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**About the Presenter:**

Radha Parikh obtained her M.Ed. and Ed.S. degrees in Special Education from the University of Florida, and her Ph.D. in Special Education (with Information Technology as support area) from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Her interest areas include Communication & Counseling. She has worked as an advocate on the Mid-Missouri Crisis Line for 2 years and on the National Domestic Violence Hotline (Austin) for another 2 years. Currently she is an assistant professor at Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information & Communication Technology (DA-IICT), Gandhinagar.

Apart from teaching and research, she has been the Convenor of the DA-IICT Gender Cell for the last 5 years. She has learned that in a male-dominant world, women need empowerment to learn their own capabilities and skills. This cannot come from without, but must come from within. The need for the day is to inculcate self-dependency, advocacy to promote awareness regarding legal and other protective measures.

**Title of Paper:** **Paru's Story: Empowerment of Women**

**Abstract:**

This is the story of Paru (not really fiction but based on the stories of many women). Paru is an intelligent girl from a labor class background. At a young age her studies are stopped and she helps around the home. Then her marriage is planned to a widower (with 2 young children). The groom-to-be dies on the wedding day as he arrives at Paru's home. The odds are all against this young girl. Her father is actively against any type of education or welfare for Paru, her mother is passively supportive, her brother is a 'lost' case and the community she lives in believes women are best seen at home in the kitchen in the background. The courageous life of this young girl who fulfills her dream to stand on her own feet, and pursues her studies further is an example from which we can learn not to lose hope and see how doors open when one perseveres, and how making a career for herself first as a seamstress teaches Paru to start her own boutique, and eventually helped Paru become a strong person. Her career guidance came from a local Church social worker who helps her buy her first sewing machine.



Domestic violence is present in subtle forms all over India and the rest of the world. Gender equality is a legislative right but in word only. Can advocates help women in need only when the women come forward and seek help or even otherwise? Promoting awareness of women's legal, physical and emotional rights is essential for equality between genders which brings harmony and growth in the home and community. Paru overcomes the obstacles of stigma as a 'widow' and works hard, saves her money and opens her own boutique. Later she marries and supported by her husband completes her post-graduate studies to teach as a College Lecturer. Even today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how many child widows survive and progress in India? Do they learn how to initiate action and explore career options? The presentation and discussions will be aimed at responses to such questions.