



2024

NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

DR. SHANTA THOUTAM '04, '16



“At NMSU, professors gave me many opportunities to prove myself. I had the freedom to learn the ways that hard work pays off.”

—Dr. Shanta Thoutam '04, '16

Dr. Shanta Thoutam '04, '16 received her M.S. and Ph.D. in electrical engineering from NMSU and her Bachelor of Technology in Electronics and Instrumentation Engineering from Kakatiya Institute of Technology and Science in Telangana, India.

The first woman to serve as Chief Innovation Officer of Telangana, Shanta's accolades include the 2023 World Innovation Award at the BRICS Innovation Forum in Moscow, which brings together entrepreneurs, urbanists, and scientists from 30+ countries to share development trends in modern cities. One of "50 Inspiring Women" of Telangana in 2023, she received the Startup Ranking Certificate of Commendation in 2021 and 2022 for her role in strengthening

the innovation ecosystem and the prestigious 2023 HMTV Nari Puraskar Award, which recognizes significant societal contributions of women in India.

Shanta's work ethic came from her parents, who sacrificed to give her and her siblings a quality education. Money was tight: Each child had one school uniform and one pair of shoes, but "our parents taught us how you can push yourself even with limited resources." Her academic prowess was a source of amusement to her cousins, but Shanta was "focused on how to ace an education" as early as 7th grade when she asked to skip a grade—and remained at the top of her class when she did.

At NMSU, she published papers with her advisor, Dr. Jaime Ramirez-Angulo, and in 2004 her extensive research work led to a job at Freescale Semiconductors, which she held for more than five years. There, she was "empowered to think outside the box. This work opened my mind, and I found my calling." She came back to NMSU for her Ph.D., immediately volunteering at Arrowhead Center and eventually becoming the director of the LAUNCH competition in charge of the proof-of-concept initiative, helping researchers identify commercially viable ideas and move them to the marketplace.

As a student, Shanta immersed herself both in her academics and the Indian community, becoming the president of the NMSU Indian Students Association and an executive member of the Indian Association of Southern New Mexico. "NMSU was a cocoon, and it remains especially good for students from developing countries. The faculty is warm and welcoming, and I had zero distractions."

After working at an accelerator in Syracuse, New York, Shanta returned to India, inspired by the progressive leadership of then-Telangana IT Minister Kalvakuntla Taraka Rama Rao. First working for the massive disruptive technology incubator T-Hub Foundation spearheading open innovation programs, Shanta soon became the Officer on Special Duty (Textiles and Handicrafts) for the Government of Telangana, and, in 2021, began her role as Chief Innovation Officer of Telangana.

Her advice to students? "NMSU is a great place to leverage the resources that are provided—NMSU is an incubator in which you can bloom. Allow yourself to be guided by faculty members, study well, and carve a niche for yourself." ▲