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10 WOMEN AND A BRIDGE OF IDEAS

- TEDxNapierBridge, Chennai's own TEDx community will host its second live-speakers event on Nov 5
- The 10-member organising team share the same passion for work, despite coming from diverse backgrounds

• Abinaya Kalyanasundaram

It has been three years since TEDxNapierBridge, Chennai's independent TEDx community, was formed. Though we've heard a lot about their successful events across the city, the people behind this vibrant community have kept a low profile. Ahead of their second live-speakers event, TEDxNapierBridgeWomen, scheduled to take place in the city on November 5, we crashed one of their Saturday-morning meetings to find out more about the team. We were pleasantly amazed, but not altogether surprised, to find that the young all-women's team is as vibrant and energetic as any TED ensemble should be.

"Our strength lies in our diversity," begins Sowmya, inviting us into her home. The curator of the TEDxNapierBridgeWomen event, and an engineer by profession, is one of the 10 women behind the event. They come from various educational backgrounds — engineering, journalism,

finance, art, sales and more! Ishwarya, Sowmya, Dikshitha, Aarathi, Indra, and Devika take care of operations while Vaishali, Sowmya and Sruthi handle the curation. Bianca, an artist, works on the stage design and Harshitha is in charge of event design and experience.

"We understand the differences we bring to the table; it keeps the ideas stronger and interesting for the audience. We make sure to throw in all our ideas in — we debate, fight it out, and come up with a strong end product!" says Sowmya, while Aarathi adds, "We do have one thing in common...the silliness," she laughs, asserting that all fun and games aside, when it comes to work, they are focused and respect deadlines.

TEDxNapierBridgeWomen is planned as a gender-inclusive event, and is happening in line with the global annual TEDWomen event in New Orleans. Over 250 such events

will be happening simultaneously across the world, in the first week of November, and the event in Chennai is one of the three happening in India.

This year's theme is 'Bridges'. "It's happening in New Orleans, the city of bridges, so, I think that's where the idea came from," says Sowmya. "It can be interpreted in many ways — a bridge connects places, or people, a bridge that connects us across time. You can walk on a bridge, sometimes you have to burn it to let go of the baggage — those are the kinds of ideas we're bringing through the speakers," she shares.

Six speakers from different backgrounds, communities and age groups have been identified through a formal process, the criteria ranging from suitability to theme and tone of the event. "The ideas matter — we don't look for popular names. We 'bucket-ise' them into categories — the content that speakers talk about can be a big idea or could be something they've already done which can be replicated, or it could be a performance/talk, or there could be an artist conveying an idea through art," she shares.

Apart from live speakers, the event is also scheduled to have exclusive access

to content streamed from the main TEDWomen global conference, in addition to other activities, performances and short video snippets curated on the theme. The speakers will also be available to mingle and network with the audience.

If you're familiar with TED talks, you will know that the concept revolves around 'Ideas worth spreading'. Ideas, and not people, are the protagonists of the events/conferences and are the point of discussion. And the team has taken this to heart, holding off from revealing the names of the speakers. "Trust the team, trust the theme, and come to the event. This is an experiment for us, but it's also good learning," shares Shyam, founder, TEDxNapierBridge.

After much coercion and needling, the team parts with two names — "Alright! You can hear never-before heard stories from two people, Aarabi Veeraraghavan, a contemporary dancer and Venkatesh IAS, MD of Co-optex," they laugh, assuring that it is poised to be a day of conversation, ideas and fun.

TEDxNapierBridgeWomen is happening on November 5 at Anna University. For tickets visit www.tedxnapierbridge.com. Tickets include Delegate Pass + Exclusive TEDx Goodie Bag + Ideas Lunch + Coffee. For details, call Shyam: 9566260587 or Sowmya: 9443708585



Bianca



Harshita