

Volume III, Issue 1



Sri Lanka National Chapter  
Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World  
(SLNC-OWSD)

SLNC-OWSD  
Newsletter - February - 2024

## WOMEN THRIVING IN SCIENCE, TOGETHER

Welcome to the second edition of the Sri Lanka National Chapter OWSD newsletter!

As we celebrate the incredible women shaping the scientific landscape in Sri Lanka, let's acknowledge the unique challenges they face. We can work together to find solutions that empower them to thrive, not only in research but also in science-based entrepreneurial ventures. Empowering women in science is not only women becoming leaders, but it is also about fostering a supportive network where women uplift, encourage, and advocate for each other. Balancing professional goals with personal commitments can be a major challenge, especially in the developing world. We celebrate the achievements of Sri Lanka National Chapter OWSD, while recognizing the importance of leading a fulfilling life beyond science.

In balancing goals and well-being in life, let us not forget the joys beyond scientific pursuits. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial for long-term success. This includes exploring and nurturing personal interests, hobbies, and the solace found in cultural traditions or spiritual practices. Supportive networks are important, as sharing experiences with each other allows us to create lives that are fulfilling both within and outside the scientific realm.

In this issue, we highlight the activities undertaken by Sri Lanka National Chapter OWSD during the year 2023-2024, with able leadership of the current president, which focused on support networks, and strategies for women in science to navigate these challenges and succeed. These activities also showcase stories of women who redefine boundaries and inspire us all.

**Together, as Women in Science, we can build a more inclusive and empowering scientific community in Sri Lanka where women reach their full potential.**

**Tharanga Thoradeniya**  
**Editor, SLNC - OWSD**

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, SRI LANKA NATIONAL CHAPTER OWSD



**Women, Science and entrepreneurship** are the three pillars of success in any country. I hope that our women scientists can lead the battle against the current worst ever economic crisis we are facing. Women scientists can improve the revenue streams, by seeking new opportunities and remodeling the existing traditional scenarios.

Science education is an important investment a country can make. It paves the way for the future. It will transform women into independent contributors to the GDP. Earning potential matters more than acquiring a degree. Empowering women to leverage their education will move us to

a new level.

SLNC/OWSD's passion and inspiration lie with its membership who serve the nation in various capacities representing diverse science fields. As the current president, I am impressed by the level of creativity, dedication, determination, and enthusiasm of our team, which is actively engaged in a number of group projects.

Science is a transformative force for sustainable development. This aligns with OWSD's motto: "The world needs science, and science needs women". There can be no development without women's involvement. This year, my primary focus is strengthening women scientists' role in economic development through entrepreneurship. Empowering women scientists to face the challenges of competing in the global market is a priority. SLNC/OWSD, a strong united team, has identified gaps and will initiate three programs to address them.

1. **Networking for Opportunities**; designed to increase exposure and connections with international communities through our Women Beyond Boundaries program - **WBB**. This program primarily connects global scientists visiting Sri Lanka with our team to share experience and explore opportunities for both countries. This win-win program is expected to expand the thinking sphere of women scientists beyond boundaries.
2. **Promoting Entrepreneurship**; by connecting our members with successful entrepreneurs through the **BizBox** platform, we empower our members to overcome startup challenges with expert support. This enables the scientists to run their own businesses rather than being a consultant in the different organization. The program allows them to choose mentors who can guide them through future challenges. Additionally, they could develop the culture of positive self-marketing the product/service promotion.

3. **Motivating and Mentoring**, throughour**Executive Edge** Program connecting early-career scientists with leading role models in science in top positions. This motivates and inspires the early career scientists to choose their career path, sustain in their positions, achieve work-life balance and pursue leadership roles.

In addition to these initiatives SLNC/OWSD is providing opportunities for the women scientists to engage or participate in conferences, seminars and grass root level activities. These activities raise awareness of the value and opportunities science education offers women and girls. I also plan to host a few panel discussions where early-career scientists can cultivate a culture of research, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Further to all we have to record what we do. However, documenting our achievements remains a challenge among women scientists, particularly those with family commitments. Creating journals and newsletters in this platform, we want to sensitize our members to develop their scientific writing skills and publish in world renowned journals.

One last, but equally important goal of mine is to motivate our women scientists to pursue global positions in science forums. I believe the Science, Women, and Entrepreneurship are key to saving our country for the next generation to live in a pleasurable and peaceful way.

Wishing you all success in becoming a '**strong women scientist, entrepreneur in your fields**'.

**Dr. Thilina Wanigasekera**  
**President, SLNC/OWSD**

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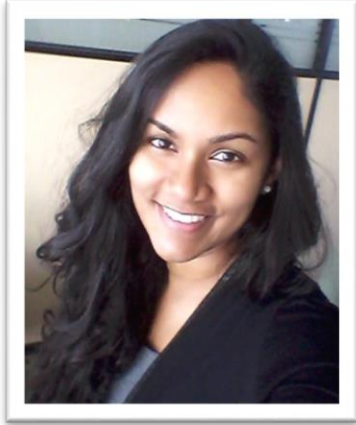
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## WOMEN BEYOND BOUNDARIES (WBB)

The Sri Lanka National Chapter (SLNC) of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) moved one step forward and held its inaugural Women Beyond Boundaries (WBB) event. Dr Asha Gopinathan, a renowned neuroscientist from India, had the honor of being the first speaker for this exciting initiative.

The event, jointly organized by SLNC/OWSD and Prof. Sithy Iqbal, a fellow scientist and former Dean of the Open University of Sri Lanka, took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023, at the Seminar Room of the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Open University of Sri Lanka.

Dr. Gopinathan is a neuroscientist with a deep passion for both teaching and research. She has dedicated a significant portion of her career to volunteering in rural Indian schools, where she has worked to improve science labs and enhance the quality of science education.

Beyond her dedication to education, Dr. Gopinathan has over two decades of experience in theoretical and experimental research, primarily focused on biophysics and the electrophysiology of the nervous system. Her work has also expanded into mathematical modeling, specifically through the development of compact finite difference schemes for dendritic conduction, with the aim of creating more accurate and robust mathematical models.

Dr. Gopinathan is particularly interested in fostering a platform that integrates theoretical and experimental approaches within the field of neuroscience. Additionally, she worked for women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and has published on the experiences of women in STEM within the Indian context.

Dr Asha graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and completed her doctoral work at SUNY Stony Brook in the United States. Her impressive academic background also includes a Pembroke Scholarship at Brown University and research positions at the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (as a Principal Investigator), the Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru, and TIFR Mumbai.

During the WBB event, Dr. Gopinathan shared her inspiring personal journey, highlighting the challenges she faced as a woman from rural India. She went on to emphasize the transformative power of STEM education for women, empowering them to achieve independence and connect with the global community. She also discussed her own path from a successful neuroscientist to an award-winning science writer, having received the prestigious

P.T. Baskaran Punicker Science Writing Award. Dr. Gopinathan's message served as a powerful motivator, encouraging women to reach for their full potential.

The inaugural WBB event was graced by the presence of Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama (Ex officio/OWSD), Professor Sithy Iqbal (Member/OWSD), Professor Sugandika Suresh (Immediate Past President), Professor Usha Hettiarachchi (ExCom Member/OWSD), Dr. Chaturi Nupearachchi (Secretary), and Ms. Indra Chapa (Assistant Secretary), along with members of OWSD and fellow scientists from the Open University of Sri Lanka.



Launching a new chapter! The SLNC/OWSD kicks off the Women Beyond Boundaries initiative with Dr Asha Gopinathan from OWSD India.



Dr Asha Gopinathan inspiring the audience with her passion for science and her dedication to empowering women



An engaging discussion





A BIG Thanks to Dr Asha Gopinathan!

## BIZBOX EMPOWERS WOMEN SCIENTISTS IN BUSINESS

BizBox champions the advancement of women scientists by fostering business opportunities and investment opportunities. The program connects these scientists with relevant legislative frameworks to ensure connection and alignment. As of February 2024, BizBox has successfully conducted two events.

### **SLNC/OWSD Holds First-ever BizBox Event**

The Sri Lanka National Chapter (SLNC) of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) successfully hosted its first BizBox event on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2023, at Sanctuarii, Rajagiriya, even amidst challenging weather conditions. The event featured a guest speaker, a leading expert in technology commercialization within the biochemistry and molecular biology fields.

There was a delightful surprise for the guest speaker upon arrival – a chance to meet his Guru, Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama (Excom OWSD). Science Diplomacy connect business, people and opportunity. Beauty of lifelong learning and how it bridges generations for the betterment of the world through scientific innovations was highlighted.

The session explored the fascinating journey of an idea – from its initial conception to the research stage and ultimately, its transformation into a marketable product. Dr P Ranasinghe offered invaluable insights into this process, particularly for budding innovators.

Dr Ranasinghe is an experienced scientist in developing marketable innovations from herbal materials. He emphasized the complexities faced by scientists in selecting stakeholders, partners and consumers. He stressed the importance of connecting with the right people at correct time and aligning cost of production with the pricing strategy and profit margins.

Does a scientist's education adequately prepare them for the realities of commercialization? How to deal innovatively with the cost of production? Dr Ranasinghe addressed these fundamental questions and explored innovative approaches to managing production costs and identified potential gaps that could be addressed to bridge the divide between research and successful commercialization.

Sincere thank you to everyone who contributed to the event's success, particularly those who persevered through challenging circumstances. Their efforts have undoubtedly added a significant chapter to the SLNC/OWSD story.



Dr. Pathmasiri Ranasinghe sheds light on the exciting world of commercializing scientific innovations



Intriguing discussions



Dr Ranasinghe taking the scientists through the fascinating journey of commercializing an idea



Thank you, Dr Ranasinghe, for the invaluable insights!

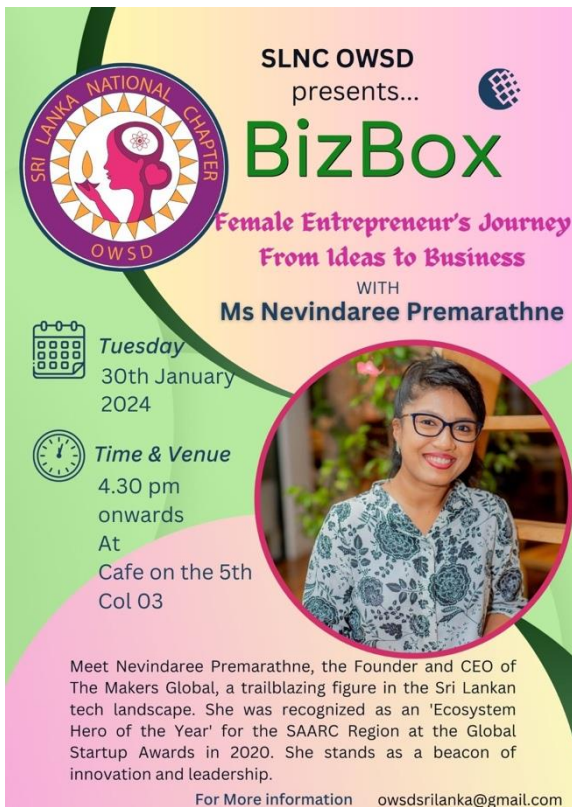
## SLNC/OWSD Hosts Successful Second BizBox Event

The Sri Lanka National Chapter (SLNC) of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) hosted its second BizBox event on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024, at Cafe on the 5<sup>th</sup> Lane. This open-air gathering aimed to motivate scientists to explore entrepreneurial opportunities and launch startups.


The event featured Ms. Nevindarie Premaratne, a successful entrepreneur and founder of "Makers Global," a leading business in the contemporary market. Ms. Premaratne shared her inspiring journey, detailing the challenges, advantages, and valuable lessons she learned through her own design.


SLNC/OWSD wishes to encourage and empower young Scientists to think beyond the traditional research role and pursue innovative paths that can contribute to the nation's economic sustainability.


Our Sincere appreciation goes to Ms. Nevindarie. The event's success is attributed to the contributions of several individuals. The organizers, Prof. Swarna Hapuarachchi, Dr. Chaturie Nupearachchi (Secretary), and Ms. Indrachapa Ruberu (Assistant Secretary), deserve recognition for their efforts. Additionally, sincere appreciation is extended to Senior Prof. Kshanika Hirimburegama for her invaluable guidance and direction.



The poster is a colorful graphic with a pink, yellow, and green background. At the top left is the SLNC OWSD logo, which features a stylized female profile with a brain and a gear, surrounded by the text 'SRI LANKA NATIONAL CHAPTER OWSD'. To the right of the logo, it says 'SLNC OWSD presents...' followed by a globe icon and the word 'BizBox' in large green letters. Below 'BizBox' is the subtitle 'Female Entrepreneur's Journey From Ideas to Business' in pink and purple. Underneath that, it says 'WITH Ms Nevindaree Premaratne' in blue. On the left side, there is a calendar icon next to the text 'Tuesday 30th January 2024', and a clock icon next to 'Time & Venue 4.30 pm onwards At Cafe on the 5th Col 03'. In the center-right, there is a circular portrait of Ms. Nevindarie Premaratne, a woman with glasses wearing a patterned blue shirt. At the bottom, there is a paragraph of text about her achievements and a contact email address: 'For More information owsdrilanka@gmail.com'.

**SLNC OWSD**  
presents...   
**BizBox**  
*Female Entrepreneur's Journey  
From Ideas to Business*  
WITH  
**Ms Nevindaree Premaratne**

 **Tuesday**  
30th January  
2024

 **Time & Venue**  
4.30 pm  
onwards  
At  
Cafe on the 5th  
Col 03

Meet Nevindaree Premaratne, the Founder and CEO of The Makers Global, a trailblazing figure in the Sri Lankan tech landscape. She was recognized as an 'Ecosystem Hero of the Year' for the SAARC Region at the Global Startup Awards in 2020. She stands as a beacon of innovation and leadership.

For More information [owsdrilanka@gmail.com](mailto:owsdrilanka@gmail.com)



The SLNC/OWSD team behind the success of the BizBox program: Dr. Thilina Wanigasekera, Professor Kshanika Hiriburegama, Professor Swarna Hapuarachchi and Dr. Chaturie Nupearachchi with the guest Ms. Nevindarie Premaratne



Ms. Nevindarie Premaratne inspires scientists to explore business opportunities



Thank you Ms. Nevidarie, you are truly amazing!

## EXEDGE ROLEMODELS OF BALANCING A FULLFILLING CAREER IN SCIENCE

### SLNC/OWSD Launches Executive Edge Program with Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama

The Sri Lanka National Chapter (SLNC) of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) successfully launched its inaugural Executive Edge Program on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2023, at PappaRich, Park Street. The program featured Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama, a founding member of SLNC/OWSD and a distinguished figure with a multifaceted career. Professor Hirimburegama currently holds the titles of Senior Professor of Botany, Former Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, Former Ambassador to France, and the first woman to chair the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka.

This event was designed to provide insights into fostering development of the STEM fields within Sri Lanka and scientist's role in the economic development of the country. Professor Hirimburegama shared her extensive experience in STEM education, emphasizing the importance of developing entrepreneurial opportunities for women in STEM fields and community empowerment through STEM education for income generation. She further explained how work and life should be balanced within a demanding STEM career. Special gratitude to Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama for her insights, the ExCom of the SLNC / OWSD for their support and the staff of the PappaRich, Park Street for their contribution in making this event successful.



Setting the stage for leadership development: The ExEdge program takes place at PappaRich, Park Street





Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama leading the discussion on STEM development and economic empowerment at the ExEdge program



Scientists at the ExEdge program, focused on advancing their leadership skills

## SLNC/OWSD Hosts Successful Second ExEdge Program with Professor Nadira Karunaweera

The Sri Lanka National Chapter (SLNC) of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) hosted its second ExEdge program virtually via Zoom on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024. The program featured Professor Nadira Karunaweera, the esteemed Founder President of SLNC/OWSD and current President of the National Academy of Sciences, Sri Lanka (NASSL).

Professor Karunaweera focused on the importance of cultivating a growth mindset for effective leadership. She emphasized how this mindset empowers individuals to approach challenges with resilience and navigate obstacles without undue stress.

There is increasing leadership opportunities available to women within the STEM field. Professor Karunaweera also addressed the challenges faced by women in balancing these opportunities with family commitments. She highlighted that this is a key factor contributing to the limited number of women who reach leadership positions.

Professor Karunaweera emphasized the vital role of mentorship in supporting aspiring leaders. She serves as an exemplary role model herself, inspiring young budding scientists through her own achievements as a successful scientist, researcher, and expert in her field.

The interactive session with Professor Karunaweera proved to be an eye-opening experience for young budding scientists. She shared insights and valuable lessons from her career, motivating participants to embrace a growth mindset and actively pursue success. Her address offered practical strategies for navigating career challenges and ultimately achieving a fulfilling professional journey.



The poster is for an 'EXECUTIVE EDGE' webinar. It features the logo of the Sri Lanka National Chapter of OWSD, which includes a stylized woman's profile holding a torch. The text on the poster includes the title 'EXECUTIVE EDGE', the tagline 'Elevate Your Knowledge and Expand Your Horizons. Join Our Webinar!', and the specific topic 'Growth Mindset: What, Why and How?'. The date and time are listed as Wednesday, 07 February 2024, at 03.00 pm. The speaker is identified as Nadira Karunaweera, Chair and Senior Professor of Parasitology at the University of Colombo. Contact information for Dr. Chaturie is provided, along with a Zoom link and a contact email address.

**EXECUTIVE EDGE**  
Elevate Your Knowledge  
and Expand Your Horizons.  
Join Our Webinar!

**Growth Mindset :  
What, Why and How?**

**Wednesday**  
**07 February 2024**

**03.00 pm**

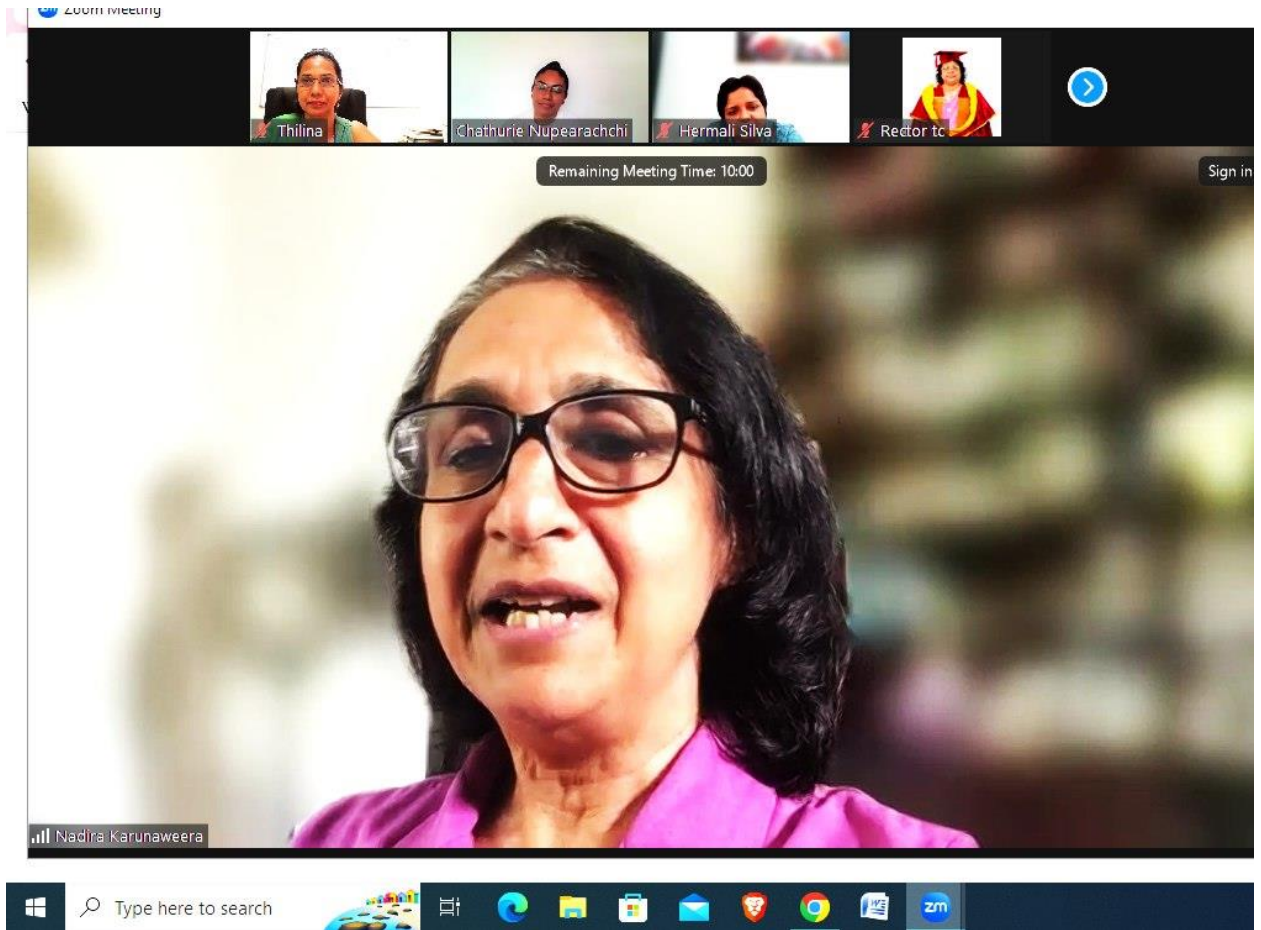
**WITH**

**Nadira Karunaweera**  
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Zoom Link:  
[https://us04web.zoom.us/j/74101951987?  
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Contact  
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0716233953



Leading by example: Professor Nadira Karunaweera, shares her insights virtually at the ExEdge program

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE YEAR 2023

### Successful Annual Conference Held by SLNC/OWSD

The Annual Conference of the Sri Lanka National Chapter of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (SLNC/OWSD) was successfully held on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023, at the main Auditorium of the National Science Foundation (NSF). This event was held in official collaboration with NSF, the UNESCO Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD), and the National Academy of Sciences, Sri Lanka (NASSL).

The conference theme was "Contribution of Women in Science and Technology to the Technology-Driven Sustainable Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka." Funded by the UNESCO/OWSD – TWAS program, the conference explored the diverse avenues of the tourism industry and emphasized the pivotal role scientists can play in its development.

The keynote speech was delivered by Professor D.A.C. Suranga Silva, a senior professor in Economics and Tourism at the University of Colombo. Other distinguished guests who graced the occasion included Dr. Sulochana Seger (CEO/WIM), Prof. Mahesh Edirisinghe (Dean/UNIVOTEC), Dr. Pathmasiri Ranasinghe (Principal Scientist/ITI), Dr. Sepalika Sudasinghe (Director General/NSF), and Dr. Himalee De Silva (Senior Lecturer/FIM).



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08.03.2024

This Sinhala poem beautifully captures the multifaceted nature of womanhood. The poem unveils the woman's silent strength throughout her life's journey - from the immense physical feat of childbirth, to cradling hands, a powerful symbol of nurture, to the shared burdens she carries and the unwavering bonds she forms. It celebrates the resilience that allows women to smile even through tears. It serves as a testament to the deep fountain of love that empowers women in all their roles.

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