

Women changing India showcases the evolving role of women

KRAMERVILLE ó The Women Changing India exhibition of photographs that have toured the world were showcased to guests at an exclusive exhibition at Gallery 011 in Kramerville, Sandton on 31 October.

The distinguished exhibition was a joint project between **BNP Paribas** Bank in India, Magnum Photos and Zubaan, an independent feminist publishing house based in New Delhi.



Urvashi Butalia leads a panel discussion on Women changing South Africa with Sibongile Mkhabela (CEO of Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital), Kirti Menon (director of academic planning at UJ), Khadija Patel (editor of the Mail & Guardian) and Kayan Leung (attorney at Lawyers for Human Rights).

Photo: Sarah Koning



Women Changing India photographic exhibition is displayed at the Gallery 011 in Kramerville showcasing the empowerment of women in India. Photo: Sarah Koning

The collection of photographs portrays the evolving role of women in six sectors of society in India, from banking to politics, celebrating women and their contribution to society.

Publisher, writer and activist Urvashi Butalia played a pivotal role in putting together the project and explained her motivation for getting involved. “Women in our countries [South Africa and India] are so often seen in a terrible light, but that’s not the whole story. Women are doing really wonderful things and moving out of structures to make real change. They are entering new professions and changing lives at a grass-roots level,” said Butalia.

The exhibition was brought to South Africa because of the very similar history shared by the two countries.



Salma Rajathi shares her personal story, which is displayed in images at the Women Changing India exhibition. Photo: Sarah Koning



Salma Rajathi stands next to some of the photos of her exhibited as part of the Women Changing India exhibition in Kramerville. Photo: Sarah Koning

After an amendment was made to the Indian Constitution in 1999 introducing compulsory quotas in the village and municipal elections for women, Rajathi was pushed into politics to replace her husband when his electoral district came under the new law.

“I would write my book from the toilet of my house at night because of my family. But when it was published in English in 2004, I received much support. I liberated myself because of my writing,” said Rajathi.

A panel discussion followed the formal explanation of the exhibition, featuring four women who have overcome gender-barriers in various fields in South Africa. Panellists included Sibongile Mkhabela, CEO of the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital, Khadija Patel, editor of Mail & Guardian and co-founder of The Daily Vox, human rights lawyer Kayan Leung and Kirti Menon, director of academic planning at the University of Johannesburg.



Ella Bella and Miss Earth South Africa 2017 Irini Moutzouris enjoy taking a look at the Women Changing India exhibition. Photo: Sarah Koning



Donae Hurst and Maleba Mpeti enjoy some drinks at the Women Changing India exhibition. Photo: Sarah Koning

The women shared their struggles in overcoming sexism and racism in the various sectors to arrive at their positions and champion the cause of other women.

Patel said, “I am still unhappy with the space afforded to young black journalists to do their thing on their own terms.” Some of the best political journalists in South Africa are women and journalism in South Africa has a long history of women leadership, but women still struggle with sexual harassment and our positions have not yet effected structural change.

“I am the granddaughter of illiterate people and now I’m the editor of the Mail & Guardian,” said Patel, reflecting on the massive barriers she and her parents have overcome to be where they are today.



Manisha Ramudu, Sayisha Rakesh, Urvashi Butalia and Kayan Leung socialise at the Women Changing India exhibition. Photo: Sarah Koning



Women discuss the images in the Women Changing India exhibition at Gallery 011. Photo: Sarah Koning



Zingisa Mkhuma and Tlhangiso Mlantoa enjoy browsing the Women Changing India exhibition in Kramerville. Photo: Sarah Koning



Amy Gottlieb, Kirti Menon and Virgima Francis examine the Women Changing India exhibition showcased at Gallery 011 in Kramerville. Photo: Sarah Koning



Publisher, writer and activist Urvashi Butalia discusses the purpose of the Women Changing India exhibition. Photo: Sarah Koning