



WORLD TRADE CENTER®
MUMBAI



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2025

Special Edition
on

WOMEN ACHIEVERS

The Battle
Within

Unstoppable and
Fierce

Through the
Storm

Emerging
Victorious

Rising from
Ruins

Owning
my Story





Bharat Ratna Sir M. Visvesvaraya

(15 September, 1860 - 14 April, 1962)

FIFTY FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING

M. Visvesvaraya Industrial Research and Development Centre (MVIRDC) is a non-profit company registered and licensed under Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 (currently Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013). On 26 June, 2025 MVIRDC will complete 55 years of continuous service in the promotion of trade and industry.

MVIRDC became a member of the World Trade Centers Association, New York, in 1971 and established the World Trade Center Mumbai, which is the first World Trade Center (WTC) in India. MVIRDC, having spearheaded the movement of World Trade Centers in India with the establishment of WTCs at Bhubaneswar, Goa and Jaipur, is assisting MSMEs in these regions through various Trade Research, Trade Promotion, Trade Infrastructure including Commercial Offices, Business Center, Trade Facilitation Services and Trade Education Programmes.

Women are integral to the prosperity and well-being of families, communities, nations, and humanity as a whole. International Women's Day serves as an opportunity to honor their unique contributions to social and economic progress. While this day often centers around discussions on women's empowerment and the challenges they face in both personal and professional spheres, I believe these conversations should not be confined to a single day. Instead, there should be an ongoing dialogue throughout the year to evaluate our progress toward gender equality and implement necessary measures to close the gender gap.

I commend the Reserve Bank of India for selecting "Financial Literacy: Women's Prosperity" as the theme for this year's Financial Literacy Week. This highlights the crucial role of financial education in ensuring women's economic independence and security. Industry associations can also contribute by organizing financial literacy initiatives specifically for women, raising awareness about credit, investment, insurance, and pension options tailored for women professionals and entrepreneurs. Additionally, I urge both central and state governments to introduce dedicated industrial policies for women, providing them with essential support such as land, access to capital, technology, and other resources to help establish and expand their businesses.



As an industrialist and economic expert, I firmly believe that women will be at the forefront of India's next wave of economic growth. The days when their roles were confined to household chores or limited to small-scale activities like jewelry making, baking, or tailoring in their spare time are long past. Today, women are the driving force behind sustainable development. It is inspiring to see Indian women excelling in diverse fields such as aerospace, defense, science, technology, research & development, sports, bureaucracy, and public administration. Notably, women make up about 15% of India's pilot workforce—significantly higher than the global average of 4%. In recent years, they have played a vital role in India's space missions, and approximately 16% of scientists in the country's R&D institutions are women. A private survey also reveals that women constitute 20% of the manufacturing workforce, with an impressive 80% representation in the rapidly expanding electronics sector.

While these figures indicate significant progress toward gender diversity across various sectors, there is still much work to be done, particularly in bridging the gender gap in entrepreneurship. India is home to over two crore Udyami-registered women-owned enterprises, in addition to numerous women entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector. However, many of these entrepreneurs face challenges in scaling their businesses due to limited access to capital, professional incubation, and acceleration support. The key challenge lies in facilitating the growth and expansion of these informal women-led businesses and integrating them into the formal economy. Supporting their development will not only boost per capita income and employment but also generate increased tax revenue, benefiting the government and the overall economy.

The government's efforts to promote women entrepreneurship through financial inclusion, digital credit access, and simplified compliance processes are commendable. However, there is a pressing need for stronger collaboration between the private sector, industry associations, research institutions, and state governments, particularly in advancing women's entrepreneurship and skill development.

Women entrepreneurs require incubation and acceleration support to scale their businesses by expanding into new markets, strengthening branding, obtaining quality certifications, retaining customers, and exploring international opportunities. Many women-owned enterprises struggle to survive due to competitive pressures, payment defaults by buyers, limited access to technology, and the high cost of capital. It is crucial for state governments to actively engage with industry associations to revive struggling MSMEs, particularly women-led businesses, to foster regional economic growth and sustainable employment.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the remarkable women featured in this publication for their outstanding contributions across business, sports, entertainment, arts, cuisine, public administration, and various other fields. On this International Women's Day, I warmly wish all women continued success and empowerment. I am confident that with collective efforts, we will soon bridge the gender gap across all sectors of the economy, bringing us closer to our vision of Viksit Bharat.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Vijay Kalantri".

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It is with great pride that we present the extraordinary journeys of remarkable women who have excelled across diverse fields—business, arts, sports, entertainment, cuisine, technology, leadership consultancy, and more. These women have pursued excellence with unwavering conviction, overcoming challenges to turn their dreams into reality.

Their stories underscore the power of ambition, the importance of perseverance, and the transformative impact of self-belief. Success, as they reveal, often demands sacrifices, and it does not always come with the privilege of a supportive environment. Many of these women had no inherited business legacies or professional mentors to guide them—yet, they carved their own paths to success.

Breaking barriers and challenging gender stereotypes, they have risen to prominence in industries where women have historically been underrepresented. While limited access to credit, technology, and skilled labor continues to pose real challenges for women entrepreneurs, these trailblazers have found innovative ways to navigate obstacles, proving that determination and resilience are just as crucial as external resources.

Their journeys serve as a beacon of inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs and young professionals seeking role models who embody the spirit of perseverance and success. We hope these powerful narratives will ignite ambition, fuel dreams, and empower the next generation to push beyond limitations.

A heartfelt thank you to each of these phenomenal women for sharing their stories in this special edition. As we celebrate International Women's Day, we extend our warmest wishes—not only to the incredible women shaping our world but also to the men who support and champion their success.

Rupa Naik

Executive Director



T rue empowerment goes beyond discussions—it is about equipping individuals with the right tools, mentorship, education, financial resources, and technology to unlock their full potential. It is about enabling people to seize opportunities and turn aspirations into achievements. While women's empowerment has been a global conversation for decades, the journey toward true gender equality in entrepreneurship, science, technology, governance, and public administration is still ongoing.

One of the most impactful ways for women to take charge of their own destinies is through entrepreneurship. In today's fast-evolving economy, there is immense scope for women to establish their businesses across diverse industries—be it beauty and wellness, catering, jewelry design, real estate, event management, daycare services, or even pet care. The growing prominence of manufacturing and technology startups also presents exciting possibilities for aspiring women entrepreneurs. With platforms like the Udyami portal, starting a business has never been easier—offering seamless access to government schemes, financial support, and regulatory assistance.

At **World Trade Center Mumbai**, we remain committed to fostering an environment where women can thrive as entrepreneurs. Through a robust ecosystem that includes world-class commercial infrastructure, market intelligence, business research, and capacity-building programs, we strive to be the launchpad for women-led enterprises. Our goal is to bridge the gap between ambition and achievement by providing the necessary support for women to scale their businesses successfully.

As we celebrate **International Women's Day**, this special edition highlights the stories of women who have risen to excellence through perseverance and determination. Their journeys are a testament to the power of resilience and hard work, and we hope their success stories serve as an inspiration for readers, especially young women who aspire to carve their own paths.

On this occasion, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to these exceptional women and express my deep appreciation for the countless women who contribute to society in various roles—as educators, healthcare professionals, corporate leaders, policymakers, social workers, and homemakers. Each of you plays a vital role in shaping a stronger, more inclusive world.

Aakruti Bagwe

Director - Operations



Women's empowerment is not just an aspiration—it is an imperative for sustainable progress. As India moves toward its vision of becoming a developed economy by 2047, the role of women in shaping this future cannot be overlooked. Real progress is achieved when women are not just participants but leaders in business, innovation, governance, and beyond.

India has a legacy of pioneering women who have made remarkable strides across industries. While the country has witnessed significant improvements in female participation in education and public life, disparities persist—particularly in leadership roles, high-growth sectors, and technology-driven industries. Overcoming these challenges requires collective effort, proactive policies, and an ecosystem that nurtures women's ambitions.

Recognizing this need, the government has introduced numerous initiatives to enhance women's access to healthcare, finance, and entrepreneurship. Platforms like the Myscheme portal offer a gateway to these opportunities, empowering women to leverage available resources and build thriving careers and businesses.

At World Trade Center Mumbai, we are committed to turning conversations into tangible outcomes. Through our extensive global network of 320 WTCs across 90 countries connecting over a million businesses and annual trade events, we create avenues for women entrepreneurs to expand their reach, form strategic alliances, and gain international exposure. Our mission is to provide the infrastructure, knowledge, and connections that enable women to scale new heights in their professional journeys.

This Women's Special Edition is a tribute to those who have defied challenges and redefined success. Their inspiring journeys reinforce the idea that when women rise, they don't just transform their own lives—they create lasting impact across industries and communities.

As we mark International Women's Day, let's reaffirm our commitment to action. The road ahead demands more than recognition—it calls for unwavering support, equal opportunities, and a collective push toward a future where women thrive as changemakers and leaders. The moment for change is now!

Priya Pansare

DIRECTOR - TRADE AND INVESTMENT PROMOTION

Rising from the Ashes: My Journey from Adversity to Global Entrepreneurship and Politics



Anjusha Chaughule

Chief Operating Officer, Chaughule Global Inc.

Life has tested me in ways I never imagined, but every challenge has only strengthened my resolve. I have known loss, betrayal, and struggles that could have broken me. But I chose to rise. From fighting a

Breaking into the UK's business world was not easy. I faced scepticism, cultural barriers, and intense competition. I built networks, studied the market, and worked relentlessly to position myself as a key player in the UK-India trade corridor.

decade-long legal battle while raising two sons alone to building multiple businesses and now stepping into UK politics, my journey is one of resilience, reinvention, and sheer determination.

As I prepare for the Wandsworth Town Council election in May 2026, I reflect on my path, how I arrived in London in 2022, unknown and uncertain, and in just 2.5 years, established myself as a successful entrepreneur and a leader.

This is my story. Not just of Success, but of Survival.

Surviving the Storm: A Decade of Struggles and Reinvention

My first setback came early in life. I lost my husband in a car accident when I was just 23 years old—only 19 days after giving birth to my first son. In an instant, my world

Instead of waiting for opportunities, I created them.

shattered. I was a young widow, grieving and alone, yet I had a newborn to care for. I had no choice but to be strong.

Later, I remarried, hoping to rebuild a family, but instead, I found myself trapped in an abusive marriage. The years that followed were filled with pain, but I refused to let my circumstances define me. After enduring years of turmoil, I finally broke free, determined to reclaim my life.

For over ten years, my life was entangled in a relentless divorce litigation, a battle that drained me emotionally and financially. As a single mother, I had to fight not just for my rights but for the future of my two sons, Aarya and Shalin.

Society was quick to judge, quick to assume that a woman alone couldn't make it. But I was not ready to be defined by my circumstances.

This wasn't the first time life had knocked me down. I **have restarted my life three times before finally building a thriving business.**

Each time, I rebuilt my career, my identity, and my confidence. Like a phoenix, I rose from the ashes—stronger, wiser, and more determined than before.

During this time, I found solace in my work. I channelised my pain into empowering other women. My self-defense journey became a purpose, not just a profession. I led some of India's largest self-defense campaigns, including the Nirbhaya Safety Drive, and trained Indian Army officers' wives, police commissioner's safety programs, remand homes, school students, and university young women, empowering more than 1 million girls and women. My mission was simple, to equip women with the confidence and skills to protect themselves.

Finding Strength in Art and Creativity

Alongside my advocacy for women's safety, I also found another creative outlet—the film industry. I had the privilege of working on several meaningful projects, directing short films and ad campaigns that told stories of

Resilience is a choice: Life will push you to your limits, but you decide whether to break or rise.

strength, resilience, and human connection. Each project was a piece of my soul, a way to express emotions that words often failed to capture.

But even with these achievements, I knew my journey was far from complete.

The Pandemic: A Turning Point toward Global Entrepreneurship

Lockdown was a time of uncertainty for the world, but for me, it was a moment of transformation. Instead of waiting for opportunities, I created them.

I saw the struggles of artisans in Indian villages, skilled craftsmen whose work deserved global recognition but remained confined to small communities. I decided to become a bridge between their artistry and the world. This was my entry into international trade.

I became a merchant exporter from India, introducing handcrafted treasures to global markets. With no prior experience in exports, I learned everything from scratch, studying trade regulations, understanding supply chains, and navigating international markets. It was overwhelm-

Failure is not the end: Every setback is a lesson, every loss a redirection.

ing, but my passion to bring Indian craftsmanship to the world kept me going.

This step led to my next big venture, **Vignaharta Ganesha, my eco-conscious brand**, which went from Mumbai to London and Auckland, becoming a symbol of sustainable devotion worldwide.

Building a Legacy in the UK: From Entrepreneur to Political Candidate

In 2022, I made a bold move. I arrived in London with nothing but a vision, to establish myself in the international business landscape. It was a fresh start, a chance to redefine my life on my own terms.

Within two years, I became the exclusive UK and Ireland Country Partner for Chitale Bandhu, one of India's most renowned food brands. I also made Vignaharta Ganesha, a premium eco-friendly brand, setting a new standard in the industry.

Breaking into the UK's business world was not easy. I faced scepticism, cultural barriers, and intense competition. But I had spent a lifetime overcoming obstacles. I

Reinvention is powerful: Don't be afraid to start over—it might just lead to something extraordinary.

built networks, studied the market, and worked relentlessly to position myself as a key player in the UK-India trade corridor.

Yet, my ambitions extended beyond business. I had always been drawn to public service, and soon, I found myself immersed in UK politics.

Making History in Wandsworth

I started my political journey as a women's officer and scaled up to be the Ward Chair Spokesperson for Roehampton, engaging with communities, helping local businesses, and addressing social challenges like youth crime and drug abuse.

My work caught the attention of key leaders, and with series of intense interviews and polling, I was selected as a Conservative Party candidate from Roehampton for Wandsworth Town Council's May 2026 election.

Wandsworth has a rich political history, Margaret Thatcher launched her leadership contest here, and the current London Mayor also hails from this borough. To be chosen as a candidate from such a historically significant area is an honour. It's not just a political achievement, it's a testament to how far I have come, representing my Indian roots in the heart of UK politics.

The Unwavering Support that kept me Going

Behind every strong woman is a support system that lifts her up when the weight of the world becomes too much to bear. For me, that foundation has been my **sons, Aarya and Shalin**. They have been my pillars of strength, my greatest cheerleaders, and my reason to keep pushing forward.

Alongside them, I have been fortunate to have incredible **mentors** who have guided me, challenged me, and believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself. No one achieves success alone. I owe my journey to those who stood by me in the darkest times celebrated with me in the brightest moments.

“Believe in your own strength: Society will doubt you, but what matters is that you don't doubt yourself.”

Lessons from the Journey

My story is proof that transformation is possible, no matter how broken you feel. Here are the lessons I've learned:

“Help others as you grow: Success means nothing if you don't lift others along the way.”

- 1. Resilience is a choice:** Life will push you to your limits, but you decide whether to break or rise.
- 2. Failure is not the end:** Every setback is a lesson, every loss a redirection.
- 3. Reinvention is powerful:** Don't be afraid to start over—it might just lead to something extraordinary.
- 4. Believe in your own strength:** Society will doubt you, but what matters is that you don't doubt yourself.
- 5. Help others as you grow:** Success means nothing if you don't lift others along the way.

A Message for Women Dreaming of More

To every woman who has ever felt trapped, undervalued, or underestimated, I see you. I was you. And I want you to know that your story is far from over.

Dream big. Take risks. Build something that makes you proud. And when you rise, rise so high that your success becomes an inspiration for others.

I am living proof that a single mother with no safety net can rebuild her life from scratch, cross continents, establish global businesses, and step into politics.

This is not just my journey. It's a reminder that anything is possible when you refuse to give up.

Here's to strong women, fearless entrepreneurship, and making history—one bold step at a time.

And just when I felt everything in life was now sorted, I again face a huge loss in my life: My strength My Baba passed away 2 weeks ago as on February 19, 2025 even before he could see me soar new heights.

Leading with Purpose: A Vision for Equality and Sustainable Growth



Ann D'Silva

Head of Strategic Alliances,
Türkiye - BLS International Services Ltd.

The Power of Influence: Shaping My Journey Through Inspiration and Community

Throughout my journey, inspiration has come from my mother and a diverse network of individuals teachers, mentors, and leaders who encouraged me to think beyond limitations and aspire to greater heights. Their support shaped my belief that growth is boundless when fueled by curiosity and resilience.

My deep-rooted commitment to community is the cornerstone of my values. I am passionate about nurturing talent, advocating for diversity, fostering gender equality, and promoting sustainability. These values are not mere aspirations but active pursuits, guided by my mother's words: *"Leave every place and person a little better than you found them."* This simple yet profound advice has guided my personal and professional life, emphasizing the importance of creating meaningful connections and committing to continuous self-improvement.

Throughout my career, I have been privileged to work

with leaders and mentors who fostered inclusive environments, amplifying diverse voices, and encouraging equality. Their examples inspired me to build a culture where everyone, regardless of background, feel empowered to contribute their unique perspectives.

I have learned that life's most impactful lessons often come from moments of failure. These experiences have reinforced my commitment to social equity, collaboration, and collective responsibility. They have driven me to actively support underrepresented voices, creating pathways for them to be heard, recognized, and celebrated.

A Bold Leap: From Corporate Success to Social Impact and Back

One of the most defining moments in my career was my decision to step away from the corporate world after two decades. This leap freed me from the traditional 9 to 5 routine and allowed me to take on the role of a consultant, offering me the flexibility to pursue my passions. I embraced my calling as an author and social change advocate, focusing on addressing societal stigmas and empowering marginalized communities. Over the past decade, I have actively championed social equity, providing individuals and communities with the tools and platforms they need to thrive.

During this period of transformation, I authored several books on women's struggles and the pressing need for social change, sparking essential conversations about diversity, inclusion, and our collective responsibility to create a better world for future generations. My consulting work focused on helping organizations implement strategies that foster meaningful change and promote community engagement.

Now, with a renewed sense of purpose and valuable insights from my experiences, I am re-entering the corporate world. This "rebirth" is not just a career shift but a holistic transformation that integrates the lessons of social activism into corporate practices. I strive to create environments that prioritize social responsibility and community impact alongside profitability. This milestone represents my commitment to driving positive change within the corporate sector and beyond.

From Resistance to Resilience: Learning Through Change

"Challenges change us," and through them, the old gives way to the new. Resistance to change is natural; the unfamiliar often meets with skepticism. However, just as water carves its path through stone, growth emerges when we learn to adapt, transforming challenges into opportunities for innovation.

One of my greatest challenges was breaking free from entrenched patterns both personally and professionally. I came to understand that embracing vulnerability is not a weakness but a profound strength that reflects our shared humanity. Accepting that perfection is an illusion has allowed me to foster deeper connections and encourage collaboration. By embracing our imperfections, we create space for collective growth and transform obstacles into opportunities for progress.

My Personal Formula for Success

At the heart of my formula for success is clear and open communication: *"If it's on your mind, ask; don't assume."* As someone who values relationships, effective communication is essential. Assumptions often lead to misunderstandings and missed opportunities, whether personally or professionally. It is crucial to express our thoughts respectfully and with clarity.

In the corporate environment, communication must be a two-way street between management and employees. Replacing fear with trust transforms the workplace, fostering collaboration, focus, and a sense of unity over competition. A successful organization nurtures growth and learning, enabling us to move forward as one cohesive team.

My Message for Aspiring Women Achievers and Entrepreneurs

The sisterhood of the She Tribe grows stronger every day. By supporting each other and celebrating each other's successes as our own, we uplift women across the globe. International Women's Day, on March 8th, should be a celebration of our achievements and milestones—something to honor every day, not just on one designated occasion.

"PAY IT FORWARD."

We have all had inspiring women in our lives who stood up for others, and now it's our turn to embody that same spirit. Dream big, and then take action to make those dreams a reality. Gender should never define the limits of our aspirations, let's reject any notion that confines us based on gender.

How Does Gender Equality Contribute to Economic and Social Development?

Gender equality is essential for both economic and social progress. When women have equal access to education, employment, and opportunities, society as a whole benefits.

Economically, empowering women leads to increased productivity, innovation, and growth. Research consistently shows that gender-diverse teams outperform their counterparts, driving stronger and more sustainable results.

My formula for success is clear and open communication: "If it's on your mind, ask; don't assume." Assumptions often lead to misunderstandings and missed opportunities, whether personally or professionally. It is crucial to express our thoughts respectfully and with clarity.

On a social level, gender equality fosters healthier, more resilient communities. When women engage fully in political, economic, and social spheres, they influence policies and programs that benefit everyone. Promoting gender equality also helps dismantle harmful stereotypes and cultural norms that hinder progress.

Achieving gender equality is not simply a women's issue it is a fundamental human right and crucial to sustainable development. Women in leadership roles offer diverse perspectives that enrich decision-making, enhance organizational culture, and drive innovation while meeting the needs of diverse stakeholders.

By prioritizing the advancement of women in leadership, organizations ensure that all voices are heard and valued, fostering a more equitable society. Initiatives such as mentorship and sponsorship programs can accelerate women's progress in the workplace, paving the way for a future where gender equality is the standard, not the exception.

Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: My Journey



Ansoo Gupta

Founder, OneShoe Trust

A few tracks have been running in parallel through my working life: technology, sustainable travel and entrepreneurship.

And through all the shifts—from traditional media evolving into digital platforms to the rise of AI, Web3, and blockchain, and from paper maps giving way to travel

“True equality isn’t about just helping women rise; it’s about changing mindsets, making workplaces more inclusive, and educating men to be equal allies in this journey.”

apps and seamless connectivity—it has been a whirlwind journey. But in hindsight, every twist and turn fell into place. Every challenge, risk, and random opportunity played a role in shaping the person I am today.

Where it all Began: A Curious Mind and a Restless Soul

Ever since I was a child, I have been curious - curious about how things worked, different world cultures, how stories were told, and how people connected. Growing up, I was drawn to books, documentaries, and the magic of storytelling. That’s what led me to the world of media. My early days at Star TV and National Geographic Channel were exhilarating. I was in the thick of it, working with some of the most creative minds, figuring out how to

“The world is changing at lightning speed, and if you’re not evolving, you’re falling behind.”

bring stories to life in a way that captivated audiences. I still remember the first time I worked on launching a TV channel - it was a moment of pure joy and validation.

But as exciting as it was, I could feel the world shifting. Digital media was on the rise, and I knew I had to evolve with it. That’s when I took a leap into the digital marketing world with Pinstorm, running global teams and navigating the fast-changing landscape of creating and managing brands. It was a perfect melange of innovation, creativity, and pushing boundaries.

Challenges: The Battles that made me Stronger

Working in media and tech came with its share of challenges. I was fortunate to be in a time when things were changing, when more women were stepping into leadership roles, and the old notions of boardrooms being male-dominated spaces were shifting. But even with this progress, I knew I was standing on the shoulders of the many strong, brilliant women who came before me—women who had fought harder, who had shattered glass ceilings so that young girls like us could have the opportunities we do today.

And now, it’s our responsibility to push that change forward—not just for the women who will come after us but for men as well. True equality isn’t about just helping women rise; it’s about changing mindsets, making workplaces more inclusive, and educating men to be equal allies in this journey.

Edith Piaf said it best: "When you've reached the top, send the elevator back down for the others." Success isn't truly fulfilling if you're not helping others rise along with you.

A Love for Travel and a Passion for Sustainability

If there's one thing that has kept me grounded, it's travel. Traveling to over 90 countries has given me perspectives no book or boardroom ever could. Seeing the effects of mass tourism on pristine environments, meeting indigenous communities struggling to keep their traditions alive-it made me realize that we need to rethink the way we travel.

That's why I started the **OneShoe Trust** for Responsible and Mindful Travels. Travel should be about connection, respect, and sustainability, not just ticking off destinations on a bucket list. Through this initiative, I've been able to advocate for conscious travel, encouraging people to leave places better than they found them.

My Formula for Success: Passion, Resilience, and Constant Learning

There's no secret recipe for success, but if I had to name a few ingredients, they would be passion, resilience, and a hunger for learning. You have to love what you do because passion is what keeps you going when things get tough. Resilience is what helps you bounce back when you fail (and trust me, failure is part of the process). And learning-oh, that never stops. The world is changing at lightning speed, and if you're not evolving, you're falling behind.

And most importantly, always remember to send the elevator back down. Edith Piaf said it best: "**When you've reached the top, send the elevator back down for the others.**" Success isn't truly fulfilling if you're not helping others rise along with you. Through my work with Headstart and IIM Bangalore NSRCEL, I support women founders creating successful businesses from an idea stage.

A Message for Women Dreamers and Doers

To every woman out there who has a dream, I want to say this: don't wait for permission. The world will always have opinions about what you should or shouldn't do, but the only voice that truly matters is yours. Take risks, make mistakes, learn, grow, and keep moving forward. Find your tribe-people who lift you up, who challenge you, who believe in your vision. And most importantly, support other women. When one of us rises, we all do.

Why Gender Equality Isn't Just a Buzzword-It's a Necessity

The fight for gender equality isn't about just giving women a seat at the table-it's about rebuilding the table altogether. When women have equal opportunities, entire economies thrive. Societies become more

The fight for gender equality isn't about just giving women a seat at the table—it's about rebuilding the table altogether. Gender equality isn't just a "women's issue"—it's a human issue, and it benefits everyone, the whole planet.

innovative, compassionate, and balanced. Gender equality isn't just a "women's issue"-it's a human issue, and it benefits everyone, the whole planet.

The Road Ahead

Looking ahead, I'm excited about what's coming-AI, blockchain, sustainability innovations-so much potential to create meaningful impact. But what excites me the most is the possibility of a world where more women lead, there's more compassion than competition, more voices are heard, and more people live with purpose. So, here's to breaking barriers, to building futures, and to making sure that the next generation of women doesn't just dream big-they achieve even bigger.

Rising Against the Odds: A Journey of Empowerment and Change



Asha Vernekar

Member Secretary, Goa Livelihoods Forum

Coming from eastern Uttar Pradesh, where access to quality education was a challenge, my mother's unwavering support ensured that I could pursue my studies. Her determination became the foundation of my academic journey, shaping my life and career. Today, as I reflect on my path, I am immensely grateful for her resilience and the sacrifices she made to secure my future.

Born into a naval defence family, my life took a pivotal turn when my father, an aviation specialist, was transferred to Goa in 1976. With his squadron based in this picturesque state, we made Goa our home. It was here that I had the privilege of completing my education, a journey that would later lead me to my life's true calling.

After earning my Master's degree in Sociology, I embarked on my career as a teacher. However, my specialization soon led me to an unexpected yet transformative opportunity in the development sector. Working with marginalized communities affected by HIV/AIDS, I gained invaluable lessons in acceptance, empathy, and non-judgmental understanding. This experience was not just a job; it was a defining chapter in my life that deepened my passion for social change.

Throughout my career, spanning national and international NGOs, I had the privilege of working closely with marginalized communities. This extensive exposure brought me to a profound realization: the root cause of most societal challenges lies in the lack of sustainable livelihoods and the relentless grip of poverty. Limited access to resources, education, and economic opportunities perpetuates cycles of hardship, further deepening inequalities. This understanding strengthened my resolve to work towards creating sustainable solutions that empower communities to break free from the shackles of poverty.

Founding Goa Livelihoods Forum (GLF)

In 2018, driven by a deep-seated desire to create meaningful change, I took a leap of faith and founded Goa Livelihoods Forum (GLF). This NGO was established with a singular mission—to empower marginalized communities by fostering sustainable livelihoods. One of our first major collaborations was with the Rural Development Department of Goa, where we served as the Project Management Unit (PMU) for the Goa State Rural Livelihoods Mission (GSRLM).

Through this initiative, we provided support to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) comprising women entrepreneurs, enabling them to market their farm and non-farm products. By linking them to exhibitions, online marketing platforms, and other sales avenues, we created opportunities for these women to achieve financial independence.

Today, I take immense pride in the fact that GLF, through the GSRLM program, has positively impacted over 38,000 SHGs across Goa. Witnessing women entrepreneurs become self-reliant and empowered, driving change in their communities, is the greatest reward of my journey as a social entrepreneur.

Breaking Barriers at the Serendipity Arts Festival

One of our most exciting achievements was the participation of rural women entrepreneurs in the prestigious Serendipity Arts Festival, one of Asia's largest cultural celebrations. In collaboration with Chef Thomas Zachariah, Goa Livelihoods Forum (GLF) curated a Community Kitchen, a space where women from diverse backgrounds—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and tribal—showcased their culinary expertise.

This platform was not just about cooking; it was an opportunity for these women to share their traditional recipes, interact with a wider audience, and gain recognition for their skills. Their participation earned them appreciation from esteemed clients, boosting their confidence and inspiring them to dream bigger.

I am proud to share that many of these women have since started their own catering businesses, transforming their passion into a sustainable livelihood. This initiative has gone beyond economic empowerment—it has fostered cultural exchange, strengthened community bonds, and created a sense of belonging and pride among these talented women.

A Message to Women Entrepreneurs

To every woman out there, I want to share a message of hope and empowerment—never underestimate the power of your dreams, no matter how small they may seem. Believe in yourself, work hard, and stay committed to your goals.

However, success is not a solitary journey. Let's build a community of women entrepreneurs who uplift and support each other. Collaboration, not competition, is the key to long-term success. By celebrating each other's victories and learning from each other's failures, we can create a ripple effect of empowerment that will inspire generations to come.

So, to all the women entrepreneurs out there—I see you, I hear you, and I believe in you. Together, we can rise and create a world where every woman thrives.

Recognition at the Highest Level

One of the most defining moments in my journey was receiving an award from the **Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji**. This prestigious recognition is a testament to the tireless efforts of Goa Livelihoods Forum (GLF) in empowering women and fostering sustainable livelihoods.

As a leading NGO dedicated to women's empowerment, GLF has played a crucial role in creating positive social and economic impact. From promoting education and healthcare to enabling financial independence, our work has been instrumental in transforming countless lives. Being recognized at the highest level is not just an honour—it is a motivation to continue striving for excellence in our mission. This award serves as a

reminder that our efforts are making a real difference, pushing us to work even harder towards a more equitable society.

Fostering Entrepreneurship among Youth

In addition to our work with women entrepreneurs, GLF has been deeply committed to nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit among Goa's youth. We were privileged to implement a year-long 'Youth Enterprise Program', designed to empower 300 aspiring young entrepreneurs across the state.

Through a rigorous selection process, 60 exceptionally talented individuals were chosen to undergo comprehensive entrepreneurship training. Under our mentorship, 35 motivated young minds successfully launched their own businesses. This impactful initiative was generously funded by the Directorate of Industries, Trade, and Commerce.

Our 'Youth Enterprise Program' not only fostered entrepreneurship but also contributed to Goa's economic growth and innovation landscape. By equipping young entrepreneurs with the skills, resources, and confidence to start their ventures, we are shaping a future where Goa thrives as a hub of innovation and self-sustaining enterprises.

The Road Ahead

As I look ahead, my vision for Goa Livelihoods Forum (GLF) remains steadfast—to expand our impact, to continue empowering women and youth, and to create a lasting change in marginalized communities. Our journey so far has been filled with challenges, triumphs, and countless lessons, but above all, it has been an incredibly fulfilling experience.

Change does not happen overnight. It takes relentless effort, unwavering commitment, and a shared vision for a better tomorrow. With the support of dedicated individuals, government bodies, and the communities we serve, I believe that GLF will continue to drive positive transformation in Goa and beyond.

To all those who dream of making a difference—never stop believing in the power of change. Every step, no matter how small, contributes to a larger movement of empowerment and progress. Together, we can create a world where every individual, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.



Cooking Up Success: My Journey in Baking, Fashion, and Entrepreneurship



Bimba Nayak

Chef and Founder, Cooking Concepts

Born into the esteemed Pathare Prabhu family in Mumbai, I was raised with the best cultural values. My greatest inspiration came from my grandfather, a Superintendent of Police, and my maternal uncle, who served in the Indian Navy. Their dedication and discipline instilled in me a desire to wear a uniform and lead with strength.

At that time, opportunities for women in the Navy or police force were scarce. However, I inherited my leadership qualities from them. After marrying at a young age, my in-laws encouraged me to pursue baking and culinary arts at Dadar Catering College.

I excelled in this field and, in 1973, started my own baking classes for women from my residence. I became Mumbai's first home baker and the first chocolatier specializing in liqueur chocolates. My classes quickly gained popularity, particularly for chocolate and cake making.

Embracing new challenges, I later pursued a two-year diploma in Master Tailoring at Zarapkar in Mumbai. Applying my expertise, I launched a successful garment business focused on newborn baby clothing, supplying

top-tier stores such as Amasons, Benzer, Instyle, Asiatic, and others across India. Additionally, I authored 16 books on dressmaking, published by Chirag and Jasmine, collaborating with Bollywood actresses who are now celebrated stars.

Through my brand, Charisma, I made a mark in the baby garment industry. Although I had to eventually close the business due to growing market competition, I have always believed in the power of perseverance.

"Jevan ani Shivan will always keep a woman alive" meaning Cooking and Stitching will always provide means for a woman to sustain herself. Likewise, success is possible with a strong will and determination.

Major Milestone in my Career

In 1994, following the Kuwait War, I secured a position as the head chef for the Royals of Kuwait—a turning point that transformed my career. My passion for cooking and baking flourished, earning recognition and appreciation from the Royals.

“
My strong will and
determination to support the
community through food kept
me motivated
”

Over my 15-year tenure in Kuwait, I traveled extensively, visiting countries like Lebanon and the United Kingdom, where I deepened my expertise in Arabic, Kuwaiti, and Lebanese cuisine. Additionally, I trained under the renowned Sir Nicholas Lodge in Sugar Art, further refining my skills.

During this journey, I had the privilege of meeting influential mentors who guided me in mastering my craft. My time in Kuwait shaped me into the strong, confident, and inspiring professional I am today.

Currently, I am an entrepreneur specializing in Sugarcraft flowers and cake decorations, supplying handmade edible goods to India's top five-star hotels. My clients include the Taj Group (Pan India), J.W. Marriott Group,

Today, women have the strength and capability to stand on their own and thrive. They deserve greater opportunities in the workforce, including leadership positions. By fostering gender equality, we can create a society where women and men are true partners in driving economic and social progress.

Accor Group, and Reliance Group. Additionally, I serve as a visiting faculty member at several catering institutes across Maharashtra, sharing my expertise in sugarcraft and cake decoration with aspiring chefs.

As a proud Pathare Prabhu, a community deeply rooted in Mumbai's heritage, I have had the opportunity to introduce our exclusive cuisine to five-star hotels across India, representing it under my own banner at prestigious events.

My success lies in setting clear goals, celebrating small victories along the way, and staying humble throughout the journey. I believe in deeply understanding the market, creating high-quality products that meet customer needs, and delivering prompt service.

My brand, Cooking Concepts, caters to the hotel industry, offering premium sugar flowers, bakery products, cookies, and macarons, continuing my journey of innovation and excellence in the culinary world.

Challenges Faced and how I Overcame them

During the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses across industries struggled, and mine was no exception. To adapt, I began selling Lebanese food and Hyderabadi biryanis, which quickly became a favorite among buyers. My strong will and determination to support the commu-

nity through food kept me motivated. The overwhelming response to Lebanese cuisine helped sustain us through those challenging months until the hotel industry reopened.

My Personal Formula for Success

My success lies in setting clear goals, celebrating small victories along the way, and staying humble throughout the journey. I believe in deeply understanding the market, creating high-quality products that meet customer needs, and delivering prompt service.

Strong salesmanship, adaptability to evolving market trends, and a dedicated, customer-focused leadership approach are essential.

Above all, maintaining cost-effectiveness while prioritizing customer satisfaction and building lasting relationships has been key to my growth.

My Message for Aspiring Women Achievers and Entrepreneurs

Value your talents, believe wholeheartedly in your work, and always give your best with sincerity and integrity.

My Thoughts on the Role of Gender Equality in Economic and Social Development

Today, women have the strength and capability to stand on their own and thrive. They deserve greater opportunities in the workforce, including leadership positions.

By fostering gender equality, we can create a society where women and men are true partners in driving economic and social progress.

A Journey of Passion, Persistence, and Purpose: My Story of Entrepreneurship and Empowerment



Deepti Jaiswal

Founder, Nulyfindia

As a woman entrepreneur, my journey has been shaped by the experiences and values passed down to me by my family, teachers, and mentors. It is not just about personal achievements; it is about being inspired by those who helped me find my path and the lessons I've learned along the way. The inspiration to pursue my dreams and give back to society has always been the driving force behind everything I do.

The Power of Inspiration and Influential Figures

From a young age, I was taught the importance of helping others and giving back to society. My parents, who instilled in me the values of kindness, empathy, and hard work, played an important role in shaping my outlook on life. But beyond my family, there were certain individuals who profoundly impacted my journey and set the stage for the woman I am today.

One of the first and most significant figures who inspired me was **Mr. Ratan Tata**. I admired him deeply as a visionary who stood for integrity, innovation, and giving back to society. His leadership and independent spirit influenced me to embark on my entrepreneurial journey. I learned from him that one must be true to one's values

and always prioritize the betterment of society while navigating the business world.

Later, another mentor appeared in my life, **Dr. Abdul Kalam**, the former President of India and a man of great vision. His teachings on dreaming big while staying grounded and working diligently toward those dreams resonated deeply with me. I vividly remember his words: "Dream, dream, dream; dreams transform into thoughts, and thoughts result in action." It was from him that I learned the importance of balancing ambition with humility. His guidance motivated me to take risks, stay focused, and embrace every challenge with a positive mindset.

Turning Dreams into Reality: Major Milestones and Challenges

The road to starting my own business was not always easy. The dream of owning and running a factory seemed distant and almost impossible at times. However, I held onto a strong belief that it was achievable, supported by the unwavering encouragement of my family and business partners. Starting out, I had no clear blueprint or roadmap to follow, but what mattered was the burning desire within me to make a difference and build something of value. With perseverance and the grace of the Almighty, the dream gradually turned into reality.

The first major milestone came when I successfully established my factory. It wasn't just about owning a business - it was about creating something meaningful and contributing to the economy, offering employment, and providing quality services. As the business grew, we had the honor of working with some of India's most renowned brands. These collaborations not only validated our work but also allowed us to learn and grow together with our partners.

However, this journey wasn't without its challenges. Like many entrepreneurs, I faced financial setbacks, self-doubt, and moments when success seemed out of reach. There were times when the road ahead was unclear, but every time I encountered an obstacle, I found the strength to overcome it. I took risks, learned from my mistakes, and kept pushing forward. One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that challenges are a natural part of growth; they are opportunities to learn, adapt, and emerge stronger.

Dealing with Government Officials and Policies

One of the toughest challenges I faced was navigating government bureaucracy. Waiting in long queues, handling endless paperwork, and facing repeated rejections felt discouraging, often making progress seem out of reach. There were moments when I even considered giving up.

The bureaucratic system, which should support entrepreneurs, often acted as an obstacle. Despite the frustration, I remained determined to push forward. I reminded myself that my dream had value, and no rejection would stop me from pursuing it.

Moreover, as a woman in a male-dominated industry, I frequently encountered gender bias and skepticism. However, these obstacles only strengthened my determination. I was confident that with perseverance, I could overcome any barriers and achieve success.

My Personal Formula for Success

Success isn't a one-size-fits-all concept. Everyone has their own journey and their own definition of success. For me, success comes from a combination of **passion**, **persistence**, and **purpose**. These three pillars are what guide me and keep myself grounded, even when the journey gets tough.

Passion drives me to keep pushing forward, even when the journey gets tough. **Persistence** is crucial because the road to success is never linear- it's filled with bumps and detours. Lastly, **Purpose** keeps me grounded, reminding me why I'm doing what I'm doing and how my work can make a difference. It's also about finding a balance between work and personal life, ensuring that I stay refreshed, connected, and motivated.

A Message for Aspiring Women Achievers and Entrepreneurs

To every woman out there who has a dream but feels unsure or hesitant about taking the leap-I want to say: Believe in Yourself. Women have immense power within them to achieve greatness, but often, they need to first recognize that power. The key to success lies in tapping into your inner strength, staying persistent, and being clear about your goals.

Women should never feel that their gender is a limitation; rather, it is a unique strength that can shape the world in

new and meaningful ways. Do not be afraid to take risks or step outside your comfort zone. You have the ability to succeed, and the world needs your contribution. Surround yourself with mentors and people who believe in you and your vision.

The Role of Gender Equality in Economic and Social Development

Gender equality is not just about fairness—it is about harnessing the full potential of society. Women have the ability to drive change, contribute to economic development, and foster social progress. When women are given equal opportunities, they don't just improve their own lives; they elevate entire communities, industries, and nations.

Promoting gender equality is crucial for sustainable economic growth. It is not just a matter of rights—it is a matter of progress. Women bring unique perspectives, creativity, and leadership qualities that are essential for innovation and growth. As we continue to break down barriers and encourage more women to step into leadership roles, we are shaping a future where everyone, regardless of gender, has an equal chance to thrive.

Conclusion: As I reflect on my journey, I am filled with gratitude for the lessons I've learned, the people who've supported me, and the path I've had the privilege of walking on. Entrepreneurship has taught me that success is not just about achieving personal goals-it's about making a meaningful impact and creating value for others.

I hope that my story inspires other women to follow their dreams, face challenges head-on, and never give up on their journey. With passion, persistence, and purpose, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

Let us all continue to uplift and empower each other, for the future is brighter when women are empowered to lead and succeed.

Women possess a unique strength to pursue and fulfill their dreams, and they should recognize this within themselves. Always remember, the only thing that can hold you back is your own inner voice. Trust yourself, stay focused, and set your goals with clarity.

Lastly, always remember Do your business with only one mantra **Start! Success! Sustain! Start with passion, Succeed with Grace and Sustain with persistence.** ■

Bridging Generations: From Cultural Heritage to Sustainable Entrepreneurship



Dr. Dhanashri Hardas

Chairperson, Women Entrepreneurs Committee, Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce Industry and Agriculture; President, Women Society for Environmental Culture and Education; and Founder Murambi Farms

Articulating one's journey, achievements, and impact in a comprehensive manner is no easy task. I firmly believe that a strong vision, effective leadership, and the ability to drive meaningful change define a truly remarkable individual, shaping a path that spans diverse fields. In my case, this journey encompasses ethno-medicinal research, social entrepreneurship, environmental conservation, women's empowerment, farm stays, and cultural preservation. However, my story is not just about accomplishments-it is about purpose, perseverance, and a steadfast commitment to societal progress.

At the core lies my profound academic background holding a Ph.D that delves into the rapidly fading traditional wisdom of tribals in medicinal indigenous flora. By surfacing this knowledge into the current scientific domain, many doors are open for the drug discovery process. This piece of my work is a testimony to my belief in holistic development, where science and tradition co-exist.

My commitment to a greener planet drives my passion for environmental advocacy and sustainable solutions. This inspired me to spearhead groundbreaking initiatives such as the Blue Revolution-a transformative movement focused on water conservation and the creation of new water resources, emphasizing the critical need to value and protect every drop.

As the Chairperson of Kumbh Mela 2015 and Care Nashik Green Call, I worked towards addressing environmental concerns during one of the world's largest religious gatherings, setting new benchmarks for sustainable event management. The seamless integration of culture, tradition, management, rituals, and faith with environmental stewardship was key in mobilizing 20,000 green soldiers to support the event. This collective effort was made possible through community engagement, education, and training. By promoting practical insights and innovative solutions, we empowered individuals to make conscious lifestyle choices, creating a ripple effect of positive environmental change.

As an entrepreneur and founder of Murambi Farms, a boutique farm stay, I envisioned a luxurious yet sustainable retreat that offers urban dwellers a chance to experience digital detox and reconnect with nature. Murambi Farms is designed as a lifestyle model that seamlessly blends modern comfort with eco-conscious living. The initiative prioritizes organic farming, relying solely on cow dung and urine to maintain a fertilizer-free environment. With a strong focus on solar renewable energy and eco-friendly architecture, the project reflects my belief that sustainability and luxury can coexist in perfect harmony.

“Economics, entrepreneurship, and business are inherently gender-neutral, yet women bring unique advantages by nature. With their analytical skills, strategic planning, and strong sense of responsibility, combined with compassion, they excel in any given situation.”

Recognizing the significance of understanding historical contexts, I sought to bring to life the narrative of Dharmveer Dr. Balkrushn Shivram Moonje-founder of Bhonsala Military School and a prominent figure in the freedom struggle, military education, and social reform. This initiative serves as an act of cultural preservation, connecting generations through storytelling and ensuring that his legacy continues to inspire the future generation.

“ I recall a leader once saying, "Do everything you believe will benefit the organization. If you succeed, the credit is yours; if you fail, the responsibility is mine." When surrounded by such inspiring individuals, motivation reaches its peak, and success becomes a natural outcome.

Women have always been at the heart of everything I do. My focus is on inclusivity and empowerment, breaking barriers in entrepreneurship by equipping women with the tools and platforms they need to move forward. As the Chair of the Women Entrepreneurs Committee at the Maharashtra Chamber, I strive to build an ecosystem where women can lead, contribute, innovate, and ultimately inspire others while driving economic growth.

Economics, entrepreneurship, and business are inherently gender-neutral, yet women bring unique advantages by nature. With their analytical skills, strategic planning, and strong sense of responsibility, combined with compassion, they excel in any given situation.

Greater participation of women in the workforce-through innovation, productivity, and skill development-drives economic progress. Socially, it fosters involvement in decision-making, improves public healthcare, and helps reduce child mortality, crime rates, and domestic violence. Ultimately, empowering women breaks cycles of poverty and strengthens social cohesion.

In conversations with achievers, I always emphasize the

power of believing in one's vision. It's not just talent that propels success, but resilience, adaptability, and the ability to turn setbacks into stepping stones. Mindset is everything-dream big, and greater opportunities will follow.

Entrepreneurs should embrace challenges, as they provide invaluable learning experiences from mentors. I recall a leader once saying, "Do everything you believe will benefit the organization. If you succeed, the credit is yours; if you fail, the responsibility is mine as President." When surrounded by such inspiring individuals, motivation reaches its peak, and success becomes a natural outcome.

Our personality is shaped from childhood, and in my case, three influences stand out. First, the bold decision of my parents to send me to an English-medium school. Second, my Aaji's bedtime stories, which instilled wisdom and imagination. And third, the support of my neighborhood and friends, who stood by me through both good and challenging times.

While writing the biography of Dr. Moonje, I realized the importance of thinking ahead of one's time. My grandfather-in-law, Mahamahopadhyay Sahityacharya Balshastri Hardas, was a renowned orator on the

“ I firmly believe that innovation is the strength of the younger generation, while experience is the wisdom of the senior generation—and it is the synergy of both that truly paves the way forward.

Ramayana and Mahabharata, drawing packed audiences for his discourses. His life story continues to inspire me to stay grounded and connected to my roots.

I firmly believe that innovation is the strength of the younger generation, while experience is the wisdom of the senior generation-and it is the synergy of both that truly paves the way forward.

Empowering Growth and Breaking Barriers: My Journey as a Woman in Law



Dimple Merchant

Advocate and Solicitor, Bombay High Court and Partner, I.V. Merchant & Co.

Every journey begins with a spark, and mine was ignited by a deep desire to make an impact through the law - an ever-evolving force that shapes industries, resolves conflicts, and builds trust.

Growing up, I was captivated by the delicate balance between structure and creativity, observing how the right legal framework could influence businesses and lives. This fascination led me to a path of purpose, resilience, and unwavering commitment to justice.

Today, as an Advocate and Solicitor at the Bombay High Court and a Partner at I.V. Merchant & Co., I specialize in Real Estate, Insolvency & Bankruptcy, Banking & Finance, Corporate & Succession Law, and Domestic & International Arbitration. My work goes beyond navigating legal complexities and advising on high-stakes transactions - it is about creating meaningful impact, ensuring businesses thrive within the legal framework, and shaping the industry with integrity and vision.

Continuing a Legacy of Legal Excellence and Sources of Inspiration

When I stepped into the world of law, I carried with me

not just ambition but a deep-rooted legacy. **I.V. Merchant & Co. (IVM)**, established in 1968 on the principles of integrity, wisdom, and excellence, has been more than just a law firm-it has been a testament to resilience and dedication across generations.

My first inspiration came from home. My grandmother, **Mrs. Indira Vinaykant Merchant** and my mother, **Mrs. Falguni Merchant**, led the firm with resilience and determination, setting an example of strength in a male-dominated profession.

When I first stepped into this field, my grandfather's (**Mr. Vinaykant Merchant**) words, who was the co-founder of I.V. Merchant & Co. -"I trust you to carry this legacy forward"- became my mission. A promise that I hold close to my heart.

And now, my sister, **Mrs. Krishma Patel**, a Partner at I.V. Merchant & Co., exemplifies the perfect balance between professional excellence and personal life, proving that women can thrive in every role they take on.

My father, **Mr. Dipan Merchant**, a Senior Advocate at the Bombay High Court, who became my greatest mentor - his unwavering faith in me and his belief in my abilities gave me the confidence to carve my own path.

I have always believed that law is not just about rules written in black and white; for me, it is an art. Just as an artist brings a vision and creativity on canvas, a lawyer

There were moments of doubt, of questioning whether I was strong enough to shoulder the expectations placed on me. But I have learned that true strength lies in persistence. I embraced challenges head-on, refused to be underestimated, and used every obstacle as a stepping stone.

shapes arguments, drafts with creativity, and interprets the law in a way that best serves their client.

Early in my career, working at Shah & Sanghavi Advocates & Solicitors and Kanga & Co. Advocates & Solicitors, I gained invaluable experience that helped me refine my perspective. I am truly grateful for the lessons learned, as they shaped me into the Advocate I am today.

Growing up in a family devoted to justice, I understood early on that the law is not just about cases—it is about people. It is about their struggles, their aspirations, and finding solutions that create real impact. Today, as a third-generation lawyer, I carry forward this legacy with not just knowledge, but with the same passion, ethics, and commitment that have defined I.V. **Merchant & Co.** for over five decades.

Pioneering Milestones in my Career

After my BBI LLB, clearing my Solicitor exam was a pivotal milestone in my journey and every case, challenge, and lesson has shaped my journey in law. I didn't just step into this profession—I grew into it, molded by experiences that tested my resilience.

At a young age, the responsibility of I.V. Merchant & Co. was given to me, a defining moment filled with both excitement and expectation. While honoring its rich legacy, I embraced evolution, transitioning the firm into a corporate-driven approach while maintaining its core values. I learned early that a law firm thrives on its people—fostering a positive work culture remains central to my leadership.

Working alongside seasoned professionals at I.V. Merchant & Co. deepened my expertise in litigation and non-litigation for public sector undertakings, government bodies, banks, NBFCs, corporate law, real estate, and private client practice. Every case reinforced my belief that legal practice is not just about strategy—it's about impactful problem-solving.

“For me, success has never been about shortcuts—it's about hard work, discipline, and showing up every day with dedication.”

“I made sure that my voice was heard—not by demanding space, but by proving my expertise, one case at a time.”

In 2017, receiving the **Excellence in Business Award** was a proud milestone, reaffirming my commitment to making a difference through legal services. Another transformative moment came in 2024 when I completed the Women Entrepreneurship Program at IIM Bangalore, sharpening my leadership and strategic vision.

Looking back, my career has been about pushing boundaries—not just for myself but for my firm, my team, and the future of legal practice. Growth is not about reaching a destination; it's about evolving, learning, and redefining possibilities.

Overcoming Challenges in a Male-Dominated Field

Being a woman in law comes with its own set of challenges. The legal profession has long been a male-dominated space, where women often have to prove their worth twice over due to personal commitments. Balancing professional ambitions with societal expectations is not easy for women.

There were moments of doubt, of questioning whether I was strong enough to shoulder the expectations placed on me.

But I have learned that true strength lies in persistence. I embraced challenges head-on, refused to be underestimated, and used every obstacle as a stepping stone. I sought guidance from mentors, stood firm in my values, and made sure that my voice was heard—not by demanding space, but by proving my expertise, one case at a time.

The Principles that Drive me

For me, success has never been about shortcuts—it's about hard work, discipline, and showing up every day with dedication. I believe that unwavering trust in God, and a belief in the power of pure intentions and integrity shape not just any career but a life.

Law isn't just about knowing the rules—it's about thinking

ahead, adapting, and solving problems before they arise. Challenges don't intimidate me; they push me to be better.

I lead the way I would want to be led-by empowering, mentoring professionals, and creating a space where women and men both feel valued and heard.

Clients trust us not just for legal solutions but for honesty, ethics, and dedication. Clear communication, accountability, and a problem-solving mindset define my approach. The legal landscape keeps changing, and I welcome that-because growth comes from embracing change, not resisting it.

I lead the way I would want to be led—by empowering, mentoring professionals, and creating a space where women and men both feel valued and heard.

These principles define my journey, shaping my leadership and commitment to delivering strategic legal solutions with impact.

Championing Gender Equality in Law and Business

I.V. Merchant & Co. was founded by my grandparents and later led by my mother, shaping a legacy of women-driven leadership.

Throughout my journey, I have witnessed firsthand how women's perspectives bring depth and dynamism to decision-making, whether in boardrooms, courtrooms, or beyond.

For me, gender equality isn't about comparison; it's about fairness where both women and men are valued for their unique strengths.

Women should have the same opportunities as men-without having to justify their success. If a man's achievements are accepted without question, a woman's should be too. Hard work, dedication, and capability should define success, not gender

At I.V. Merchant & Co., I have made it a mission to create an environment where women and men are empowered, where opportunities are based on talent and dedication, and where every contribution is valued.

A Message to Aspiring Women Leaders and Entrepreneurs

To the women who are stepping into the world of entrepreneurship or leadership, I want to say – first have faith in God, keep your conscience clear, and plan your path with intention. Take small but right steps, and never compare yourself to others-your circumstance and journey is unique. Celebrate small wins, learn from setbacks, and embrace mistakes as part of growth.

As an entrepreneur, think like an artist-create a business and workplace where people feel valued, heard, and safe. Build a strong support system and surround yourself with those who uplift and empower you. None can succeed alone.

Don't be afraid to take risks, and never let anyone make you feel like your dreams are too big or you cannot achieve them.

Growth comes from Embracing Change, not Resisting it.

Remember one more thing: there is no "right way" or "unique way" to succeed. Success is personal. Define it for yourself, and never compromise and give up on your values to achieve it.

In conclusion, My journey is shaped by faith, guided by intention, and fueled by purpose. I am grateful for the challenges that strengthen me, the people who believe in me, and the opportunities that allow me to make a difference.

My hope is to build a legacy that inspires others to pursue their dreams with courage and integrity. With faith and perseverance, even the most daunting crossroads can lead to remarkable destinations.

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Breaking Barriers: My Journey in Media and Entertainment



Gayathiri Guliani

CEO & Founder, Kleos Entertainment Group

Sources of Inspiration and Influential Figures

Born in New Delhi, raised in Chennai, and now working in Mumbai in the field of international business and distribution, my journey has been shaped by diverse cultures and experiences. With parents from different cultural backgrounds-South and North India-I grew up in a family that was both traditional and progressive.

From a young age, I have been inspired by strong, independent women who defied norms and paved the way for future generations. My grandmother and mother, both resilient and determined, instilled in me the values of perseverance, self-reliance, and unwavering determination.

Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to have incredible mentors who pushed me beyond my limits and challenged me to think differently.

Additionally, global industry leaders and visionaries such as Shonda Rhimes, Donna Langley, and Oprah Winfrey have demonstrated the power of storytelling, leadership, navigating in a highly competitive sphere, breaking

barriers of mindset and the profound impact of authenticity in media and entertainment.

Major Milestones in my Career

My career has been a journey of bold leaps as I carved my path into film distribution - a traditionally male-dominated field. Over the past 26+ years, I have had the privilege of working on over 2,500 hours of content and distributing more than 50 films across 70+ countries.

During my tenure with leading global and Indian studios such as Fox Star, Sony Pictures, Lionsgate, Viacom, and Reliance Entertainment, I played a key role in leadership positions and in expanding Indian content into new global markets. From launching television channels to securing theatrical releases in Spain, Morocco, Russia, Taiwan, and South Korea, each milestone reinforced my commitment to international cinema.

One of the biggest achievements was releasing the iconic 3 Idiots in China-a groundbreaking success that opened new avenues for Indian films and became one of the most significant commercial contributors to the overall box office business.

“Instead of allowing challenges to define me, I used them as fuel to push forward. I turned every doubt into an opportunity by focusing on what I knew best. Rather than seeking validation, I let my work speak for itself.”

Being recognized by the industry and invited to represent as a key opinion leader at prestigious global events such as Digital Davos, Cannes, FICCI Frames, and Berlinale has been an incredible honor. Receiving accolades like the L'Oréal Wonder Woman Award, 100 Faces of Women Leaders, and Changemaker of the Year has been deeply humbling, as has the privilege of being invited to TEDx.

A defining moment in my journey was launching **Kleos Entertainment Group**, my company dedicated to

international films, and securing strategic partnerships to further our global footprint. Another major milestone was stepping into the investor space as a Producer with projects like **Demon Hunters, the first Indo-Taiwan co-production.**

Each of these experiences have reinforced my belief that media is a powerful tool for storytelling, influence, and global collaboration. I am truly grateful for the opportunities, recognition, and the chance to contribute to an industry that continues to evolve and inspire.

Challenges and Overcoming them

No journey is without obstacles. As a woman navigating the highly competitive and male-dominated film distribution industry, I have often encountered skepticism and underestimation.

There were moments when I was met with stereotype mindset who came with fixed ideas thinking that it would be easy way through the deal and there have been

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Each challenge I overcame reinforced my belief that barriers are meant to be broken and that perseverance always pays off.
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instances where I was the only woman expected to prove myself repeatedly in ways my male counterparts did not have to.

However, I refused to be discouraged. Instead of allowing these challenges to define me, I used them as fuel to push forward. I turned every doubt into an opportunity by focusing on what I knew best—sales, distribution, and revenue generation. Rather than seeking validation, I let my work speak for itself. By consistently delivering results, breaking new markets, and driving tangible business growth, I earned the respect of peers, partners, and industry leaders.

But success wasn't just about strategy—it was about resilience. In the high-pressure world of film distribution, where every project is a delicate balance of creativity, commerce, and logistics, setbacks were inevitable. Failed

deals, last-minute obstacles, and moments of sheer exhaustion became part of the journey. Distribution is a critical function - it's not just about securing screens but ensuring that a film is marketed effectively and made visible worldwide, often on the same day as its release in India. With directors, talent, and financial stakes all tied to a single project, there is no room for error.

Yet, instead of being overwhelmed by the pressure, I learned to embrace it, adapting to challenges and finding solutions in real time. Each hurdle became a lesson, reinforcing my ability to think on my feet and navigate the complexities of global film distribution.

Strategic networking played a crucial role in my journey; I built strong relationships with industry professionals across the globe, collaborated with like-minded visionaries, and sought mentorship from those who had walked this path before me. Above all, a relentless commitment to excellence became my guiding principle. I refused to settle for mediocrity, constantly pushed boundaries, and redefined what was possible for women in my field.

Each challenge I overcame reinforced my belief that barriers are meant to be broken and that perseverance always pays off.

My Formula for Success

Success, to me, is a dynamic blend of vision, persistence, and adaptability. In an industry as fast-paced and ever-evolving as media and entertainment, staying ahead requires not just talent, but an unwavering commitment to learning, innovation, and resilience.

Over the years, I've realized that true success is not defined by titles or accolades but by the impact we create and the ability to navigate challenges with confidence.

Here are the core principles that have guided me:

- **Clarity of Purpose:** Success begins with a clear vision. I have always believed in setting ambitious yet achievable goals and charting a strategic path to reach them. Whether expanding into new international markets or taking on leadership roles, having a well-defined purpose has kept me focused and driven.
- **Fearless Execution:** Ideas alone don't create success—execution does. I've learned that taking calculated risks, making tough decisions, and acting

decisively are essential. From bringing Indian films to unconventional markets to launching my own company, stepping outside my comfort zone has always been key to progress.

- **Strong Relationships:** No one succeeds alone. The media business thrives on collaboration, and building meaningful relationships with industry peers, mentors, and partners has been invaluable. I believe in cultivating genuine connections, not just for business, but for shared growth and mutual success.
- **Self-Belief:** Confidence is the foundation of resilience. There have been moments when I've been challenged, doubted, or underestimated, but trusting my instincts and standing firm in my convictions has helped me push forward. Believing in my abilities—especially in a competitive, male-dominated industry—has been one of the most empowering aspects of my journey.

Ultimately, success is not just about reaching the top—it's about continuously evolving, staying true to one's values, and paving the way for others to rise alongside you.

“ Ideas alone don't create success—execution does. I've learned that taking calculated risks, making tough decisions, and acting decisively are essential ”

The Role of Gender Equality in Economic and Social Development

Gender equality is not just a moral obligation; it is a fundamental driver of economic growth and social progress. When women are given equal opportunities, industries flourish, economies strengthen, and societies evolve toward greater inclusivity.

Throughout history, women have played a pivotal role in economic stability and development—yet true recognition and representation remain crucial.

“ Gender equality is not just a moral obligation; it is a fundamental driver of economic growth and social progress. When women are given equal opportunities, industries flourish, economies strengthen, and societies evolve toward greater inclusivity. ”

A Message for Aspiring Women Achievers and Entrepreneurs

To all the women striving to make their mark - own your power, embrace it, and let it propel you forward. Do not wait for permission to step into the spotlight; claim your space with confidence. Build your network, seek mentorship, and never hesitate to take risks. The path to success is rarely linear, but every setback is a lesson, and every challenge is an opportunity for growth.

Most importantly, lift other women as you rise. When we support and empower each other, we create a stronger, more inclusive industry - one where every woman has the chance to thrive.

The media and entertainment industry, in particular, holds immense power in shaping narratives and redefining societal norms. By championing diversity and inclusion, we can ensure that the stories we tell reflect the vast spectrum of human experiences, challenge outdated stereotypes, and inspire future generations.

As we continue to push boundaries and break barriers, let us remember: our voices matter, our stories deserve to be heard, and our potential is limitless.

The more we uplift and empower one another, the closer we move toward a truly equitable world.



From Inspiration to Impact: My Journey of Growth and Leadership



Fatima Agarkar

Founder, Agarkar Centre of Excellence

A Legacy of Strength, Vision, and Perseverance

As cliché as it may sound, for every daughter, her father is often her first role model. For me, my father has been more than just an inspiration—he has been the guiding force behind my values, work ethic, and entrepreneurial spirit. I have closely followed in his footsteps, driven by his passion for innovation and relentless dedication to his craft.

With an MBA and a Master's in Literature, my father's love for learning shaped my own academic pursuits—combining business acumen with a deep appreciation for language and the humanities. I truly believe that entrepreneurship runs in my veins, passed down not just as a skill but as a mindset—one that embraces challenges, views failures as stepping stones, and believes in achieving the impossible through hard work and perseverance.

At 82, he still works nine hours a day, leads his business with unwavering commitment, and inspires those around him every single day of the year. He is my hero, my inspiration, and the wind beneath my wings.

As a veteran of three startups, I find myself embodying his drive to keep moving forward, even at 50. Moize Esmail Ghadially—my father—built an empire from the debt he inherited, putting the 'Made in India' brand on the global map at a time when Indian manufacturing was underestimated. Today, his brand is synonymous with quality and excellence, a testament to his vision and resilience.

His journey is a powerful reminder that success is not just about business—it's about determination, legacy, and the courage to keep pushing forward.

I have been truly blessed to be surrounded by men who have built their legacies from the ground up—self-made through sheer hard work, resilience, and an unrelenting drive to succeed. From my father, who shaped my values and instilled in me the power of perseverance, to my husband, Ajit Agarkar, whose journey in cricket exemplifies dedication and excellence, I have always drawn inspiration from those who rise against the odds.

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success is not just about talent
but about relentless hard work,
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love for one's craft.
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Ajit's work ethic, commitment, and passion for continuous growth have defined his remarkable career—from his early days as a Mumbai cricketer to becoming a celebrated Indian player, a winning captain for Mumbai, and a veteran of four World Cups. His journey has seen him evolve into a leader—first as Chairman of Selectors for Mumbai and now for BCCI, a respected media expert, and a coach for an IPL franchise.

Yet, despite these many achievements, his passion for the game remains as fierce as it was when he first donned the India jersey at just 19. His journey is a testament to the fact that success is not just about talent but about relentless hard work, adaptability, and an unwavering love for one's craft.

Surrounded by two self-made professionals who carved their own paths without a blueprint to follow, I have had

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There will always be reasons to delay an idea, but I've always believed in moving forward swiftly, knowing that momentum creates opportunities. Speed has given me the advantage of time - time to learn, adapt, and perfect.
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the privilege of drawing inspiration from the very best. For 25 years, my father's resilience and vision shaped my perspective, and for the next 25, my husband's dedication and passion continued to fuel my own journey. With such powerful role models by my side, it's safe to say that my path has been guided by the strength, determination, and unwavering commitment I've witnessed up close.

Achievements That Count: From Recognition to Real Change

Being recognized by the prestigious Education World in June 2020 as one of India's Top 50 educators with the potential to transform Indian education was a truly special moment.

However, the greatest milestone has been witnessing my son grow into a responsible, compassionate, and sensitive young man-qualities I have also celebrated in over 10,000 students nurtured over the years, watching them evolve into confident individuals ready to take on the world.

For me, true success lies in the moments when someone smiles because of an interaction with you, when you can make a difference-whether for a teacher, a parent, or a child. At the heart of it all, that's what hard work is truly about: uplifting others and helping them achieve their goals. And I feel deeply blessed to have had the opportunity to do just that.

Building Dreams, Overcoming Betrayals, and Leading with Purpose

As a seasoned entrepreneur with three educational start-

ups, I have encountered moments of disappointment-times when those I trusted, including partners who were meant to support me, fell short. But in retrospect, these challenges only strengthened my resolve and shaped the person I aspired to become. They reinforced my commitment to nurturing my dream through collaboration, mentorship, and leading by example.

Yes, some opportunities were missed-ventures that could have grown into significant businesses. But in the grand scheme of things, success isn't just measured by financial milestones. When you build a team that respects your ethics and values, sees you as a role model, and recognizes the positive impact you've created, the journey-however winding-becomes one worth taking.

Dream Big, Lead with Purpose, and Redefine Equality

Success begins with a bold vision-dare to dream big and keep dreaming. But dreams alone aren't enough; planning, perseverance, and surrounding yourself with a supportive ecosystem are key. Mistakes are inevitable, but they are also invaluable lessons that shape your journey. Push your limits, be patient, and let ethics guide your path. Hard work, faith, and a little luck-when respected and maximized-can take you further than you ever imagined.

There will always be reasons to delay an idea, but I've always believed in moving forward swiftly, knowing that momentum creates opportunities. Speed has given me the advantage of time-time to learn, adapt, and perfect.

The right team, one that enjoys the process as much as you do, transforms work into a meaningful journey. On tough days, their energy will be the force that keeps you going.

I was raised to be a good human first, never restricted by gender or societal expectations. I was taught to contribute to my country and society with pride. Marrying my best friend-the one who believed in my dreams as much as his own-only strengthened this belief. If we, as parents, instill this mindset in our children from the start, equality won't even be a discussion-it will simply be a way of life. By raising individuals who are compassionate, driven, and contributors to society, we move beyond gender labels and focus on collective progress.

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Driving Change: A Journey of Purpose, Resilience & Action



Harshita Narwekar

Former Corporator - Ward # 226

Leadership is not about titles - it is about owning responsibility, breaking barriers, and creating tangible impact. My journey has been guided by visionaries, mentors, and a deep-seated belief that action, not just words, is what drives change.

From governance to grassroots, from economic empowerment to environmental sustainability, my mission has been to bridge the gap between policy and real-world transformation, ensuring that every initiative leads to meaningful outcomes.

Inspired by Leaders, Guided by Purpose

Every leader is shaped by those who came before them, drawing inspiration from their vision, resilience, and dedication to progress, which pave the way for future generations to lead with purpose and impact

I draw immense inspiration from **Hon. Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi Ji**, whose vision for a self-reliant, empowered, and globally influential India has been truly transformative. His focus on inclusive development, innovation, and sustainable growth has set a benchmark for leadership.

Closer to home, **Hon. Speaker of Maharashtra**

Legislative Assembly, Shri Rahul Narwekar Ji, has greatly influenced my approach to public service. His commitment to accountability, strategic action, and people-centric governance exemplifies leadership in action. His ability to navigate complex challenges while staying deeply connected with the public has reinforced my belief that leadership is about service, not status.

Equally, the **women in my life** - my family, colleagues, and the countless inspiring women I meet every day - have taught me the true power of resilience and determination. Their stories fuel my commitment to breaking systemic barriers and fostering an environment where women can lead, innovate, and create meaningful change.

Above all, one of the most valuable lessons I've learned is that **Leadership is defined by Action, not Position**. Whether it's tackling civic challenges, improving infrastructure, or advocating for public safety, I believe that real impact comes from listening, engaging, and driving solutions that make a difference.

Challenges and Triumphs

The path to change has never been easy. There have been moments of resistance and obstacles, times where being a woman meant having to prove my leadership with twice the effort.

One such instance, among many that women face daily, occurred during a BMC meeting where I was accompanied by a male Corporator. The BMC official directed the entire conversation toward him, completely ignoring me - his behaviour a blatant display of misogyny. Refusing to be sidelined, I took charge of the discussion, speaking firmly and assertively to command his attention and called him out on his conduct. The shift was immediate - he apologized and, from that moment on, acknowledged and engaged with me seriously.

On a personal level, stepping into public life came with its own set of struggles. My children were very young at the time, and I often felt the weight of guilt leaving them behind. It was during this phase that my mother became my pillar of strength, standing firmly by my side and supporting me unconditionally.

My husband, too, encouraged and guided me, helping me navigate this journey.

Every challenge has been an opportunity, reinforcing my belief that resilience, determination, and collective action drive true transformation. With this belief, I have worked toward initiatives that not only address immediate concerns but also create lasting systemic change.

- **Mumbai's First Miyawaki Urban Forest Initiative** – A pioneering project introducing eco-restoration and sustainability, later adopted as a model across the city.
- **Gully Clinics** – A first-of-its-kind initiative bringing accessible healthcare directly to underserved communities, ensuring no one is left behind.
- **Presenting Mumbai at COP28** – Showcasing the city's climate resilience efforts on a global stage, advocating for sustainable urban development.
- **Job Fairs with On-the-Spot Offer Letters** – Because true empowerment begins with economic independence.
- **Digital Marketing and Skill Development Courses for Women** – Moving beyond traditional vocational training to equip women with future-ready skills.
- **Cybercrime Awareness Programs** – Addressing the growing digital threats, especially for senior citizens and women, by equipping them with digital literacy and cybersecurity knowledge to protect themselves in an evolving cyber landscape.

Each of these initiatives reflects a commitment to not just solving problems but shaping a more inclusive, sustainable, and empowered future for all.

Gender Equality in Economic and Social Development

True progress is impossible without gender equality. When women have access to education, economic opportunities, and leadership roles, they don't just uplift themselves - they transform families, communities, and economies.

Economic empowerment is the most powerful tool for bridging the gender gap. Women-led enterprises and women in the workforce add significant value to the GDP, yet persistent barriers - such as limited access to capital, societal biases, and safety concerns - continue to hinder progress.

To create a more equitable future, we must actively dismantle these obstacles by:

- Ensuring equal access to financial resources for women entrepreneurs.
- Promoting STEM education and digital literacy among young girls.
- Establishing safe and inclusive workplaces that encourage women to excel in leadership roles.
- Supporting policy reforms that enable economic participation, maternity benefits, and flexible work structures.

Beyond economics, gender equality is fundamental for social development. A society that values and invests in

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One of the most valuable lessons
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”

women's health, education, and leadership fosters stronger families, better governance, and a progressive national identity.

Accelerating Action for a Better Tomorrow

We are at a defining moment where women are not just shaping the future - they are leading it. The challenge is not just participation but breaking deep-rooted biases that limit progress.

To every woman pushing boundaries - your voice matters, your work matters, and your dreams are valid.

Together, we must build a future where opportunity is not dictated by gender, where success is determined by effort, and where leadership is defined by action, not privilege.

**The time for action is now. Let's keep moving forward,
Let's keep working towards #DrivingTheChange**



Racing Beyond Limits: My Journey of Grit, Glory, and Growth



Hima Das

Sportsperson

From the lush green fields of Dhing in Assam to the grand arenas of international athletics, my journey has been a tapestry woven with threads of passion, resilience, and unwavering support. Every triumph has been built on a foundation of hard work, perseverance, and the encouragement of those who have stood by me through every challenge.

My Journey, Their Belief

At the heart of my story stands my family, whose unwavering belief in me has been a constant source of strength. **My parents**, despite our modest means, nurtured my dreams with their sacrifices and encouragement. Equally pivotal have been my coaches, **Nipon Das** and **Nabajit Malakar**, who recognized my potential early on and transformed my raw talent into refined skill. Their combined support has been my anchor, especially during moments of self-doubt. Having such pillars to lean on has been invaluable in my journey as an athlete.

Defining Moments: My Journey to Glory

The year 2018 marked a turning point in my life. Competing at the **World U20 Championships** in **Tampere, Finland**, I clinched the **gold medal** in the **400**

meters, clocking a time of **51.46 seconds**. This victory was historic, as it was the first time an Indian woman secured a gold medal at a global track event.

Later that year, at the **Asian Games** in **Jakarta**, I achieved a silver medal in the **400 meters** and contributed to India's **gold** in both the **women's** and **mixed 4x400 meters relays**. During the 400 meters final, I set a **new national record** with a time of **50.79 seconds**.

In 2021, I was honored to be appointed as a **Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP)** in **Assam**, a role that allows me to serve my community and inspire others to pursue their dreams, both on and off the field.

Battling Setbacks, Rising Stronger

My journey from a small village in Assam to the international athletics stage has been filled with challenges. Despite my rise, I have faced several struggles, including financial difficulties, injuries, and career uncertainties.

- **Early Life Struggles:** Growing up in **Dhing, Assam**, in a humble farming family, resources were scarce. With no formal sports facilities in my village, I initially played football with boys on muddy fields before shifting to sprinting. Lack of proper training facilities and coaching meant I had to train under tough conditions. My family's financial struggles made it difficult to support my athletic ambitions, but their belief in me never wavered.

It is crucial to dismantle barriers and create an environment where everyone, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to development.

- **Injury Setbacks:** After my breakthrough in 2018, I suffered from recurring back and hamstring injuries, significantly affecting my performance. These injuries forced me to withdraw from major events, including the **2019 World Championships** and the **Tokyo 2020 Olympics (held in 2021)**. Rehabilitation was a long

and difficult process, and it was mentally and physically exhausting to be away from the track for so long.

- **Shift from 400m to 200m:** Due to persistent injuries, I had to **shift my focus from the 400m race to the 200m sprint**, as shorter distances put less strain on my body. This transition was challenging because it required adjusting my training, racing strategy, and competition mindset while striving to regain my top form.
- **Financial and Training Struggles:** In my early career, I trained under difficult conditions, without access to high-tech facilities, proper diet plans, or financial stability. Even after achieving national fame, I had to work hard to secure sponsorships and financial backing to continue my training.
- **Career Uncertainty and Comeback Efforts:** With injuries affecting my performance, I struggled to maintain my ranking and was unable to qualify for key international tournaments, including the Olympics. One of the biggest setbacks in my career came in July 2023, when I faced a 16-month ban due to a 'whereabouts' failure. Navigating this period required immense mental fortitude. With the unwavering support of my family, coach, and well-wishers, I focused on introspection, learning, and preparing for a stronger comeback. Despite these obstacles, I remain determined to return stronger and represent India on the global stage once again.

Personal Formula for Success

My philosophy is simple: hard work and trust in the process. Talent may provide a foundation, but discipline

and relentless effort script the story of success. I believe that every challenge is an opportunity to grow, and I have always pushed myself to be better than I was yesterday.

Message for Aspiring Women Achievers and Entrepreneurs

To every woman with a dream, remember: success isn't about where you begin, but about how fiercely you rise. Your journey is unique, and your strength is limitless. Success is not just about talent; it's about perseverance, discipline, and the courage to rise after every setback.

Challenges will come, but let them fuel your determination, not weaken your resolve. Believe in yourself, surround yourself with those who uplift you, and never stop striving for excellence. Whether in sports, business, or any field you choose, remember that hard work and resilience will always pave the way forward. Dream big, push boundaries, and carve your own path-because your potential knows no limits!

Thoughts on Gender Equality in Economic and Social Development

Gender equality isn't just a moral imperative-it's a catalyst for societal progress. When women are empowered to participate fully, communities thrive and economies flourish. It is crucial to dismantle barriers and create an environment where everyone, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to development.

In sharing my journey, I hope to inspire others to persevere, dream big, and believe in the transformative power of dedication, resilience, and unwavering support. ■



How it all Happened: The Journey from Receptionist to Business Leader



Jayshree Agarwal

Director & Managing Partner, Subhadra Metal Pvt. Ltd.
Director & Partner, Ronak Money Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
Proprietor, Patronus

Success is rarely a straight path; rather, it is a journey of resilience, learning, and perseverance. My career, which started at the reception desk of a company, evolved into leadership in the male-dominated marine and defense industry. Each step of the way brought challenges, lessons, and unwavering support from the people around me.

When I first stepped into the corporate world in 1993, I had no prior experience, just a desire to learn and grow. Working as a Front Desk Receptionist at Mahadev Paper Products and later at Lloyds Finance Ltd, I was introduced to business operations, professionalism, and structured work environments. During this period, I had the privilege of learning from incredible mentors, including Mr. Arun Murarka, Mr. G.C. Garg, and Mr. Prabhu, who helped shape my foundation in business ethics and leadership.

However, my journey was not without its challenges. A major setback came in 1992 when I did not achieve the expected results in my FYBCom exams. It was a moment that could have derailed my confidence, but my parents'

unwavering belief in me changed my perspective. They taught me that a single failure does not define intelligence or potential, and instead of dwelling on it, I chose to move forward with renewed determination. That lesson became a turning point, instilling resilience that would serve me throughout my career.

Marriage brought new responsibilities but also an incredible support system. My husband became my biggest cheerleader, encouraging me to pursue my dreams while balancing personal and professional aspirations. His faith in me reinforced my confidence, proving that with the right mindset, one can build a thriving career without compromising on family life. My sister, too, has been my greatest source of motivation, always pushing me forward with her unwavering belief in my potential.

“ I realized that commanding respect was not about demanding it, but about proving my worth through actions, strategy, and leadership. ”

Motherhood was another transformative phase. I took a four-year break to focus entirely on my child, a period that seemed like a professional pause but was, in reality, a time of immense personal growth. Motherhood taught me patience, multitasking, and resilience—qualities that would later define my leadership style. The experience enriched me, preparing me for the next chapter of my career.

In 2007, an unexpected opportunity changed my trajectory. A simple act of helping a friend with his business introduced me to the world of non-ferrous casting and marine engineering. What began as a favor soon turned into a full-fledged career shift. That friend eventually became my business partner, and together, we ventured into uncharted territory, navigating the intricacies of a technical, highly competitive industry.

By 2009, I had officially stepped into leadership at **Subhadra Metals Pvt Ltd**, co-leading the company in the marine and defense industry. Entering a male-dominated field where experience often outweighed

intent was challenging, but I embraced the complexities with confidence. Rather than seeing my lack of technical expertise as a drawback, I focused on business intelligence, negotiation skills, and relationship management. My role complemented my business partner's expertise in production and technology, and together, we built a powerful and balanced leadership duo.

Over the next few years, our company expanded its reach globally. With top-tier marine and defense clients, we established a reputation not only for our technical capabilities but also for the relationships we nurtured. My expertise in communication, crisis management, and business strategy played a key role in our success, ensuring that we remained agile and solution-oriented in the face of challenges.

Being one of the few women in meetings, trade fairs, and industry negotiations, I often found myself in the minority. Instead of feeling like an outsider, I turned it into an advantage. I realized that commanding respect was not about demanding it, but about proving my worth through actions, strategy, and leadership.

Managing factory workers in an industry unaccustomed to female leadership was another hurdle, but I approached it with integrity and presence. By listening, making informed decisions, and fostering an inclusive environment, I earned their trust and created a workplace culture that valued equality and innovation.

By 2010, our company had further strengthened its position in the global marine and defense market. My role transitioned from daily operations to strategic leadership, focusing on long-term business partnerships, market expansion, and innovation. Today, Subhadra Metals Pvt Ltd is recognized as a trusted name in the industry, an achievement that is the result of years of dedication, perseverance, and strategic vision.

Parallel to this journey, I have also taken on another leadership role as Co-Head of **Ronak Money Solutions**, a venture dedicated to helping businesses and individuals secure financial solutions tailored to their needs. Here, my expertise in business strategy, relationship management, and negotiation plays a crucial role in structuring financial opportunities that drive growth and success. Understanding client aspirations and offering solutions that align with their goals has made this journey deeply fulfilling.

Beyond my corporate roles, my passion for creativity led

me to establish **Patronous - expression of creativity**, a venture where I create handcrafted products from live-edge wood. This is not just a business; it is an extension of my love for artistry and craftsmanship. Working with natural wood, shaping raw materials into unique, functional pieces, brings a different kind of satisfaction—one that balances my corporate pursuits with personal fulfillment.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of the incredible people in my life. My parents, Prakash - my husband, Ronak - my son, and my extended family Shanika have been my pillars of strength, providing both emotional and physical support, allowing me to focus on my career growth without hesitation.

My brother, Narayan, along with his wife, Poonam, and my close friends, Ajay Mathrani, Prasanna Acharya, and Swapnil Jain, have been my trusted advisors, offering invaluable business insights, steering strategy when needed, and helping build the brand. My mentors, including Mr. Arun Murarka, Mr. G.C. Garg, and Mr. Prabhu, played a crucial role in shaping my leadership approach, instilling in me the principles of resilience and integrity.

Lastly, Sachin Sawant, my business partner, whose strategic vision and relentless drive constantly pushed me to aim higher, while my team at Subhadra—my extended family—stood by me through every challenge, making even the toughest moments surmountable. Their unwavering faith and support have been the foundation of my success.

For aspiring women navigating their own career paths, my message is simple—"your journey does not have to be linear". Success is not about waiting for the perfect opportunity but about creating your own. Take that first step, embrace learning, and surround yourself with people who uplift and believe in your potential. The business world needs more women leaders, and the only thing standing between you and success is the belief that you can do it.

You have the power to redefine norms, break barriers, and carve your own destiny. Take that leap, own your space, and never look back!



Bridging Tradition, Modernity, and Sustainability: A Journey with Bivabari Fashions



Choudhury Jyoshna Das

Director, Bivabari Fashions

“My vision goes beyond just fashion shows and runways. I am deeply committed to providing financial independence for women in handicrafts and handloom sectors.”

Graduating from the JD Institute of Fashion Technology was the beginning of an exciting journey that would ultimately shape my path in fashion. The creation of my boutique, Avenue Creation, marked the foundation of my artistic expression, but it was my design studio, Bivabari, which I launched in 2017, that truly gave life to my vision. Bivabari represents a fresh approach that integrates Indian textiles, sustainability, and the empowering voice of ‘Vocal for Local.’

At the core of my designs, is a commitment to both - comfort and confidence, catering to people of all age

groups and body types. I firmly believe that the clothes I design should not only be comfortable but should also inspire confidence. “The clothes I design are all about comfort, which they can carry with confidence.”

A significant part of my work revolves around preserving Odisha’s rich handloom heritage. Each thread of my creations carries this dedication, as I source fabrics from across India, weaving them into exquisite pieces that honour tradition while embracing modernity. From the handwoven textiles of Nuapatna, Gopalpur, Barpali, and Balangir in Odisha to those of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal, I transform these raw fabrics into artistic expressions that celebrate local craftsmanship.

Bridging Tradition and Modernity

The essence of my design philosophy lies in the seamless fusion of traditional aesthetics and contemporary sensibilities. My collections are a harmonious blend of timeless handloom patterns and modern designs. I have always been passionate about reviving local art forms such as handlooms, hand painting, and embroidery. My designs aim to do more than showcase fabric—they revive traditions and empower artisans.

One of my key objectives has been to make tradition contemporary, preserving its essence while making it relevant to modern tastes. In the past, handloom fabrics were often perceived as outdated or associated with older generations. From the beginning of my career, I made it a point to experiment with handloom, often blending Odisha handloom with Andhra Kalamkari, or incorporating hand embroidery, applique, and patchwork. These innovations have resonated strongly with my younger customers, especially through the popularity of indo-western garments. The key to keeping tradition alive is to modernize it, ensuring it appeals to contemporary audiences while preserving its authenticity.

Empowering Change

My vision goes beyond just fashion shows and runways. I am deeply committed to providing financial independence for women in handicrafts and handloom sectors. Through creativity and research, I have successfully established a brand that not only resonates on a national level but has also garnered international attention.

As the world embraces eco-friendly fashion, my cre-

ations—rooted in handloom and sustainable practices—serve as a testament to how style and conscience can coexist. With plans to train rural girls and expand my mission of empowerment, I aim to weave brighter threads of change into society's fabric.

Sustainable Fashion with Bivabari Fashions Pvt Ltd

Bivabari Fashions Pvt Ltd, the dynamic startup I founded, is at the forefront of sustainable fashion. Our commitment lies in upcycling and recycling leftover fabrics, breathing new life into discarded materials and transforming them into stylish, eco-friendly accessories. Our product range includes carefully crafted iPad covers, chic sunglass cases, elegant wallets, unique key rings, artisanal handmade notebooks, and exquisite jewellery. Each piece not only reflects our creativity but also promotes environmental responsibility, allowing our customers to contribute to a more sustainable planet without sacrificing style.

Throughout my entrepreneurial journey, I am proud to have created opportunities that go beyond business

success. I have had the privilege of impacting lives of over 500 women through indirect employment. By collaborating with local artisans, self-help groups, and small-scale manufacturers, I have empowered women to achieve financial independence and play an active role in their communities. This ripple effect of sustainable entrepreneurship not only promotes eco-friendly practices but also fosters social upliftment, enabling women to support their families and build brighter futures.

Redefining Fashion with Purpose

In a world where tradition and fashion converge, I stand as a strong advocate for a more sustainable and socially responsible industry. My designs are not just about clothing; they carry a deeper narrative of heritage, sustainability, empowerment, and the vibrant spirit of supporting local craftsmanship. Through Bivabari Fashions, I continue to champion the cause of eco-friendly fashion and local artisans, weaving a brighter future for both the industry and the communities it supports.



Weaving Dreams and Shaping the Future: Empowering Women in Odisha's Handloom and Handicraft Sector



Manisha Marathe

Director, Saroj Sweets Pvt. Ltd.

Saroj Sweets, a renowned name in the world of sweets, was established in 1955 by the late **Mr. D.K. Marathe**, my father-in-law. Coming from a modest background, he had a strong vision of creating high-quality sweets and farsans. His journey began with limited financial resources, initially working as a **milk distributor** to support his ambitions.

One of his biggest challenges in those early days was sourcing premium Mawa and Grade-A raw materials, along with finding skilled labor, as **Saraj Sweets was the first sweet shop in Chembur**. However, his dedication and unwavering determination allowed him to overcome these hurdles and turn his dream into reality.

The name '**Saraj**' is deeply personal—it was named after Manisha's my mother in-law, a tribute that gives the brand an intimate touch.

Looking back on my journey, I never set out to break barriers or prove a point—I simply wanted to do my best and contribute meaningfully to my family's business.

When I first stepped into Saraj Sweets in 1993, the industry was largely male-dominated, and it was uncom-

mon for women to take on leadership roles in business, especially in customer-facing or decision-making positions. I faced scepticism from those around me—customers, suppliers, even my own team—because people weren't used to seeing a woman actively involved in running a sweet shop.

Despite the challenges, I stayed focused on what mattered: ensuring that the business thrived while maintaining the quality and reputation that my family had built. It took time to earn trust and respect, but gradually, through hard work and perseverance, the resistance began to fade. Today, I am grateful that my role is recognized not just within the company, but also by our suppliers, customers, and corporate partners.

Interestingly, my initial dream was to become an **IPS officer**—not for the title, but for the opportunity to bring positive change to society. While I eventually found myself in business instead, I have realized that many of the qualities required in law enforcement—discipline, crisis management, leadership, and the ability to connect with people—have played an equally crucial role in my entrepreneurial journey. In many ways, I feel I have fulfilled my purpose of making an impact, just in a different way than I had originally imagined.

“ I always believed that to run a successful business, you must see it from a customer's perspective, and that philosophy has guided every decision I've made. ”

My upbringing instilled in me the values of hard work and responsibility. Coming from a middle-class background, I saw my parents work tirelessly to support not just our immediate family but our extended family as well. That sense of duty and commitment shaped my approach to business.

I did not have formal education in management or marketing, but I relied on keen observation and real-world experience to navigate challenges. I always

believed that to run a successful business, you must see it from a customer's perspective, and that philosophy has guided every decision I've made.

One of the biggest challenges in our industry is **consistency**, especially with staff turnover. Over the years, we have built a strong system-meticulously refining recipes, mentoring employees, and maintaining close relationships with suppliers-to ensure that every product meets our high standards. Our commitment to quality has remained unchanged for over 68 years. We have never used preservatives or artificial colors, relying only on

“Even during difficult times like the pandemic, when many businesses struggled, we held onto our core values, knowing that trust and quality are what keep our customers coming back.”

pure ingredients and natural saffron. Even during difficult times like the pandemic, when many businesses struggled, we held onto our core values, knowing that trust and quality are what keep our customers coming back.

Expanding beyond a single location was another turning point. To grow, we ventured into **institutional sales and corporate gifting**, partnering with organizations like **BARC, TISS, and HPCL**. This step allowed us to reach new markets, and today, Saroj Sweets is recognized not just locally but across India, including cities like Bangalore.

In the early days, navigating finances and external business relationships was another challenge. As a woman, I had to work harder to establish credibility with banks, suppliers, and corporate clients. There were moments when my opinions were dismissed, but I focused on results rather than seeking validation. Over time, my work spoke for itself, and today, I am consulted for business decisions and valued for my expertise.

Beyond business, I believe in using my platform to support other women. I understand how difficult it can be to step into a space traditionally led by men, and I want to

“Dream big, stay passionate, remain disciplined, and never give up. Success is not about where you start but about how determined you are to keep going.”

encourage more women to pursue their dreams fearlessly. I have been involved in **women's empowerment initiatives**, offering mentorship, financial literacy workshops, and opportunities for women to achieve independence.

Economic and social empowerment go hand in hand, and I strongly believe that when women succeed, entire communities benefit.

Giving back to society has always been important to me. Saroj Sweets has been involved in **various charitable efforts**, from supporting local schools to food donations for the underprivileged. During the pandemic, we ensured that those in need were not left behind, distributing food and sweets to healthcare workers, hospitals, and affected communities.

These contributions are not about recognition; they are simply about doing what feels right.

Looking back, I wouldn't change much about my journey-except perhaps that I wish society had been more welcoming to women entrepreneurs from the start. But times are changing, and I am hopeful that more women will find the courage to step into leadership roles without hesitation.

To those aspiring to build something of their own, my message is simple: **Dream big, stay passionate, remain disciplined, and never give up.**

Success is not about where you start but about how determined you are to keep going. I may not have worn the IPS uniform, but in many ways, I feel I have fulfilled my purpose-leading with integrity, creating opportunities for others, and proving that with the right mindset, anything is possible.

From a Single Room to Boardrooms: A Story of Resilience and Reinvention



Metilda Stanley

MD and CEO, Techsurance

I come from very humble beginnings. My family stayed in a single room tenement with a shared corridor or what is called a “chawl” in Mumbai. I have faced the usual financial constraints. There was one thing I never lacked: an unshakable desire to excel.

“The best lessons are taught by struggles of life. It opens you to embrace change”

Education was my gateway to a better future, but affordability was a constant hurdle. A professional degree was out of reach, so I carved my own path.

Every borrowed book, every late-night study session, and every small victory reinforced my belief that success wasn't just about privilege—it was about perseverance.

Life moved on, responsibilities grew, and the pressure to secure a stable career became more pressing. That's

when I set my sights on attempting multiple competitive exams for Banks, Railways and Insurance. Incidentally, I cleared all exams, but the results from LIC of India came in first. That set the first steps to a career in Insurance.

The journey had its own share of challenges. My career and life gained momentum with promotions and marriage. I was blessed with the most cherished role of motherhood.

I continued to pursue further studies to make myself relevant and future ready.

This required me to balance the demands of a growing career, caring for my parents, and raising children while continuing my studies.

I realized then, that both career growth and personal responsibilities evolve like two parallel, upward curves, each demanding time and attention simultaneously.

There were moments of exhaustion, self-doubt, and

“Don't look back once you take a decision. Work on making that decision right”

extreme guilt. But not working was never an option I considered. I had this feeling of untapped potential inside of me.

Then came the turning moment of my life. The Insurance sector opened up. The newly licensed private Insurers looked for people with Insurance experience to start their core business.

Joining **HDFC Life Insurance** from **LIC** was a leap of faith, especially with my husband working abroad, aging parents and in-laws, and two young children, just 5 and 7 years old at the time.

It was a difficult decision, but I deeply owe it to my father-in-law, whose encouragement and simple nod of approval gave me the confidence to take that step forward.

“
Change is painful but always
takes you ahead
”

In the early days of establishing the insurance process at HDFC Life, I traveled extensively, met new people, conducted training, built a team, and implemented new processes-an experience I thoroughly enjoyed. It gave me a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment. Looking back, this career shift broadened my perspective and renewed my confidence.

It was here that I encountered inspiring mentors, and the organization continually challenged me to push my limits and strive for excellence. As I progressed, I transitioned across functions to gain broader exposure and a deeper understanding of various aspects of the insurance industry.

New found success on the professional front meant monetary gains and we moved to a larger home keeping in mind the growing family needs. Just when I felt that things are looking stable, the 2005 Mumbai floods happened. This was another setback wherein my new home got completely submerged in water and the resultant damage hit me hard.

Not one to be bogged down, my husband and I decided to move out of the locality and try a new location equipped with a checklist for the new house to be.

Till date, that home and property has been the best decision of our life.

These past incidents taught me major life learnings –

- The best lessons are taught by struggles of life. It opens you to embrace change
- Change is painful but always takes you ahead
- Don't look back once you take a decision. Work on making that decision right

Life continued and the home front was managed with a support system of home aids and family. Children flew to pursue their own interests.

In the corporate world, especially in senior leadership roles, the demands only intensified. The very challenges that once excited me in the early years gradually began to feel overwhelming.

I am not sure, if it was age or the number of years of work or the constant balancing act that I did all along, but something hit me and I felt the need to put a stop to all of it. I quit the corporate world with no agenda in mind. I took a sabbatical for myself.

My plan was to do all that I missed out namely the reading, travelling, teaching, working on my fitness and watching some interesting movies. The next few years, I did work on my fitness regime, travelled few countries, spent quality time with family and caught up on reading.

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My advice to all women working,
self-employed or otherwise is this
- the journey of life is bound to be
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time. And that is absolutely OK!
You are human and have every
right to fail.
”

Life was a steady boat and friends started reaching out from the industry seeking help in their business challenges and this picked up a little momentum, which led me to start **AdWISE ASSURE Pvt Ltd**, an insurance advisory firm.

However, there was this soft, inner voice nudging me to start 'touching lives' in a way that went beyond reasoning. This voice grew louder, and the action began with a five-member team in a small cabin-driven by a singular mission: to provide an '**employable skill set to the youth, especially the needy ones.**' This was how **Techsurance Pvt Ltd** was formed in October, 2021.

“
The ability to create jobs and
positively impact lives is truly
priceless.
”

What started as a small idea soon gained momentum. Three years later, Techsurance has grown into a 150+ strong team across Mumbai and Pune, serving both domestic and international insurers. Today, we take pride in offering:

- **Training and Upskilling** – Bridging the skill and knowledge gap in insurance with industry-relevant expertise
- **Claims and Underwriting Support** – Helping insurers optimize processes and improve efficiency.

Building Techsurance from the ground up has been a transformative experience, both professionally and personally.

Some of the best opportunities come unexpectedly, and this journey has been one of them, bringing immense value and a deep sense of fulfillment. The ability to create jobs and positively impact lives is truly priceless.

My entrepreneurial journey with Techsurance has been incredibly rewarding, and I am grateful for the recognition it has brought.

- Selected as part of Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Women Entrepreneurs for their business program at IIM Bangalore.
- Chosen among 60 entrepreneurs by the Maharashtra government for the Cornell Maha60 Business Program.
- Honored as the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year by the Christian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- Invited as a keynote speaker by the Mauritius Insurance Association for the 3i Conference held in Mauritius in November 2024.
- Awarded the Pratibhashekha Gold Winner in the SAARC category by the Women's Chamber of Industry

and Commerce of Sri Lanka in January 2025 in Colombo.

My advice to all women working, self-employed or otherwise is this - the journey of life is bound to be uncertain and it will cause anxiety at times.

You may not know the answer and you may get lost at times. You may not be a perfect mother, wife and daughter every time. And that is absolutely OK. You are human and have every right to fail.

Don't let the illusion of perfection weigh you down. Life will bring both roses and lemons—embrace the joys and cherish every moment.

Struggles and losses are not the end; they are simply turning points leading to new beginnings if you choose to move forward. Trust your heart and mind—they will never fail you. I, too, have stood at the edge of uncertainty, questioning whether I had the strength to keep going. My journey—from a humble home where I grew up to

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where I stand today—is a testament that struggles do not define us; rather, it is how we respond to them that shapes our path.

As I move forward, I do so with an open heart, embracing life's inevitable ups and downs with resilience and gratitude. But no matter what comes next, I now carry the unshakable belief that I am capable, I am strong, and I am worthy of every success I have fought for.

■

Radically Yours: Bridging Gender Gaps in Finance and Entrepreneurship



Radhika Bajoria

Founder, Radically Yours

Standing at the intersection of global finance, entrepreneurship, and gender equality, I founded Radically Yours as a knowledge-sharing platform that connects innovative businesses with institutional capital. With established chapters in Singapore, London, and India, my mission is to create pathways for women entrepreneurs in an industry where gender-based funding disparities remain stark.

As a UN Fellow and a speaker at prestigious institutions, I have dedicated my journey to addressing systemic challenges facing women in business. From my early days as a TEDx speaker at 21 to being recognized as one of Mumbai's most influential women leaders, my experiences have shaped my perspective on perseverance, strategic networking, and purpose-driven entrepreneurship.

Sources of Inspiration and Key Influences

My journey began at Narsee Monjee College of Commerce, where I completed my Bachelor of Management Studies. It was during this time that I first became aware of the gender disparities in entrepreneurial funding, and it profoundly shaped my mission.

I noticed a pattern early in my career: brilliant women entrepreneurs with viable business models were consistently overlooked by institutional investors, despite demonstrating stronger metrics than their male counterparts. This realization fueled my determination to create change.

I owe a great deal to the early mentors in the investment community who provided me with behind-the-scenes insights into funding decisions. These relationships helped me identify the specific pain points in the investor-entrepreneur dynamic that disproportionately affected women founders.

Career Milestones

My career has been a series of calculated steps toward expanding impact and addressing gender disparities in business. Some of the defining moments include:

- TEDx Speaker at 21 – My early foray into public speaking positioned me as an emerging voice in entrepreneurship.

“I found that preparation was my best ally. When I could speak knowledgeably about market trends and growth projections, the conversation would shift from who I was to what I knew.”

- Founding Radically Yours – Establishing this US-registered platform was my commitment to providing systemic solutions rather than simply highlighting problems.
- Launching the W.I.P.E Initiative – Women in Private Equity and Enterprise (W.I.P.E) was my structured approach to women's empowerment, offering concrete resources, networks, and opportunities.
- Podcast Development – My show, Radically Yours by Radhika, has featured over 50 global women founders

and investors, documenting success stories and creating visibility for women breaking barriers.

- **Global Expansion** – Launching chapters in Singapore and London demonstrated my understanding of global investment flows. The Singapore chapter, in particular, focuses on facilitating jobs and internships for women in the India-Singapore corridor while supporting fundraising efforts for women General Partners and founders.
- **Recognition as a LinkedIn Influencer** – Being named among India's top 20 LinkedIn influencers has helped amplify my message and advocacy for gender equality.

“My journey has been about more than just personal success—it's been about creating tangible pathways for women entrepreneurs while challenging systemic barriers in the investment landscape.”

- **UN Fellowship** – My appointment as a UN Fellow solidified my role as a thought leader in women's economic empowerment.

Overcoming Challenges

Like many women entrepreneurs, I have faced significant challenges throughout my journey, many of which I have openly discussed in my public speaking engagements and podcast episodes.

- **Credibility in Male-Dominated Spaces**

As a young woman entering the investment landscape, I initially struggled to establish credibility among traditional investors. My response was methodical: I developed deep expertise in tech-driven and tech-enabled businesses. This specialized knowledge allowed me to engage as a domain expert rather than being categorized by gender or age.

I found that preparation was my best ally. When I could speak knowledgeably about market trends and growth

projections, the conversation would shift from who I was to what I knew.

- **Building a Global Network**

Expanding Radically Yours beyond India required navigating different business cultures, regulatory environments, and established networks. I approached this challenge by identifying strategic partners in each target market who shared my vision for women's economic empowerment.

The successful launch of the Singapore and London chapters demonstrates my ability to translate this model across cultural contexts while maintaining a consistent mission.

- **Measuring Impact**

A persistent challenge in advocacy work is demonstrating measurable impact. To address this, I implemented tracking mechanisms for key metrics:

- Number of successful funding rounds facilitated
- Job placements created through my network
- Partnership agreements between investors and women founders
- Media visibility for women entrepreneurs featured on my platform

This data-driven approach has strengthened my case when approaching institutional partners and expanding the reach of my initiatives.

Personal Formula for Success

My approach to professional development and leadership is rooted in several key principles:

1. Evidence-Based Advocacy – I ground my work in research and data rather than relying solely on personal experience.

2. Platform Diversification – By leveraging podcasts, speaking engagements, written content, and networking events, I ensure resilience in my outreach strategy.

3 Strategic Network Building – My global network of HNIs, family offices, venture capitalists, and investment

funds has been developed through intentional relationship-building.

4. Continuous Learning – Despite early success, I remain committed to educational development, engaging with prestigious institutions and fellowships.

5. Mentorship Exchange – Rather than viewing mentorship as a one-way transaction, I have created systems for mutual knowledge sharing between established investors and emerging entrepreneurs.

Message for Aspiring Women Achievers

For women entering entrepreneurship or investment fields, my advice is straightforward:

- **Document your achievements meticulously:** Women tend to underreport their successes, which affects everything from funding applications to leadership opportunities.
- **Develop expertise in specific vertical markets:** Specialized knowledge creates inroads to otherwise closed networks.
- **Financial literacy is essential:** Understanding term sheets, valuation methods, and funding instruments isn't optional—it's crucial for engaging investors as equals.
- **Support other women:** The W.I.P.E initiative exemplifies this by creating structured opportunities for collaboration rather than competition.

Gender Equality in Economic Development

My perspective on gender equality goes beyond social justice arguments - I see it as an economic imperative.

Through my podcast and speaking engagements, I highlight research that demonstrates the economic value of women's participation.

The funding gap isn't just unfair - it's inefficient. When women-led businesses generate significantly higher revenue per dollar of funding, restricting their access to capital represents a market failure.

My approach to economic development emphasizes:

1. Access to Capital – Creating direct pathways between

women entrepreneurs and funding sources.

2. Skills Development – Providing technical and soft skills training for women in high-growth sectors.

3. Network Access – Opening previously closed networks to qualified women professionals.

4. Policy Advocacy – Engaging with regulatory bodies to address structural barriers.

Conclusion

My journey from a college graduate to a globally recognized advocate for women in business has been about more than just personal success - it's been about creating tangible pathways for women entrepreneurs while challenging systemic barriers in the investment landscape.



Through Radically Yours and the W.I.P.E initiative, I have worked to translate inspiration into impact. My recognition as a top LinkedIn influencer, a UN Fellow, and a sought-after speaker reflects both my achievements and my commitment to advocating for others.

For the next generation of women entrepreneurs, I hope my journey serves as a blueprint for combining business acumen with social purpose.

Addressing gender disparities isn't just about fairness—it's about unleashing untapped economic potential and fostering more dynamic, innovative business environments.

As I often say at the conclusion of my speaking engagements: This is just the beginning of a beginning.



A Tale of Resilience, Passion, and Innovation: The Story of My Entrepreneurial Journey



Mousumee Pattanaik

Founder, Choco Galleria and Wahi Dahi

My entrepreneurial journey is not merely about business achievements; it is a profound tale of overcoming immense personal loss, embracing change, and channelling the pain of the past into a force for innovation. It is a story fuelled by a deep love for my family, a strong desire to give back to my community, and an unwavering passion to create something meaningful. From this journey, I birthed two unique businesses: **Choco Galleria** and **Wahi Dahi**.

The Calm before the Storm

Before 2015, my life seemed perfect - stable, content, and full of promise. Living in Jamaica with my husband and children, I had established myself as a successful catering service provider, a role that allowed me to combine my love for food with my natural talent for service. Alongside my work, I was deeply involved in social causes, giving back to the community that had supported me. My life felt secure and fulfilling, with a bright future ahead.

However, life often has a way of throwing us unexpected challenges. In 2015, while on vacation in India with my family, tragedy struck. I lost my husband suddenly, a devastating blow that left me grappling with grief. The life I had known came to a standstill, and everything that

once felt secure became uncertain. My plans were shattered, and I was forced to confront an entirely new reality.

In the aftermath of this profound loss, I was unable to return to Jamaica and continue the life I had so carefully built. Faced with overwhelming sorrow and uncertainty, I made the difficult decision to donate everything I had to the Army Salvation and the National Children's Home. It was a necessary step, but one born out of deep compassion, signalling the end of a chapter in my life that I could

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Anything is possible when you have the will to succeed, the love to push you forward, and the adaptability to innovate in the face of adversity.
”

not hold on to any longer.

The Birth of Choco Galleria

With no prior business experience and a future clouded by uncertainty, I faced a difficult choice: start a new venture or remain uncertain. The idea of running a business wasn't something I had considered before, but the need to secure my children's future and create a stable life made entrepreneurship a necessity.

In 2015, the concept of a chocolate showroom in Bhubaneswar was an unheard-of idea. There were no boutiques offering high-quality, chemical-free chocolates, and this gap in the market became an opportunity. Driven by my husband's last wish and a desire to create something fresh and innovative, I took a bold leap and decided to open **Choco Galleria**, a specialized chocolate store in Bhubaneswar.

Choco Galleria was more than just a chocolate store; it was a vision that I wanted to bring to life. My goal was to provide customers with the best chocolates, made from pure, chemical-free ingredients. In a world dominated by mass-produced chocolates, I envisioned a space where people could indulge in authentic, handcrafted choco-

lates that were healthy and delicious.

The journey wasn't easy, especially in the early days. With the pressure of raising my children while starting from scratch, I poured my heart into building this business. I sourced the finest ingredients, honed my recipes, and made sure each chocolate piece was a work of art. Over time, Choco Galleria gained the trust of the people of Bhubaneswar, earning a reputation for its authenticity and commitment to quality.

My hard work paid off. Choco Galleria became recog-

“
In any entrepreneurial journey,
setbacks are inevitable,
”

nized for its creativity and dedication to excellence. People who had never experienced handcrafted chocolates were discovering new Flavors and textures, and the business continued to grow, proudly representing purity and craftsmanship.

Navigating the Storm: Overcoming COVID-19

In any entrepreneurial journey, setbacks are inevitable, and for me, the next major challenge was the global pandemic - COVID-19. Like countless businesses worldwide, Choco Galleria faced enormous hurdles during the lockdowns, market disruptions, and changing consumer behaviour. Yet, I refused to let this crisis define me.

Instead of succumbing to the pressures of the pandemic, I saw it as an opportunity to innovate. I recognized that the business landscape was shifting, and relying solely on chocolate sales would no longer suffice. This realization sparked the birth of **Wahi Dahi**.

The Birth of Wahi Dahi: Oven-Baked Sweet Curd

In 2019, I took a bold step into an uncharted territory by experimenting with something entirely new - oven-baked sweet curd (Dahi). I created five earthen pots of Dahi as Diwali gifts for my corporate clients, unaware that this small act would change the trajectory of my entrepreneurial path.

The response to the Dahi was overwhelming. People loved the distinct taste and the traditional touch of being presented in earthen pots. Encouraged by this success, I

decided to explore the idea further. In 2020, I launched **Wahi Dahi** at the MSME Trade Fair, and the public's response was extraordinary.

Wahi Dahi was not just another food product; it was an experience. The process of baking curd in earthen pots ensured a unique flavour, while also extending the shelf life without the need for preservatives. As the water content evaporated during the baking process, the curd absorbed the natural elements from the pots, resulting in a rich, delicious taste, free from chemicals and harmful bacteria.

As the first product of its kind in Odisha, Wahi Dahi quickly gained popularity and received recognition from food critics and influential figures, including the former Chief Minister and Governor, who became loyal fans. Its unique flavors, from saffron to pina colada, and the ability to customize earthen pots for special occasions, set Wahi Dahi apart from other offerings in the market.

As demand for Wahi Dahi skyrocketed, I opened the first-ever Wahi Dahi outlet in Odisha—a milestone that signalled a new chapter in my entrepreneurial journey. Through my passion, resilience, and commitment to quality, I had created not one, but two successful businesses that were now cherished by the people of Bhubaneswar and beyond.

A Labor of Love and Strength

Both Choco Galleria and Wahi Dahi are more than businesses to me; they are labours of love. They are my way of honouring my late husband's wishes, providing for my children, and contributing something truly unique to our community. Every flavour, every presentation, and every concept behind these ventures is a reflection of my journey - one of perseverance, passion, and determination.

Despite the unimaginable personal loss, I channelled my grief into something positive. I used my love for innovation and my desire to provide for my family as the driving forces behind my success. This journey has been a reminder that anything is possible when you have the will to succeed, the love to push you forward, and the adaptability to innovate in the face of adversity.

Where there is a will, there is a way. The journey continues, and there is still much more to come. ■

The Road Less Travelled: Creating a Niche in Investment Banking



CA Prajakta Shetye-Deo

Director, Posiview Consulting Partners Pvt. Ltd.

From Top Ranks to Top Deals: Building a Boutique Investment Banking Firm: I have always had a strong academic inclination and consistently excelled in my studies. I ranked among the **All India Top-10** at all three levels of the rigorous **Chartered Accountancy** examination and also secured the **top position at Pune University** in my Commerce graduation.

I was thriving in a high-flying banking career when the birth of my daughter became a major turning point in my life. With the need to spend more time at home, I began exploring alternative career paths beyond the conventional corporate trajectory.

Back in 2007, Chartered Accountants in Pune were primarily engaged in either **service roles (jobs) or practice (audits and taxation)**. However, my husband and I wanted to take a different route. Instead of following the traditional paths, we decided to establish a **boutique Investment Banking firm**,

From 2007 to 2009, we took on every small job that came our way, gradually finding our niche in the **Real Estate sector**. We chose this industry as it was gaining significant interest from new-age financial institutions, while many builders and real estate developers remained

unaware of the evolving financing options available to them.

What made this sector particularly promising was that each client typically had multiple fundable projects, and each project could secure funding at various stages of its life cycle. This allowed us to tap into an unmet customer need while also building a financially rewarding business model. We achieved a reasonable level of success while staying attuned to shifts in both the competitive landscape and economic environment.

Post-Covid, we expanded our focus to include financial consulting and fundraising for startups. By late 2023, we further diversified into M&A deal-making and advisory, broadening our expertise. Today, our firm operates with three Directors, each leading a specialized vertical-**Real Estate, Early-Stage Startups, and M&A**-ensuring focused growth and strategic execution across these domains.

Family, Work, and the Art of Making It Work: As a mother of two daughters, one of whom requires special attention, balancing the demands of both home and work has been anything but easy. I firmly believe that the idea of "having it all" is a myth. Being a mother and an entrepreneur are both full-time roles, each requiring immense dedication. The reality is that compromises are inevitable, and once you accept this, it becomes easier to set realistic expectations and make decisions based on the circumstances at hand.

There have been countless instances where I found myself stretched thin, forced to choose between attending a crucial business meeting or staying home to care for a sick child-along with the many other familial responsibilities that we, as Indian women, often juggle. However, I have learned that with effective time management, a reliable and efficient support system-both at work and at home-and understanding partners in both spheres, everything eventually falls into place. The key is to prioritize wisely, delegate when necessary, and embrace the journey with resilience and grace.

A message for aspiring women achievers and entrepreneurs: I have increasingly observed that many women entrepreneurs excel in managing operations and business development but often overlook the financial aspects of their business. In most cases, financial management is delegated to a partner or a family member.

Finance is the lifeblood of an organization, and it's crucial for every entrepreneur to have an understanding of financial fundamentals. Being able to read, interpret, and analyze financial statements empowers business owners to make informed decisions that drive growth and sustainability.

This needs to change. Finance is the lifeblood of any organization, and it is crucial for every entrepreneur to have a solid understanding of financial fundamentals. Being able to read, interpret, and analyze financial statements empowers business owners to make informed decisions that drive growth and sustainability. Developing financial acumen not only helps in achieving business goals and ensuring financial independence but also significantly boosts confidence in navigating the entrepreneurial journey.

I recall working with a woman entrepreneur from Pune who had been successfully managing her MSME unit for over three decades. A seasoned business leader, she had recently expanded into a new vertical by acquiring another unit. However, she soon found herself at a crossroads, struggling to determine how to generate a reasonable return on her capital investment in the new venture.

Through a series of informal discussions, we delved into both her existing and new businesses, analyzing key metrics and growth prospects. The information itself wasn't unfamiliar to her, but my role was to help her view it through a more structured and strategic lens.

Once she gained clarity on how the financials of her two revenue streams would function—considering factors such as working capital requirements and the conversion cycle—she was able to develop a well-defined target plan for the year. This newfound perspective enabled her to make informed decisions, setting her on a clear path toward optimizing her investment and ensuring sustainable growth.

My Personal Formula for Success: I firmly believe in the saying, "The devil is in the details." Whether it's a small initiative or a large-scale project, success largely depends on meticulous planning and efficient execution. In today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world, where the environment is constantly evolving, it is impossible to predict every challenge that may arise.

However, being well-prepared from the outset makes it easier to adapt to changes. **Planning enhances agility.** For instance, every weekend, I plan my family's meals and weekly schedule in advance. This ensures that, during the week, I can focus more on my work commitments without constantly managing household responsibilities. Of course, unforeseen situations may arise, but addressing occasional disruptions is far easier than dealing with unplanned tasks every single day.

The same principle applies to business. At any given time, we are managing multiple deals and consultancy assignments in parallel. By maintaining deal-wise progress sheets, implementing structured activity-based planning, and ensuring regular communication and feedback, we make certain that every project receives the attention it deserves. This organized approach not only streamlines operations but also helps us consistently exceed client expectations.

Paying It Forward: As a parting thought, I encourage all readers to embrace the philosophy of "Paying it Forward." Throughout our entrepreneurial journey, we receive immense support—be it in the form of advice, mentorship, funding, valuable connections, or even encouragement from family, friends, and colleagues.

It is essential to reflect on how we can give back and extend the same support to others. Giving back does not always have to be monetary, such as donations, employee welfare, or startup funding. It can also take the form of mentorship, knowledge-sharing, skill-building, or even a simple act of connecting someone with the right people. Whether it's guiding an employee with a startup idea, training aspiring professionals, or supporting a colleague through networking, every small effort counts.

As Winston Churchill famously said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Let's strive to create a ripple effect of kindness, mentorship, and opportunity for others.

Theatre, Inclusion, and Empowerment: A Life on Stage and Behind It



Rael Padamsee

CEO and Managing Director of ACE Productions and Numero Uno Productions.

My Inspiration, key life events, and influential people in my journey:

I come from a family of strong-willed and creative minds, and my biggest inspiration has always been my family- especially the five most important women in my life: my mother, Pearl Padamsee; my other mother, Rose; my closest aunt, Dr. Julie Nathwani & Sabira Merchant; and the strongest of them all, Dr. Mithu Alur. Theatre has been my passion for as long as I can remember. I started my journey at 18 at Kulsum Terrace, and all these years later, I'm still here, still driven by the same excitement to create something magical. That passion led me to start ACE Productions, and over the years, we've staged some incredible musicals like **'The Sound of Music'**, **'My Fair Lady'**, **'Grease'**, and many more.

I've always wanted to do things differently- to push boundaries and bring fresh ideas to the stage. Inclusivity has been close to my heart, which is why I **started 'Create Foundation'** in memory of my mother. Through this initiative, children from different NGOs get the same opportunities to perform in our productions as anyone else. Seeing them shine on stage is one of the most fulfilling parts of my work.

One of our most special productions, **'Mahatma - Come Find the Gandhi in You'**, was recognized by Amitabh Bachchan, Sachin Tendulkar, Alia Bhatt, and the late Om Puri. The Governor of Maharashtra, C. Vidyasagar Rao, was so moved by the effort that he invited 300 children to celebrate at the Governor's Bungalow. Another proud moment was **'Rediscover the Epic'**, a modern retelling of the Ramayana featuring 150 children and young adults from seven NGOs, which received appreciation from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his wife, Amruta Fadnavis, for its message of diversity and inclusion.

Victoria Krane, President of the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute (New York), recognized our efforts in making theatre more inclusive, and I've been lucky to have the support of some incredible people along the way- Sunil Shetty, Boman Irani, Juhi Chawla, Raveena Tandon, Cyrus Broacha, and Kunal Vijayakar, to name a few. Their belief in what we do has meant the world to me.

Major milestones: One of the biggest milestones in my career was producing **'Broken Images'**, a play that brought together three incredible Padma awardees - Padma Bhushan Girish Karnad, who wrote the play; Padma Bhushan Shabana Azmi, whose performance remains nothing short of phenomenal; and my father, Padma Shri Alyque Padamsee, who directed it. The fact that **'Broken Images'** has completed over 100 shows and still plays to packed houses is something I hold very close to my heart.

Another moment of realization came when I was compiling productions for my website and saw, in front of me, the sheer volume of work we had done - over 75 plays in 40 years. It wasn't something I had consciously kept track of, but seeing it all come together was a humbling and proud moment. Additionally, we perform over 700 plays a year with our 15,000 students!

Along with our shows, ACE also runs Speech & Drama courses in 25+ schools- a journey that began on a small scale at Kulsum Terrace and gradually expanded to nearby areas. Today, we are proud to be present in schools across South Mumbai, Thane, and Borivali, impacting the lives of over 15,000 students each year and contributing to their holistic development.

Having said that, Theatre productions come with their fair share of challenges- tight deadlines, unpredictable

obstacles, and the pressure to make every show a success. But at the end of the day, it all boils down to staying focused on the goal and making it happen, no matter what. As the famous saying goes, "The show must go on," and that's exactly what we live by in this industry. There have been crazy, chaotic moments, but the passion for storytelling and the love for the stage make it all worth it.

My personal formula for success: I don't take no for an answer - whether it's from myself or my team. I have always believed that there is a way to make things happen if you're determined enough. Challenges will come, but they're just problems waiting for solutions. Our real work begins when the opportunity says 'no'.

One thing that really helps me is planning. Instead of getting overwhelmed by where to start, I first picture what the final outcome should be. Once that's clear, we break it down step by step, setting deadlines along the way to make sure we're always moving forward. Additionally, **planning a WDW (Who is Doing What) and understanding Why We Do What We Do is a crucial step.** It keeps us focused, accountable, and, most importantly, ensures that we reach our goal on time.

But beyond strategies and planning, success is about having the drive to keep going, the flexibility to adapt, and the confidence to take bold steps - even when the odds are stacked against you.

A message for aspiring women achievers and entrepreneurs

Don't let a "no" stop you. If Plan A doesn't work, remember there are 25 more letters in the alphabet - keep trying until you find the one that does.

The road to success isn't always smooth, and there will be moments of doubt, failure, and frustration. But what truly defines you is how you push through those moments. Be relentless in chasing what you want, stand your ground when you believe in something, and don't wait for permission to follow your dreams. Surround yourself with people who uplift and challenge you, and most importantly, trust in your own abilities - even when others don't.

The world needs more women who refuse to settle, who dare to take up space, and who create opportunities not just for themselves but for others as well. If you have a dream, go after it - no excuses, no apologies.

Remember, we are 50% of the population, so demand your share. Most importantly, know your self-worth. You should be the most important person in your life. When you grow yourself, you can help others grow. Think of it like the oxygen mask principle: first, secure your own mask—only then will you have the ability to focus on and support others in your life and career.

My thoughts on the role of gender equality in economic and social development: Gender equality isn't just a concept - it's essential for a progressive and thriving society. But true change doesn't start in workplaces or boardrooms; it begins in childhood. That's why I believe in sensitizing children at a young age - as early as four. The sooner we break stereotypes - or better yet, prevent them from forming - the stronger the foundation we build for future generations.

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Planning a WDW (Who is Doing What) and understanding Why We Do What We Do is a crucial step. It keeps us focused, accountable, and, most importantly, ensures that we reach our goal on time.
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From the very beginning, we have been an all-women team, and our motto has always been "Equal Opportunity for All." Our current project, Rise Up for Equality, is focused on making Maharashtra the safest state for women and children globally. We are working with various NGOs and engaging the three pillars of our democracy to help create a more just and equitable society.

Beyond this, at ACE, we actively incorporate gender equality into our workshops and programs. We ensure that children grow up seeing superheroes of all genders, equal representation across professions, and shared responsibilities at home. Whether in our Speech & Drama courses or theatre productions, we instill the values of inclusivity and fairness from a young age.

When equality is ingrained in our upbringing, it naturally reflects in every part of society - economic growth, social progress, and daily life. The goal isn't just to empower women; it's to create a world where no one is limited by their gender. That's when real progress happens.

Weaving Dreams and Shaping the Future: Empowering Women in Odisha's Handloom and Handicraft Sector



Rosalin Dash

Co-Founder, Sarna Educational and Cultural Services LLP

I have spent 15 years working in multinational corporations and startups after earning an Engineering degree and a Post Graduate Diploma from SIBM, Pune. A chance to return to my roots in Odisha and connect with like-minded, passionate individuals working for the state's development resonated deeply with me. In 2019, I quit my corporate career, and by 2020, my co-founder Mr. Jitu Mishra and I launched a shared vision to promote slow, immersive travel focused on Odisha's heritage, textiles, and crafts.

We secured a contract with our state's Tourism Department to conduct heritage walks. I had the privilege of guiding Mrs. Kyoko Jaishankar on an architectural temple trail during Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in my city Bhubaneswar. Additionally, I was invited to lead a storytelling session for a spousal retreat attended by prominent business families from Mumbai, including members of the Ambani family who play a significant role in India's economic development.

Inspired by the state's rich cultural landscape, I now work towards empowering local artisans, especially women, by preserving traditional crafts and ensuring their sustain-

able future. As a first-generation entrepreneur in a family of bankers, doctors, and government servants, I faced numerous challenges. My mother stood by me unwaveringly, while my husband was initially hesitant but eventually supported my dedication and passion.

My journey is not without its challenges, The art of weaving demands long hours of meticulous work, which can be difficult to balance with household responsibilities. Moreover, navigating the complexities of the market and ensuring fair compensation for the artisan's craftsmanship adds an additional layer of difficulty. From curating free heritage experiences to inspire young minds to designing new weaves and sustaining artisan

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communities by personally purchasing their work—despite having no followers initially - the journey has evolved significantly.

Over time, many women weavers in Odisha have embraced collaboration and mutual support, overcoming obstacles and achieving remarkable success. The key to their success lies in strengthening public-private partnerships. By encouraging collaboration between government agencies, private enterprises, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a supportive ecosystem has been developed that not only provides financial backing for artisans but also ensures the long-term sustainability of traditional crafts.

Initiatives like **Odisha Potli** and **Sarna** play vital roles in connecting these artisans with wider markets, allowing them to showcase their work to a global audience. This exposure has not only enhanced their visibility but also contributed to the preservation of Odisha's cultural heritage, ensuring that these age-old traditions continue to thrive.

Take the story of Maya, a potter in Odisha, as a testament to this transformation. As Maya shapes clay into a beautiful pot on her wheel, she feels a deep sense of pride. She is not merely a potter; she is a guardian of Odisha's rich artisanal heritage. Through her work, she connects the past with the present, shaping a future that honours her craft.

The path may still be challenging, but with continued support and collaboration, Odisha's artistic legacy is poised to flourish, enriching the lives of artisans and captivating the world with its unique beauty.

This narrative highlights the crucial role women play in Odisha's handloom and handicraft industries. Their contributions not only drive economic growth but also preserve the region's cultural identity. By recognizing the challenges they face and supporting their entrepreneurial efforts, we can ensure the sustainability and growth of these traditional crafts for generations to come. In the current collaborative environment, artisans are achieving personal growth while also contributing to the broader success and prosperity of the nation.

One such initiative, Sarna, takes its name from the word 'grove', symbolizing its deep connection to the Sal tree in Odisha's Chotanagpur region. Local folklore holds that a village deity resides within the Sarna, a sacred grove located on the outskirts of a village. This grove, revered by

From curating free heritage experiences to inspire young minds to designing new weaves and sustaining artisan communities by personally purchasing their work—despite having no followers initially—the journey has evolved significantly.

the community, is a rare example of environmental conservation practices rooted in religious beliefs. Inspired by these ancient traditions, Sarna was founded in Bhubaneswar with a mission to create innovative cultural tourism experiences while promoting sustainable crafts and handlooms as offerings for discerning patrons.

Similarly, Odisha Potli is dedicated to reimagining Odisha's rich handloom and handicraft heritage by enhancing its utilitarian value. By adapting these traditional crafts into modern, functional forms, Odisha Potli seeks to introduce them to a wider audience while ensuring their sustainability in an ever-evolving world. Today, Odisha Potli has established a global presence, earning a reputation as a trusted brand for unique handcrafted and handwoven products.

Odisha's handloom and handicraft sectors represent not only a source of livelihood but also a testament to the resilience and creativity of its artisans, particularly women. Through continued support and collaboration, we ensure that these crafts not only survive but thrive, contributing to both the economic growth and cultural preservation of Odisha.

In conclusion, Odisha's handloom and handicraft sectors represent not only a source of livelihood but also a testament to the resilience and creativity of its artisans, particularly women. Through continued support and collaboration, we ensure that these crafts not only survive but thrive, contributing to both the economic growth and cultural preservation of Odisha.

While the phrase women in business is often celebrated, the reality is that we still have a long way to go. However, women today play a crucial role in driving our country's development. Through my work in community-driven and community-managed tourism, I collaborate with women for business sustainability and can only commend the progress we are making.

At the end I would like to say that my journey has been challenging, and there is still a long way to go. I encourage every startup founder to dedicate 1,000 unwavering days to building their business. With nine out of ten startups failing, endurance and commitment are the true determinants of success.

Art, Entrepreneurship, and Empowerment: My Journey as a Contemporary Artist



Sanjukta Arun Barik

Founder, Director, La Aartemisia Private Limited.

From a corporate boardroom to the vibrant world of fine arts, my journey has been anything but conventional. I am **Sanjukta Arun Barik**, a Mumbai-based contemporary artist, founder, and director of **La Aartemisia Private Limited**, a company dedicated to lifestyle products and fine arts. I also own

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Gender equality is no longer a dream but a reality in the making. Whether in education, careers, or entrepreneurship, women are standing tall alongside men.
”

Label **Sanjukta Arun** and **Sanjukta Arun Signature**, both of which focus on wearable art while providing a platform for rural artisans.

Though I pursued an MBA in **Sales & Marketing and**

International Business, and had a brief stint in the corporate world, my true calling was always art. I eventually embraced my passion, transitioning into a full-time artist, and have never looked back. Over the past **30** years, I have showcased my work in **80 exhibitions worldwide**, including **28 solo** shows. One of my most significant milestones was my solo exhibition at **Nehru Centre, London**, held in association with the **Indian High Commission**.

Despite being largely self-taught, I was fortunate to have received initial training from my Guruji, a senior alumna of Sir JJ School of Arts, who mentored me for over six years. This one-on-one guidance refined my artistic skills and gave me the confidence to carve a niche for myself in the art industry. Every day remains a new learning experience, and the journey to gaining recognition was not easy. It took time for people to take my work seriously, but perseverance always pays off.

Recognitions and Achievements

The past few years have been particularly rewarding, with several accolades recognizing my contributions to the field of art and culture:

- Mid Day Most Powerful Woman Award 2023 (Iconic Entrepreneur – Art & Culture)
- All India Women Achievers Award 2023
- Crazy Tales Powerful Women Award 2023
- Pillars of Maharashtra Award for Art & Culture
- AIWAA Honour of Merit Award
- IFAC Award for Outstanding Contribution to Arts & Entertainment
- Shri Mahatma Gandhi Rashtriya Abhiman Puraskar for Excellence in Arts & Culture (2023)
- 50 Top Most Iconic Women of India Award 2023
- Awarded Art Director for AAI, Greece (an affiliate of UNESCO)

These recognitions are not just personal milestones but validations of the belief that **passion, dedication, and hard work always find their way to success**.

Art with a Cause

For me, **art is more than self-expression - it is a means to give back to society**. Through my work, I have been able to support **children battling cancer** and those with **special needs**. My exhibitions have often been curated

with a purpose, raising awareness and funds for meaningful causes.

Significant Exhibitions

Some of the most memorable showcases of my work have taken place at:

- IFACS Gallery, New Delhi
- Visual Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
- Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- Heart to Heart with Nature – A special exhibition at Nehru Centre, Mumbai, benefiting children fighting cancer

Support System & Inspirations

I owe much of my journey to the unwavering support of my **family**, who have been my pillars of strength. My

“Art is more than self-expression—it is a means to give back to society. Through my work, I have been able to support children battling cancer and those with special needs. My exhibitions have often been curated with a purpose, raising awareness and funds for meaningful causes.”

parents instilled in me the values of honesty and discipline, shaping the person I am today.

In my professional journey, I have been guided and inspired by incredible mentors like **Mrs. Rupa Naik, Executive Director of the World Trade Center**, whom I consider not just a mentor but a best friend, philosopher, and guide. Ms. Priya Pansare, Director of Trade Promotions, WTC, is another remarkable woman I deeply admire and share a close association with.

A special mention goes to my music guru, Farida Khanum

Ji, who has enriched my life with music, adding yet another dimension to my creative pursuits.

Breaking Barriers in the Art World

One of the defining aspects of my career has been proving that **you don't need a degree in fine arts to make an impact**. Coming from a corporate background, entering the **art industry** was a challenge, but persistence and passion helped me create a distinct identity. My label of wearable art has brought rural artisans onto the global map, creating sustainable livelihoods while celebrating traditional craftsmanship.

“Recognitions are not just personal milestones but validations of the belief that passion, dedication, and hard work always find their way to success.”

Message to Aspiring Women Achievers

To every **woman entrepreneur and aspiring artist**, my advice is simple:

- **There are no shortcuts to success.** Hard work and honesty are the foundations of long-term growth.
- **Be patient and stay focused.** Success takes time, and perseverance is key.
- **The world is evolving.** Women today have opportunities across all sectors—seize them!
- **Gender equality is no longer a dream but a reality in the making.** Whether in education, careers, or entrepreneurship, women are standing tall alongside men.

The Road Ahead

The journey is far from over. **Art and entrepreneurship are ever-evolving, and I believe there is always more to achieve, more to learn, and more to contribute.** The avenues for women today are endless—we just have to be bold enough to conquer them. ■

From Humble Beginnings to Culinary Success: The Journey of "B2D - Breakfast to Dinner"



Sasmita Nayak

Founder, B2D Food Services

The irresistible aroma of freshly packed tiffin boxes, brimming with hot, homemade meals and children's favorites, became the soul of 'B2D - Breakfast to Dinner' in the most unexpected way. It all started in the modest kitchen of my rented home, where the vision for B2D first took shape. As a passionate home

“Doubts crept in, and I questioned if I was truly capable of achieving my dream. But, through it all, my husband stood beside me. In a society often limited by gender biases, where women are discouraged from pursuing their dreams, we persevered.”

cook with an unwavering love for crafting culinary delights, I had always dreamed of sharing my creations with the world.

“The success of B2D stood as a testament to the power of passion, perseverance, and the belief that anything is possible when you dare to dream.”

In the beginning, I catered to working mothers, preparing tiffins and breakfast for their children, while also serving meals to neighborhood students and bachelors. What started as a simple idea soon grew beyond my wildest expectations. Orders began flooding in, sometimes leading to sheer chaos—there were even moments when I had to turn down requests, as I was managing everything alone. But destiny had grander plans in store.

The Pandemic Blessing: When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, I feared the worst for my small venture. The lockdowns, social isolation, and economic downturn seemed like they would drown me in poverty. However, in the midst of what felt like an impossible time, the crisis unexpectedly became a turning point for me. Taking a leap of faith, I began delivering meals to those in isolation, including COVID-19 patients. Despite the health risks, we remained committed to providing nourishment and comfort to those in need during their recovery.

During this period, we received overwhelming support from NRIs who entrusted us with the responsibility of delivering food to their elderly, homebound parents. Their trust pushed us to go above and beyond, reinforcing our confidence and deepening our sense of purpose. The heartfelt gratitude and positive feedback we received filled us with pride and strengthened our resolve.

Being a woman in the restaurant industry was never going to be easy. But with the unwavering support of my husband, Mr. Pratap Kumar Nayak, and the courage to challenge societal norms, we began breaking barriers. My dream had always been to be my own boss—to turn my passion into a thriving business while making a meaningful difference in society. And thus, B2D was born.

The Birth of B2D - Breakfast to Dinner: The idea of

opening a restaurant was never the primary goal; rather, it was the growing demand for my dishes through cloud kitchens that inspired me to take the leap. My regular customers wanted a place where they could gather and savour my home-cooked meals, and this idea simmered in my mind for a long time. But the journey was not without its challenges.

Finding the right location, securing funding, and navigating the complexities of the food industry were daunting obstacles. Doubts crept in, and I questioned if I was truly capable of achieving my dream. But, through it all, my husband stood beside me like a pillar of support, despite facing health issues of his own. In a society often limited by gender biases, where women are discouraged from pursuing their dreams, we persevered.

With the help of family, friends, and the unwavering belief in our vision, we overcame these hurdles. We meticulously sourced ingredients, crafted a warm and inviting ambiance, and curated a menu filled with dishes that showcased my culinary talents. Breaking away from traditional roles, I secured funding, built strong networks, and sought mentorship—all essential steps in transforming this dream into reality.

“We listened attentively to feedback, both positive and sometimes harsh, always striving to improve.”

Together, we learned to adapt to setbacks and embrace the challenges along the way. We thought outside the box, constantly innovating to provide unique and delicious meals. It was our unwavering dedication, hard work, and resilience that laid the foundation for B2D's success.

The B2D Experience : Finally, the doors of B2D opened, unveiling a space filled with the promise of culinary delights. The response was overwhelming. Word spread like wildfire, and soon, the restaurant became a beloved spot for families, couples, and friends. The five-star Google ratings and constant flow of patrons reflected the success of our venture.

As we worked tirelessly, our passion for food and customer satisfaction shone through. We listened attentively to feedback, both positive and sometimes

“I aim to create more job opportunities for women, empower them, and provide them with the tools and skills needed for a better life.”

harsh, always striving to improve. Over time, B2D became more than just a restaurant; it became a community hub where families celebrated birthdays, couples enjoyed romantic dinners, and friends shared laughter over delicious meals. Our dream had come true, and we had created a space where people could connect, share joy, and make lasting memories. The success of B2D stood as a testament to the power of passion, perseverance, and the belief that anything is possible when you dare to dream.

Guidance and Support - A Strong Foundation: Along the way, we received invaluable guidance from experienced entrepreneurs and industry experts. Building a network of women entrepreneurs through initiatives like Millets Mission and Mission Shakti was essential to our growth. Encouragement and support from loved ones provided the emotional strength needed to keep pushing forward.

As B2D continues to grow, I remain dedicated to expanding the business and boosting revenue while also empowering more women like me—women seeking a livelihood and the opportunity to build a future with dignity and ethics.

Looking Forward - Creating a Positive Impact: My ultimate goal is not only to expand our business but also to make a lasting, positive impact on our community and society. Through B2D, I aim to create more job opportunities for women, empower them, and provide them with the tools and skills needed for a better life. By serving finger-licking, memorable meals, I hope to touch lives and create a legacy of love and success.

The journey is far from over, and there is much more to achieve. Together with my team and family, I will continue to serve our community, one plate at a time, and build a business that will leave a lasting impression for years to come.

From Dhanbad to the Global Stage



Shafaque Ali

Director, Shafaque Designs Pvt, Ltd

As a young woman entrepreneur and fashion designer, my journey has been a testament to the power of dreams and determination. Hailing from Dhanbad, Jharkhand, and growing up in a middle-class family, I was driven by a deep desire to transcend the ordinary and create a life of extraordinary impact. Cinema and television opened my eyes to a world beyond the confines of my small town, fueling my aspirations with stories of possibility.

However, my greatest source of inspiration has always been my mother, a woman ahead of her time. Her impeccable sense of fashion, dedication to education, and innovative approach to homemaking instilled in me the belief that boundaries are meant to be challenged.

Fashion diplomacy has been a cornerstone of my start-up journey, enabling me to connect with high-net-worth individuals (HNIs), government dignitaries, and leaders from across the globe. These interactions have not only expanded my horizons but also reinforced my belief that fashion is deeply intertwined with governance, culture, and policy. Through my work, I have seen how fashion can serve as a bridge between nations, fostering dialogue and collaboration.

My design ethos has been profoundly shaped by real-life

experiences and international exposure. Throughout, I've learned that fashion is more than what we wear; it's a reflection of who we are, where we come from, and the change we wish to see in the world. It's a language that transcends borders, unites communities, and drives progress - one stitch at a time.

Milestones that Defined my Career

My exploration in the world of fashion began with a significant milestone - being selected to pursue a Master's in Fashion Design at Polimoda, Italy. This opportunity not only honed my skills but also opened doors to a global perspective on design.

My career took flight when I joined Hugo Boss in New York, where I gained invaluable experience in the luxury fashion industry. However, the true turning point came when I decided to launch my own fashion startup.

In 2023, I had the honor of representing India at the BRICS Fashion Summit in Moscow, Russia. Being among the four designers selected to showcase my brand, **SAHAFAQUE**, was a moment of immense pride. The summit provided a platform to highlight the "**Made in India**" initiative, and I was privileged to speak on a panel discussing the importance of cultural sustainability and craftsmanship in fashion. This experience not only elevated my brand but also reinforced my commitment to promoting Indian artistry on the global stage.

“
Never devalue yourself. Believe in
your potential and remain
committed to constant learning.
Success may not come overnight,
but every step you take brings
you closer to your goals.
”

Another defining moment came in October 2024, when 'Shafaque', made a spectacular debut in Spain at INDIA HOUSE, Madrid. Hosted by the Indian Ambassador, Dinesh K. Patnaik, this event marked one year of my business and celebrated the fusion of Indian heritage with contemporary design. Additionally, the launch of 'Shafaque' at AJIO LUXE in 2025, backed by Reliance Fashions, has been a significant milestone.

Challenges and Resilience

Returning to India from New York after the COVID-19 pandemic was a period of personal and professional turmoil. The uncertainty of the times forced me to rethink my approach and adapt to the changing landscape of the fashion industry. It was during this phase that I launched an artisan-pre-luxe label from Mumbai, focusing on blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design.

My efforts were recognized at the BRICS+ Fashion Summit and Moscow Fashion Week, where I championed the "Made in India" narrative. Emphasizing the importance of craft and cultural sustainability, I have consistently worked towards creating a brand that resonates with authenticity and luxury. Recently, I had the opportunity to address the Paris Fashion Week, where I highlighted the urgent need for eco-conscious practices in the fashion industry.

“
 Women’s Climate Resilience Initiative (WCRI), launched in 2025 in rural India : This grassroots movement, led by women farmers and entrepreneurs, empowers them to combat climate change through sustainable practices, proving that gender equality and environmental sustainability are interconnected.
 ”

The Formula for Success

In my experience, success is a combination of three key elements: aptitude, attitude, and connections. Aptitude ensures that you have the skills and knowledge to excel in your field. Attitude determines how you navigate challenges and seize opportunities. Connections, both personal and professional, provide the support and collaboration needed to grow.

A Message to Aspiring Women Achievers

To all the aspiring women achievers and entrepreneurs: never devalue yourself. Believe in your potential and remain committed to constant learning. Patience and perseverance are your greatest allies. Success may not come overnight, but every step you take brings you closer to your goals.

Whether you come from a small town or a bustling city, your dreams are valid, and your potential is limitless. Embrace your uniqueness, stay true to your values, and never stop striving for excellence. Together, we can create a world where every woman has the opportunity to shine.

"My small-town roots inspire me to create a global narrative where authenticity and luxury converge, empowering women and protecting our planet."

– Shafaque Ali

My thoughts on the role of gender equality in economic and social development

Gender equality is not just a moral imperative—it is the foundation of sustainable economic and social development worldwide. From India to the global stage, empowering women and girls has the power to transform communities, drive innovation, and fuel economic growth.

In India, initiatives like **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** have made significant strides in improving girls’ access to education, particularly in STEM fields, while platforms like **SheTrades** have enabled women entrepreneurs to access global markets, fostering economic independence.

Global initiatives such as UN Women’s **Generation Equality Forum** mobilize resources to advance gender parity. Another inspiring development is the **Women’s Climate Resilience Initiative (WCRI)**, launched in 2025 in rural India. This grassroots movement, led by women farmers and entrepreneurs, empowers them to combat climate change through sustainable practices, proving that gender equality and environmental sustainability are interconnected.

‘We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back.’



The Path to Purpose: Overcoming Obstacles and Inspiring Change



Shraddha Subramanian

India's First Intuition Expert, Businesses Manifestation & Executive Leadership Coach; Founder - Sparkling Soul, Breakthrough Sports Academy, and SJT Wellness Center

“
My mission is to make transformation easy, fast, and fun—breaking traditional coaching barriers and helping individuals and businesses achieve extraordinary results.
”

Roots of Strength: The Values That Shaped Me:

My parents always believed in me, and in many ways, I am a reflection of both of them.

My mother **Sheela** was a devoted, sincere, and dedicated individual with deep faith in God and the journey of life. Her spirituality had a profound impact on me, shaping my intuitive nature and enabling me to identify deep-rooted

subconscious blocks within minutes.

My father **Jayant** was a true leader who taught me to express myself fully and assertively, focus on solutions, and always find ways to help others.

Together, they provided a strong foundation for my life, and I am deeply grateful for their openness and encouragement in every aspect of my journey.

Key Life Events:

Coming Full Circle: My Journey into Coaching

If I were to write my autobiography, I would title it “Why Coaching Excites Me!!!” because my journey has truly come full circle. From a young athlete to a corporate leader and now a transformational coach, every chapter of my life has shaped the work I do today.

The Beginning: A Gift of Athletics (1992)

In the fifth grade, my parents enrolled me in athletics coaching, a decision that proved to be one of the greatest gifts of my life. Training as a national-level hurdler instilled in me confidence, resilience, leadership, and the ability to handle pressure. It built my mental toughness and shaped my belief that any challenge could be overcome. At just ten years old, I had no idea that these experiences would later guide me towards a career in coaching.

Corporate Exposure & Global Perspectives (2004–2018)

My corporate career began with TCS/Morgan Stanley, where I had the incredible opportunity to live in Tokyo for over two years. Interacting with clients and business partners on a global scale, and experiencing the fast-paced world of investment banking and trading first hand, broadened my understanding of business and leadership. Today, I use these insights to help my clients gain clarity and work towards their bigger picture in business and life.

Moving to HSBC in 2009 marked another significant shift. The corporate culture was vastly different, and adapting to it gave me invaluable learning experiences. Over nine years, I transitioned from a senior developer to a global leadership role. This period was not just about career

“
 You are powerful beyond
 measure. Never let anyone—be it
 family, society, or self-
 doubt—dictate your potential.
 YOU define yourself, on your own
 terms, and you own it completely.
 ”

growth but also personal evolution—preparing me for a much larger shift in my life.

A Turning Point: Cancer and a New Purpose (2012)

In 2012, my life took an unexpected turn when I was diagnosed with cancer. As a former athlete who had always been physically and mentally strong, this shook me to my core. But cancer came with a message: it was time for me to help others navigate challenges and fast-track their journey to success. I emerged with a renewed purpose—to share my corporate experiences and personal growth with people in a way that would truly make a difference.

Stepping into Coaching (2013–2015)

In 2013, I began journaling my desires, a practice I had always believed in. That August, I attended a two-day workshop at my organization and soon started incorporating my learnings into internal training sessions.

By 2014–2015, I had trained over 250 professionals, including senior management teams. Experienced leaders, with over 25 years in their fields, started booking time with me to discuss their challenges. I felt immense gratitude that they trusted me with their deep-rooted concerns and that my guidance helped them achieve major breakthroughs. This trust laid the foundation for my leap of faith into the coaching business.

Embracing My Calling (2016–2018)

The birth of my daughter in 2016 was a powerful moment—a victory over cancer and a testament to life's miracles. In 2017, as part of my yearly goals, I decided to deepen my knowledge of coaching and became a Certified Life Coach from ICF. The following year, I took a

sabbatical—and never looked back.

In 2018, I published my first book, *Circle of Perspectives*, and left my corporate career to fully invest in coaching. It was a bold step as my daughter was just 2.5 years and my mother was sick needing attention, but one that felt deeply aligned with my purpose.

Navigating Loss & Creating Impact (2019–2021)

The years 2019 and 2020 brought immense grief as I faced the illness and eventual passing of my parents. Yet, through this pain, I found even greater clarity in my mission.

By 2021, I was conducting 20-minute power conversations with business owners, helping them gain insight into their businesses. Knowing that my work was creating an impact on India's economy and beyond reinforced that I had truly "made it" in my home country—helping businesses thrive and transform.

“
 With natural intuition, empathy,
 and a collaborative spirit, women
 bring a unique edge to
 leadership, decision-making, and
 innovation.
 ”

Becoming India's First Intuition Expert & Business Manifestation Coach

Today, I wear many hats: Intuition Expert, Business Manifestation and Executive Coach, NLP Master Practitioner, Mind Coach for Indian Players. IICA Certified Independent Director, Author, Speaker, Angel Investor and Founder & CEO of Sparkling Soul, Breakthrough Sports Academy, and SJT Wellness Centre

Over the years, I developed my own signature Jackpot Method, which has helped countless businesses and individuals unlock success with ease. My approach to coaching is unique in several ways:

1. Intuition-Based Deep Discovery – In just a three-minute conversation, I can identify deep-rooted subconscious blocks, ensuring that paid coaching sessions are entirely solution-focused.

2. Rapid Transformation – I streamline the preparation process for transformation, achieving outstanding results in a significantly shorter time.

3. Breakthroughs in Every Session – Many clients experience massive opportunities and shifts even after a single free discovery call.

The Future: Disrupting the Coaching Industry

In an era where products are delivered in minutes, my work in human and business transformation is creating ripples. My mission is to make transformation easy, fast, and fun-breaking traditional coaching barriers and helping individuals and businesses achieve extraordinary results.

My journey has come full circle. From a young athlete learning resilience to a corporate leader gaining global

True progress happens when men and women work together as equals, harnessing their diverse strengths to build inclusive, thriving businesses and societies.

insights, and now a transformational coach changing lives and businesses, every step has led me to this moment. And I know this is just the beginning.

Overcoming Challenges: A Journey of Resilience

1997 – A Lesson in Perseverance

As a 10th-grade student, I was on the brink of achieving a significant milestone-qualifying for the India Camp at the national-level hurdle race. After dedicating five years of relentless training, I knew the gold medal was within my grasp. However, life had different plans. A false start-twice-cost me my place. It was my first major failure, one that shattered me. But in that heartbreak, I found resilience, learning that setbacks are merely stepping stones in the grand journey of life. Today coaching Indian players to build their mental resilience and helping them showcase their peak performance makes me feel I have made it to the India Camp.

2012 – A Fight for Life and Purpose

In 2012, my world took an unexpected turn-I was diagnosed with a rare form of uterine cancer. From being in a phase of life where I was ready to bring new life into this world, I found myself battling for my own. The resilience I had built at 16 was tested once again, and this time, it transformed me. Surviving cancer was not just about overcoming a disease; it was a wake-up call to align with my true purpose-helping people navigate their personal and professional challenges. It was a defining moment that led me to trust my intuition and carve a path that brings fulfillment every day.

2019-2020 – Navigating Loss and Rebuilding Strength

Losing my mother in 2019 and my father in 2020 was a heartbreak beyond words. My mother, diagnosed with stage 4 cancer in 2010, defied medical predictions and lived nine more years-an embodiment of strength and determination. She was my first guru, my biggest cheerleader, and the one who embraced my decision to leave corporate life in 2018 and start my own business. Just as I was coming to terms with her passing, my father was diagnosed with blood cancer in early 2020. His passing in August that year left me carrying the weight of grief once again.

The journey of healing from these profound losses was not easy, but it strengthened my resolve. Overcoming grief and continuing to build my purpose-driven career in the last four years has been one of my most challenging yet rewarding transformations.

Major Milestones in My Career

- **2004-2018** – Corporate Career
- **2019** – Founded Sparkling Soul, becoming the first entrepreneur in my family. Today I have 21 years of leadership experience and over 3,500 hours of coaching, having impacted 7500 lives across 23 countries.
- **2020** – Founded Breakthrough Sports Academy to provide peak performance mind coaching for Indian athletes.
- **2023** – Established the Sheela Jayant Thergaonkar Wellness Centre (SJT Wellness Centre) to support cancer patients in their healing journey.
- **2024** – Professional Certified Coach (PCC) from International Coach Federation, Angel Investor.
- **2025** – IICA Certified Independent Director.

Recognitions and Awards

My contributions have been recognized through numerous prestigious accolades and media features, including:

- Global Women Leader award – World Women Leadership Congress (2024, 2025)
- Featured in Fortune India Magazine as one of the Most Dynamic Personalities (2022)
- Named among Outlook India's Top 10 Dynamic Leaders (2022)
- Recognized by Insights Success as one of the 40U40 Brightest Business Leaders
- Women Entrepreneur Award (2020-2023)
- TOP SME Business of the Year by Great Companies (2021, 2022)
- National Women Excellence Award for Executive Coaching (2022)
- Certificate of Recognition by IMCC Myanmar
- Vocational Excellence Award by the Rotary Club of Pune
- Speaker at NLP India Summit (2020) & The World United - Global Transformation Festival (2021), impacting six continents, 200 nations, and 7.5 billion people.

Unlocking Success: A Roadmap for Growth

Success isn't just about hard work-it's about honing your energy, setting intentions, and trusting the process. Here's how you can cultivate yourselves for lasting success:

- **Protect Your Energy:** Energy leaks-whether through thoughts, people and situations-can drain your focus and energy. Learn to protect and channel your energy where it truly matters.
- **Set Boundaries:** A successful career doesn't require you to be everywhere-recognize your worth and choose to create harmony in personal and professional life.
- **Surrender and Trust:** Give your best, set your intentions, and let go of resistance. Trust that the right opportunities are unfolding.
- **Rituals and Mindfulness:** Small, daily habits ground you in the present, keeping you aligned with your goals while ensuring a deep sense of fulfillment.

A Call to Women Achievers and Entrepreneurs

You are powerful beyond measure. Never let anyone-be it family, society, or self-doubt-dictate your potential. YOU define yourself, on your own terms, and you own it completely. You are strong, resourceful, and fearless. Stand tall, love yourself unapologetically, and always lead from the front!

Gender Equality: The Key to Collective Growth

Women are not just participants in economic and social progress-they are catalysts for transformation. When a woman rises, she lights the way for others. With natural

The future is shaped by those who dare to challenge limits—so step forward, claim your space, and create the impact you were meant for!

intuition, empathy, and a collaborative spirit, women bring a unique edge to leadership, decision-making, and innovation. True progress happens when men and women work together as equals, harnessing their diverse strengths to build inclusive, thriving businesses and societies.

The future is shaped by those who dare to challenge limits-so step forward, claim your space, and create the impact you were meant for!

As I reflect on my journey, I am deeply grateful for everyone who has shaped the person I am today. My parents, **Sheela** and **Jayant** Thergaonkar, my daughter Ira, and my husband Subramanian R, have been my greatest pillars of strength. Beyond family, the wisdom found in books, the guidance of mentors and coaches, the unwavering support of friends, and even the skepticism of those who doubted me have all played a vital role in my growth.

Every experience, every challenge, and every connection has contributed to this incredible journey, and for that, I am truly thankful.



Stitching a New Future: My Leap from Banking to Business



Sneha Santosh Kudnekar

Proprietor, Snehshree Creations

My transition from employee to entrepreneur was anything but conventional. It was a journey filled with twists and turns, uncertainty, and triumphs. However, one thing remained constant - my passion for creating something of my own.

In this article, I will share my journey of shifting from a corporate career to becoming a successful entrepreneur in the tailoring industry. As the founder of **Snehshree Creations**, my professional life began in banking. Leaving behind an 11-year successful banking career was not an easy decision - who would have thought I would trade my suit for a sewing machine?

What started as a simple hobby soon became a defining chapter of my life. Everything changed when I got married and became a mother to a beautiful daughter. Balancing my job with family responsibilities became increasingly challenging, and I realized I wasn't able to spend enough time with my child. That's when I decided to take a leap of faith and start my own business.

My husband's unwavering support and encouragement gave me the confidence to pursue my passion. Driven by my love for fashion and creativity, I made a bold decision to pivot into the world of tailoring. Today, I am proud to

have successfully balanced my work and family life.

With a small investment and a great deal of determination, I began offering custom tailoring services to friends, family, and neighbors from the comfort of my home. Running my own tailoring business has been a fulfilling experience, allowing me to blend my business acumen with artistic skills. Nothing brings me more joy than creating customized garments that make my customers feel confident, satisfied, and stylish.

From a Home-Based Startup to a Thriving Business

Launching my tailoring business from home was both nerve-wracking and exhilarating. Balancing family responsibilities with business demands was challenging, but the flexibility of working from home made it possible. It provided the perfect opportunity to test my business ideas, refine my skills, and gradually scale up. Additionally, keeping overhead costs low allowed me to focus on building a loyal customer base.

I invested in quality equipment, and through word-of-mouth referrals and positive reviews, my business began to flourish. I still vividly remember setting up my sewing machine in our car porch to offer tailoring services. As my business grew, I expanded my product line to cater to the diverse needs of my customers. In addition to tailoring, I started offering saree falls, linings, saree petticoats, and a beautiful collection of cotton sarees. To complement these, I introduced a wide range of women's accessories.

Recently, I ventured into manufacturing aprons, lab coats, and boiler suits, supplying them to pharmaceutical companies, the food processing industry, and hospitals. This new venture has been an exciting challenge, and I take great pride in the positive response from clients who appreciate the quality, comfort, and durability of my garments.

Today, I am proud to say that my business has evolved into a **"one-stop shop"** for women's fashion needs. I am deeply grateful to all my satisfied customers whose support has been instrumental in this journey.

Overcoming Challenges and Achieving Growth

Building my business has been a journey filled with both challenges and rewards. One of the most significant hurdles I faced was securing the necessary funds to

expand. As a new entrepreneur without an established credit history, accessing financial support was difficult, and managing cash flow required careful planning and discipline.

Beyond financial constraints, scaling the business presented new complexities. Meeting increasing customer demands while maintaining high-quality standards was a constant priority. Additionally, staying ahead of evolving fashion trends required continuous learning and adaptation.

Despite these challenges, I take pride in the steady growth of my business. Expanding my product range has allowed me to cater to diverse customer needs across multiple industries. The strong relationships I have built with my clients and the trust they place in my work continue to motivate me.

Balancing entrepreneurship with personal responsibilities has not always been easy, but it has been one of my most fulfilling achievements. Knowing that I can pursue my passion while remaining present for my family makes every challenge worth overcoming.

A Bold New Chapter and a Legacy of Growth

The year 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, marked a turning point in my life. After spending 19 years in the tailoring industry, I made the bold decision to leave behind city life and establish a boutique and manufacturing unit in a village. Seeing my brand, Snehshree Creations, thrive in this new setting fills me with immense pride and serves as a reminder that it is never too late to chase new dreams.

Beyond building a successful business, I take great satisfaction in creating job opportunities for others in my community. My journey as a woman entrepreneur in a traditionally male-dominated field has been recognized in the media, further validating the impact of my work. Through my business, I have also been able to support local charities and initiatives, giving back to the very community that has embraced and uplifted me. Looking ahead, I am eager to explore new markets, introduce innovative products, and continue expanding my reach while remaining dedicated to delivering quality and excellence.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned is to embrace challenges as stepping stones to growth. Every obstacle has provided an opportunity to refine my

approach and strengthen my resilience. Staying true to my vision and values has been essential - while external pressures can be overwhelming, my commitment to my principles has guided every decision I have made, from product offerings to customer relationships.

Reflecting on my 25-year entrepreneurial journey, I still remember the early days when financial struggles and self-doubt threatened to derail my ambitions. Yet, instead of giving up, I used those challenges as fuel for learning, innovation, and perseverance. I owe much of my success to my mother, who instilled in me the values of hard work, dedication, and creativity. Her influence laid the foundation for my entrepreneurial spirit, and it is her teachings that continue to drive my passion and commitment to this day.

Empowering Women to Build and Thrive

As a woman entrepreneur, I have realized that my journey can serve as an inspiration for other women, showing them that they, too, have the strength to

“
Entrepreneurship is not just a destination-it is a journey that requires dedication, perseverance, and hard work. While the road may be demanding, the rewards make it all worthwhile.
”

overcome challenges and achieve success. Women bring unique perspectives and resilience to every field, making a lasting impact through their contributions.

Entrepreneurship is not just a destination-it is a journey that requires dedication, perseverance, and hard work. While the road may be demanding, the rewards make it all worthwhile.

To all the women aspiring to start their own business, I say: **"From Passion to Profit: Women in Business!"**



The Unplanned Path: How I Found My Calling



Trapti Shinde

Founder & Director, Treleva Technologies

The People Who Shaped My Journey: Family, Mentors, and Team

As Michelle Obama once rightfully said, "There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish." I was made aware of the limitless opportunities that lay at my feet at a very young age.

I found my first inspiration in my mother. She was not very highly educated but what she has a wilful spirit that remained stubborn until she achieved her most desired result. Her determination to carve out her own identity despite societal constraints left a deep impression on me. She taught me that independence isn't just about financial freedom, it's about having the confidence to make your own choices.

As I navigated adulthood, my husband became a pillar of strength. He encouraged me to take risks, to challenge the norms, and most importantly, to believe in myself. There were moments when self-doubt crept in, but his unwavering belief in my potential kept me going.

Today, my biggest inspiration is my children. They make me want to be better, to push beyond my limits, and to never stop learning. I want them to see a mother who is

fearless, who embraces challenges, and who is always ready to explore new horizons. If I want them to dream big, I must lead by example.

And then, there's my team, the people who bring my vision to life every single day. They are passionate, dedicated, and ambitious. Watching them grow and thrive fuels my drive to create bigger opportunities, not just for myself, but for them as well. They remind me that success is not a solo journey, it is a collective effort we tackle together as a team.

An Unconventional Path: From Engineer to Entrepreneur

My career hasn't been something people would consider conventional. After completing my engineering degree, I wore many hats, working in IT, serving as a principal of a

Success is a continuous process, not a destination. If I had to break it down into a formula, it would be: Quality + Innovation + Customer Centric Approach = Sustainable Growth.

pre-primary school, training teachers, and conducting soft skills workshops for engineering students. Each role taught me something invaluable, but nothing prepared me for the leap I took in 2020.

When COVID-19 disrupted the world, I saw an opportunity. The pandemic made remote work a necessity, and I realized there was a gap that I could fill. I took a bold step and started my own IT company **Treleva Technologies**, not just as a means of personal growth, but as a way to generate employment, especially for those who needed work-from-home opportunities. This decision was a turning point in my life, marking the beginning of my entrepreneurial journey.

The Roadblocks to Building a Dream: Challenges of Entrepreneurship

Starting a company from scratch came with its own set of challenges. One of the biggest hurdles was credibility. In

the initial days, convincing clients to trust a new company was difficult. And building that trust required consistent effort, delivering high-quality results, and proving our worth time and again.

Managing finances was another challenge. Unlike established businesses, a startup doesn't have the luxury of financial stability. Every penny had to be strategically invested to ensure sustainability and growth. Learning to balance operational costs while expanding the business was a steep learning curve I never expected I'd have to navigate. Scaling up was yet another obstacle. As the business grew, so did the responsibilities. Managing a growing team, meeting increasing client demands, and ensuring we maintain the same level of service quality requires meticulous planning and adaptability.

“There will be moments of doubt, and there will be challenges that seem invincible. But take that first step then take another and another... eventually, you will carve a path that is uniquely yours.”

My Success Formula

Success, to me, is a continuous process, not a destination. If I had to break it down into a formula, it would be this:

Quality + Innovation + Customer Centric Approach = Sustainable Growth.

Delivering quality results has always been a priority. No matter the project, our aim is to add value to our clients' businesses. Feedback, whether positive or critical, is taken seriously because it helps us improve. We at Treleva Technologies believe in offering innovative IT solutions; whether it's customized software, SAAS products, websites, or mobile apps, tailored to meet our clients' unique needs.

Above all, we keep our customers at the heart of everything we do. Their success is our success, and this mindset has been instrumental in our journey so far.

Message for Aspiring Women Achievers and Entrepreneurs

There will be moments of doubt, and there will be challenges that seem invincible. But take that first step then take another and another... eventually, you will carve a path that is uniquely yours.

You don't have to know everything before you start. Growth comes from taking action, making mistakes, and learning along the way. Trust yourself, surround yourself with people who uplift you, and never stop believing in your vision. The world needs more women who dare to lead.

The Importance of Gender Equality for Economic and Social Development

Gender equality is not just a moral imperative, it is an economic necessity. When women have equal access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities, economies grow faster, workplaces become more creative and collaborative, and societies become more progressive.

A balanced workforce brings diverse perspectives, which leads to better decision-making and innovation. Companies that prioritize gender diversity are proven to perform better, both in terms of productivity and profitability.

Beyond the corporate world, empowering women has a ripple effect. Educated and financially independent women contribute to healthier families, better communities, and stronger nations. When we invest in women, we invest in the future.

Final Thoughts

My journey has been one of transformation, resilience, and continuous learning. Each challenge has been a stepping stone, each failure a lesson, and each success a motivation to aim higher.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, let's remember that every woman's journey is unique, but the one thing that binds us all is our potential to create change. Whether in business, technology, education, or any other field, women are redefining the rules and breaking barriers every single day.

And if my journey can inspire even one woman to take that leap of faith, then every struggle has been worth it!



Many Roles, One Vision: Educating, Empowering, and Elevating Lives



Venecia Vaz George

Founder, St. Anthony Medical Store; Co -Founder, St. Anthony Supermarket; Founder and Partner, St. Anthony Marketing

My Early Years: Nurtured by Family, Guided by Passion

I was born and raised in Mumbai, a city that has always held a special place in my heart. My mother, the eldest of five sisters and one brother, played a pivotal role in shaping my life. My maternal aunts and uncle were overjoyed by my arrival, and as the firstborn, I was cherished as the apple of their eye. Growing up in a family full of love and support, I was fortunate to feel surrounded by warmth, care, and unwavering affection from a young age. These formative years laid the foundation for my values and aspirations. My family was rooted in strong values and principles, yet it embraced a liberal approach to life. Although I was an only child, my parents always encouraged me to follow my passions, speak my mind, and uphold the values of integrity, humility, compassion, and mutual respect.

I completed my primary education in Mumbai, but soon after, my family relocated to my Dad's ancestral home at Carmona, in South Goa, where I continued my schooling and later completed my higher secondary education. It

was during these years that I developed a deep passion for learning, particularly in the English language. This love for the language led me to pursue a bachelor's degree in English, followed by a teacher training course. I was fortunate to secure a teaching job soon after completing my studies.

From Classroom to Commerce: My Journey of Reinvention

For 14 fulfilling years, I worked as an English teacher for 9th and 10th-grade students. I found great joy in shaping young minds and guiding them through their academic journey. However, after much reflection, I felt the need for a new challenge and decided to take Voluntary Retirement (VRS) to explore different paths. Embracing change, I ventured into the business world by opening a medical store, under the name of **St. Anthony Medical Store**. This was a complete shift from my teaching career, but I found the experience of running a business and interacting with customers to be exciting. A month later, my husband, who worked in the United Arab Emirates, joined me. As the medical store flourished, my husband decided not to return back to his job in the U.A.E. In the meantime, I did my **D 'pharm** and became a registered pharmacist.

Five years later we bought another premises next to my medical store and embarked on a new venture of opening a supermarket namely, **St. Anthony Supermarket**. The supermarket quickly became a local favourite, building a loyal customer base that was a testament to our hard work and dedication. After eleven successful years in retail, I expanded my horizons further by taking on as a distributor of Hindustan Unilever Limited products. It was not an easy task, as the two previous distributors of HUL had closed shop due to mismanagement. The products for distribution were many and it required careful management and a lot of hard work. Over the past 13 years, I've gained invaluable experience in supply chain management, customer relations, and community engagement. While the journey was not without its challenges, especially in securing initial funding, we took risks-leveraging our personal finances and even securing an overdraft against our land. These challenges, however, only made the journey more rewarding.

Throughout this journey, I have been deeply inspired by my father's risk-taking mindset and my mother's tireless

work ethic. Alongside my mother, my aunts—who were skilled in crafts—instilled in me a love for creating beautiful handmade items, and I suppose that's where my craft passion was born.

A Mission Beyond Business: Uplifting Women Through Skill Development

While running my businesses was fulfilling, I felt a deeper calling to contribute to my community in a more hands-on way, particularly in empowering women through skill-building initiatives. My love for working with self-help groups, especially in creating handcrafted jute products, grew stronger. I began dedicating more time to these groups, helping women develop new skills and empowering them both financially and personally. Our efforts have been recognized with several accolades, including runner-up positions in **The Business Diva 2024** and **Ms. Yashaswini 2024**, along with the **Womannovator Award 2024**.

Additionally, under the International Co-operation Scheme by the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, we had the incredible opportunity to showcase our jute products at TRAFTS 2024 in Bangkok, where we secured exciting business deals. We have also exhibited our products at Jaipur Saras and Goa Saras. Impressed by our work, the Project Director of the District Rural Development Agency, South Goa, sponsored a dedicated display space for us at Amazing Goa—a prestigious event attended by international delegates and buyers.

Today, I am honoured to serve as the **Chairperson** of the **Village Organization**, working alongside fellow leaders to improve the lives of people in our community. I also serve as the **Chairperson** of the **Cluster Level Federation**, where I focus on creating platforms for collaboration, support, and growth within local networks. This work has been immensely fulfilling, as I have had the privilege of helping others achieve their goals and witnessing their growth into stronger, more confident individuals.

Recognizing my efforts, the Joint Director of MSME, along with the mentor of Salcette Block, entrusted me with the opportunity to train over 50 women from self-help groups in crafting jute products under the ESDP program by MSME in both North and South Goa. This experience has been deeply fulfilling, as I witnessed these women grow in confidence, achieve financial independence, and discover a renewed sense of purpose.

I am also associated with Sangath as a Sangathi in Implementation of Evidence Based Facility and Community Interventions to reduce treatment gap for

depression.

Endurance, Faith, and the Road to Success

Not everything in life is rainbows and butterflies. I, too, have faced my share of challenges, difficulties, and setbacks. The loss of my firstborn son to congenital heart disease at just one and a half months was an indescribable pain that left a lasting impact on me. In my weakest moments, my trust in God never wavered, and my faith gave me the strength to move forward. Today, I am blessed with two sons and a daughter, all of whom have already begun carving their paths in the business world. My formula for success has always been simple: Be truthful to yourself and to others. The rest follows. In business, we can climb the ladder of success in two ways: one steep and fast, and the other consistent and steady. I chose the latter. It may not make you rich overnight, but it will surely take you to the top one day.

Empowering Women to Achieve More

To aspiring women entrepreneurs and achievers, my message is clear: Hard work pays off. While competition is healthy, remember that the most important competition is with yourself—strive to be better every day. You'll be amazed at how much you can grow and evolve. Women are natural multitaskers, managing roles as daughters, daughters-in-law, and mothers while balancing work and home life. We must support and uplift each other. When you channel your ideas constructively, there is no limit to what you can achieve.

A Balanced World is a Better World

Gender equality is key to economic and social development because it enhances productivity, drives innovation, and ensures that full potential of both men and women is utilized. It leads to better economic growth, improved quality of life, reduced poverty, and stronger social cohesion.

Empowering women enhances health, education, and poverty alleviation, creating positive ripple effects across entire communities. Ultimately, gender equality upholds human rights and fosters social stability, building the foundation for a thriving and equitable society.

Looking back on my journey, I feel immense gratitude for the lessons life has taught me. Whether it was in the classroom, in business, or through my work with self-help groups, it's been a path of growth, learning, and giving back. I look forward to the future and the many opportunities that await.

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Creating Impact: Leadership, Sustainability, and Social Change



Supriya Badve

Executive Director of Belrise Industries Limited

I have always believed that success is not just about achieving milestones but about driving meaningful change. My journey to leadership, especially in a dynamic and traditionally male-dominated sector, has been filled with challenges, opportunities, and invaluable lessons but one thing has remained constant my unwavering commitment to innovation, excellence and empowering those around me.

At the heart of my journey is the steadfast support and inspiration of my mother and elder sister. My mother was a lecturer, and her resilience and unconditional love instilled in me the values of hard work and humility, while my sister's perseverance taught me the power of self-belief. I also deeply admire Indra Nooyi's remarkable rise to leadership—her ability to break barriers and redefine success continues to inspire me to dream big and push boundaries.

As a student, I encountered a setback when I narrowly missed securing admission to an engineering program by just a few marks. However, fate had a different path in store for me. I went on to earn an MSc in Physics with a specialization in Digital Electronics and later began my professional journey with LIC.

After marrying Shrikant Ji Badve, who was then managing a proprietary unit in Aurangabad (Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra), he encouraged me to join our family business rather than continue my career at LIC. Embracing this transition, I skillfully balanced my responsibilities, ensuring I could both nurture my sons while contributing to the growth of our business. In this journey, I deeply appreciate the support received from my mother-in-law.

Through hard work and dedication, we secured a new business opportunity from Bajaj's Polymer Division in Aurangabad. During this period, I began championing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), long before it became a widely discussed topic.

As I navigated the business landscape, I had the privilege of working alongside an incredible mentor—my husband, Mr. Shrikant Badve. His unwavering support, shared vision, and strategic mindset have been instrumental in shaping my journey, making it both successful and fulfilling despite its challenges. His companionship and insights have played a vital role in scaling Belrise Industries (formerly known as Badve Engineering Ltd) with higher standards of quality and sustainability.

Together, we have created an ecosystem driven by innovation, sustainability, and global collaboration, shaping the future of mobility and manufacturing. Expanding our reach, we focused on serving multiple customers across various locations throughout India and globally. To address challenges related to quality and delivery, we embarked on the TPM (Total Productive Maintenance) journey. To maximize this opportunity, I implemented strategic business approaches tailored to enhance the efficiency of each department.

Today I lead one of India's top automotive component manufacturers **Belrise Industries Limited** (formerly Badve Engineering Ltd) as its **Executive Director**. Operating across **eight states** with a workforce of **16,000+ employees**, we proudly serve esteemed clients, including **Bajaj, Tata, Honda, JLR, Suzuki, Mahindra, Ashok Leyland and VECV**.

Entrepreneurial Ventures: Innovation Beyond Automotive

In addition to my role at Belrise Industries, I have pursued entrepreneurial ventures that align with my passions and vision for a better future.

- **Xara Flowers** – Driven by my passion for nature, Xara is a high-tech floriculture venture exporting roses and introducing a unique concept of customized printing on fresh Roses in India. It also creates employment opportunities, particularly empowering women.
- **SportsIndi** – An online sports hub connecting sports enthusiasts, fostering engagement, and supporting athletes across India.
- **ArtiGenius** – Leveraging technology to make artistic education more accessible and engaging, ArtiGenius offers a web platform and mobile apps that provide easy access to courses in **Music, Dance, Painting, Film, Theatre, and Literature**, empowering learners of all levels to enhance their skills.

Empowering Entrepreneurs and Driving Social Change

“No success story comes without its challenges. Stepping into leadership in a competitive industry required me to work twice as hard to prove myself. I encountered resistance to change, market fluctuations, and high-stakes decisions, but each obstacle became an opportunity for learning and growth.”

As the Chairperson of DCCIA Women Wing and Member of Skill, Employment, Entrepreneur, and Innovation Committee, I have worked to create opportunities for young entrepreneurs and startups by organizing panel discussions, mentorship programs, and awards.

Beyond business, my commitment to social impact extends to:

- **CSR Initiative - STEP (Skilled Training and Employability Program)** – A nationwide skill development initiative in collaboration with **Rotary**, providing training, job opportunities, and industry-ready skills for unskilled individuals.
- **Environmental Commitment** – Leading a mission to plant 1 lakh indigenous trees across India, with **93,000+ trees already planted**.
- **Blood Donation Drives** – Annual campaigns collecting thousands of blood units to support those in need.

Key Milestones in My Career

At Belrise Industries, I have been instrumental in driving business growth and shaping the future of mobility through innovation, sustainability, and strategic collaborations, establishing our leadership in Automotive Manufacturing, EV infrastructure, and smart mobility.

Key Achievements:

- **JIPM Awards (Japan Institute of Plant Management) – Kyoto, Japan:** Sambhaji Nagar Plants (Aurangabad) secured four awards across three factories, with two more set to be conferred in March 2025.
- **Pride of Maharashtra Award (2021):** Honored as Women Entrepreneur of the Year, presented by the then Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra, Shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari.
- **Gallant Warriors Award (2023):** Conferred by the former President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind.
- **Lokmat Sakhi Women Achievers Award (2024):** Recognized as an Impactful Change Maker in Singapore.
- **Corporate Titan Award (2024):** Honored for Women Leadership.
- **Tribute to Excellence:** Recognized for Business Leadership League at the Bombay Stock Exchange.
- **Panel Speaker – ABP Majha & MCCIA (2023-24 Budget):** Analyzed the Union Budget 2023-24 presented by Hon. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in a live panel discussion.
- **Women in Leadership Award – FICCI:** Recognized for excellence in a 97-year-old organization representing 2.5 lakh industries.

- These milestones are a testament to our team's dedication and my unwavering commitment to leadership, innovation, and growth in the industry.

Overcoming Challenges: Resilience, Innovation, and Leadership:

No success story comes without its challenges. Stepping into leadership in a competitive industry required me to work twice as hard to prove myself. I encountered resistance to change, market fluctuations, and high-stakes decisions, but each obstacle became an opportunity for learning and growth.

One significant challenge was mastering the intricate Decal application process. To address this, I introduced a

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The business landscape is constantly evolving, and women are at the forefront of shaping industries, driving economic growth, and fostering innovation. While the path may come with obstacles, remember that your voice, ideas, and leadership have the power to make a lasting impact.”

dedicated women's workforce, provided specialized training, and transformed it into a success. Similarly, recruiting women engineers for molding and paint shop operations was initially difficult, but we broke barriers and set new benchmarks. These experiences reinforced my belief that resilience is a leader's greatest strength and that challenges serve as catalysts for innovation and progress.

I also came to understand the power of building strong teams, fostering collaboration, and cultivating a culture of innovation. Shrikant Ji's unwavering support has been invaluable, and I feel grateful for his encouragement as I navigate my journey as a businesswoman. Additionally, as a proud mother of two sons, Sumedh (MBA, Harvard) and Swastid (BS, Wharton and Upenn), I take immense

pride in their dedication to carrying forward our legacy, making the journey even more rewarding.

My Personal Formula for Success

- Success, to me, is a combination of: **PEARL**
- **People-Centric Leadership:** Investing in teams and fostering a culture of excellence.
- **Envision:** Envisioning the growth path.
- **Adaptability:** Embracing change and innovation to stay ahead in a fast-moving industry.
- **Resilience:** Facing challenges head-on and using them as learning experiences.
- **Learning:** Staying curious and open to new ideas, no matter how experienced you are.

Message to Aspiring Women Leaders

To all the women striving to lead, innovate, and break barriers, my message is simple—embrace your space, trust in your abilities, and never shy away from challenges.

The business landscape is constantly evolving, and women are at the forefront of shaping industries, driving economic growth, and fostering innovation. While the path may come with obstacles, remember that your voice, ideas, and leadership have the power to make a lasting impact.

The Role of Gender Equality in Economic Growth

Empowering women in leadership is not just about diversity; it is all about inclusivity. This drives economic and industrial progress. I believe that the involvement of women in the workforce is equally important. Their sincerity, dedication, time management, and multitasking skills have consistently delivered the best outcomes for the organization.

At Belrise Industries, we are committed to creating an environment where talent, irrespective of gender, is recognized, nurtured, and empowered. The future of business lies in collaboration, inclusion, and visionary leadership, and I am proud to be part of this journey.

As we celebrate International Women's Day 2025, let's continue to break barriers, challenge conventions, and create a world where women leaders thrive and inspire the next generation.



From Mexico to Global Markets: How I Found My Purpose



Elizabeth A. Vazquez

CEO & Co-Founder, WEConnect International

I was born in Mexico, where I witnessed firsthand the challenges women face in pursuing economic independence. These early experiences were formative in shaping the person I would become. My mom, a courageous and resourceful woman, was my first and most profound source of inspiration. Her resilience in the face of adversity taught me that financial independence is not just about money—it's about freedom, dignity, and the ability to make choices.

One memory stands out vividly. My mom was trapped in an abusive situation with limited options for escape. But rather than accepting her fate, she devised a plan. She organized what I believe was Mexico's first-ever yard sale, selling off our belongings to raise the funds she needed to start a new life for us. This act of bravery was not just an escape—it was a declaration of her ability to shape her own future.

Witnessing her strength made me realize how transformative entrepreneurship can be for anyone seeking power and control over their life and the lives of other family members.

That early lesson stayed with me as I pursued my education and began to carve out my own path. I

eventually earned a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. While my studies focused on international development, I was also deeply interested in understanding how global systems could either empower or exclude people—especially women.

Education was not just a means to an end; it was a tool to help me understand how power works and to find solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems.

Discovering My Purpose: Connecting Women to Global Markets

My introduction to the world of women entrepreneurs came early in my career when I helped to organize the first Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD Conference on Women's Entrepreneurship. I was struck by how many brilliant, innovative women were building companies, delivering solutions, creating jobs and helping their families and communities. Despite having incredible products and services, they were invisible in our global value chains.

It became clear to me that the problem wasn't a lack of talent or ambition—it was a lack of access—access to market knowledge and networks. Women-owned businesses deserved a seat at the table, and I wanted to help.

This realization led me to co-found **WEConnect International**, a corporate-led global non-profit dedicated to connecting women-owned businesses with very large member buyers. What began as a vision to level the playing field has grown into a global movement.

Today, we work with **180+ multinational corporations** with over **\$4 trillion** in annual purchasing power and a

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commitment to buy more from women-owned businesses that are ready to compete and win in 135+ countries.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this work is seeing the tangible impact it has on women's lives. I remember meeting a woman in India who ran a successful logistics company. Despite her expertise, she struggled to secure major contracts. After joining WEConnect International, she landed a deal with a member buyers that transformed her business and allowed her to hire more people in her community. Stories like hers fuel my commitment to this mission—they are proof that when women succeed, everyone benefits.

The Power of Collaboration and Lifelong Mentors

I know that no one achieves success alone. Throughout my journey, I've had the privilege of working with and learning from remarkable individuals who have shaped my approach to leadership.

One of the most important lessons I've learned is the value of building strong partnerships. The most successful entrepreneurs and leaders don't work in isolation—they surround themselves with people who bring different skills and perspectives to the table.

I've learned that to drive real change, you must be both persistent and adaptable.

Early in my career, I was fortunate to be mentored by leaders who understood the importance of paying it forward. These mentors not only shared their knowledge, but also encouraged me to trust my instincts and take calculated risks. Their belief in me gave me the confidence to push boundaries and challenge the systems that keep all of us from benefiting from the products and services women have to offer.

One of my most significant professional milestones came when the founding members of **WEConnect International** asked me to incorporate the organization because at the time they did not have access to a global database of Certified Women-Owned Businesses. The Certification Standard was set by the Women's Business

No one achieves success alone. One of the most important lessons I've learned is the value of building strong partnerships. The most successful entrepreneurs and leaders don't work in isolation—they surround themselves with people who bring different skills and perspectives to the table.

Enterprise National Council (WBENC) focused on the United States, and so we adopted it as the Universal Global Certification Standard.

Our Founding Member Buyers created us to open doors for women-owned businesses to compete and help build more innovative, resilient supply chains while also delivering social impact at scale. We started in the United Kingdom, and then Canada, and then India and China, and then Latin America and Africa, and **today we are serving women-owned businesses based in over 135 countries.**

Overcoming Challenges and Staying the Course

Building a global organization has been a very steep learning curve. Some of the biggest hurdles have been navigating different regulatory landscapes, entrepreneurial ecosystems and different cultures. In some regions, it is very difficult for women to start and grow a business, and globally women still earn only 1% of corporate and government spend on products and services.

I've learned that to drive real change, you must be both persistent and adaptable. There have been many moments when the path forward was unclear—when it seemed easier to accept the status quo. But I've always believed that the work we do is too important to stop.

While the progress can feel painfully slow at times, every

breakthrough-every woman who secures a new contract or scales her business-reaffirms that change is possible. Each challenge we face only strengthens my resolve to keep pushing for a world where everyone can contribute and benefit.

My Formula for Success

If I had to distill my approach to success into a few key principles, it would be this:

- 1. Collaboration Over Competition** – The most impactful solutions come from working together. I believe in building ecosystems and fostering environments where each perspective is valued and leveraged.
- 2. Resilience and Adaptability** – Challenges are inevitable, but how you respond to them defines your path. Zero in on what you can control, be willing to pivot, learn from setbacks, and stay focused on your long-term vision.
- 3. Lifelong Learning** – The world is constantly evolving, and staying curious is essential. Seek out new knowledge, listen to those with different experiences, and never stop growing.

Challenges are inevitable, but how you respond to them defines your path. Zero in on what you can control, be willing to pivot, learn from setbacks, and stay focused on your long-term vision.

- 4. Purpose-Driven Leadership** – At the heart of everything I do is a commitment to moving large amounts of money into the hands of women as fast as possible because of the way they spend it on everyone around them. Having a clear purpose keeps me grounded and motivated, even during tough times.

A Message to Aspiring Entrepreneurs

To anyone dreaming of starting your own businesses or breaking barriers in your industries, I want to say: Your

Don't be afraid to ask for help-
there is power in community.

voice matters, and your contributions are invaluable. Do not let anyone make you feel otherwise. Take risks, embrace your unique perspective, and build a support network of people who believe in your potential.

I also encourage you to seek out opportunities to connect with other business leaders and business owners. Networks like the World Trade Center Mumbai and WEConnect International exist to help you access the resources and partnerships you need to thrive. Don't be afraid to ask for help-there is power in community.

The Role of Women in Shaping the Future

I am deeply passionate about the role women play in economic and social prosperity. When women are economically empowered, they invest in their families and communities. This leads to better education, improved health outcomes, and more sustainable economies.

But beyond the numbers, there is a moral imperative to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. We cannot afford to leave half the population behind. When we break down the barriers holding women back, we all move forward.

Looking Ahead: A Future of Prosperity Based on Purpose

As I reflect on my journey-from a young girl in Mexico watching her mother reclaim her independence to leading a global movement to make procurement systems work for everyone-I feel a profound sense of gratitude. I am grateful for the mentors who believed in me, the business owners who inspire me every day, and the companies that are committed to creating a new world where trade is open to all.

The work is far from finished. But I remain hopeful and committed to practical steps we can all take towards impact - by purchasing with purpose - one connection at a time.



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