

THE POWER OF LOVE

Two Asian women, one based out of the UK and the other in the US, are touching the lives of millions of people, in their own unique way. Find out what makes **Ninu Galot** and **Meera Gandhi** ideal role models for Asian women outside of India. Psst... they also have plans for Dubai



Embracing Positivity: Ninu Galot

She could have been just another person fighting Vitiligo, a medical condition that results in the loss of pigmentation, in white patches visible on the skin. But Ninu Galot was not just another girl. This British Asian entrepreneur, who has spent many years in Dubai managing her property business, fights not just the stigma associated with the disease but is also a role model for those going through a similar problem. Born and raised in Reading, UK, London-based Ninu did her MBA and decided to enter business, like the rest of her family. Her vitiligo was detected as a young girl and she went through severe phases of doubt and shame but a decision to enter a fitness competition, embracing her body the way it was, changed it all. Today, Ninu travels the world, giving inspirational speeches, runs her business and uses the media to spread the message of positive body image. She shares with us her inspirational story.

WHAT WAS THE TOUGHEST PART OF BATTLING VITILIGO AS A CHILD?

I was 11 years old when I developed my first patch of vitiligo behind my neck. This patch remained there through my school and university days. Fortunately, since it was behind my neck and I had bob cut hair style, no one saw it. It was when I left university that I had a sudden outburst of vitiligo.

HOW DID YOUR FAMILY REACT, HOW DID THEY HELP?

My family found it very hard as I personally found it difficult to cope with. I went to all the best dermatologists, tried different treatments like UV light treatment and even changing my diet. I've always believed that anything is possible if you



work hard for it but the vitiligo taught me otherwise. It was out of my hands. Imagine a young woman who was lovable at university, always in trend with the latest fashion and then these white patches which appear, and the doctors say they can't do anything... what do you do? I remember being in Dubai on business and covering myself up so people wouldn't see the vitiligo. I would go on the beach before everyone else, as I was told sunlight would help with the re-pigmentation. If I was lying on the beach in a swimsuit I would cover my face so I could see no one looking at the white spots. In March 2016 when I returned from Dubai I noticed some white patches appear on my hands too. This

was the most difficult time for me. After many emotional outbursts I realized I had to change my way of thinking. A friend suggested reading a book by Louise Hay *Power is Within Me*. Louise Hay taught me about self-love and to accept the white marks. It was in October 2016 that I decided to go travelling on my own. Whilst traveling I realized no one noticed the white marks apart from me. They noticed me for the person I was. It was then upon my return that I moved up to London and entered a fitness competition.

HOW DID YOU COPE WITH THE TREATMENT AND ITS AFTERAFFECTS?

Vitiligo changed my life and I feel like I lost

out on many years of my life. Fourteen years after university I had UV light treatment in Milan. It was a rollercoaster ride. There were times it got better and then worse. I was having the treatment every two weeks initially and as it got better, it was every four weeks. In between the treatments, my skin was very sore which meant I couldn't wear fitted clothing and wasn't sociable. I tried to hide the fact from others that I had vitiligo. I was embarrassed about it and didn't want people asking me questions about it.

HOW WOULD YOU COMPARE THE EAST AND THE WEST IN TERMS OF ACCEPTING PEOPLE FOR THE WAY THEY LOOK?

When I spoke about vitiligo in the media in January this year, I received immense love. People who had been suffering with vitiligo loved that finally somebody was speaking about it. Many people messaged me about the stigma attached to Vitiligo in India. I decided to then raise awareness in India and to date have done 2 events there. People in India still believe it's contagious, they don't want to marry someone with it or won't want to have kids as they don't want their children to have it.

WHAT MADE YOU TURN TO MODELLING?

Entering a fitness competition in London was the best thing I ever did. When I was on stage, I embraced my vitiligo and showed it off. I finally felt free. It was then that I decided to speak about my challenges with vitiligo and to help others.

WHAT IS YOUR FITNESS REGIMEN CURRENTLY?

Whilst I was competing I was training twice a day - six days a week. I was on a very strict diet and calculated everything that I ate. Now I train 4-5 times a week.

CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES IN THE UAE?

I've always found the people loving, friendly and caring. Even when on the beach when I was embarrassed and covered myself, this person I met said to me why are you covering your vitiligo? You're beautiful.

HOW DO YOU SPREAD THE MESSAGE ABOUT VITILIGO HERE?

To date I've been in the media in both India and the UK. I've done two events in India and one in the US. I am a spokesperson for Vitiligo Society in London. I have just set up my website and YouTube channel. I also plan to have an event in Dubai later this year to spread the message and raise awareness for Vitiligo.