

Leadership is a great tool for promoting equity. Women, now more than ever, are making major cracks in the glass ceiling. In the case of women of color, we are making cracks in the marble roof since barriers have many layers. It is easier to crack the glass, but it takes time, effort, and great strength to crack marble. It's only a matter of time until that gets shattered for good. I am sharing here my experiences as an immigrant woman of color in an attempt to draw some broad lessons and create a snapshot of what the leadership of the future will hold when women can emerge without barriers and biases and just as themselves without compromising their personal goals. And how they can use what they have gained to pay it forward to women who need it to succeed similarly.

I have emphasized my journey because my experiences have helped me form my views and understanding of why representation and leadership matter for all, and especially for women like me. My experiences have also shown me how everyone can contribute to cracking the ceiling.

#### LEADERSHIP IS A GREAT TOOL FOR PROMOTING EQUITY.

One of the women who has inspired me the most is someone I met only once in India before coming to the United States. Shubhi Lall wrote a book with my husband as the main protagonist, *Why Outside? Why Not India?* The book was basically about putting together a narrative of large-scale migration of talented and skilled Indian IT workers who have left India to work in different parts of the world due to various systemic reasons. That was back in 2003.

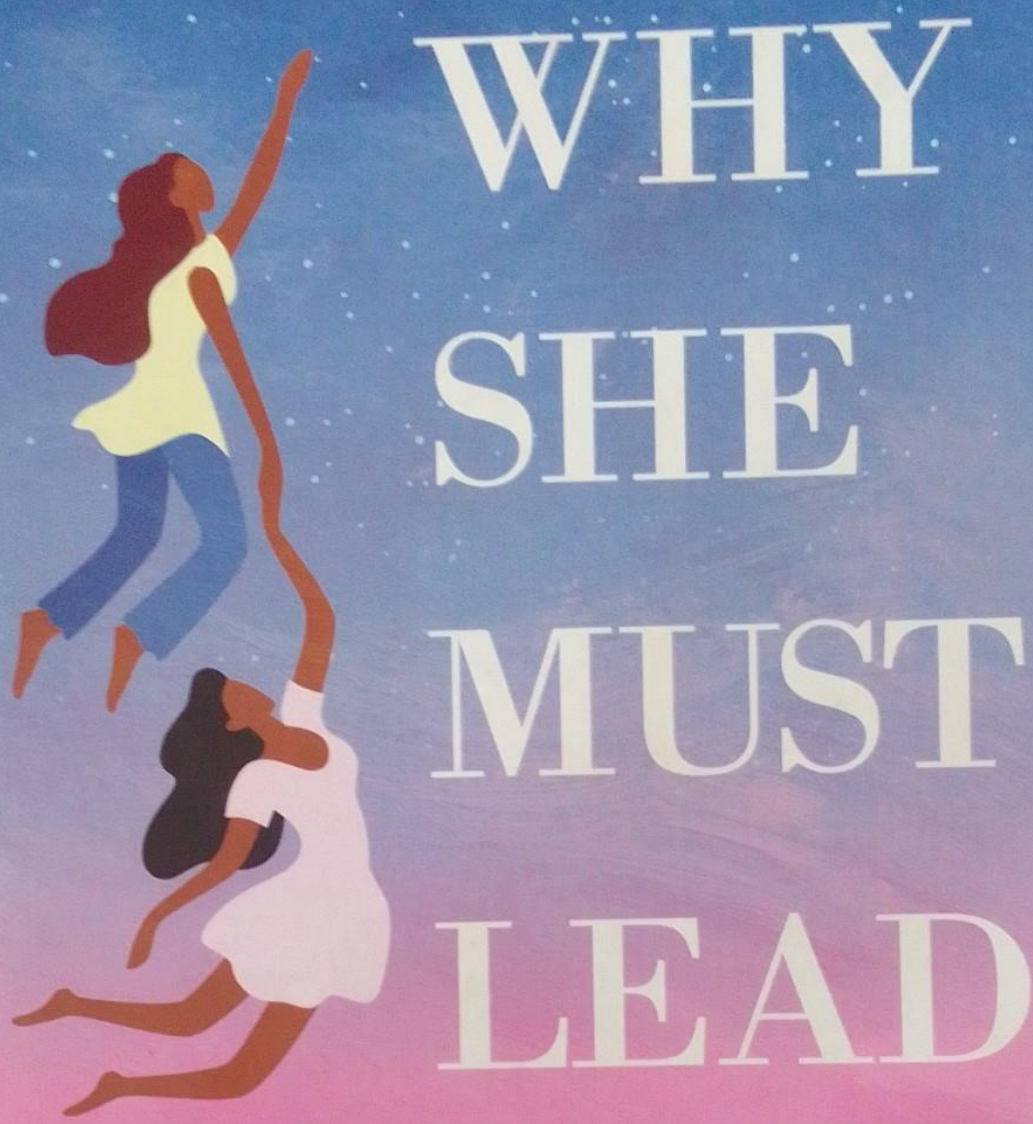
When I read the book, I was busy planning my wedding and wanted to learn more about my husband. When I met Shubhi, I found her warm and gritty. She asked me if I was sad about leaving India to settle in the United States, and would I be able to bring Puneet back to India. That question amused me. Coming to the United States is a dream many young hearts have, no matter how much you love the country where you are born. I never thought about whether I would be sad to leave home before she asked me that question. I guess I was too rosy-glassed with the prospect of the upcoming wedding. I said, "Actually, I have asked him if he ever wanted to return to India, and he said he plans to settle in the US."

I told her I couldn't have an opinion yet because I had not been to the US. Besides, my physical therapy profession had better opportunities in the US than India, but she cut me off and said, "If you get a chance to return to India, you have to take it."

I was stunned. Shubhi had just written a book about the challenges of professionals in India, but she wanted me to consider moving back if possible? I had to ask, "What makes you say that?" She replied, "Because your chances of making a difference are much greater here since you are from here. The US is a great nation, but India needs talent, too. It needs people with revolutionary mindsets and skills who will not leave but challenge the status quo, especially for women. If you get that chance, take it."

This was a riveting moment for me, and it's one reason I am a passionate advocate for women who are trying to make a difference in societies they were raised in rather than leaving them for good. It made me realize the importance of paying forward the kindness and hope I had received from my mentors in India.

It always excites me when I meet such women wherever I go.



# WHY SHE MUST LEAD

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN  
OPPORTUNITIES AND WOMEN OF COLOR

**VASUDHA SHARMA**

Foreword by Dr. Aditi Govitrikar

*Why She Must Lead:  
Bridging the Gap Between Opportunities and Women of Color*  
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An illustration on the left side of the book cover shows two women in silhouette, reaching upwards towards a bright star in a dark blue, starry sky. The woman on top is wearing a yellow top and blue pants, while the woman below is wearing a white top and a dark skirt. The background of the cover transitions from dark blue at the top to a light pinkish-purple at the bottom.

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## PRAISE FOR WHY SHE MUST LEAD

"I believe *Why She Must Lead* combines all aspects of creative ideas that women of color need to be successful today. Vasudha has created a detailed account of her personal experience and women leaders' stories that will enlighten readers with a broader perspective of the work-life experiences of women of color. I highly recommend this book to everyone regardless of their background or ethnicity so they can become the allies women of color need."

**Sage Ke'alahilani Quiamno, CEO & Co-Founder of Future for Us  
Advancing Women of Color at Work | Forbes 30 Under 30 Nominee**

"*Why She Must Lead* is a true reflection of my transition into the non-profit world from a serial entrepreneur... Leadership is not just leading some people and organizations. A leader should have commitment, passion, empathy, decision-making abilities, and the skill to motivate people in a certain direction while planning daily life with due diligence. Vasudha's book will be a game-changer, an inspiring force for many upcoming women leaders to become the powerful agents of change for a brighter tomorrow."

**Meera Satpathy, Founder & Chairperson of Sukarya**

*Vasudha is a passionate advocate for the equal representation of women. Her dedication to equality and equity shines through in this book, and her deep commitment and long-standing work in the fight for fairness can be a lesson to many. I am excited to bring her vision of women leadership into the work I do, training and readying women to run for office."*

**Karen Basserman, Executive Director of Emerge Washington**

Women's Studies/Leadership

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