



Ray-ethnic

PORTRAITS *of* PURPOSE

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*This Month's
Edition.*

This month, we celebrate women whose journeys are defined by resilience, reinvention, and quiet determination. Women who have carved their own paths in fields where the odds were often stacked against them, from the world of STEM to spaces where persistence and courage become the true markers of success.

Each story in this edition is a reminder that resilience is rarely loud. It is found in the decision to keep going, to learn, to rebuild, and to rise again with renewed purpose.

At Ray Ethnic, we salute these women, for their strength, their intellect, and their unwavering spirit. Their journeys inspire us to believe that progress is not just about breaking barriers, but about continuously redefining what is possible.



The One who transformed lives
જેમણે લોકો ના જીવન બદલ્યા

Kinneri Desai

Sr. Manager at Blind People's Association,
Ahmedabad

Her story moves from Dahod's beginnings to Ahmedabad's formative years, guided by education and a deep commitment to inclusion. A B.Com and BCA graduate, and a Ford Foundation Fellow at Syracuse University, New York, where she studied Cultural Foundations of Education and Disability Studies.

She now works as Deputy Director of the

Blind People's Association, Ahmedabad :

Dedicating her work to empowering lives through access, education, and opportunity.



In Conversation with
Kinneri Desai

The conversation begins with a question that feels both urgent and timeless: where does women empowerment stand in India today? She pauses before answering, as if weighing the many Indias that exist simultaneously. Empowerment, she says, cannot be understood through a single narrative. Indian women are not a homogeneous collective; their realities are shaped by geography, class, access, and circumstance. The divide between urban and rural women remains stark.

Her work with women with disabilities offers her a deeply intimate view of this inequality. In rural regions especially, she encounters women she describes as triply disadvantaged—economically vulnerable, living with disabilities, and navigating entrenched gender bias within a patriarchal society. Progress is visible, but slow. Structural change, she believes, demands collaboration between communities, government institutions, and civil society organizations. Even within states, realities shift dramatically. Women with disabilities in Gujarat, she notes, stand comparatively stronger than those she has worked with in Varanasi, where conservatism and patriarchal norms continue to shape everyday life.

Yet, hope persists. Nearly 400 women with disabilities have moved toward self-employment through her initiatives. She does not speak of statistics; she speaks of stories—400 dreams, 400 struggles, and 400 women beginning to rewrite their own narratives. For her, empowerment reveals itself not in grand declarations, but in quiet transformations.

When the discussion turns toward the idea that women sometimes reinforce patriarchy themselves, her response reframes the conversation. She resists the notion that women suppress other women. Instead, she sees patriarchy as a system so deeply embedded that it often operates through those shaped by it. Relationships between women, she insists, are fundamentally rooted in care and authenticity. Even conflicts commonly associated with familial roles arise less from rivalry and more from inherited social pressures. Many women are themselves searching for space, dignity, and identity. The real task, she suggests, is not assigning blame but dismantling the structures that perpetuate inequality. Solidarity, not division, is where empowerment truly begins.

Underlying her work is a clear moral compass guided by values she holds with quiet conviction. Choice, she says, is power—the freedom to make decisions for oneself while honouring the autonomy of others. Integrity and dignity remain non-negotiable across every sphere of life. Every interaction, she believes, must protect the self-worth of another person. Honesty, discipline, and punctuality are not merely professional habits but expressions of respect for people irrespective of their social standing. Authentic relationships, she reflects, can only exist when individuals meet one another without the masks imposed by caste, class, or hierarchy.

Away from institutional roles and public responsibilities, another dimension of her identity emerges. She speaks fondly of cooking, of ordinary moments that ground her. Music, however, carries deeper emotional resonance. Trained in Indian classical music and once devoted to playing the sitar—a passion she shared with her father—she gradually stopped after his passing. Yet music remained a companion during one of the most vulnerable transitions of her life, when she began losing her eyesight. In those uncertain years, learning and listening to music became a form of emotional survival.





Her journey has been marked by profound personal transformation. She began her professional life as a computer programmer, shy and withdrawn, convinced that her fingers should speak through code rather than her voice. Public speaking felt impossible. But immersion in the field of women's development reshaped her understanding of both society and herself. Exposure to lived realities expanded her perspective, and slowly, confidence replaced hesitation. Today, she speaks passionately and at length about women's rights—something she once believed she could never do. Communication, she realized, is not optional in the pursuit of change; humans are not machines, and dialogue is the catalyst of transformation.

The loss of eyesight remains one of the defining turning points of her life. Looking back, she describes the journey from denial to acceptance as resting on three pillars: family support, the presence of a nurturing environment, and ultimately, self-acceptance. Multiple surgeries and nearly three years spent in depression left her feeling that her career—and perhaps her identity—had collapsed. Then came a decisive moment in 2000, when she joined the organization that would redefine her path. A firm yet compassionate push from Dr. Punani—to stop grieving and begin anew—shifted her perspective entirely. Life, she realized, was not ending; it was transforming. From that moment forward, she chose movement over mourning.

Even personal style reflects this philosophy of ease and authenticity. Comfort guides her clothing choices. Flowing silhouettes replace restrictive forms, practical attire accommodates constant travel to rural areas, and Indo-western ensembles allow freedom of movement. She gravitates toward bright colours, occasionally moderated by her sister's gentle fashion counsel. Traditional Indian wear finds its place during moments of leisure and travel. For her, clothing is less about appearance and more about confidence born from comfort.

Her wardrobe, she reveals, is an archive of memory. Each garment carries a story—a birthday purchase, a gift from her sister, an outfit bought with her niece's first salary, or clothing lovingly given by her father. Some pieces have remained with her since 1998, preserved alongside memories from her time in Syracuse, New York. Fashion, in her life, becomes a vessel for remembrance.

She admires actor Sonam Kapoor for her ability to balance style with comfort, though she ultimately believes fashion is defined by self-assurance. When one feels good in what one wears, confidence naturally follows. Asked about her favourite colour, she answers simply—purple.

Spirituality quietly anchors her daily routine. Each night ends with prayer, a ritual of chanting that offers reflection and calm before sleep.

As the conversation draws to a close, she is asked how she wishes to be remembered. Her answer carries the simplicity of lived wisdom. She does not seek remembrance through titles, positions, or accolades. Instead, she hopes people recall the support she offered during difficult moments in their lives. Having once needed strength from others, she has devoted herself to extending the same compassion forward. Even if her name fades, she hopes the feeling remains—that someone stood beside them when they needed it most, walking an extra mile for persons with disabilities, leaving behind not recognition, but kindness.

In the end, her story is not one of overcoming adversity alone. It is a story of transformation—of turning personal loss into collective strength, and of redefining empowerment as an act of presence, dignity, and unwavering human connection.