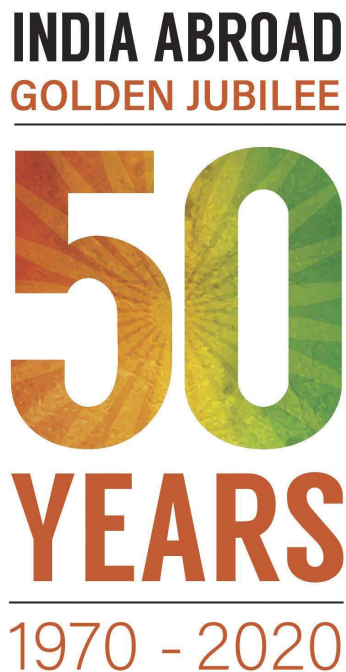


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## **NFIA's first woman president Angela Anand continues her quest to keep the org relevant**

By Aziz Haniffa

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Community Service Award recipient Dr. Mandira Nandani Mehra addresses audience at an event hosted by the National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) to celebrate the International Day of Women at the Durga Temple auditorium in Fairfax Station, Va., March 8.. From left, NFIA president Angela Anand, executive committee member Dr. Lalita Kaul, former NFIA president Dr. Parthasarathy Pillai, Dr. Sambhu Banik, Fairfax County School Board at-large member Rachna Sizemore Heizer, Shachi Ghildyal, counselor, Indian embassy, GTV Inc. producer and executive director Nilima Mehra, Mehra with her 2-year-old daughter Ishani, and her husband, Dr. Mathew Witek, assistant professor of Radiation Oncology at University of Wisconsin, Madison.

FAIRFAX STATION, Va. – At the end of organizing yet another program, this time with regard to building bridges of understanding between generations and communities that coincided with the International Day of Women on March 8, Angela Anand, the first woman president of the National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) – the oldest umbrella community organization in the U.S. – spoke of her continuing efforts to make the four decades old entity relevant again.

Anand, who before taking over the reins of NFIA, was the driving force behind the highly popular women conferences, which had virtually become the flagship facet of NFIA's annual conventions over the past several years, and in large part responsible in attracting the

Generation X'ers and millennials in the community that years ago had all but given up on the NFIA as a wholly patriarchal and entrenched organization, acknowledged that sustaining this resurrection has not been easy.

She told India Abroad that “after getting elected to leadership position of president in NFIA, it did not take me long to realize that NFIA will require lot of energy and new thinking to get it moving forward.

“The generation of committed leaders were not any longer energetic and had become tired of giving their time to the association,” Anand said. “NFIA had a goal of mobilizing the community and it had accomplished it,” and recalled, “At one point, buses from DC’s neighborhood would come to nation’s capital to meet the lawmakers and articulate Indian American issues.”

But she said, “The diaspora had gotten somewhat assimilated and did not look for their countrymen’s network of support as they were quickly getting comfortable so membership base became smaller.”

Anand also said, “Some of the professional and business associations had come to an age and now were successfully functioning for the benefit of their members, for example, the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI), Asian Americans Association of Hotel Owners (AAHOA) that had all started as part of NFIA.

“They were all now dealing with the issues of their profession and supporting their newly arrived members status in the medicine and hospitality fields. AAHOA had their own issues to be able to leverage their membership strength to purchases their supplies to support their spiraling enterprises with multifaceted needs,” she explained.

Consequently, Anand said, “NFIA lost its strong members and new associations that came into its fold were much smaller in number and financial resources,” and bemoaned that “the NFIA leadership in the last decade had not come up with goals that are attractive enough to attract membership.

“Additionally, community had so many associations that were region based such as Telugu speaking, Malayalam and Gujrati speaking for example and were able to provide cultural events that fulfilled their need to speak their own language socially.”

Anand said, “Realizing that Indian women were educated and working, under the banner of NFIA as vice president, I started women empowerment related events because women were in the work arena and had issues of economics, upward mobility, and social and societal

status parity and violence at home, and I successfully coordinated seven women conference and supported NFIA's Congressional lunches and White House briefings for the last seven years.”

But she said, in the current context, for venerable organizations like NFIA to continue to exist, “I feel generations of Indian Americans have gaps that need to be bridged. Youngsters need to get their parents and grandparents to become technically adept, accept new social norms, and get engaged civically by volunteering.

Anand said, “Honoring four young women was to bring community from diverse backgrounds to come together as Indians of varied cultural heritage and to work together to solve problems of the society of this country.”

She said this was also the rationale behind NFIA launching an internship program, “which will help parents and youth to get involved.”

Anand said that “other programs are also on the drawing board and we are working co-operatively with other Asian associations towards this end even as we continue with NFIA's its signature events on Capitol Hill with the Congressional receptions and the White House briefings with regard to our community's issues and concerns and NFIA's bi-annual conventions.”

Before coming into her own at the NFIA, Anand had also organized youth conferences in Los Angeles and also founded the Asian Indian Women's Network which continuously sponsored events on a quarterly basis in Los Angeles to provide networking opportunities for Indian American and South Asian American women.

Along with her late husband, Dr. Rajen Anand, who served in senior positions in both the Clinton and Obama administrations in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and was a longtime Democratic Party stalwart, Anand was also active in the Democratic Party having been elected as a national delegate to its conventions in New York city and later in Denver.

She served as the secretary of the Orange County Democratic Party for two terms, and since she joined NFIA, has been instrumental in organizing the Congressional lunches and White House briefings.

Professionally, Anand works as a technical trainer in a private industry and has spent the last 14 years working for a global company with a multinational presence – the Harris Corporation, and in the last year for another company with a global presence, Peraton, Inc.

Amritsar-born Anand immigrated to the U.S. after a chance meeting with her to be spouse, Rajen Anand, who had visited his parents in Meerut after finishing his Ph.D from the University of California in Davis.

They first lived in Long Beach, California, where Rajen Anand got his first teaching appointment in the University to teach nutrition and physiology, which were his specialties.

Anand has a master's degree in Economics and also in journalism and before immigrating to the U.S. worked in public relations for an Indian pharmaceutical company in New Delhi.

After moving to California, she took marketing and business courses towards an MBA program at the University but did not complete her studies as she soon became mother to two boys who both now live and work in California.

When she was elected president over a year ago, NFIA founder and also a former president Dr. Thomas Abraham said Anand was a leader among the “Indian American women involved in the community activities who have made history at the NFIA conventions when they got elected to all the senior positions when elections have been conducted, which shows the women power in our community.”

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