

# Outlook

initiative



In the post Covid era, Women have set new benchmarks in leadership skills. Outlook is featuring a few women who have been part of this new beginning.



## WOMEN REDEFINING LEADERSHIP







**Prof. Sunaina Singh**

**UN** announced the theme for International Women's Day 2021 as "women in leadership" for promoting women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls." UN declaration is remarkable for its emphasis on women-led development, empowerment and shaping of an equal future. If an opportunity is provided, there is nothing impossible for a woman to accomplish. On the occasion of International Woman's Day, it is necessary to tell the inspiring real story of an educationist par excellence Prof. Sunaina Singh, well known as an Institutional builder, a woman widely acknowledged for her scholarship, courage, integrity, inventiveness and out of the box thinking in governance. She is currently the Vice-Chancellor of Nalanda University (since mid-2017), an internationally acclaimed historical institution which has earned India the title of Vishwa Guru. The privilege of rebuilding this renowned citadel of learning has been given to her for her compelling leadership. Earlier, she served with sterling dynamism at The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), a well-known Central University as the Vice Chancellor (2012-2017); as President of Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, a renowned Bi-National Research Institute (2010-2012) and as the Vice President of the soft power titan of India the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), (2016-2020). For her colossal contribution in promoting Indian higher education and culture, the Academic Union of Oxford honoured Prof. Sunaina Singh as "Honorary Professor" of Oxford on 15 December 2020, which in the citation also an acknowledges for her remarkable achievement of re-inventing the historic

## Transformative Vision and Leadership of Prof. Sunaina Singh: An Educationist Par Excellence

*"For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it"*

-Amanda Gorman

Nalanda University and its academic architecture.

Prof. Singh has excelled as a leader in the field of education for more than three decades now. Her journey from Professor of English to second time Vice Chancellor in central institutions, apart from her contribution to other institutions of eminence, has not been without its challenges. Prof. Singh is a fine example of how women empowerment can change India for a better future and inclusive society. She has ushered in the "Education Revolution" to educate the Indian masses. Being one of the most prominent leaders in higher education in the South Asian region, Prof. Singh is engaged with the naissance task of rebuilding the renowned ancient Nalanda University. The honour of reestablishing this International University of 'National Importance' has been entrusted to her largely because of her inventive and compelling leadership.

### Academic Excellence:

Prof. Singh has the distinction of being an institutional builder, as the first Indian woman President of Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (a bi-national research institution with headquarters in New Delhi and Calgary under the MHRD and Canadian Government) and as the former Vice Chancellor of the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad. Prof. Singh has played a dynamic role in creating innovative research clusters, streamlining the administration, reinvigorating the academic culture, and bringing about transparency and accountability into the system. These crucial interventions have helped the University steer forward and assert itself as an important institution of higher learning in the Asian region. It is due to her sterling leadership that after 17 years, EFLU was accredited with an 'A' grade by NAAC. It is also widely accepted that the University has emerged out of a critical period in its history largely due to her determined and indefatigable leadership. She also held the first convocation in its history of over 50 year's journey. The then President, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, complimented her for her diligence and visionary dynamism.

### Reshaping of Pedagogy, Research and Governance:

Prof. Singh has been engaged in the tectonic task of restructuring and redesigning university pedagogical and governance systems. As a distinguished academician and administrator, she plays a key role as a member-designate on several distinguished Boards, to recapitulate some of these - Member of the Governing Council, Association of Indian Universities (AIU); Member, Comprehensive Language Policy of India; Visitors' (President of India) Nominee on the Executive Board of more than 12 Central Universities; Bihar Audit Advisory Board; Executive Council member, Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute; Academic Advisor, National Cyber Safety and Security Standards India; Member of the Board of Trustee, India Foundation (a think tank); Member, Board of Directors, Divi's Laboratories Limited India; Member, Advisory Committee, Samajik Nyay Sandesh, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, to name a few. Few academics can match her integrity, intellectual caliber, and dedication to teaching, research, and administration. She has seven books and numerous articles in the national and international journals to her credit. As a Visiting Professor at reputed Universities abroad, she has played a crucial role in drawing the attention of the West towards Indian culture and literature, pedagogical systems, epistemological concerns, and educational policies.

### Awards/Accolades:

Prof. Singh is the recipient of several prestigious awards, -Honorary Professor Oxford Union, Oxford, UK 2020; Vishwa Kavi Rabindranath Tagore Award by Oriental Heitage, 2020; Innovative Vice Chancellor of the year, by Asia Today 2020; Most Admired Woman in Education Sector, by Knowledge Review 2019; International Education Award-2018 (NWSI) by British Parliament, House of Lords, London; Bharat Ratna Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Excellence Award, 2018; Bharat Shiksha Ratan award 2018; Education Leadership Award, by World Education Congress 2017, 2018; Bharat Gaurav Award 2016; Chanakya Award for Excellence in Good Governance 2014 by Public Relations



Council of India; Woman of the Year Award, 2014 by Citizens Council of A.P.; International Leadership Certificate by National College, Nottingham University, U.K. (2013), Rashtriya Gaurav Award, (2011) and by India-Canada Chamber of Commerce (ICCC), Calgary, for her initiatives in strengthening bilateral ties and collaboration in higher education (2011). Among several achievements, Prof. Sunaina Singh has the honour of presiding the Hon'ble President of India's Address on "Building a Happy Society" to 126 Central Institutions of the country through the e-platform National Knowledge Network, on 10th January 2017.

She is also has a very unique distinction for her contribution to social causes. Inspired by her sterling leadership and commitment to philanthropy, a group of citizens have established a foundation in her name in Hyderabad in 2015. The foundation is driven by her vision of building a better society through the education of economically challenged girl child.

#### **Revival of Nalanda University:**

At Nalanda University, Prof. Singh aims to reconnect India with Asia and East Asian/ ASEAN countries not only through historical linkages but also through new emerging knowledge route catering to the needs and challenges of the 21st Century. Prof. Singh endeavours "to recreate the dynamics of the ancient Nalanda Knowledge Tradition and Culture and to evolve innovative globally relevant courses – a coming together of Indian ancient wisdom, its knowledge tradition with the contemporary polity and technology". Under Prof. Singh's dynamic leadership, Nalanda University aims to enable and empower the inter-Asian interactions, cross-cultural and transnational sharing of knowledge amongst the scholars coming from ASEAN and other countries through their rich knowledge repositories. Sharing the roadmap for the university, Prof. Singh envisions Nalanda University as an "intellectual bridge between India, Asia and Asia-Pacific countries". She believes that "Nalanda University to be a symbol of India's soft power. The effort is to strive to rebuild Nalanda University as an icon of Asian Renaissance". Prof. Singh's relentless and determined leadership is to fulfil the University objective in the direction of "the promotion of regional peace and harmony".

Eight hundred years after the destruction of the ancient Nalanda University, former President late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam proposed the idea of its revival in 2006. In 2007, the leaders of sixteen member countries of the East Asia Summit (EAS) endorsed the proposal to re-establish Nalanda and with their collaboration, the Government of India pursued the matter and the Indian Parliament passed the Nalanda University Act 2010. The university

was established as the International University of 'National Importance' under the Ministry of External Affairs in Rajgir, Bihar. The University had somehow started without much progress. Prof. Singh accelerated the construction work for academic and administrative infrastructure and moved the establishment to the new campus in December 2019 with the completion of five priority buildings— Teaching Block, Faculty Offices, Laboratory Block, Mini Auditorium and Administrative Block-1. With her vision for academic and research excellence, the University has scaled up to six Schools and 12 academic programmes from just three in 2017. Prof. Singh has been the force behind the commencement of Global PhD Programmes, Masters Programmes, MBA in Sustainable Development and Management, Diploma Programmes, and Certificate Courses with the credit system as per international standards. All courses are designed in interdisciplinary cafeteria model; hence, open to students from any stream. Prof. Singh academic architecture and framework, (widely applauded by the distinguished members of Governing Board and Academic council) her intellectual inputs helped to innovate curriculum with a focus on research. The curriculum consists of Foundation, Bridge, Advanced and Specialized courses with a focus on new knowledge as well as India – ASEAN interconnections. This led to a 60% jump in the international students in various programmes of the University. Even amid the pandemic, Prof. Singh's efforts in the successful conduct of academic and administrative activity have set an example for online teaching and learning. Further, the University Health Centre conducted a health check-up of international faculty members and students on a day to day basis following the instructions from the vice-chancellor.

Prof. Singh's leadership and vision have been pivotal in setting up laboratories; research centres; organization of workshops and seminar to prepare students to publish research work, improve writing skills and build soft skills; scholarships for students; commencement of short-term courses in Remote Sensing and GIS, Yoga, Sanskrit, Korean and English, Pali and Yoga. She initiated a Global Ph.D program along with MBA in Sustainable Development and Management in 2019 -2020. Under Prof. Singh's leadership, the university conducted an academic audit and reviewed the courses to add new courses keeping with the International mandate of the university. She provided the space for such new courses as Academic Writing, Critical Thinking, Nalanda tradition in Buddhism, Coastal and Marine Environment, the Birth of Civilization in East Asia, Cultural Anthropology, Performance

Studies and Mnemocultures, climate science, Sustainable Management etc. Further, the University has set up Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies, and Centre for Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies. Prof. Singh's mission for international excellence of Nalanda University has entrusted it as the nodal centre of the India-ASEAN Network of Universities, which would lead to establishing the road map for linkages, twinning programmes, exchanges, joint-research, credit transfer and other collaborative initiatives.

Prof. Singh's efforts have also gone into making the University Campus self-sustainable and environment-sensitive with Net-zero waste into the environment. The university is recognized as 'Green University' and is conferred with National Green Conference Award in 2019 by the Gujarat Energy Development Agency and awarded in 2018, 2019 and 2020 by Griha Council, under Ministry of Urban Development for the Net-zero impact Campus. Prof. Singh strives to build the Campus on the principles of the ancient Nalanda University to create a carbon-neutral and zero-waste campus. Prof. Singh believes that "not everything we attempt will succeed, but the promise of a great and confident university rests on the knowledge that if we do not risk, we fail" to persevere and aim at as she envisions "if the world's future lie in achieving a multipolar system, it is necessary that an institution such as Nalanda charts the course new knowledge system for the 21st century". Her courage and audacity of hope draw inspiration from Rudyard Kipling's 'If':

**If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss.**

#### **The Sunaina Singh Way:**

On International Women's Day, the route for women's empowerment is the Sunaina Singh Way in terms of conviction, courage, leadership, integrity, commitment, determined governance, team leadership, vision and leadership signal the way forward for an equal future for women. The road for Prof. Singh was not easy, her tough decision making ability, integrity and uprightness have piqued many with vested interests. Still her commitment, passion and vision for architecting knowledge make her a "phenomenal woman". Prof. Singh is one of the rare woman scholar-administrators, who represent the hope and inspiration for everyone, she rises-

**Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.**