



Celebrating Women Entrepreneurship

Championing innovation, inclusion, and the rise of women-led enterprises

In the last few years, there has been a substantial focus on entrepreneurial success on one hand, and women's prowess on the other. Many focused entrepreneurial funds like StrongHer Ventures (now a part of Arise Ventures), entities like The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TiE), Only Women and our own Natarajan Empowerment Foundation (NEF), have strongly focused on initiatives to ensure that women in general and women entrepreneurs in particular, find their rightful place in the sun.

India has celebrated women entrepreneurs like Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw and Falguni Nayar, and for every national icon, there are multiple regional and city level success stories, which deserved to be noticed, mentored and celebrated. Our work at 5F World has seen some amazing companies blossom. In the art and culture segment, there has been Live History India (LHI) Digital set up by former CNBC and UTV anchor Mini Menon in 2016, which has now merged with Peepul Tree and raised two rounds of capital from niche investors and funds. There is Studio Coppre, run by four women, Rashmi, Chhanda, Sudakshina and Seemantini, one of India's high-quality companies focused on artisan work, which has enabled many copper artisans to find national and global demand for their products. It is probably fitting that two successful women on the board, Uma Ganesh and Aasiya Tejani, have supported them with funds and advice to bring them to their current level of prominence. And as a third example, there is GTT Data Solutions Ltd, a recently listed entity on the Bombay Stock Exchange, which had its early beginnings as Global Talent Track (GTT) founded a decade ago by Uma Ganesh, which raised three rounds of capital and then merged with other skills, data and AI companies to form a new rising star in the corporate sector.

In each of these cases and many more, it has been the strong focus of the woman entrepreneurs and their unwavering commitment to quality and growth of their enterprise that has taken them to success. Another role model entrepreneur has been Parul Ganju, a young scientist who set up Ahammune Biosciences to focus on drug research for skin problems, and is today not only a success story with three rounds of funding, but also a valued leader who helps other young



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women find their wings as entrepreneurs. The core elements of having a differentiated product or service, exploring and developing product-market connect, perfecting a winning business model, building a team with complementary skills and developing a capital raising runway to success has been well demonstrated by all the women who are building successful corporate businesses.

In the social sector, there have been many women exemplars who have co-founded visionary organisations and led them to success. Chetna Gala Sinha of Mann deshi, Ruchi Mathur of Lighthouse Communities, Zarina Screwvala of Swades and Safeena Husain of Educate Girls global foundation are just a few cases of success. Educate Girls is a well-recognised success story, with its focus on putting out-of-school girls back into school and educating them for self-confidence and independence, initially in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and now spreading nationally and into Africa. The sense of purpose that inspires their employees, voluntary district representatives (Team Balikas) and their "Maitri" Partners, and their extraordinary national and global fund-raising success has led to this entity being the first Indian social organisation to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award. The stage is set for many more women social entrepreneurs to join the movement.

This year two back-to-back initiatives have been launched in Pune, which could probably find their place in many cities in future. The TiE women

initiative, which has been part of the successful global initiative to encourage women to set up and build companies, has recently concluded with some outstanding entrepreneurs identified. And, for the larger cohort of women who applied for the pitch-refining support by TiE, the NEF is offering an intensive four-month training and mentoring process that will help each entrepreneur find their own pathways to success. With the participation of many successful entrepreneurs in the city and the training sessions led by Narendra Goidani, founder of LifeSchool and the Keep Moving Movement, the programme is intended to initiate an acceleration of the women's entrepreneurship movement, initially in Pune and eventually spreading to West and South India.

Unleashing *nari shakti* is an idea whose time has come. The success of the Indian women's cricket team with their successful comeback from three successive losses to win the ICC Women's World Cup, demonstrated that women have the spirit and strength of purpose to succeed in any field of chosen endeavour. What was even more inspiring than the win itself was the atmosphere in which the final was played between India and South Africa with no sledging, no gamesmanship, and a joint party at the end that celebrated both the spirit of the game and the wisdom of the young women. Women are ready to find their place in the sun in all fields of human activity. It is the responsibility of all of us to encourage and open up pathways to success. ■