

SHATTERING GLASS CEILINGS

There was a time when 3Ks were dedicated for women, these 3Ks were Kitchen, Kids and Knitting. Then came an era when 3Ps entered a woman's life i.e. Powder, papad and pickles but now the phase is when 4Es can easily be associated with most of the women. These 4Es are Electricity, Energy, Engineering and Entrepreneurship.



Rahul Trivedi



India is one of the fastest growing economies and the importance of entrepreneurship has been realized across all fields. Not only entrepreneurship but women entrepreneurship has become an important component. Women entrepreneurs are now an important part of the global voyage for unremitting economic development and social progress.

A paradigm shift in the lifestyle of Indian women is easily visible as they have shifted from kitchen to a different level of professional activities. Now women are taking more professional and technical degrees to cope up with market need and are successful in almost every sphere such as singing, interior decoration, exports, publishing, garment manufacturing and other new avenues of economic participation.

Business fraternity across the world is taking note of women entrepreneurs not only because of their involvement in business for survival but because they are also able to satisfy their inner urge of creativity and proving their capabilities. Women entrepreneurs have discovered the prospects of starting a new enterprise; undertake risks, introduction of new innovations, coordinate administration, control of business and providing effective leadership in all aspects of business and have proved their footage in the male dominated business arena.

Educated women of today is contributing to the social transformation and in the future, will be seen venturing into more areas traditionally dominated by men.

Paradigm shift

The emergence of women owned businesses is increasingly visible in the economies of almost all countries due to various reasons like growing

industrialization, urbanization, social legislation and along with the spread of higher education and awareness.

Shahnaz Husain, Founder, Chairperson and Managing Director of The Shahnaz Husain Group of Companies says, "We have seen women making a mark in every field and storming male bastions, including the business world over the last 2 decades. We have really seen far reaching changes in the work place, with tremendous growth in opportunities for women. I would say that business acumen and sound management are without gender."

"There is no hard and fast rule that a man is a better entrepreneur by virtue of being male. Women have shown

that given the same opportunities, they can be equally successful. Entrepreneurship actually implies an independence of spirit. It is this independence that women in India have begun to express over the last two or three decades. We need to give importance to women's acquiring of professional qualifications and training, so they can express their creativity and innovativeness with more confidence."

Over last decade or so, women have broken glass ceilings in all corporate and business sectors. Monica Anand, Co-founder and CEO of Under Cover Lingerie comments, "Women today are gaining in all fields. We are seeing the glass ceiling

LAWS ARE STRONG

Government of India has taken stringent steps to protect women at work. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is a legislative act in India that seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work. Ruchira Karnik Co-founder & head of business development at Work Better says, "The Sexual Harassment Act which was recently passed should help women security at work. While I am not sure it is foolproof and people have been educated about it but it definitely is a step in the right direction."

But Andree Pouliot, Creative Director, Soma Blockprints still feels that the law is not able to protect the women at workplace. She says, "There is not much work done here to protect women at work. On daily basis we see news about a women getting harassed at their workplace which is a great problem in India. Woman enjoys equal rights in the constitution but I am afraid the attitude of people and at times, of law also is very biased."

In the era where women are matching the footsteps of the men workforce and even sometimes they give them a tough competition it can be easily seen that the number of women entrepreneurs are increasing in the country which is not only good for the women fraternity but also for the economy of the country.

According to a report of SHEROES - a career destination for women professionals shows that the number of women entrepreneurs is increasing in the country. Sairee Chahal, Founder SHEROES, points out that according to the International Labor Organisation, India ranks in the bottom 20 of a list of 131 countries in female labor force participation. "Senior level female employees in India are just 5 per cent compared to the global average of 20 per cent," she adds. "In India almost 48 per cent women drop out of workforce before they reach the middle of their careers, compared to the Asia regional average of 29 per cent."

shatter everywhere. We have powerful entrepreneurs like Zia Modi and Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw on one hand and corporate leaders such as Chanda Kochchar and Shikha Sharma on the other. As the Indian social structure evolves, women have begun to take their careers more seriously. They are now taken seriously and are being evaluated at par with their male counterparts. As a female entrepreneur, I haven't seen any prejudice against me on the basis of my gender. I have been judged on the basis of my abilities which goes to show that the traditional thought process is changing."

Kavitha Reddy of Basecamp Adventures, an integrated Adventure, Outbound Training and Consulting organization, says that law does not differentiate between entrepreneurs; in-

fact women entrepreneurs have special schemes that encourage them and its time women took full advantage of those schemes and step out into newer, challenging and traditionally male dominated businesses. If government

doesn't feel that the paradigm has shifted completely. She says, "I still feel that as a country we have far too few women entrepreneurs though there has been a marked improvement on this front in the past



"Be prepared to give the business your all and don't abandon your dreams mid-way. Stay after them till they are realized. The farther you are willing to stretch yourself, the greater could be the degree of success that you may end up achieving."

Vandana Luthra,

Founder & Mentor, VLCC Group

plays the role of an enabler rather than job creator we will have more and more entrepreneurs in various businesses irrespective of gender.

Although, Vandana Luthra, Founder & Mentor, VLCC Group

two decades on account of a greater acceptance of women at workplaces."

Factors driving women entrepreneurs

There are many factors which has



BE PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO

India, despite being a men dominated society, has started accepting women entrepreneurs. This acceptability has given wings to many aspiring and dynamic women entrepreneurs. **Divya Jain, CEO of Safeducate** - a skilling company for truck drivers is one of them. She is the only woman in the trucking industry.

In a chat with **Rahul Trivedi, Sr. Reporter, Money Mantra**, Divya shared her journey. Edited excerpts:

How do you see the emergence of women entrepreneurs in India?

Business even today is fairly male dominated especially at the leadership level with less than ten percent of enterprises being started by women. But there are definitely more women who are a part of the workforce and I feel that is amazing. Companies and industries are realizing that there are certain roles that can be better done by women-whether it be content development, research and development, connecting with customers and working through their issues, to name a few. In fact a very interesting Harvard research actually shows how the collective IQ of a group increases when a woman is introduced into the mix as they improve group dynamics by better communication and understanding.

Do you think that liberalization of economy has played an important factor in the increasing number of women entrepreneurs?

The liberalization of the economy has definitely contributed in changing the traditional mindset of the women being the sole caregiver in a family. But even more instrumental has been the increased access of internet and mobile technology. It allows women to be better informed even if they are not a

brought in number of women entrepreneurs. One of the major reasons behind the increasing number of women entrepreneurs is liberalization of economy. Veena Kashyap, a passionate educationist who started Number Nagar in HSR layout, Bangalore in a tie up with BrainSTARS says that liberalization in short means removal of control. It may be the flexibility in the working environment, relaxation of certain government rules or transferring of ownership of business. Definitely, liberalization has helped women to move away from domestic responsibilities to accept corporate and management responsibilities. She sites some other reasons too behind this paradigm shift. "Women now are highly educated and are ready to face challenges. They are not

only limited to certain fields but are seen in every field from software, architects, arts, education to self-employed to entrepreneurs. A wide variety of experience and exposure to different aspects of life helps them to

the world. Aarti K Singh, who runs her own wedding film company, says that the interaction of women entrepreneurs from abroad with Indian women has given the latter impetus and inspiration to try and



We need to believe that we are necessary to the fabric of society. Be comfortable with yourself and take pride in your achievements. Always have open channels of communication with your family.

Yeshasvini Ramaswamy,

Managing Director, e2e People Practices Pvt .Ltd.

recognize the passion and pursue their dreams."

Then there is the role that communication technology and media has played in exposing Indian women to what is happening around

attempt something that is happening the world over. It has also led to a distinct change in men when they interact with women professionals. Somewhere down the line the walls are breaking, because men as well as

part of the formal workforce.

What reasons do you see behind the women rising to the top in key sectors?

I do see women rising to the top in sectors, like for example banking, healthcare, PR, education. These sectors are fairly professional, with great working conditions, well laid out policies, clear mandates for growth and most importantly, they actually have policies to address needs of working women like maternity leave, day-care or working from home. There are, however, a host of sectors that by their very nature are less conducive for women to grow like construction, mining, logistics even. As industry and businesses mature and become more streamlined I feel there would be a lot more opportunities for women to grow beyond the current glass ceilings.

How did the idea come to your mind of starting your own venture?

I was working with our family concern, Safexpress since 2007 which is India's largest Supply chain and logistics company. I spent considerable time and energy on developing human resources and in training them to meet our needs and requirements. As a part of the supply chain industry, I saw the tremendous need for trained manpower and the efficiencies that it would bring for the industry. Reports by NSDC have placed this requirement at 20 million people by 2022. As

someone passionate about education, it was the perfect opportunity for me to start Safeducate and really make a difference.

What problems or challenges, according you, women face while they start their journey as an entrepreneur? How can they overcome them?

Entrepreneurship is a journey riddled with self-doubt. Being a woman, it is compounded multi-fold as most people don't really take you seriously starting out. There is always an apprehension that you might stop or abandon it in the middle because you'll get married or have a child. The only way to get over it is to walk the talk. Work harder, do more, demand more and show the world you mean business. Also have a plan; before starting out create a business plan on an excel sheet with your numbers and variables taken into account and then follow it.

What tips would you like to give to other women who wish to be an entrepreneur?

I'd say be extremely passionate about whatever you decide to do. You will still need to look after your family, your house and your kids. You need to really love your work to able to do it justice. Also have clearly, defined, measurable goals and milestones that you should systematically work towards achieving. But honestly Steve Jobs says it best, "Stay hungry, Stay foolish."

women are becoming more aware, more receptive to change. I believe the more well-read, and not just educated a woman is, the more liberated she will be."

Parushni Aggarwal, Owner & Creative Director, Studio Creo says, "Liberalization of the economy has opened many opportunities for entrepreneurs, not just women but men too. But after liberalization cost of living for an average middle class family has increased and the needs and demands of family members are increasing. Everybody wants to lead comfortable life. To balance the socio-economic status to cope with day to day demands of the family more number of women are pushing in to the market as entrepreneurs."

Problems faced by women entrepreneurs

Starting up any business is not an easy task. Further, when a woman starts her business she has umpteen problems standing tall at various stages beginning from their initial commencement of enterprise.

Financial Arrangements : Arranging finance for women is difficult as they in general don't have any asset on their own names to use that as collateral securities for obtaining funds from banks or other financial institutions. Apart from this obtaining the support of bankers, managing the working capital, lack of credit resources are the problems which still remain male's domain.

Gender competition: Women entrepreneurs have to face a stiff competition with the men entrepreneurs who have an upper



Liberalization is often seen in the context of the country's economy opening up. However there is a lot more to it. Satellite television, foreign brands, entry of MNCs etc exposed us to previously unforeseen opportunities and cultural concepts as well as ideas.

Rashi Bajaj,

Principal Designer and Founder, Carpet Couture

TRAITS OF SUCCESSFUL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

- They are ambitious
- They are confident
- They are open and willing to learn
- They are cost conscious
- They value cooperation and allegiance
- They balance home and work well
- They are aware of their legal and social responsibilities
- They focus on their plans
- They are resourceful and put their resources to better use

hand in the promotion and marketing of their products as market is also male dominated. Such competitions ultimately result in the insolvency of women entrepreneurs.

Family Conflicts: Women entrepreneurs also tolerate the conflict of performing of home role as they are not available to spend enough time with their families. In India, mainly a woman's duty is to look after her children and manage the other members of the family. In business they have to spend long hours and as

a result, they find it difficult to meet the demands of their family members and society as well. Their incapability to attend to domestic work, time for education of children, personal hobbies, and entertainment adds to their conflicts.

Apart from these problems few women entrepreneurs have shared the problems which they feel are hitch for the women entrepreneurs to grow. Dr. Chiranjiv Chhabra, Dermatologist, Skin Alive Clinics says, "Women lack social support and there is still some time before Indian society becomes completely receptive and encouraging to women entrepreneurs." Rashi Bajaj says that the biggest problems women face is fighting the mindsets of people. Every time a woman tries to venture into something new, she has to answer questioning glances and apprehensions. While it is considered very ordinary for a man to establish a new venture, it is still considered nearly impossible for a female to do so.

Vandana Luthra on the other hand points to a crucial business input. "The biggest challenge for women keen to become entrepreneurs still remains one of raising finances. Financial institutions, including banks, still continue to adopt a very cautious approach to lending to ventures started by women who don't hail from business families, particularly if the initiatives entail a foray into innovative or 'non-typical women-oriented projects'. However, I am hopeful that the establishment of the Bharatiya Mahila Bank would go a long way in removing this problem faced by prospective women entrepreneurs." ■



"Follow your passion but also we need to learn how to turn your passion into profits. Create a Board of Advisors from various industries who could help you to take fresh perspectives on your business and also open new doors to network."

Sarika Bhattacharyya,

Co-Founder - Biz Divas India

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