

INSPIRING. EMPOWERING. WOMEN.

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DAMYANTI "RANI" GUPTA
*Engineering
her Destiny*

7 HAPPY
BRAIN HABITS

**PROFILES
IN COURAGE**

**FROM FEARLESS GIRL
TO FEARLESS WOMAN**



PLUS!
YES SHE CAN

Walk Softly AND CARRY A Big Dream

DAMYANTI GUPTA ENGINEERED HER FUTURE
THROUGH UNERRING FOCUS AND HARD WORK

Darkness hung over Pakistan's Port of Karachi as 5-year-old Damyanti Gupta followed her parents up the metal ramp and onto the waiting cargo ship. She wore her finest *fork*, a dress made by her mother's own hands. She walked slowly — sandwiched, single file — between her mother and grandmother. She eyed the blue silk of her mother's sari, moving like waves in a gentle sea, as she stepped onto the ship poised to take her from her home.

Her family, like 10 million others, had become displaced: instant refugees in an emerging crisis. The family rose early in

their small town of Sindh, taking only what they could carry. The rest of their belongings would be claimed by another family who, despite the harsh political and religious environment, chose — or were able to — stay.

Over 200 years of British occupation had ended, and a bloody, religious war between Hindus and Muslims caused a physical division of Gupta's home country. Overnight, her home in India had become part of Pakistan. She could hear water slapping the sides of the ship as it pulled away from port. Large brown eyes looked up into the strong faces of her elders.

"What is gone, is gone," her 25-year-old mother, Gopibai Hingorani, told her gently. "Now we must look forward."

Without employment, finances or contacts, they traveled to the bustling city of Bombay (now Mumbai). Amidst lively sounds of street peddlers, taxi horns and hurried drivers, the family created a new foundation upon which their future would be built. In turn, it changed the course of young Gupta's life.

"My mother was a visionary. She only had a fourth-grade education, yet she was wise and very talented. She sewed and cooked for jobs, while my father became a pharmacist and



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Inspired by her mother,
Damyanti Gupta has always
visualized her future.





eventually owned a small medical shop. Every day, my mother would look into my eyes and tell me that I could do anything I wanted," Gupta says. "She said I was special, and promised to do everything in her power to make my dreams come true. Quite a statement, when we had so little. She said she would make certain I would have something that no one could ever take from me: a good education."

Like her mother, Gupta visualized her future.

"I always dreamed what I wanted in my life," she says. "But dreams alone are not enough. My parents and grandparents taught me to block out everything that would take me away from my goal and to work hard to achieve what I wanted. I followed their advice and did just that."

The prime minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, came to Baroda (now Vadodara) where the family settled in 1955. Gupta was 13. She rode her bicycle to the polo ground where he was to speak, found a space near the podium, pulled a red handkerchief from her pocket, smoothed it out upon the brown

dirt and sat, cross-legged, waiting to be inspired.

"He said that after years of British rule, we finally have freedom," she recalls. "But we have no industry, he told us. We need people to do technical jobs and we need engineers," Gupta says. "The Prime Minister told us that he wasn't just talking to the boys, he was also

"I didn't have boots. I didn't have a car. I didn't have a warm coat. But I did have a big weapon: my dream." ~ Rani Gupta

talking to the little girls in the crowd. I knew in that moment that I wanted to be an engineer."

Gupta was the first female to attend the College of Mechanical Engineering in India, where, initially, they didn't even have a bathroom for females. They built one, however, as they, too, saw her tenacity and exceptional spirit.

"No one should ever tell you how to be you," she says. "It is up to you to find your passion and then to create your path."

At the age of 19, while at the university, she read a book about Henry Ford and a new dream appeared on her horizon.

Following graduation, utilizing her parents' life savings, a determined Gupta left India and went to Germany to work before coming to America.

To make her dream a reality, she traveled to Detroit, Michigan, applied to Ford Motor Company and was turned away.

"I didn't have boots. I didn't have a car. I didn't have a warm coat," Gupta says. "But I did have a big weapon: my dream."

Months later she tried again, explaining to them that they will never know what a woman engineer can do for them until they hire one. Gupta became the first female with a master's degree in engineering (from

Left: The Hingoranis: Damyanti Gupta's parents

Right: Wedding day 1968: Subhash and Damyanti Gupta

Left: Family portrait: Subhash, Sanjay, Suneel and Damyanti Gupta

Right: Subhash and Damyanti Gupta have two sons and five granddaughters.

Oklahoma State University) to be hired by Ford.

Her supervisor asked her to choose a nickname, as Damyanti was thought to be too hard to pronounce. She chose the name "Rani" because of its Hindi translation. "Every day they called me Queen," she says with a broad smile, eyes shining like the sun. "I don't think they ever knew that."

Gupta views life's adversities as possibilities.

"Life is going to be a rollercoaster," she says. "There is always a thrill in the up and the down. Challenge comes from hardship and learning comes from failure. Do not be afraid of any of it," she says, the melodic accent of her childhood still evident in every word.

At 77 years of age, she looks back on a satisfying life.

"My father always said that satisfaction is more important than success, and I am a content woman."

Gupta met her husband when she was driving through Ann Arbor after moving to Detroit. Her car had broken down and she searched the white pages at a phone booth for the first Indian surname she could

find. She called the number and Subhash not only answered his friend's phone, he offered to come to her aid.

The stars collided, they fell in love, married and had two sons, Sanjay and Suneel.

As she spoke of her family, Gupta's wide smile broadened, and her gentle eyes sparkled.

"I'm proud of my family. My son Sanjay is a neurosurgeon, chief medical correspondent for CNN, won the (Ellis Island) Medal of Honor and

The mission of the Gupta Family Foundation is to support organizations which provide focused intervention in the lives of individuals disadvantaged by poverty, disability or discrimination around the world. The goal is to help these organizations become self-sufficient. For more information, visit GuptaFamilyFoundation.org.

several Emmy awards," she gushes. "And Suneel is an entrepreneur, a lawyer and has an MBA. He is a visiting scholar with Harvard, ran for Congress and was nominated to the Supreme Court bar," she beamed.

"We have five granddaughters. No grandsons," she continues. "God must have a plan for these girls. My daughters-in-law are also educated women with college degrees. They are both accomplished, but if my granddaughters need anyone stronger, they have me. You can't push children, but they will follow."

Rani Gupta has known who she is since she breathed her mother's early visualization into her soul. She exemplifies the brave, intelligent, loving and steadfast woman that causes other women to want to be in her presence.

"Everything happens for good," she says, "but it takes education, dreams and patience to see that. If not for apartheid, I would not be where and who I am today. The good things in my life happened after something bad. While you wait to see the beauty, work as hard as you can to create a very satisfying life." ❁