

Dutt adds a new spark to activism with her innovative multimedia campaigns



#VOGUEEMPOWER

# Culture shift

Leading human rights activist **MALLIKA DUTT** of Breakthrough uses theatre, music and multimedia to change attitudes towards women's issues. By **AARTI VIRANI**

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Founder, president and CEO of Breakthrough, a New York- and Delhi-based nonprofit, Dutt's approach to galvanizing pairs pop culture with mobilisation. "By allowing violence to happen, we allow a culture of conquest to exist," she says.

## HER JOURNEY

Dutt, who arrived in the US from Kolkata at age 18 to attend Mount Holyoke College, America's oldest all-women's university, had her first brush with activism there—demonstrating against the US occupation of El Salvador, protesting South African apartheid and rallying for victims of sexual and domestic violence in Take Back The Night rallies. A few years later, while working at the Ford Foundation in Delhi, she attempted to bring subjects like domestic violence into the public dialogue. "I wanted to close the gap between rhetoric and reality," she says. The result was an award-winning album, *Mann Ke Manjeere* (2000), featuring anthems by artistes like Shubha Mudgal. "It was a runaway hit. It was an experiment, which showed me that it was possible to discuss serious issues through a pop culture medium."

## EMPOWER METER

In addition to Breakthrough, Dutt, who's received multiple social impact awards, including the prestigious Lipman Family Prize from The Wharton School, also co-founded Sakhi for South Asian Women, an anti-domestic violence organisation that works to unite survivors in the New York area. "In 1985, in Nairobi, we had to fight to even get the concept of domestic violence recognised by the United Nations," she says. "For years, what women were going through and what men were doing to them was just seen as part of how women were supposed to be treated—a *fait accompli*." ■



## WHY SHE'S OUR WOMAN THIS MONTH

"I think I popped out of my mom's belly a feminist," declares Mallika Dutt. When we meet, the 52-year-old human rights advocate has just returned from Haryana, the state with India's bleakest sex ratio—an appalling 879 females per 1,000 males. For her 14-year-old nonprofit, Breakthrough, Dutt has engaged with the community to produce skits urging men to play a pivotal role in women's empowerment. Cases in point include Bell Bajao, a multimedia series that portrays men sounding the alarm against domestic violence (actor Boman Irani stars in one) and #BeThatGuy, a zippy 30-second animation screened on Jumbotrons at stadiums across the United States. "It's subversive. But if you're changing men's attitudes towards power and masculinity, that's a culture shift at work. In transforming both men and women, we're building a new world for everyone."

On December 20, at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Stadium in Mumbai, the infamous comedy group All India Bakchod (AIB) presented the AIB Knockout of Arjun Kapoor and Ranveer Singh. Over 90 minutes, jokes and insults were traded for a good cause—part of the proceeds go to GiveIndia charities for #VogueEmpower. [VogueEmpower.in](http://VogueEmpower.in)



## I PLEDGE...

"To encourage men to take a stand against sexual harassment through public speaking and three social media campaigns in 2015 that target 5,000 male students and 10 business leaders" —**MALLIKA DUTT**

ANBAL MARTEL