among the worst affected by this phenomenon. Impossible and alien standards of beauty, propagated through skin-lightening creams and hair colour, mythical body structures and clothing silhouettes, wreaked havoc with personal confidence that was already being systematically smothered by an oppressive patriarchy.

But I think nothing prepares you for woman's resilience and her ability to fight back and reclaim her identity. This narrative is not just Indian; it is global. Recent efforts championed by women all around the world have started a new conversation about confidence and self-awareness. Indian women have joined in too. Social media-driven campaigns in India like the 100 Saree Pact are encouraging women to reclaim and embrace their inherent Indian-ness. As someone who works within this sphere, I see at first hand the impact of such public discourse on the topic of ethnic clothing. The saree has re-emerged not only as a garment but as a conduit for expressing pride, ethnic history, nationality and a unique narrative that is wholly owned by women themselves.

I want to talk about a few uncomfortable truths about our society in India. It has been overwhelmingly patriarchal for far too long. Domestic violence, dowry, female infanticide and women's disfranchisement are issues women have to battle on a daily basis. I do not wish to overstate or misrepresent my role in shifting the paradigm, but as a brand we play a small part in inspiring Indian women to be themselves and embrace their Indian clothing and textile heritage. In doing so, we promote an economy that largely benefits craftsmen and craftswomen from all over India who have been effectively silenced by global greed.

Women in India, by embracing their cultural identity and Indian-ness, are recreating a demand for craft and empowering their sisters at the grass-roots level. Every time you buy a saree, you are actually putting somebody's

children in school. As the perception of women evolves to include the idea that they can be economically self-sufficient, I hope and pray that the uncomfortable truths that I speak about today will no longer be a part of women's narrative in India.

Thank you again for inviting me today. It is so important to have a day not only to celebrate women as they stand before us, but to reflect on the past and to look forward to a more congenial future. As Rabindranath Tagore from Calcutta once said, "I have travelled the world looking for beauty. Never did I know that it lay on a dew drop on a blade of grass right next to my doorstep".

Jai Hind.

Nazreen Visram: Madam Speaker, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, if I asked you in this room today to define yourself—Who are you? What are you? Where are you from?—I am confident I would get a variety of responses. Would you define yourself by your name, your race, your religion, your values or perhaps your heritage or gender? To take my own example, I am Nazreen Visram, an Ismaili Muslim with East African, Indian and Pakistani heritage. I am British from Harrow. I am the Head of Charities for Barclays, and my core values are integrity and service to others. The list could go on.

The question of who we each are when we meet each other or get to know each other is a complex one. Today, it is our differences rather than our commonality that we must try to understand. That is why the concept of pluralism is now more important than ever. In a world where the disruptive effects of economic globalisation are creating inequality, where technology is unsettling our sense of identity and where we are seeing the rise of nationalism and populism, pluralism is a value that needs to be embraced so that we can resolve and avoid conflict, and make progress. This is important for me, for my son, and especially so for generations to come, so that they can grow up in a world where they understand each other and live in peace.

What do I mean by pluralism? Defined simply, pluralism is an ethic of respect for diversity. Whereas diversity is a fact, pluralism is a choice. Pluralism results from the daily decisions taken by state institutions, by civil society actors and associations, and by individuals, to recognise and value human difference. Pluralist societies are not accidents of history. They require continuous investment and decision-making across many different sectors—economic, political and social. Pluralism seeks to bridge rather than erase human differences and in that way fosters belonging.

As an Ismaili Muslim, I represent a culturally diverse community. In the UK and Europe alone, we are predominantly from East Africa, the Indian sub-continent and, increasingly from Central Asia and the Middle East. While our traditions, languages and practices are different, we recognise that the ethics and values of our faith are what unite us. Through the celebration of the arts and the spirit of sport, we are embracing pluralism and building bridges of

peace and understanding, not only within the community but in wider society.

His Highness the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims, founded both the Global Centre for Pluralism and the Global Pluralism Award. He said: "Some people make the mistake of thinking that pluralism requires them to dilute or de-emphasise their own distinctive identities. That is not true. What it requires is to ensure that one's identity is strong enough to engage confidently with those of other identities as we all walk together along the road to a better world."

What can we do as individuals and as a collective to put pluralism into action? I propose that we set up our own centre, here in London, and make it our mission to work in a multi-pluralist way. Wouldn't that be amazing? Perhaps most importantly, each of us should take the time to develop a deeper understanding of our own selves and what we stand for, and, with that, acknowledge difference with respect and understanding, seeking to learn and appreciate those around us without judgment. Let us all be an inspiration to each other and expand the boundaries of the possible.

Xinran Xue: Madam Speaker and friends, it is an honour to speak to you and to share my experience and knowledge of Chinese women and Chinese families. I am a journalist and I used to work for the first women's hour radio show in China in the 1980s. I have published eight books worldwide, all based on my research on Chinese women and Chinese families.

China's single child policy was a very big part of my research. The policy is a unique birth control system on this planet. It started in 1979 and ended in 2015. During the 36 years of the policy China reduced the population by 400 million, which is a gift to the planet. As a result of the policy, China had a chance to break from the war between limited food and a fast-growing population, but Chinese families and the Chinese people have paid a huge price.

According to government analysis, in 2015 there were 30 million more men than women in China, and 150,000 Chinese girls had been adopted by 27 countries. I set up a charity called "The Mothers' Bridge of Love" to try to help those children learn why and how they became adopted and, if there is any chance, they can go back to their own country and birth family.

By 2016, China was successful and had developed, as everybody knows. By that time, China had halved the rate of suicide. In 2002, according to the United Nations, China was in the top five, and Chinese women were at number one for suicides. By 2016, China was off the top of that list, but, according to *China Daily* in 2014, and the NGO system in 2015, the number of rural Chinese elderly women committing suicide had increased by 500% in the past two decades.

China has made a remarkable change. Chinese women have been fighting for freedom of marriage and equal rights for girls' education with that of the boys, and even the right to

eat at the same dining table as men. China is not just the Han people. We have 56 different peoples, and in some minorities for a girl or a woman to go into a public place when she has her period is still treated as evil or criminal.

From my research, I realised that across the world we have been talking about human rights, and particularly women's rights, for over 100 years, but the father still has the most important place in the family. That is why I would like to give you a message from my heart, and from my research with many Chinese girls. Family is our first world. It should be the place where we learn how to be equal to everyone. Parents are the first teachers in our lives. I believe that parents should be educated before becoming parents, so that our daughters and the new generation can live in freedom in an equal society.

Sonal Sachdev-Patel: I am afraid I must start today with an apology. The topic I am here to discuss is considered rather dull, uninspiring and too commonplace to attract media attention. It is too universal to warrant specific consideration from many policymakers.

I am here today to discuss violence against women and girls, particularly violence against BAME women and girls. It is BAME women who suffer the highest rates of gender-based violence in this country, and BAME women whose access to vital protections is being undermined by a shameful lack of interest and lack of funding.

Let me take Asha as an example. Asha came to the UK after marriage with little formal education. She did not speak much English, and she was completely financially dependent upon her husband. As a newly-wed, far from home and cut off from the outside world, she was expected to cook and clean for her husband and his family. In this isolated and unfamiliar environment, her husband began to beat her, often with his own shoes. When Asha's brother-in-law made violent sexual advances towards her, Asha's mother-in-law was unsympathetic. Asha is alone.

Then again, Asha is not alone, for that is the story of far too many BAME women in this country. I called a journalist recently about some of our new research on the sector. Do you know what he said to me? "The story of a man beating his wife is not news. It's just not interesting enough for our readers. If you get something with a shock factor, call me back." That is what I call shocking.

BAME women are three times more likely to commit suicide than other women. They are subject to multiple and multiplying forms of discrimination based on their race, their gender, their class, their level of poverty and their immigration status. Those all act as barriers to their seeking help. When they do courageously seek help from protective agencies, they are often met with a lack of understanding of their culture and their specific needs.

What can we do about it? First, as we sit here in Westminster, we must demand that the Government do more to meet the needs of all women. Too often, UK policy

is designed as if women were one homogeneous group. That fails to meet the specific needs of women of different cultures, classes and communities. Secondly, we must support the very existence of BAME specialist service providers because they are struggling to survive. Since 2012, half of all BAME shelters have been forced to close their doors, leaving women like Asha even more vulnerable. Finally, you can join me in supporting the Rise Together campaign, which is a collaborative crowdfunding effort of five brilliant organisations, each led by trailblazing, fearless women like the women you see here today, who are determined to keep all women safe.

I know it might be provocative for me to call domestic violence dull, but that is how society is choosing to treat it—as something unsurprising and inevitable. I reject that. BAME women and girls' human rights are being failed by us on a daily basis. That is something that should shock and shame us, and spur each and every one of us into action.

Sonia Meggie: Good afternoon. I want to tell you about a mosquito bite. If you can relate to this, please raise your hand: "You do not look how you sound." "You are attractive for a black, Asian or Indian woman." "You speak so well."

What is a micro-aggression? It is a comment or an action that often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude towards a member of another group such as BAME people, LGBTQI, those with disabilities, religious groups and more. In a retail store, it is being followed around. It is being asked, "Where are you really from?" It is, "I don't see colour." "You aren't really black, black." "I have black friends." "You are very articulate." "Is that your real name?" It is changing our name or touching our hair. It is not just confined to race. A friend with dyslexia is often told, "You wouldn't know you are dyslexic. You don't look like a dyslexic. Would you like me to read this to you?" There are comments such as "funny tinge" or "coloured", as used yesterday.

In a previous role, I worked in tech. I was used to being asked if I was the engineer. On one such occasion, we had a call to the office and the person asked to speak to the senior engineer. I said, "How can I assist?" He repeated it and insisted that I pass the call on. I passed it over to my line manager. The conversation then went something like this, "Yes, she's all right. She's not bad. She's all right for a colouroid".

Negative micro-behaviours, known as micro-inequities, can be extremely damaging to morale and motivation in a workplace. They make us feel uncomfortable and uneasy. There are different types of micro-aggression in the workplace. There is non-verbal, such as checking your phone, or no eye contact when talking to your peers. There is verbal, such as interrupting, or inviting you to comment on something that has absolutely nothing to do with you. There is behavioural, looking at how tasks are distributed, or simply just remembering your name.

In the BITC Race at Work report in 2015, those who had experienced racial harassment or bullying came from predominantly Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other Asian groups, the lowest being white at 8%. When asked about difficulty in reporting incidents, many said that they just got used to the racist behaviour and saw it as part of their job. Some quit their job, even though they loved their career, because they were told that highlighting it would not be good for them.

I am not asking for sympathy but empathy. I ask you to look at how you could lead by example. I ask you to think about how you could be proactive. I ask you to think about how you could start to take these reports seriously and how, with confidentiality, you could all move forward. If you witness micro-aggression, I ask you to SPEAK. S stands for straightaway; P is being polite about how you handle it; E is looking for evidence; A is avoiding confrontation; and K is knowing who to speak to.

None of us enjoys a mosquito bite, but we remember how it feels to be severely bitten. Micro-aggressions are like a paper cut. One paper cut on one finger is uncomfortable, but multiple cuts will eventually impact on how you operate and use that finger.

Asma Khan: Thank you very much for inviting me to speak here. I want to talk about something that is very close to my heart. I run a restaurant where all the people in the kitchen are women. They are a very special kind of woman. They are all housewives. They are all south Asians and their average age is 50. Fifty is a significant number. I turned 50 this year, and those who understand cricket will know that it is the second innings in my life. I do not intend to get out cheaply, but my score is only significant if my entire team wins.

I set up the restaurant with the attitude that I am going to lift up and raise the image of the mother. All of us have forgotten the role of the mother, not just in feeding us but nourishing us. She is somebody you learned from—somebody who fed you with a lot of love when you were young. If you grew up in south Asia, that was such a privilege.

I come from Calcutta, which is the food capital of the world. The food there is incredible. We have a beautiful culture of food, yet when I came to this country and looked around at the Indian restaurants I never saw any women anywhere. How is that, when the food is good enough for you to eat at home, where food has that magic in it? We are very accustomed to making money when it comes to professional cooking, and men are there.

It has been a real privilege to have Darjeeling Express. It has been running for a year and a half. We are in the Michelin Guide, and some of you may know that I am the first British chef on Netflix's "Chef's Table", which is one of the biggest and most popular programmes. That is me; I am representing Britain. The story is about south Asian housewives and the food we cook. The south Asian

housewife, apart from the fact that she nurtures, protects and feeds the entire family, is also the custodian of recipes. Those are the recipes that all of us grew up eating and take for granted. There is a generation now that does not know how to cook. If we do not record and preserve the recipes of our previous generation, they will lose something big. It is not like a monument that someone will pay money to restore. If we lose these recipes, they will go for ever.

I want people to understand how serious it is. In this country, the lowest employment rate is among Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somalian women. They can all cook. This is the one thing that I really want to change. I want to change the attitude that this is non-professional. These women are skilled. Two curry houses a day are closing in this country because they cannot get skilled staff, but they never look at us as being skilled. Isn't that a shame? It is such a shame. Listen to my voice and listen to my accent. I have a culture, and my roots go deep down into the soil of Bengal. It is so important that we remember who we are. To every man and woman in this room who is in a position of power and has anything to do with hospitality, I say hire women, because we deserve it.

Bhaskar Ramachandran: Madam Speaker, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, there are several imbalances that need to be addressed in the world today. One of the fundamental imbalances is between the standard of living and the standard of life. Over the years, the standard of living has improved enormously. Today, we have better homes, better vehicles and better comforts, but the standard of life has deteriorated enormously. Terrorism, debts, divorce and depression plague human minds. In spite of all the comforts, people are still unhappy. Recently, the UK Government appointed a Minister for Loneliness and a Minister for Suicide Prevention. The problems are big and they affect a cross-section of society, from the young to the old. What can be done to set this balance right?

If we examine the world carefully, there is over-emphasis on improving the world externally. Instead, efforts have to be directed to improve individuals internally. There is no programme in the world today to develop the individual. There has to be research and investment to develop a global programme to improve human minds. For example, what is the research and development budget of companies like Amazon? It is \$22 billion. Apple's is \$10 billion. Google's is \$3 billion. They are researching smart devices, but first we need smart humans. They are researching artificial intelligence, but we need real intelligence first. It is not just about funds; it is about priorities. If each one understands the importance of self-development, it will automatically get prioritised.

What improves the standard of life? What improves human beings? It is Vedanta, a knowledge that was born 10,000 years back. It is a philosophy, not a religion. Knowledge of Vedanta does not belong to any country. It does not belong to any institution. It is universal. Vedanta has to be taught in schools and universities, in businesses and in government institutions.

The theme of Vedanta is “Intense Work is Rest”. It is not work that causes stress; it is your mind that causes stress. John Milton says: “The mind can make a hell of heaven or a heaven of hell.” The mind has to be controlled and directed by the intellect. Unfortunately, in the world today there is no intellect; there is only intelligence. Intelligence is knowledge you get from external sources like schools and universities, but you have to develop intellect yourself. It is the capacity to think. Shakespeare was not a graduate of any university, but to graduate from a university today you have to study Shakespeare. How about that? Vedanta focuses on developing the intellect.

The tangible, actionable change that every one of us can practise from today onwards is to question everything. Do not take anything for granted. Do not follow the herd mechanically. Think before you act. Think before you speak. To achieve that, you need to study Vedanta every day and use it as a gym for your mind.

There is no balance for women in society because people act on their emotions and impulses. If everyone starts using their intellect, there will be balance for better. Internal change is essential. We need to change our attitudes and think that every day is women’s day.

Meenal Sachdev: Kofi Annan said: “In the long history of human wrongs, the trade in human beings will go down as one of the greatest crimes ever committed.” I am here to ask you as parents, consumers, employees and employers and, fundamentally, as human beings to join the fight in addressing human trafficking. This is a universal fight; it is not an option.

I would like to start by taking you through my journey. When I first learnt about the horrors of human trafficking, I was compelled to help fight this awful crime. I learnt that in India it is cheaper to buy a girl than a buffalo. I learnt that every year millions of children are bought and sold to brothels. I watched a video of a girl, my son’s age, being raped repeatedly. I learnt that men pay more for sex the younger the child. I learnt things that I did not want to accept about this world. As the journey continued, I realised that it was not a problem in far-away lands, but is actually happening everywhere, including on our own doorstep.

There are over 40 million people living in conditions of slavery around the world, 71% of whom are women and girls. In the UK, which is my focus right now, estimates of victims of modern slavery range from 13,000 to 136,000, but no one knows the real extent of the figure because of the hidden nature of the crime. Slavery in the UK takes various forms. Car washes and nail bars can be hotspots for exploitation. Young people are being targeted by friends to traffic drugs across counties, called county lines. There is also a great deal of risk in businesses such as clothes, food and other services, whether it is the cotton from Uzbekistan used for the clothes sold in our shops or the underpaid cleaners who clean our office buildings. Exploitation is happening everywhere.

Within the hospitality sector I heard about Emily, who was offered her first job by the alleged owner of a local restaurant. However, the restaurant was not where Emily ended up. She was instead taken to a hotel where she was drugged, beaten and forced to have sex with 60 men over three days. Rashmi thought she would find a nursing position in the UK through an agency in exchange for 100,000 rupees. When she arrived here, her passport was taken and she was forced to work as a domestic worker. She had no bed, was threatened with beatings and was only fed leftovers. She never saw her wages, as they went directly to the agency. She felt desperate. What happened to Emily and Rashmi is not unique.

The UK was a leader in 1833 when it abolished slavery. It is a leader now with the advent of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Despite these efforts, millions continue to be harassed, deceived, tortured, drugged and tricked for profit. Modern slavery is a symptom of failing systems around the world. This is relevant to us all, so here are my three asks.

For the individual, I ask you to continue this conversation. When you are choosing your hotel, buying your clothes or grocery shopping, ask your favourite brands what policies they have in place to prevent trafficking. Report any concern that you may have to the police or the Modern Slavery Helpline.

For businesses, you have the resource and the power to end this crime. Look at your business practices and find gaps where people can become vulnerable to exploitative conditions, whether that is in your own operations or your supply chains. At the very least, publish a modern slavery statement detailing what you are doing to address this, and share best practice with others.

Finally for the Government, please follow the recommendations set out in the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act when it is published. Victims require more support; businesses need to be sanctioned when they do not follow the law; and the Government must lead by example with their own supply chain investigations. I urge you to keep modern slavery at the top of your agenda or very high up.

As Nelson Mandela said, being free is not just casting off your own chains but living in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. Let us make sure that our freedom is not the cause of someone else’s misery.

Nishma Gosrani: Madam Speaker, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, a few minutes ago, my learned friend talked about intelligence versus intellect. I now want to think about that and reframe what I was about to say. How many of you really understand how automation is going to change your life in the next five years? I ask that question particularly of the women in the room. How is it going to change your workplace, your household income and the way you live?

As automation changes the world of work, Governments and businesses, we as women need to take action and adapt. The world of work, as we all know, is in a state of flux, which is causing considerable anxiety and for good reason. There has been growing polarisation of labour market opportunities between high and low-skilled jobs. There is unemployment and under-employment, especially among young female talent, and stagnating incomes; a large proportion of households will have income inequality.

Migration and its effect on jobs has become a sensitive political issue in many advanced economies. From Mumbai to Manchester, public debate rages about the future of work and whether there will be enough jobs to gainfully employ everyone. To the contrary, labour markets are under strain and talent is under-utilised. Almost 75 million youth are officially unemployed. Women represent one of the largest pools of untapped labour; globally, 655 million fewer women than men are economically active.

We are only starting to capture the opportunities from digitising economies at sector and company level. Digital technologies are creating major new opportunities for female talent in both advanced and developing economies, but there are significant variations within and across countries and sectors. My use of the word “digitisation” here is very much based around measurement and encompasses two things. There is digitisation of operations. What I mean by that is how you consume as a female consumer on a day-to-day basis. The second is the digitisation of the workforce.

In measuring each of these aspects of digitisation, we find large relative disparities among the large organisations. Based on those measures, a few sectors are highly digitised—for example, financial services, the media and the tech sector itself. They tend to be among the sectors with the highest productivity, growth and wage growth. Many others are less digitised, including healthcare, education systems and retail. These tend to be the larger share of the economy in terms of GDP but the lowest productivity sectors, in particular for women.

How are we going to positively affect the future of work? The disruptions to the world of work that digital technologies are likely to bring will pose significant challenges to policymakers, business leaders and every single one of us. I urge you to evolve education systems so that we all have access and change them for the workforce that is coming. Policymakers working with education providers could do more to improve basic STEM skills through school systems. I was appalled when I recently visited a leading London prep school recently, where they told me that ICT lessons were still the traditional way of teaching code in classes.

Let us put a new emphasis on creativity as well as critical system thinking, and foster adaptive and lifelong learning. Determine how the private sector can drive training, in particular for women. Innovate how humans work alongside machines. Greater interaction will raise productivity, but it requires different and ultimately higher skills, new

technology interfaces, different wage models in some cases and different types of investments by businesses and workers to acquire skills.

Beth Robotham: Madam Speaker, as I prepared to speak to you today, I felt concerned that I was a non-BAME woman potentially occupying the space of a BAME speaker, whom it would be so important to hear. My great friend Poppy Jaman is CEO of City Mental Health Alliance, and she is a powerhouse. If you have not come across her, please look her up. She reminded me that, as female leaders, we can support each other by sharing our stories and encouraging more stories to be shared, because mental health in BAME communities does not receive enough focus, so I was prepared to do a really good job.

My experience of mental health, in the workplace at least, was of feeling unwell and rising panic. When I was most unwell, I used to hide in the bathroom at work and have panic attacks, calm down and then go back to my desk. Sometimes I would do that multiple times a day. I was masking the symptoms. I did not feel that I could talk to anyone about it. No one in the City was talking about mental health. No one in my workplace was talking about mental health. I therefore assumed that I could not be susceptible in that environment.

Sharing my experiences means that other people can find space to share theirs. I hope that, by speaking with you all today, we can talk more about mental health. This is really turning into something quite special. It has helped to create the City Mental Health Alliance, which works with business leaders and City leaders to change mental health in workplaces and systems.

My commitment, and I ask you all to join me, is to learn about mental health and share more stories in communities where mental health is not talked about. In that spirit, I thought that today we could talk together about some of the things we know. The common understanding that you will hear is that one in four people experiences mental health issues. What you might not know is that you are more likely to encounter someone with suicidal feelings than someone having chest pains. What you also might not know is that 70% of people with mental health conditions receive no treatment at all. When you interact with people day to day, you have a great opportunity to help improve their experience.

The BAME community and mental health is significantly under-researched. The research that is available tells us that there are many cultural differences that make it harder for people from different communities to talk about mental health. In fact, if people share mental health stories, they may not be supported by their family and friends for fear of stigma. In the UK, people from BAME communities are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health problem, but much more likely to disengage from mental health services. Again, we have a great opportunity for our communities to interact. I learnt that information on a mental health first aid course, a two-day training that helped

me to learn the skills I need to look after my own and others' mental health. It had such an impact on me that I started a master's degree at King's College in London.

Let us think a bit more about the topic and what we can do. You can ask your employer if they have physical first aiders and mental health first aiders and, if not, why not. You can ask your employer whether they take into account cultural differences when they think about mental health and wellbeing policies. I suspect the answer is no.

I ask you to support the current measures to change the law so that mental health first aid is part of how we protect health, so that we can all talk more openly. Until the law is changed, we encourage people to continue to hide in the bathroom and not share their experience. For me, Balance for Better means creating an environment where we can all thrive, where we can expect inclusion for each other and where we know it is okay not to be okay.

Anita Goyal: Madam Speaker and esteemed guests, I am pleased to see that there is a rise in female philanthropists—empowered women who are collaborating and investing in other women and girls to yield one of the best social returns.

Through our family foundation, the Hemraj Goyal Foundation, which was founded by my husband Avnish Goyal, I have been lucky enough to travel to India and explore the projects that we support. I want to share some powerful stories with you today to celebrate them.

The first story is of a woman we met in a village in the state of Maharashtra. Her name is Dhanashree. She was one of 500 women supported by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women in collaboration with a local partner, the Mann Deshi Foundation. Dhanashree lost her hand operating a noodle-making machine in her small grocery store several years ago. She fell into depression and believed that that was the end of her entrepreneurial dream. Over time, she began to lift herself when she decided to engage in workshops receiving business and financial literacy training. They supported her and gave her the skills and confidence to establish her saree business and grow her milk-selling business. She purchased eight more cows through taking a loan from the women's saving collective in her village. Now she runs a number of small-scale enterprises, quadrupling her income, and is able to pay her children's school fees and send them to university in the main city. Dhanashree is not just an entrepreneur. She is a pioneer, role model and change maker in her village. The work of those foundations has helped families to prosper, communities to thrive and economies to grow.

More recently, I had a wonderful opportunity to speak in Mumbai at the World CSR Congress, where I shared the progress of our foundation. It was there that I had the pleasure to meet a social warrior named Ruma Devi. Dressed in her colourful traditional Rajasthani attire, she stood out and shared her powerful story. At an early age, she lost her mother and was responsible for taking care of her younger siblings. She was married at the tender age of 17.

The only skill she had learned was stitching and some embroidery. A few years later, she gathered women from her neighbourhood, forming a self-help group where they made handcrafted items to sell to the locals. They grew their buying and selling power and increased their profits, which eventually empowered them to secure bank loans and procure raw materials.

Ruma is now 30 years old and is the president of an NGO that gives inspiration to top designers in India. Her textiles and prints are showcased in fashion shows. Under her leadership, she has expanded the operation to 75 villages and trained 11,000 artisans so far. Ruma Devi is an example of a leading woman from rural Rajasthan in India, working with a large team to create sustainable livelihoods for many other women. Her determination, dedication and commitment is truly remarkable, and she was proud to share her article with me when she appeared on the front cover of *India Today*.

Here, back in London, I decided to join the British Red Cross Tiffany Circle and became a member of a global group of over 900 extraordinary women who are helping people in crisis. This unique collective enables me to connect with many like-minded women united by a common goal. Just as a pebble dropped in water forms a series of concentric circles, spreading outwardly, collective giving creates ripple effects by expanding the impact of philanthropy.

As women wield greater influence and do things in more co-operative and inclusive ways, together they create new ways to reach women at all levels of society with resources to grow their power. Let us use this time to come together, to galvanise the power of the next generation of women and men to create the greatest impact for girls and women around the world, and other communities, by creating a platform for next generation philanthropy in causes that matter to them.

Farzana Baduel: In the immortal words of the philosopher, songwriter and singer, Gabrielle, I believe that dreams can come true. I had a dream when I was 10. I was living in suburbia, bored out of my brains. My parents said, "Let's go to Heathrow"—to pick up yet another random relative coming from Pakistan. I said, "Sure". Nothing else to do, obviously. We drove through central London on our way to Heathrow, and I remember seeing for the first time Hyde Park Corner, and the beautiful statue of the angel of peace and his chariot with four horses. I thought, "Oh my God, what is this place?" I remember being inspired by the neo-classical architecture at Hyde Park. I even remember looking at the lamp posts that I thought were so beautiful compared with the lamp posts outside my house.

I said to my parents, "Where is this place? Why aren't we living here? I want to live exactly here". Obviously, my parents said, "Well, it's really expensive. We can't even afford to stay for the day and have lunch, let alone live here". I never really listened to my parents, so I ended up moving to central London. It was a dream for me. Every

morning, when I did my commute to work, I would go past that very statue, and every morning I smiled to myself on my way to work and on the way back.

Ultimately, it is wonderful to have dreams, but how do you go about achieving them? I am in the world of reputation and influence. A lot of people focus on the amplification and tactics of influence, but true influence starts with knowing thyself. There are three building blocks to influence. The first is self-awareness, understanding who you are and your strengths. That is very difficult for a woman, particularly of an ethnic minority, living in society in the UK, because you have to strip away all the layers that society communicates to you subconsciously.

For instance, we are sitting in this room talking about women and women's stories, but if you look around at the art surrounding us, the silent stories, or the micro-aggressions that one of our fellow speakers discussed earlier, tell us that there is not a single woman at the table. If you look around, what are the stories that the art on the walls is telling us? It is important to be very self-aware in understanding exactly who you are and stripping away the layers and the messaging that has come to us through society's storytelling, be it overt storytelling or non-verbal, or even art. It is very important to understand who you are.

The second building block is self-management, understanding your limitations and the areas where you can contribute to society, and navigating through life and finding a path to a position where your strengths will come to the surface and you will not be compromising yourself. Influence also starts with authenticity. For instance, self-management for me means that I know what I am good at and what I am not good at. I carved out a career. I started my first 10 years working as an accountant. Then I realised that taxes weren't quite my thing. Everybody around me was either an accountant, a lawyer or an Uber driver. I thought, "Hey, I'm not very good at parallel parking so I may as well do tax returns". It took me until I was about 31 to figure out that that was not my thing and that I should not live my life according to what my parents think, or what society or my wider community think. Delaying yourself of all that messaging is so important in finding out who you truly are, and then taking your path.

The third area of influence in knowing thyself is self-development. That is where the courses come in, finding your mentors and creating a network around you. My message would be that we all have dreams. Martin Luther King had a dream that one day his children would be judged by the content of their character rather than the colour of their skin. My dream is that one day my daughter will talk about women and women's liberty in a room where the art surrounding her tells the story that women are also part of the history of humanity and that we too should have a seat at the table.

Kim Nilsson: Artificial intelligence: two words that create mixed emotions in most of us. We think of technological advances. We think of personalised medicine and tailored

decision-making. We also think about job losses and Terminator-style machines taking over our lives.

The truth is that every innovation has a good and a bad side. In either case, AI is here to stay. In fact, AI and data science make up one of the four pillars of the Government's industrial strategy. These innovations are key to the UK's economic growth over the next decade and will create more jobs than will be lost.

For the AI industry in the UK to thrive, companies, Government and organisations will need to innovate, and innovation requires diversity in every sense of the word: people with mixed backgrounds, ethnicities, skill sets, mindsets and, of course, gender. Diversity is critical for future AI developments as it prevents biases from creeping into algorithms and solutions. According to Kate Crawford, researcher and journalist: "Like all technologies before it, artificial intelligence will reflect the values of its creators." It has been proven that the first generation of algorithms is often biased in favour of young, white men. Unfortunately, diversity in the data industry today is poor, and only 15% of professional data scientists in Europe are female.

We can change that. All along the educational and career funnel, we lose the interest of girls and women. Starting with young girls, organisations such as Girls Who Code, Code First: Girls, and Stemettes encourage children to develop an interest in coding and technology. For young women taking STEM A-levels and university degrees, further encouragement from society is needed. At this stage, it is also critical that young women have strong female leaders and role models to look up to in a range of career types and stages. It is so often the case that what they cannot see, they cannot be.

Once those women graduate, they need support and encouragement to enter tech jobs in industry, or even to start their own business. Above all, those of us already in the tech world need to work hard to change industry stereotypes in order to avoid women leaving their careers prematurely. That includes more options for childcare and work-life balance, more female leaders in top positions and more funding for female entrepreneurs. The Government can do a lot to make that happen, especially at the younger ages in schools and the educational system, and at later funding stages, via grants and business loans.

At Pivigo, we are passionate about diversity. We pledge here today to take at least 40%, with a target of 50%, female participation in our data science training programme Science to Data Science, where we train MScs and PhDs to take up careers in data science.

I have an ask for you, the audience. Encourage a young girl you know to take up an interest in STEM subjects by, for example, simple things like buying her a science toy, encouraging her to read a science book or telling her about the female pioneers in our industry. Together, we can bring diversity to UK businesses and build a stronger future for the next generation.

Roianne Nedd: Today, International Women's Day is for all women, yet feminist activities and campaigns have historically focused disproportionately on white women, leaving women of colour out in the cold. The growth of the black feminist agenda has only amplified how disparate the two movements have become. It is time for a change. As Sojourner Truth said: "Ain't I a woman?" As a black woman, my femininity is often cancelled out by my blackness. Doors are literally closed in my face while being held open for white women, and the thought of carrying my bags and lightening my load is anathema to some people.

As a group, we experience life, especially our professional lives, very differently from the way that white women and black men do. Stereotypes abound and we are constantly treading a fine line to be heard without being accused of shouting; to be the casual racist's confidante without being angry. I cannot tell you how many black women have shared stories with me about colleagues and acquaintances seeking their approval or validation for racist views. "Ifeoma in finance is really aggressive, isn't she?" you get asked in hushed conspiratorial tones, knowing that whatever you reply, you cannot win. You either indict one of your sisters with the stereotype that you abhor or you are tarred with the same brush for coming to her defence. Any attempt to address bias is received with hostility and affront. As a black woman, who am I to set my boundaries when history has dictated that I am owned by everyone but belong to no one?

We are not allowed to be ourselves. Instead, we have to step into the boxes constructed for us. I have explored some of those boxes as part of the Trusted Black Girl movement, identifying personas that are placed on black women in the UK workplace, such as the workaholic black girl, a hard-working woman who has been fooled by the meritocracy myth; or the not black girl forced to trade her blackness to progress; or even the trusted black girl—the inspiration behind the movement—a woman given opportunities because somehow she has become the acceptable face of blackness in her workplace.

Despite the fact that black women are often managing stereotypes placed on them by other people, we are still the ones expected to change. Despite what you think, this is our reality and we must seize the opportunity to change the narrative. As Whitney said, "It's not right, but it's okay", because who is more equipped than a black woman to navigate the intricacies of educating other people about how to treat her and her sisters?

It is not just about women of colour. We all have a responsibility and an opportunity to reframe the narrative. Let's use it. Leaders, especially white men, control most of industry. You make most of the high-level decisions that impact women of colour. Check your biases. Are they impacting the way that you recognise, develop, progress and reward women of colour? You need to reimagine your definition and visualisation of talent.

White women, it is time for you to step up and show up for other women. Since time immemorial, you have had the power to influence change. The gender debate has increased your positions and your power. Increased board and organisational representation for women has largely benefited you. Use your power as a force for good.

My beautiful sisters from across the world, look within. Do you collaborate or compete? Do you perceive that there is space for only one of us at the table? Take responsibility for how you present our collective identity as BAME women to the world. Like it or not, you represent all of us.

Sabree Kansagra: Good afternoon. I am a partner and trustee at Friendsline, a charity focused on female empowerment through improved mental health. I am so pleased about how many in the room are acknowledging the importance of mental health. Although that indicates that we are making progress as a developing society, we still have a long way to go globally.

Imagine that you are having a terrible day. Perhaps you did not get the promotion you have been working for or you received unfortunate news about someone close to you. I will be honest; for me, all it takes is to miss my morning croissant and I am really stressed. But imagine feeling that it is your worst day every day. Now think of a child working long-hour days in the heat, or a young girl running the household while, of course, her brother is playing outside. She feels the anxiety of feeding her family without even knowing that the word exists. In your scenario and the scenario of the young girl, what do you think is the impact on productivity? What do you think is the impact on positivity at home?

What provokes stress in each of us is relative, but the feeling of anxiety and depression is universal. By 2020, the World Health Organization predicts that depression, which is twice as likely to affect women, will be the second largest contributor to the global disease burden. That is why at Friendsline we bring mental health support to women and girls in developing countries like India, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Friendsline has developed pre-recorded mindfulness and healing sessions, which range from yoga for menstruation to coping with domestic abuse and anxiety. Based on research and our experience, yoga is an effective route to combating the impact of heightened stress and anxiety through lowering the blood pressure and reducing heart rate. The seminars also have social benefits, as women and girls are able to make new friendships and develop sustainable communities which act as support networks.

Our impact lead has over 30 years of experience in development and health. She runs an evaluation framework using tailored WHO tools. This allows us to quantify the changes we see in women and girls, in their quality of life and wellness. We have already seen a boost in confidence, focus and overall positivity. Through using technology, we are able to reach remote parts of the world which otherwise

would receive no mental health support. This is a key step in empowering women and girls, and promoting gender equality and social and economic development. So far, we have worked with almost 500 beneficiaries, and, due to the low start-up costs of our partnerships, our operations are quite simple. All that is required is a projector, yoga mats, a 3G internet connection and a notebook.

We all know that the issues related to gender equality are long-standing relics in our society. To help us make a difference in countries where women are not as lucky as we are, we ask you to raise awareness of how we can empower women from all backgrounds through improved mental health. Our website, Friendsline.org, hosts studies on the tangible benefits of yoga and mindfulness, with testimonials from our beneficiaries and our plan to launch three new partnerships in 2019. Please take a look to support our mission.

Thank you, Rupa and Rupal, for organising this fantastic event, and thank you, Lord and Lady Popat, for hosting this fantastic forum in celebration of International Women's Day.

Avnish Goyal: Madam Speaker and esteemed guests, last year my wife Anita was invited to speak at the inaugural event on International Women's Day to celebrate the achievements of women. It was a woman-only event, but through sheer persistence I managed to get an invite. That day, I was moved and inspired by the passionate and articulate women who talked about their achievements, hopes and dreams, as well as their struggles for gender equality. I felt that more men should have been present to listen, as well as sharing their thoughts on what is, after all, such an important subject. I am pleased to be one of the three men selected today. I guess that is progress.

Why do women sometimes feel more comfortable discussing the challenges they face and celebrating their achievements among themselves? Women would benefit from encouraging us men who really get it to get involved. It is our job as men to take responsibility for the behaviour of other men. As a man, I benefit from gender equality and women being empowered, as do my family, my company and my communities. If I benefit, so should every other man.

Today, I want to be one of the men who is willing to share his views. As I have said, I am married to a wonderful woman, Anita. My job is to know her hopes, dreams and goals while understanding her fears and challenges without judgment. I am also her best friend and her number one fan. By the same token, she is my best friend and gives me the space to be vulnerable and share my goals, aspirations and feelings, also without fear of being judged—a win-win solution for marital bliss.

While she still wants me to open the door for her and help her to be seated at the dinner table, there are other women, like my female barber, who are highly offended if a man offers them a seat on the Tube or opens the shop door for

them. Today, there is much confusion as to the roles that men and women need to play and what they want from each other. Maybe rather than gender equality, let's start to talk about gender equity. Gender equity pushes for fairness and allows us to embrace our differences as well as the contradictions that exist within us all. This in turn may lead to better co-operation between the sexes and speed up progress for change.

Let us look at the bigger picture. The World Economic Forum has calculated that it will be 201 years—yes, by 2220—before we achieve economic parity between men and women. Women around the world are still deprived of many things, including access to education, basic sanitation, menstrual dignity, opportunity and equal pay, as well as being subjected to violence and abuse. We need more women in positions of power, so that men are forced to address those issues collectively. Women need to be protected by the law as well as being empowered to protect themselves.

As Anita mentioned, we have a family foundation, the Hemraj Goyal Foundation. We fund projects such as supporting vulnerable women and girls. One example is the Angan project in Varanasi in India, where women in the village we visited have come together to protect their daughters from being trafficked into the sex trade. They have done that by educating each other to recognise what the trafficker's techniques are to entice their girls away. Anita and I listened with delight to a story of how they chased out of their village a street trader who sold bootleg liquor to their husbands. That act of bravery helped protect their hard-earned money and reduced the impact that drunkenness has on domestic violence. They also shared with delight how their husbands no longer see them as a threat, and how proud they are of their wives' achievements. In fact, they now encourage them to go out and do more.

My message today for all men is to join me in speaking up in support of gender equity. Let us break the stereotypes and stop circulating male chauvinistic jokes on WhatsApp, for example, so that we can all move closer to a more equitable and safer world for us all.

Closing Remarks

Rupal Sachdev Kantaria: Brexit. Walls. Anti-Semitism. A breakdown in family, faith and community. Too often, diversity has become division in today's modern world. Our circles are getting smaller and tighter.

It is my honour today to take on the traditional role of a Minister and close our event, weaving together the key discussion themes of our speakers. My deep gratitude to Lord and Lady Popat, who asked myself and Rupa—my co-creator and kindred spirit—to organise a showcase of 25 speakers. Beyond that, they gave us a blank canvas.

Rupa and I had four key principles that shaped our curation of today, and are central to our mission of inclusion and our core personal beliefs. The first was to give a platform to the

people whose stories are not heard. Stories that are personal and powerful like Tracey's that change hearts. There are stories that are excluded and dismissed because the woman who is speaking is black, her femininity cancelled out by her blackness, as Roianne described; because she was born in a male body as powerfully outlined by Nour; because their stories are a normal part of Chinese culture, as Xinran commented; because, as Meenal said, it is too easy for hundreds of thousands of modern slaves—Emily or Rashmi—to go unseen in our society, in our clothes and in our hotel decisions; or, as Tracey said, because we think that youth on youth violence is an inner-city, black issue. There are stories that, when spoken, are attacked or misunderstood—the fine line, as a woman of colour, to be heard without being accused of shouting or the misogyny associated with anti-Semitism, which Tracy talked about.

There are stories we do not expect. Diipa, known for her fashion, is using her influence to powerfully question cultural norms with a simple action. There are stories that remind us that we are more likely to encounter someone with suicidal thoughts than chest pain, as Beth powerfully reminded us. There are the stories of micro-aggressions that Sonia talked about; they are the unspoken and unseen actions that un-level the playing field—the multiple paper cuts that disable our finger. We share unheard stories to educate, to break down stigmas and to challenge each of our biases.

Our second principle today was to represent diversity in its fullest. Diversity of race and ethnicity, as British Indians reaching out to our sisters and brothers from other under-represented communities. Diversity of sector, from fashion to finance, food and philanthropy. Diversity of theme such as AI, mental health, transgender rights, youth on youth violence, anti-Semitism and the future of work.

Kim talked about AI and the lack of diversity feeding into machine learning, which intrinsically and inadvertently magnifies biases. We need greater diversity in business. As Nishma argued, digitisation is fundamentally changing opportunities for women. Certainly my own organisation, global management consultancy Oliver Wyman, has put humanity, inclusion and diversity at the heart of our strategy and culture. It is core to leadership, core to creativity in solving complex problems and core to unleashing the potential of our people.

Today, I think you will agree that we have heard from a diverse range of powerful role models. Rupa - an entrepreneur to inspire. Farzana had a clear, three-step self-development framework: self-awareness, self-development and self-management. Have we delayed? Do we know ourselves? Do we know the subtle, silent expectations that are suffocating BAME women? Roianne described the boxes we have to step in.

Asma is a powerful role model. Through her thriving business, she is raising the image of the mother as nourisher, skilled and capable. She has a thriving business in the hottest part of London, and the average age of staff is 50. Sonal

shared her work on preventing violence against BAME woman and said that solutions cannot treat women as a homogeneous group. Women are diverse, and there is great value and importance in that difference. We have shown today that feminism is not the preserve of middle-class, white, straight women. While the focus of this event has been BAME women, we have deliberately included men and non-BAME individuals. Beth, you are very welcome. The issue goes way beyond ethnicities and gender. It is about society and our shared humanity. Baroness Prashar talked about us all as humans. In her 47 or 48-year career, she has not thought of herself as a woman or as BAME but as a human being.

That brings me to our third guiding principle, which is our message of inclusion. Underlying inclusion is allyship. Avnish powerfully articulated the role of the male ally. Gender equality is for his benefit as much as Anita's. Sabyasachi spoke up about uncomfortable truths faced by Indian women and India, as well as many other BAME cultures, such as skin lightening and infanticide. His work celebrates the traditional saree so that women have the courage to celebrate their heritage.

Allyship is a call for all men. Notice gender inequality. Stand up and speak out. The rewards are as much yours as they are ours. Allyship is not just about women and men. It is the interaction between each and every one of us within, across and outside the narrow boxes we define ourselves in.

Sisters, as well as for our own communities, we must speak out for each other. A great example is Lord Popat, a proud British Indian, who last year called a debate on anti-Semitism. The same concept, also known as pluralism, was talked about by Nazreen, with her admirable work with the Aga Khan Foundation and the Global Centre of Pluralism.

Today, as a group, we are united in our interest in creating change. How do we make small differences beyond sitting here today? What are the actions that I, a lawyer, an accountant or a father, can take? To create change beyond a great afternoon was my fourth, and final, guiding principle. I asked our speakers to focus not on broad-brush statements that momentarily inspire but on tangible, practical actions. These will be published after this event in a *Handbook for Change*, which anyone can pick up. There will be clear actions to change our world. If you are interested in getting involved, please connect with Rupa and me afterwards.

Each of us has heard at least 25 tangible things that we can do as trustees, mentors or ambassadors. We can serve as a trustee, as Sabree does for Friendsline. We must use our voice in engaging with our local MPs, which Beth alluded to, writing to them to campaign on mental health or other cherished issues. We can use social media, as Diipa said, to help us to fly in the most depressing of situations. I recognise that that is easier said than done, but we must not be afraid to keep speaking up. Tracey Ford has taken the most tragic of circumstances to radiate her powerful message, "No silence to violence". She is an inspiring role model.

As well as using our voice, we can, and must, learn to listen. As Tracy-Ann emphasised, it takes courage for women to put their heads above the parapet. We have heard about the gender pay gap, the ethnicity pay gap, and the investment and productivity gaps. I would like to talk about the listening gap, which is central to the change that many have talked about today.

We do not hear the stories and experiences of our fellow brothers and sisters. It is not because they are not speaking. Listening is assumed to be passive and easy. Today, my job was to listen so intently to each of the speakers that I was able to weave a discussion through their comments. I can tell you that it has taken every ounce of effort in me. Bayo talked about the importance of listening to women of colour, giving them communities and empowering them to speak out.

I can share my own practical case study on listening as a key pillar of change. At Oliver Wyman, and through Mission Include—a cross-company movement that I founded—we have created listening circles with CEOs and minority groups. They start with everyone sharing a story of how they have felt excluded. CEOs share their vulnerabilities alongside BAME women. Suddenly the tone in the room shifts. It is a meeting of human beings. CEOs listen without the urge to judge or to jump to solutions, without the compulsion to interrupt. This same model can be applied to any group where there is misunderstanding, unconscious bias and lack of empathy.

In this moment, we have a choice. We can ignore this event and go back to our busy lives, or we can use it as a moment to commit to an action for change. Is it a gift to others or a gift to ourselves? We need to open ourselves up to the gift of giving. The rewards of making even the smallest difference to other people's lives, to bringing a smile to someone else's face, are greater than any material gain. We do not need proof. We do not need more facts. We only need to experience it and feel it for ourselves.

Bhaskar described it as the difference between intelligence and intellect. Anita shared her excellent work in collective giving. We have to get specific, as Alice said. We have to stand together and say, "Enough is enough". Enough looking away. Enough ignorance. Enough indifference. Today, on International Women's Day 2019, let us come together. Let us work together. Let us transform the lives of others. In doing so, we will give ourselves the greatest gift of happiness. Solidarity and diversity is the only way forward. What will you commit to?

The Whip [Reena Ranger]: Is the motion to mark International Women's Day under the theme "Balance for Better" agreed?

The motion is agreed. The House is now formally adjourned.