

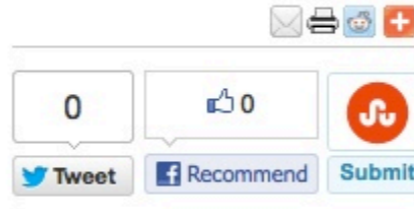


Shefali Razdan Duggal

PRESS CLIPS

Pray, eat, love say these three ladies

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Nona Walia chats with three women of Indian origin in San Francisco, London and Paris, whose quiet zeal and success leave us proud.

San Francisco Shefali Razdan Duggal Voted one of 2012's Most Powerful Women in California

Just the way she picks a different-coloured dress to slip on each day, Shefali Razdan Duggal singles out a Sanskrit shloka every morning. Her choice on the Tuesday we speak over the telephone is one that discusses the power of a fleeting moment. "Look to this day for it is life. In its brief course lie all the realities and truths of existence".

It's a lesson that has clearly worked. The 40-year-old has made it to the prestigious list of the Most Powerful and Influential Women of 2012 in California, voted by the National Diversity Council, a non-profit body that champions diversity in the workplace and communities. "It's a surreal feeling," she laughs, as we imagine her break into a wide, flashy smile that we've seen splashed across newspapers with US President Barack Obama holding her warmly for a photo op. "Kind, friendly and approachable," is how she describes the president. "He has this disarming personality that puts everyone around him at ease," says Duggal, who holds an MA in political communication from New York University.

Getting the president re-elected is her current mission. A member of Obama's Presidential Partners, National Finance Committee (NFC) and Northern California Finance Committee, Duggal is among the top fundraisers for his re-election campaign, having already raised between \$50,000 and \$1,00,000. "People believe their participation won't matter. It's this (notion) that I wish to change. Historically, South Asians have been underrepresented in American politics. I aspire to educate and inform as many people about President Obama as I can," she says with gentle firmness.



(US First Lady Michelle Obama,...)

Formerly a political volunteer for the Al Gore campaign in 2000, and having supported Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2008, with a special focus on recruiting from the Indo-American young professional community, Duggal isn't a new player. And yet, she listed her "two wonderful children" as her most significant accomplishment in a previous online interview. "Success is about striking a balance, walking that line between raising a healthy family and fulfilling personal and professional responsibilities. Each plays an important role. I have a dream, and I like going out and achieving it," she says.

A childhood spent in Haridwar, Uttarakhand, in the comfort of traditional values, followed by an exposure to American education at institutions in Cincinnati, New York and Chicago, helped Duggal find what she calls a "unique East-West perspective". It's one that she hopes to share with her 10-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter. "Rajat (her husband) and I are committed to having them embrace their Indian heritage, and with a large Indian community in the Bay Area, that's easy. Visits to the neighbourhood temple and the cultural events that it hosts help us stay connected." Being at the centre of political razzmatazz and mingling with America's who's who hasn't taken away her quiet faith in God, or the love for Bollywood. "I grew up listening to my mum humming Aaj phir jeene ki tamanna hai. Songs from back then hold a special place in my heart," says Duggal.

London Rekha Bhakoo Head teacher of school voted as UK's Best English Primary Rekha Bhakoo's day starts at 7.30 am when she stands at the gates of Newton Farm Infant, Nursery and Junior School in Harrow, North West London, smiling as young students troop in. The smile doesn't leave her face till 3 pm, when the kids pack up to leave. This has been the routine for the last 20 years.

The head teacher is at the helm of an institution that was recently named the best primary English school in England by UK government agencies. The junior school - where more than 95 per cent of final-year students achieved a Level 5 in Math, English and Science (one grade higher than the standard expected of their 11-year-average age group) - houses kids from Gujarati and Tamilian families, 65 per cent of whom don't speak English at home. "We have an outstanding curriculum and instill self-belief through lessons. We'd like them to believe they can be anything they dream of," says Bhakoo, whose mixed parentage encouraged her to challenge her learning skills. "My father is Indian, my mother is from Kenya. My grandparents hailed from Punjab. I came to London when I was just seven and learnt to speak Hindi, Punjabi, English and French. Somewhere, it made me who I am," says the Bath University graduate.