



Confederation of Indian Industry

October 2024

Leading the change

50 inspirational women in innovation

Second edition



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Foreword

In India's vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, the stories of women trailblazers shine bright. The impact and value generated by women is increasing with time. These women are not just businesspeople; they are more importantly innovation catalysts, architects and promoters of economic growth and advancement. As we set out on the journey of creating a compendium on 'Leading the change: 50 inspirational women entrepreneurs', we discovered that Indian women entrepreneurship is thriving, unquestionably.

The CII Centre of Excellence on Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Startups (CII CIES) aims to recognise 50 remarkable women who have not only met our jury's demanding criteria, but also redefined success with their technology-enabled startups to lead and sustain growth in the world of business. Within this compendium lie stories that embody the transformational abilities of creativity and resilience of these visionary women. Their journeys epitomise an innovative spirit, demonstrating how they can spot market fissures, create clever solutions, and empower expansion for organisations, society, and the nation as a whole.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the 50 visionary women founders and co-founders. Your stories not only represent personal triumphs but also inspire countless lives. Through your creativity, determination, and unyielding courage, you have broken stereotypes, paving the path for a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, for other women to follow.

I firmly believe that these entrepreneurial journeys will ignite innovation, promote cooperation, and ensure that a 'gender-equal' future turns into a reality rather than just a slogan. CII continues to advocate for women in invention and business at large, to work towards ensuring that every woman with an idea receives the support necessary to be successful.

Let us progress as one on this path of empowerment, imagination and endless possibilities creating a place where women's entrepreneurship has no limits.

I convey my best wishes to all the women entrepreneurs of today and the future, and wish them success in their endeavours.



Chandrajit Banerjee
Director General, CII

Foreword

It brings me great joy to present the second edition of 'Leading the change: 50 inspirational women in innovation', – a spotlight on 50 exceptional women founders and co-founders within India's dynamic startup ecosystem. This compendium by the CII Centre of Excellence for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Startups (CII CIES) recognises and celebrates the remarkable contributions of women entrepreneurs who are driving innovation and reshaping industries.

CII CIES is focused on promoting a more gender-inclusive economy, and showcasing the innovations of women entrepreneurs and positioning them as role models in the startup ecosystem.

I am convinced that the stories shared by these trailblazing entrepreneurs will ignite a spark in countless individuals, encouraging them to embark on unique entrepreneurial journeys of their own.

I extend my appreciation and congratulate the 50 women founders and co-founders featured in this compendium. Your accomplishments are truly inspiring, breaking through gender barriers and motivating individuals from all walks of life. Women entrepreneurs are making significant strides in various industries, breaking through barriers and shattering stereotypes. Their stories are inspiring and empowering.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Steering Committee members and experts for their steadfast support in diligently shortlisting the 50 entrepreneurs whose entrepreneurial journeys are shared in the compendium.

I invite all aspiring young minds to go through this compilation, feel inspired and celebrate the success of these extraordinary women entrepreneurs who have confronted adversity and overcome barriers to achieve their dreams of becoming entrepreneurs.

In CII CIES, our vision is to foster a women-driven innovation ecosystem and to highlight the contributions of female innovators and their achievements.



Kris Gopalakrishnan

Chairman, CII CIES Advisory Board and
Chairman, Axilor Ventures

Foreword

It is with great joy and pride that I introduce the second edition of the 'Leading the change: 50 inspirational women in innovation' compendium crafted to honour the extraordinary achievements of women startups within the Indian startup ecosystem. My journey as the Chairperson of the Women in Innovation Steering Committee has been profoundly memorable, and I've witnessed the immense impact and steadfast perseverance of these remarkable entrepreneurs.

The compendium aims not only to recognise women founders for their innovative solutions that accelerate innovation but enable more women to join the economic workforce through entrepreneurship and encourage many more women entrepreneurs to emerge as role models in the startup ecosystem.

This compilation showcases our belief in the power of diversity and inclusivity to spark creativity and drive substantial change. It highlights the pioneering spirit and groundbreaking innovations of these visionary women, whose experiences challenge the status quo and prove that the startup landscape recognises no gender boundaries.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the 50 women founders and co-founders profiled in this compendium. Their extraordinary accomplishments and unwavering pursuit of greatness serve as a beacon of hope for countless others. They have not only pushed conventional standards but also paved the way for a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial landscape.

I would like to specially thank some of the members of steering committee and assessors. A special appreciation goes to Vijayalakshmi Rao for her active contribution and guidance to select the top women entrepreneurs.

My sincere appreciation to Prof Thillai Rajan A. from IIT, Madras and Dr Balachandran from VIT-Technology Business Incubator (VIT-TBI) for their dedication and time for evaluating all the applications.

Our sincere gratitude to Kris Gopalakrishnan, Chairman, CII Centre of Excellence for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Start-ups Advisory Board, for promoting diversity and inclusion.

I also thank Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, CII, for his invaluable support in this endeavour.

My special thanks to Madhu Vasanthi, Senior Director, CII Startup Initiatives, for being the anchor for this initiative and for her unwavering support to the steering committee. I also thank Sangeeta Karki, Director, CII for her support and perseverance.

My appreciation and thanks to our knowledge partner, PwC, for bringing out the stories of these exceptional women achievers in the form of a compendium.

I extend my thanks to the CII Centre of Excellence for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Startups (CII CIES) for their dedication towards creating an inclusive and diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem in India.

To aspiring women entrepreneurs reading this compilation, I encourage you to dream big, embrace challenges and pursue your passions with relentless determination.

My firm belief is that we are in the golden era of entrepreneurship and have the right ecosystem to support women-led start-ups.

Women bring different thinking and innovation which is very valuable. Having more women-led startups will not only benefit to their families and organisations but will also create an equitable entrepreneurial environment which will inspire more women in the coming generations.

I wish all women featured in this compendium continued success and happiness as they scale their enterprises.



Anu Sriram

Chairperson, CII Women in Innovation Steering Committee and
Co-founder and Joint Managing Director, Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.



Message from PwC

In today's world, when disruption has become the new normal, reinvention is integral for businesses to stay ahead of the curve. The 21st century witnessed a surge in women entrepreneurs who started their entrepreneurial journey and successfully established themselves in the business world.

The role of women entrepreneurs in driving inclusive economic growth is paramount. The support system for women in the startup ecosystem in India has also evolved over a period of time. Having more access to education, government schemes and policies, their ventures are not only generating income for themselves and their families but also creating several opportunities for others in society, thereby creating a ripple effect of positive socioeconomic impact.

The stories of women entrepreneurs stand as pillars of inspiration and progress. As we embark on the second edition of 'Leading the change: 50 inspirational women in innovation', it is imperative to shine the spotlight on the remarkable contributions of women innovators to the nation's growth story through their startups.



Arijit Chakraborti

Partner, Advisory
PwC India

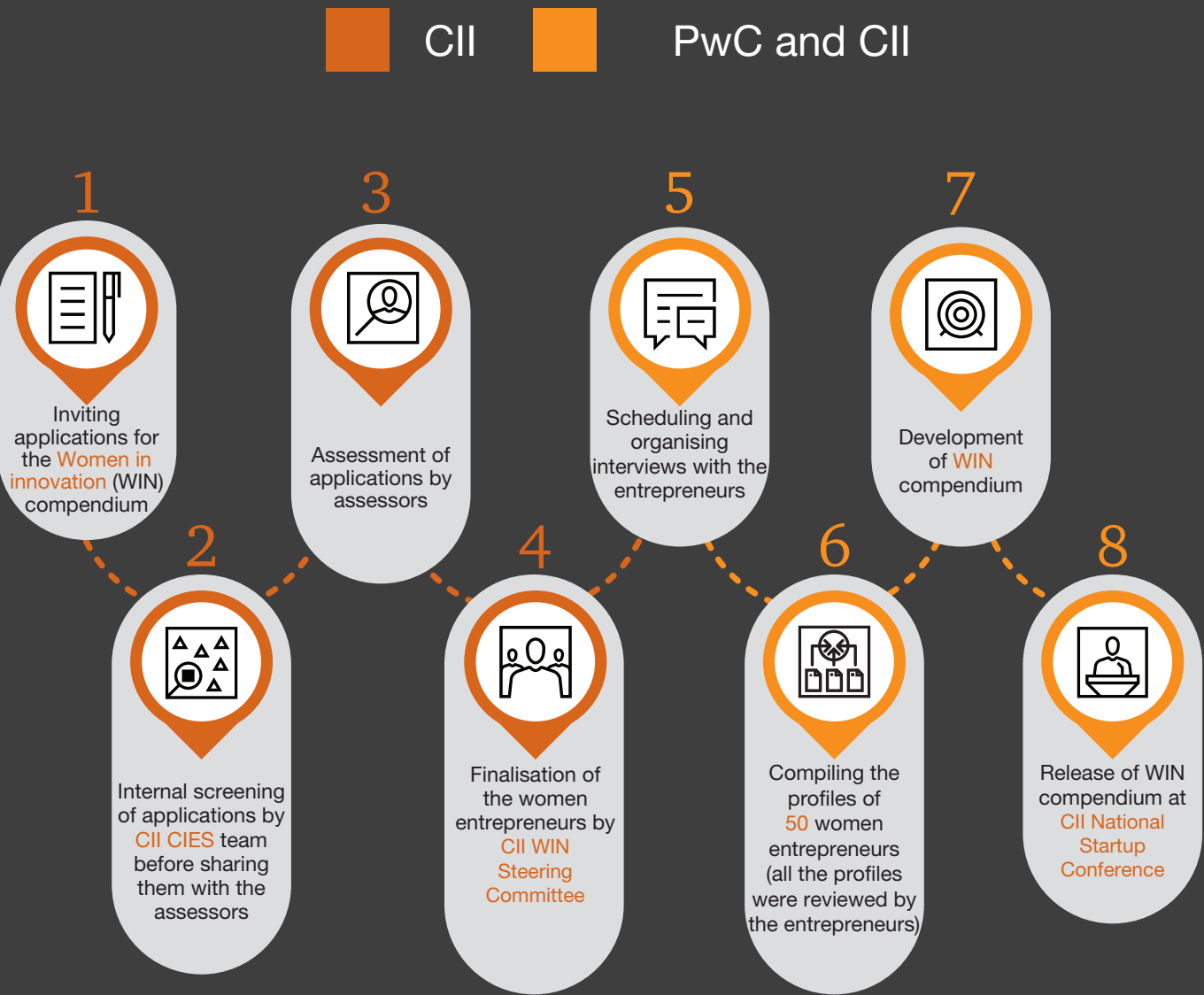
PwC is proud to collaborate with CII in highlighting the pivotal role played by Indian women in driving innovation, reshaping industries and fostering socio-economic development. This partnership is a testament to our unwavering commitment to championing diversity and empowering women to thrive in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The narratives in these pages portray the essence of Indian women entrepreneurs – their grit, resourcefulness and resilience. From using advanced technology to develop socially relevant programmes that create value for communities who need it most, to coming up with innovative and impactful business models, these pioneers truly epitomise innovation and influence.

The achievements of these visionary women leaders go beyond contributing to economic growth. They also stand as symbols of inclusivity, sustainability and social responsibility. Their success stories not only evoke inspiration but also act as agents of change which brings empowerment and opportunity.

We are sincerely thankful for all the women for sharing their stories with us. May their paths become the beacons leading future generations of Indian women to dream big and make an impact in the world.



Methodology



*CII CIES = CII Centre of Excellence for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Startups



The stories of the entrepreneurs



1. Dr Anasuya Roy

Founder, Nanosafe Solutions

How it began

The journey of Dr Anasuya Roy from academia to entrepreneurship embodies the challenges and triumphs faced by many researchers who venture into the world of business. Beginning her academic pursuits in 2014 at IIT Delhi, Dr Roy delved into a PhD programme focusing on polymer engineering with a specialisation in antimicrobial materials. During her doctoral journey, Dr Roy and her team identified a significant gap in the Indian market regarding antimicrobial technologies. She found that Indian industries heavily relied on imports from countries like the US and the UK for these. Having considerable expertise in the field, Dr Roy realised that she could contribute to the domestic ecosystem in some capacity. However, the path forward remained unclear due to her lack of formal business training and unfamiliarity with entrepreneurship.

Later on, when Dr Roy applied for and was awarded resources under the Biotechnology Ignition Grant programme of Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), she saw a way to pursue an entrepreneurial route, despite it not being planned. By initially focusing on developing antimicrobial water containers to address the issue of clean drinking water accessibility, Dr Roy and her team were poised to make a significant impact. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she was forced to brainstorm inventions that could act as solutions for the mask shortage in the market, thus moving away from her previous idea.

Capitalising on her background in polymer engineering, Dr Roy rapidly designed and marketed the 'N-Safe' mask, which could provide protection from viruses like SARS-CoV-2 as it was equipped with antimicrobial technology. This career swivel into mask production later drove the incorporation of her company, Nanosafe, in October 2019.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The radical transition from academia to the unfamiliar grounds of entrepreneurship was only possible because of Dr Anasuya's determination and resilience. She was an academic researcher specialising in antimicrobial technology but faced a series of setbacks in scaling her innovations for industrial production. Many times, the manufacturing processes and standards for such industries prove to be burdensome for a single researcher. Moreover, a non-business background comes with its own set of problems. Therefore, she had to master new skills fast and gain knowledge in market analysis, supply chain management, contract manufacturing etc. Even in the face of scepticism and gender bias in a male-dominated industry, she pushed forward to eventually turn Nanosafe into a successful venture through innovation and relentlessly pursuing her goal to make a positive impact.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

In her journey, Dr Anasuya has been upfront about inclusivity and diversity and has advocated for a culture wherein talent and expertise are valued over and above any other factors. In a world where gender bias is prevalent, Nanosafe has a team made purely based on talent where women outnumber their male counterparts, enabling an inclusive work culture.

The entrepreneurial journey of Dr Anasuya Roy is a landmark in antimicrobial technology and an inspiration to many women pursuing entrepreneurship. Being a successful female founder and CEO, she is an inspiration to all women who want to become entrepreneurs. She actively promotes initiatives aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs through mentorship, networking, and education programmes to assist them in overcoming the challenges of entrepreneurship. Moreover, she uses her platform to influence people by raising awareness on issues of gender bias in the workplace.



“The pursuit of entrepreneurship poses formidable challenges, rendering it considerably arduous in the absence of requisite zeal and passion.”

– Dr Anasuya Roy,
Founder, Nanosafe Solutions

She is a regular participant in panel discussions and a featured speaker at events related to women-driven innovation and business growth. Her contribution in this regard, through advocacy and support, will surely leave a lasting impact for women entrepreneurs within India and beyond.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | www.nanosafesolutions.com |
| USP | To eliminate growth of wide-spectrum microbes, the company invented antimicrobial active copper technology (ACT) applicable on textiles, polymers, and coatings. ACT is a multi-purpose technology, and it offers protection against bacteria, viruses, fungi, and algae, with a proven effectiveness of over 99%. This efficacy is achieved through the interaction of active copper cations released from ACT-treated materials with microbial proteins. As a result, the proteins are rapidly denatured, providing a powerful inhibiting action against microbes. |
| Mission | Encourage industry members to generate innovative ideas by offering strong and mutually beneficial development support, to continuously explore sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions to address various existing societal problems and to build a community of research fellows who are commercially savvy, focusing on market-centric and market-facing R&D projects. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Team size | 11–50 |
| Headquarters | Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Startup Award 2023, Startup India • National Tech Excellence Award 2022 (Women Entrepreneur – Young) by Technology Development Board (TDB), DST, Gol (cash prize of INR 1 lakh) • DST NIDHI Acceleration Program 2022, CCAMP Bengaluru • One of the Top 75 Biotech Women Entrepreneur 2022 by Biotechnology |
| Next-big milestone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create a portfolio of 10 niche material science technologies following the dual goal of ‘functionality with sustainability’ • To be among the top 10 material science companies in the world by 2030 • To champion the nationalistic cause of ‘Import Substitution-Export Promotion’ |
| Qualification | IIT-Delhi, University of Stuttgart, Germany |
| Investment/grant/funding | IIM Lucknow, DST Nidhi SSS, Indian Angel Network |



2. Aradhita Agarwal Kedia

Partner, Karakoram Healthcare Services LLP

How it began

Aradhita comes from a family of entrepreneurs. This background instilled in her a strong drive to start her own ventures. After her graduation, she ventured into trading and specialised in interest rate swaps. She joined a banking and financial services company in Singapore. Later, she returned to India to contribute to her family's business, particularly in managing her grandfather's tea estates. She also built a tea brand of her own.

The motivation of Aradhita to venture into the healthcare industry came during the COVID-19 pandemic where she identified the lack of infrastructure in India's healthcare. In the beginning, both she and her husband started selling sanitisers and used a friend's paint manufacturing plant which was converted into a sanitiser manufacturing plant. This was soon followed by an even bigger project – working together with cloth manufacturing factories that were not actively operating during the lock-down to make cloth masks.

Through these efforts, they established connections with numerous hospitals where Aradhita identified a critical issue of insufficient supply of oxygen. Later she realised that the supply of oxygen to most hospitals in India was not done in accordance with international standards. Aradhita leveraged her husband's network within the construction industry to explore avenues to optimise oxygen supply to hospitals through technological enhancements and prudent capital investments.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Karakoram Healthcare works on issues related to medical gas pipeline systems. In the initial years, the government had provided a directive that such systems should be implemented in all public hospitals. This turned out to be beneficial for her company and they secured many contracts with both government and private hospitals due to this directive. Embarking on diversification of services, her company started the installation of oxygen tanks while also delving into civil construction and turnkey hospital projects.

Aradhita also understood that there was a huge requirement of medical equipment like ventilators. She had set goals of owning a company that would offer comprehensive medical infrastructure services. In order to do this, she successfully cultivated affiliations with overseas medical device companies to import similar products into India. Her team at Karakoram Healthcare comprises a strong group of trained personnel with vast knowledge in construction services across several states, thus giving the company the advantage to undertake projects across the nation. Their deep knowledge of state legislation and regulations supports their services' reliability level. Furthermore, the company has solutions which suit every client's requirement. The team of experts in the company possess the desired flexibility to change and introduce different strategies based on the needs of clientele.

Aradhita has a clear strategic plan of taking the Karakoram Healthcare brand to all the states in India. Looking ahead, she aims to position the company as a comprehensive solution provider encompassing all facets of healthcare services in the country.



“My journey in the healthcare domain started by identifying the gaps in the country's healthcare system. Witnessing the gaps firsthand, from scarcity in vital supplies to inefficiencies in oxygen distribution, I was compelled to take a step. At Karakoram healthcare, we strive to revolutionise healthcare infrastructure to ensure that no individual faces such dire shortages again.”

– Aradhita Agarwal Kedia
Partner, Karakoram Healthcare Services LLP

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

An invaluable piece of guidance Aradhita wishes to impart to aspiring women entrepreneurs is the importance of resilience in the face of challenges encountered along the startup journey. She encourages them to persevere through the many hurdles that they might face during their journey and emphasises the significance of prioritising ambition and pursuing one's goals. She urges women not to be deterred by scepticism or negativity from those who doubt their capabilities.

As part of her commitment to women empowerment, Aradhita actively promotes equal employment opportunities for women within her organisation. She is also involved with Young Indians which is the youth wing of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), where she participates in various activities aimed at advancing female literacy and recognising the contributions of women in the entrepreneurship community

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | www.k2healthcare.in |
| USP | Karakoram Healthcare offers unparalleled integrated healthcare solutions, leveraging 30 years of construction expertise and strategic partnerships with a leading gas manufacturer and top medical device companies |
| Mission | To ensure safe and uninterrupted supply of life-saving medical gases to hospitals |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Team size | 150+ |
| Headquarters | Kolkata |
| Next big milestone | Becoming a preeminent provider of comprehensive healthcare solutions within the nation. |
| Qualifications | B.Sc. Economics (Hons) from National University of Singapore |

3. Chetana Koulagi

Founder, LetsTagOn Foundation

How it began

The inspiration for the LetsTagOn Foundation was from the personal experiences of its founder, Chetana Koulagi, who was an IT professional involved in volunteer work at a government school. Inspired to mobilise more people to volunteer, she envisioned a technology platform to connect people with volunteering opportunities. The idea for her venture took shape during a women's startup programme, which led her to quit her job and pursue building her company full time.

The company evolved by integrating learning objectives with community service, focused on a unique pedagogy called service learning. Initially conceptualised as a technology platform to connect volunteers with opportunities, the company refined its focus to target educational institutions, finding a market fit in offering sensitisation workshops and social immersion programmes. This unique integration of education and community service became the company's core USP, differentiating it from other volunteering platforms.

The company now offers sensitisation workshops, social immersion programmes, and service learning integrated into academic curricula.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Chetana's entrepreneurial journey highlights the crucial challenge of defining the problem and identifying the target audience. For her, this was a particularly difficult challenge given the multiple stakeholders involved, including students, NGOs and educational institutions. While the venture initially struggled with stakeholder alignment and monetisation strategies, Chetana went on to experiment with different business models before finalising a B2B approach, charging educational institutions for their programmes. During COVID-19, they explored a B2C model as well, targeting individuals needing community service credentials. The evolution of the venture from being a technology platform to a service-oriented model shows adaptability and resilience of the venture in finding a product-market fit – which is a crucial aspect of sustaining businesses.

Currently, the company charges educational institutions for three types of programmes (sensitisation and orientation, and short and long versions of social immersion). While being mostly prevalent in western countries, progressive changes in education policies were able to level the playing field in India as well. Scaling strategies include making the student volunteering engagement framework open source (supported by NGOs) and conducting faculty development workshops. In order to scale-up, Chetana had to step into an advisory role, emphasising the need for a competent team to handle product development, organisation building, market expansion and business development.

The company engaged closely with its NGO partners to design community engagement programmes that matched the needs of both NGOs and academic institutions. For example, in January 2024, LetsTagOn did a cybersecurity awareness workshop across 44 government schools with an NGO and an academic partner. The company's focus on building socially aware citizens and measuring impact through metrics like student engagement and community outreach reflects its commitment to empowerment. Chetana also highlights the importance of ecosystem support, problem clarity and adaptability in navigating the entrepreneurial landscape and scaling the venture.



“For aspiring entrepreneurs, I suggest focusing on a specific aspect initially due to the complexity and involvement of numerous stakeholders. Mastering one area before branching out can lead to a more successful expansion into other areas.”

– Chetana Koulagi
Founder, LetsTagOn Foundation

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Chetana highlighted the important role of support groups for women entrepreneurs, drawing from her positive experiences with incubation programmes and networks like WISEN (Women in Social Entrepreneurship network). She advised women entrepreneurs to find similar groups to share experiences and support each other through highs and lows. Additionally, she stressed on the importance of patience and perseverance during the experimentation phase to achieve a better product-market fit.

She also noted the evolving nature of volunteering in India, shifting from religious contexts to personal and skill development, with increasing regulatory support from governmental bodies. Therefore, for aspiring entrepreneurs in the volunteering space, she recommends narrowing focus to serve a specific segment effectively before expanding and emphasises the benefits of having co-founders who are subject matter experts in different domains.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | www.letstagon.com |
| USP | The company offers a service-learning approach, which is a pioneering effort and with very few players in the domain. The key USP are alignment to curriculum, mapping to skill development, and strong partnerships with non-profits across various causes and Sustainable Development Goals. |
| Mission | LetsTagOn aims to become the ecosystem partner to bring effectiveness and efficiency in youth engagement to enhance reach and impact of sustainable development initiatives, driven by service learning and powered by technology. Service learning combines learning objectives with community service. LetsTagOn's technology platform offers a marketplace for social impact initiatives to enable easy access to opportunities to 'tag on'. |
| Founded in | 2017 |
| Team size | 0–5 |
| Headquarters | Bengaluru |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Top 15 in Women Startup Program 2017 by Goldman Sachs and IIM Bengaluru (Bangalore)• Winner at Elevate 2018 by the Government of Karnataka• Founding member of Women in Social Entrepreneurs Network• FICCI Road Safety Award for our academic partner |
| Qualifications | Master of Science in Software Systems from BITS Pilani |
| Investment/grant/funding | Incubation/grant/CSR |

4. Divya Shetty

Founder, Cercle X

How it began

Divya Shetty began her career as an engineer at Mindtree and went on to co-found Cercle X, a sustainable business that deals with waste management. Divya's aim was to support farmers, mainly in districts such as Mandya, Karnataka, where she had personally witnessed the plight of farmers due to financial crises. This prompted her to give up her corporate job and work towards improving the standard of living of her community and country.

Started in 2020 by Divya and her husband and co-founder Vishnu, Cercle X sought to help brands send zero waste to landfills by dealing with the industrial waste and extended producer responsibility (EPR) requirements of their businesses. Their flagship product, paper pencils with seeds to be planted after use, represented their corporate social responsibility and innovation. While working with farmers in 2017, Divya constantly encountered water shortages. She discovered that one of the reasons for this was deforestation. So, she asked herself a simple question – can she make pencils from wastepaper and solve both problems at the same time? She also embedded organic seeds, which she had procured from her network of farmers, in those pencils and this is how Plantcil (plant in pencil) was born. This was rechristened into Pepaa in 2019, her first company for sustainable stationery paper products that evolved into the creation of CercleX in 2020, aiming to enable brands to go zero waste to landfill by managing their industrial waste and EPR compliances.

Technology-wise, Cercle X uses a comprehensive platform called Waste Not to ensure that it has clear visibility of organisational waste stream management. This platform also integrates with enterprise software as a service (SaaS) for waste tracking from generation all the way to recycling or disposal. Further, through the launch of Cercle X, it brought forth Metabins – smart IoT-enabled bins that offer cashbacks or incentives to ensure people dispose off their waste appropriately and thus improve environmental outcomes.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The journey was not without its difficulties. The unorganised nature of the waste management segment and moving stakeholders from cash-based transaction to standard billing posed challenges when it came to scaling up Cercle X's business model.

However, Divya highlighted that the key to success is hustling, believing in one's idea, and being persistent and strong, particularly when one is a woman and comes across other barriers. Cercle X itself is building an entrepreneurial culture within the company where employees are asked to pitch ideas and own them, wherever possible, offering equity to ensure that employees take responsibility for their various projects.

As for future development plans, Cercle X plans to continue its development in the domestic and international markets. Although the company now operates from India, Cercle X has partnered with SEMBCORP in the Singapore region which has given them a significant market share in waste management. Additionally, Cercle X smart bins are in the R&D (Research and Development) stage for the final version to be later implemented across Singapore. In the



"I initiated Cercle X with a vision to tackle environmental challenges and uplift local communities. Our flagship product, paper pencils embedded with seeds for post-usage planting, embodies our dedication to sustainability and innovation."

– Divya Shetty
Founder, Cercle X

long term, Cercle X aims to become a prominent industrial waste management company by eliminating 'wastage of waste' and to strengthen its impact by enabling 500 brands to achieve zero waste to landfill status.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Women empowerment has been a singular focus for Divya Shetty and her entrepreneurial journey. In Cercle X, she leads initiatives such as the Enterprise Founder programme, offering women equity incentives to head projects and/or spearhead innovations. Divya makes sure that women within her company are provided with all the resources and support they need to thrive professionally. Furthermore, Cercle X is an organisation that focuses on sustainability, and also promotes the rights of women by creating employment opportunities in sectors like waste management. Through her leadership and inclusive business practices, Divya sets a precedent for women's participation and success in entrepreneurship, inspiring others to pursue their aspirations with confidence and resilience.

Beyond her enterprise, Divya advocates for women's empowerment through mentorship and collaboration. She actively engages with women-led organisations and suppliers, amplifying their voices and economic opportunities. By championing inclusivity and supporting women entrepreneurs, Divya catalyses positive change, creating a more equitable ecosystem where women can thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

In a nutshell

| | |
|---------------|--|
| URL | www.cerclex.com |
| USP | Cercle X aims to put an end to waste leakage to landfills, oceans, and other water bodies through use of technology. Its robust and deep-rooted technology connects 5,000+ragpickers, kabadiwallahs, aggregators, urban local bodies (UBLs), material recovery facilities (MRFs), manufacturers and other members of the waste management ecosystem together. |
| Mission | CercleX was started in 2020, with the aim of enabling brands to go zero waste to landfill by managing their industrial waste and EPR compliances. It strives to create a world without waste and to make the world a better place every day. The company's mission is to create a world without waste, not just for the current but for future generations as well. It aspires to build a cleaner, greener world – one that's safe for today and tomorrow. |
| Founded in | 2020 |
| Co-founder(s) | Vishnu Vardhan |
| Team size | 25+ |
| Headquarters | Coimbatore, India |
| Qualification | B. Tech, Nitte Mahalinga Adyanthaya Memorial Institute of Technology (NMAMIT) |

5. Gouthami T S

Founder, AquaAirX Autonomous Systems

How it began

Gouthami T S is a passionate aeronautical engineer. She had an impressive academic background and secured an All-India Rank of 148 in GATE Aerospace and got an admission in the prestigious Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology for her master's in Flight Mechanics. However, she soon realised her true passion was entrepreneurship and decided to quit her M. Tech and fully commit herself to her entrepreneurial journey.

Both her friend from engineering days and now the co-founder of AquaAirX, Jitendra Saini, and Gouthami shared a love for aeromodelling and aerial vehicles. This shared interest led them to take on an ambitious final year project. They created a versatile drone that could transition seamlessly between air and underwater environments.

At that time, the market was only offering drones that could either fly or operate underwater. Some vehicles could enter water or come out of it, but they were typically one-way, disposable drones. There wasn't a vehicle that could work effectively in both environments. Seeing the huge potential in the market and noting how countries like the USA, China and Japan were ahead in developing such technology, Gouthami and Jitendra decided to start their entrepreneurial journey.

Their hard work and vision paid off when they received a prototyping grant from NIDHI Prayas. This allowed them to build the first version of their amphibious drone. Their innovative project gained more attention, and within a year, it was approved for funding by the IDEX Indian Navy grant for technology development. This recognition validated their efforts and perseverance.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Gouthami emphasises the importance of finding reliable vendors and integrating data to boost product quality. Her company carefully selects components from both local and international suppliers to ensure that they meet strict regulatory and production standards. One of the biggest challenges they have faced is dealing with regulatory issues, especially for drone deployment. Each country has its own rules to protect its

airspace which makes the regulatory landscape quite complex. To address these challenges, it is integral to partner with local entities. Collaborating with local partners helps the company meet regional compliance standards and makes it easier to operate their drones in different countries. This approach is essential for scaling their products internationally and ensuring smooth operations across various regions.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Gouthami advises aspiring entrepreneurs to focus on building relevant skills while they are in college and to develop a strong drive to succeed. For women returning to the workforce, she highlighted the importance of building their confidence and rejoining the workforce. Gouthami believes that with confidence and perseverance, women can excel despite the challenges they might face.

She is committed to supporting young women who have the courage to start their own businesses, even in the face of societal pressures. Her future plans involve providing mentorship and resources to help aspiring female entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of starting and running a business. Gouthami wants to ensure that these women get the support they need to thrive and succeed in their chosen fields and take bold steps in their careers.



“College students should embark on novel and innovative pursuits, leveraging their freedom from constraints and absence of prior commitments to create opportunities that can pave the path to success.”

– Gouthami T S
Founder, AquaAirX Autonomous Systems

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | www.aquaairx.com |
| USP | AquaAirX Autonomous Systems is dedicated to developing cutting-edge solutions for underwater, aerial and amphibious vehicles. With a strong focus on advanced navigation and control systems, the organisation aims to revolutionise how autonomous vehicles operate in diverse and challenging environments. |
| Mission | To revolutionise the way autonomous vehicles operate in diverse and challenging environments. AquaAirX is committed to developing innovative, reliable, and versatile autonomous and navigation systems that enhance the capabilities of underwater, aerial, and amphibious vehicles. By integrating advanced AI (Artificial Intelligence), cutting-edge technology, and seamless command control, the company aims to provide unparalleled solutions for scientific research, industrial inspections, and environmental monitoring. |
| Founded in | 2024 |
| Co-founder/s | Jitendra Kumar Purnmal Saini |
| Team size | 10–15 |
| Headquarters | Yelahanka, Bengaluru (Bangalore), Karnataka |
| Next big milestone | To be a global leader in transformative technology, redefining mobility by offering innovative solutions that bridge the gap between air and water domains. |
| Qualification | Master of Technology in Aerospace, Aeronautical and Space Engineering – Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology |

6. Harini Chodagam

Founder, Palasah Manufacturers and Traders Private Limited

How it began

Harini Chodagam's entrepreneurial journey is a compelling narrative of career transition, social impact and innovation in the women's hygiene industry. Starting in the subtitling industry, Harini slowly became one of the most well-known names in her trade. However, recognising the seasonal nature of subtitling work and desiring greater engagement with society, she pursued alternative opportunities. Her exploration led her to the Central Institute of Plastics Engineering & Technology (CIPET), where she undertook an entrepreneurial course on plastic recycling under the Ministry of Petroleum. Her primary motivation was to address the mounting issue of plastic waste, particularly due to sanitary napkins, which significantly contribute to landfill waste.

She observed that these products are major contributors to plastic waste due to their non-biodegradable components. Her company, Palasah, produces sanitary napkins and manufactures the machinery for making these products as well as vending machines and incinerators, positioning itself as an all-rounder in women's hygiene solutions.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a pivotal moment for Palasah. During the lockdown, when demand for sanitary napkins dropped, the company adapted its strategy by producing surgical masks, thus addressing the urgent need for protective equipment. This also allowed Harini and her team to research and diversify their product offerings. By 2021, they expanded into manufacturing vending machines and incinerators for their sanitary napkins, responding to client demands and solidifying their market presence as a one-stop shop for women's hygiene products.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Harini identified the challenge of raising awareness about sanitary napkin usage, especially in rural India, where the topic remains taboo still to this date. To address this, Palasah collaborates with organisations like the Confederation of Women Entrepreneurs (COWE) and NABARD. The aim is to train women in manufacturing sanitary napkins, empowering them to become entrepreneurs as well as raise overall awareness about such products. Training programmes have also been designed to educate women on production techniques, enabling them to set up their businesses or work collectively to establish manufacturing units. This initiative also addresses the accessibility of sanitary napkins in underserved regions.

A key differentiator for Harini's company is their local production of sanitary napkin manufacturing machinery in Telangana. This local manufacturing capability allows them to offer customised solutions to suit the specific needs and constraints of their clients. Their machines can also be adjusted to fit various spaces and budgets, and they provide the flexibility to customise the type of sanitary pads produced as well. Another innovative feature is the provision of machine interfaces in local languages, therefore making them accessible to operators with basic technical backgrounds.



“To succeed, maintain resilience, stay committed to your vision, and never think of quitting. Each day presents equal chances of discouragement as well as motivation, so remain steadfast, focused, and unwavering in pursuit of your goals.”

– Harini Chodagam
Founder, Palasah Manufacturers and Traders Private Limited

Harini's commitment to increasing the availability of sanitary napkins in rural areas is evident in her goal to install manufacturing machines in each district of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh within the next two years.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Throughout her entrepreneurial journey, Harini has achieved significant milestones. She was selected for the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women Program by Goldman Sachs and IIM Bengaluru. The programme recognises promising female entrepreneurs and provides them with the resources to scale their businesses. As a Goldman Sachs alumna and NSRCEL alumna, Harini also received a prestigious opportunity to meet the honourable president of India. These recognitions are proof of her company's impact on social entrepreneurship. The focus on biodegradable products highlights her commitment to environmental sustainability as well, reducing plastic waste and benefiting communities.

Palasah not only addresses immediate practical needs but also paves the way for long-term social and economic empowerment, highlighting the significant impact created by women entrepreneurs.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | https://www.palasah.co.in/ |
| USP | Ensuring that women from diverse economic backgrounds have access to hygienic products using low-cost sanitary napkin manufacturing machines |
| Mission | Creating a sustainable future where Palasah's products are accessible to all |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Team size | 11–50 |
| Headquarters | Hyderabad |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mahila Pragna Puraskar from COWE Telangana • Women in Manufacturing Award from HiBiz TV |
| Next big milestone | Minimise our environmental footprint by using sustainable materials. |
| Qualification | IIM-Bangalore |

7. Himanshi Singh

Founding Member, Bare Craft Consulting

How it began

Himanshi Singh's entrepreneurial journey began when she witnessed how difficult it was for artisans to access markets and get fair wages for their work. She used her experience in the manufacturing industry to create a platform that connects rural artisans with global small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) integrating UN SDGs framework via technology.

Her goal was to make the process easier – from linking artisans with potential clients to handling orders and ensuring clear and transparent pricing. The platform lets subject matter experts (SMEs) browse various crafts which suits their needs and place orders with the assistance of community mobilisers and design consultants. This not only cuts down operational costs for SMEs but also gives artisans a reliable income and market exposure right in their own communities.

One of the key features of the platform is its integration of AI technology which enhances efficiency and sustainability in the supply chain. AI algorithms help in geographically mapping artisans, optimising raw material selection and calculating the environmental impact of each transaction. This facilitates informed decision-making for SMEs and also contributes towards reducing waste and promoting sustainable practices.

The platform also incorporated the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework to measure its social and environmental impact. For each transaction, it generates an impact card that highlights key metrics like employment generation, wage distribution, reduction in carbon footprint and support for local economies. This approach promotes transparency and also encourages businesses to prioritise sustainability in their operations.

Himanshi's business operates as a hybrid entity. It has a not-for-profit arm that focuses on skill development for artisans and a for-profit arm that offers consulting services to SMEs and fashion designers. This dual approach lets the venture address both social and economic goals by supporting artisans while generating revenue through consulting fees.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Himanshi faced some early challenges in defining the legal structure and setting up the operational processes for Bare Craft Consulting. However, despite the initial struggle, her venture has gained significant traction and attracted recognition from global organisations like the United Nations and the Clinton Greenhouse Initiative. The venture also expanded its reach to markets in the US, Europe and Africa.

Looking ahead, Himanshi plans to scale up her venture's operations by training over a million artisans and serving a



“Do not wait for the right time to start, just start! You will only miss the chances that you do not take.”

– Himanshi Singh
Founding Member,
Bare Craft Consulting

hundred enterprises within the next five years.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Sustainability and women's empowerment are central to Himanshi's venture which is dedicated to uplifting and supporting female artisans and entrepreneurs in the traditionally male-dominated artisanal sector. The venture offers free entrepreneurship training sessions and mentorship programmes to equip women with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. By providing access to resources, networks and opportunities, Himanshi's venture helps women take control of their economic destinies, break barriers, and become leaders in their communities.

Himanshi also remains committed to sustainability and fair-trade practices by ensuring equitable wages and working conditions for female artisans. She is putting efforts towards promoting gender equality within supply chains and instilling an inclusive and respectful culture. She aims to create an environment where women feel valued and empowered to thrive.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | https://barecraft.my.canva.site/this-is-barecraft |
| USP | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitates Market Access for Artisans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes direct market linkages with artisans, bringing buyers to their doorstep. Implements technology solutions to connect artisans with potential customers and markets. Provides training and support to artisans to navigate and benefit from these market linkages. Empowers Nations to Attain UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Develops and implements strategies that align with specific SDGs, tailoring approaches to individual country contexts. Collaborates with governments, NGOs, and local communities to create sustainable initiatives. Monitors and evaluates progress regularly to ensure effective contribution towards achieving the SDGs. Addresses SME Supply Chain Challenges in three steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manpower Solutions Logistics Optimisation Warehousing Enhancement Harnesses Technology to Enhance Reverse Migration and Product Delivery: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops digital platforms to connect to opportunities. Implements e-commerce and distribution technologies to enable the sale and delivery of locally crafted products. Conducts awareness campaigns and training sessions to equip individuals with the necessary skills for meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities in their home region |
| Mission | To dignify the craftsmanship and the creators by strengthening small businesses (SMEs), design houses and boutiques in their supply chain via technology. |
| Founded in | 2023 |
| Team size | 5 |
| Headquarters | Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | UN Young SDG (Sustainable Development Goals Supplemental Data Gathering) Innovator 2021, UNLEASH PLUS 2022 winner, Speaker at Glasgow Climate Impact Summit during COP 27, IIM Bengaluru (Bangalore) – NSRCEL – WSP -4 Impact matters awardee, NASSCOM startups, Tie Bengaluru (Bangalore) Global Women Startup Competition Semi Finalist |
| Next big milestone | Helping countries achieve UN SDGs through 'creative economy' |
| Qualification | MA, Azim Premji University |

8. Dr Hiresha Verma

Founder and CEO, Han Agrocare

How it began

Prior to starting Han Agrocare, Dr Hiresha was managing her own knowledge process outsourcing (KPO), business process outsourcing (BPO) and software development company. However, her trajectory shifted during the 2013 Uttarakhand floods when she seized an opportunity to provide aid by distributing food packets and clothing to the affected populace. Witnessing the disproportionate impact on women in the region, she resolved to empower them through recovery initiatives. Acknowledging the impracticality of establishing an IT enterprise in the hilly terrain, Dr Hiresha conducted research and identified Uttarakhand's climate to be conducive for mushroom cultivation. Through dedicated study and mentorship, she introduced mushroom farming to local women, recognising its potential for substantial profitability. Her initiative has helped train over 5,000 women, landless farmers, and tribal communities, enabling them to double their incomes while fostering self-sufficiency through ongoing support.

Initially, she was focused on cultivating button and oyster mushrooms. Later on, she realised the high demand for shiitake mushrooms, particularly in the hospitality sector. Recognising the reliance on imports from China, she strategically addressed this gap by incorporating shiitake cultivation into her operations. She honed cultivation methodologies through relentless research and experimentation, optimising yields, and profitability across multiple mushroom varieties.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Dr Hiresha is now concentrating solely on medicinal varieties such as cordyceps, shiitake, Ganoderma, lion's mane, turkey tail and maitake, transitioning away from cultivating button and oyster mushrooms. Recognised as superfoods, medicinal mushrooms are renowned for their nutritional and health benefits, including anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory, anti-viral and antioxidant properties. They serve as functional foods and nutraceuticals, especially beneficial for pregnant women, children, teenagers, old people and cancer patients. Despite their benefits, Hiresha identified a significant shortage in the cultivation of medicinal mushrooms and limited utilisation in value-added and nutraceutical products. To bridge this gap, her venture operates in two key areas: (1) her AgroTech food-processing division focuses on producing functional foods and beverages like mushroom tea, coffee, ginger ale and cookies and (2) the biotech division extracts bio-active compounds from these mushrooms to create a library of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and nutraceuticals. In this way, Han Agrocare emerged as an innovator in commercial-scale cultivation of these medicinal mushrooms.

Her zero-waste approach differentiates her product in the market. To achieve this, the project uses agricultural by-products such as sawdust for mushroom cultivation, and repurposes compost as both manure and fuel, thereby minimising waste generation.

Dr Hiresha has filed multiple intellectual properties (IPs) in order to introduce innovative products like mushroom wine and cosmetics. She is also actively working on securing funding to scale her venture further, aiming to expand into other Indian states and increasing product exports internationally.



“The devastation of the 2013 Uttarakhand floods ignited a fire within me to empower women. I found inspiration to not just cultivate mushrooms, but also provide a way for helping thousands of people in the region by harnessing the land's potential and resilience of the affected women.”

– Dr Hiresha Verma
Founder and CEO, Han Agrocare

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Dr Hiresha believes unwavering determination is key to success and that no obstacle is insurmountable for those with a resolute spirit. Her own journey serves as a testament to this ethos. Despite lacking prior experience in agriculture or mushroom cultivation, she has emerged as a trailblazer in these fields through her venture. This achievement stands as a tribute to her disciplined approach and unyielding perseverance.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | www.hanagrocare.com |
| USP | Han Agrocare has pioneered cultivation of medicinal mushrooms like shiitake, ganoderma, cordyceps, turkey tail, and lion's mane, reducing the dependence on Chinese imports for these products. |
| Mission | Their mission is to address the growing health concerns of an aging population and combating modern lifestyles by promoting the use of natural compounds found in medicinal mushrooms. They aim to fill the gap in cultivation, extraction and utilisation of these mushrooms to provide innovative therapeutic alternatives for various diseases, physical and mental wellness, particularly in the post-COVID era which has been marked by increased stress, sleep disorders and depression. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Team size | 20–25 |
| Headquarters | Dehradun, Uttarakhand |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represented Government of India (GoI) in the APO meet in Singapore in August 2023 • Represented GoI in the Bangkok Expo backed by Embassy of Thailand in July 2023 • Selected by Niti Aayog – GoI as the top 75 Innovative Company of India • Best Industrial Award by Uttarakhand Government – Amar Ujala – 2023 • MANAGE Samunnati Award – 2022 • Enterprising Women Entrepreneur – MSME – ICAR 2022 • Best Women Entrepreneur – Mahila Department, Government of Uttarakhand – 2022 • Accelerator in AWE – Banasthali and the US Embassy – 2022 • Best Progressive Farmer – ICAR 2021 • Enterprising Women Entrepreneur – MSME 2021 • Best Social Enterprise Award – Action for India – 2019 • Selected among 100 Women Transforming India by NITI Aayog – 2019 • Top 10 Agri Companies in Agri Udaan – 2019 • Honoured as Agri Input Company by Development Bank of Singapore – 2019 • Awarded Tech Camp – Changing Women Changemakers – US Embassy – USA – 2018 • Award from Cherie Blair Foundation for Mentoring Women in Business – 2017 • CII Innovation Award – 2017 • National Award for mushroom farming by GoI - ICAR – 2016 • Awarded Udyog Ratna Award – 2015 • Awarded Successful Businesswomen of Uttarakhand in Social Entrepreneurship – 2015 • State Award for Mushroom Farming – Uttarakhand – 2015 • Certificate for Training Programme on Medicinal Mushrooms held at ICAR – Directorate of Mushroom Research – Solan – 2015 |
| Next big milestone | Secure patents and launch more innovative products like mushroom wine and mushroom-based cosmetics. |
| Qualifications | B.Sc in Botany and Chemistry - Poona University, PhD in Mushroom Farming - Rai University, MBA in International Business - The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts (ICFAI) |



9. Ishita Ghosh

Designated partner, MillValley Technologies LLP

How it began

Initially involved in her family business, Ishita Ghosh transitioned to entrepreneurship by starting MillValley Technologies LLP in 2018 with her tech-savvy husband. Business operations officially began in 2019, focusing on innovative digital displays. Inspired by a trip to China, where they saw displays utilising advanced technology, they identified a gap in the Indian market, especially in states like West Bengal, and decided to address it. The company specialises in connected displays (design and manufacturing). In India, it is a field with limited but high-cost solutions. Since its inception, Ishita's company expanded to sectors like digital out of home (DooH) (used by a state-owned transit system), manufactured connected displays for hospital chains, diagnostic centres, hospitality, restaurants, quick-service restaurant (QSR) chains, education, national retail and public sector undertakings (PSUs), and has marquee clients from all these sectors.

Ishita's journey was laden with challenges, particularly in scaling her business in the public sector. While MillValley was able to secure small Government orders, large-scale projects were hindered by stringent requirements in terms of experience and substantial financial guarantees – both of which were difficult for the startup to pick up.

However, MillValley was able to overcome that and currently aims to expand across India, leveraging its innovative connected displays technology which can be customised according to the region and controlled remotely. In the long term, the company is eyeing nationwide expansion and increased presence in the education and hospitality sectors.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The initial phase of MillValley involved targeting schools and hospitals, which had the most demand for connected displays. Key clients like Ruby and other hospitals in Kolkata helped the company gain traction. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the company secured significant projects from the state government, which solidified their market presence. MillValley's innovative products, such as digital stands and multi-section displays, which can be controlled remotely, ensured high customer satisfaction with a nil-grievance track record. Their strategic approach involved gradually expanding across India and supplying to neighbouring countries like Nepal.

While trying to scale up MillValley, challenges arose in the form of navigating bureaucratic hurdles and securing sufficient funding for their larger projects. As mentioned before, government tenders had high-level requirements for experience and financial guarantees that startups typically do not have. However, despite these obstacles, the company successfully implemented projects in major metros.

In the short term, the company aims to expand into new states and enhance their DooH advertising reach. Patience and perseverance are emphasised by Ishita as crucial traits for such entrepreneurial success, advising young entrepreneurs to remain persistent despite setbacks.



“We must exhibit patience and perseverance even in the face of setbacks, as success may not come immediately but can be ultimately achieved through consistent efforts and dedication.”

– Ishita Ghosh
Designated partner, MillValley Technologies LLP

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Despite not being from a technical background, Ishita leveraged her husband's expertise in electronics and display technologies to build the company. The importance of collaboration and utilising available technical expertise when entering a new field were highlighted time and again by her. The couple's experience highlights the need for identifying market gaps and being innovative in offering solutions. She suggested that aspiring entrepreneurs should start by addressing specific needs and expand strategically, ensuring high-quality products and maintaining customer satisfaction.

She highlighted the need for better understanding and support for startups, especially from governmental bodies. Her advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly women, focuses on being patient and persevering.

While not extensively involved in empowerment initiatives, she actively contributes to Nirdhan, supporting rural women in West Bengal by providing sewing training and equipment. This initiative has helped many women gain financial independence and pursue further education, illustrating the impact of empowering women through development and support.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | www.livesignages.com |
| USP | MillValley offers a unique product and solution that's entirely different in approach from the market. The company has targeted eight industries and the government as its clients and has been successful in all projects so far. The product offers the option of remotely controlling the connected displays from anywhere, which is a major advantage. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Team size | 5–10 |
| Headquarters | Kolkata |
| Next big milestone | Their strategic approach involves gradually expanding across India and even supplying to neighbouring countries like Nepal. |
| Qualification | Master of Arts in English |
| Investment/grant/funding | Debt |

10. Jayshree Shah

Founder, Esha Biodegradable

How it began

Jayshree Shah is a resident of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Though originally from a software engineering background, Jayshree has always been motivated by a deep-seated desire to tackle environmental issues. Through her startup venture, she set out to create natural, biodegradable and sustainable alternatives to the widely used non-biodegradable materials. In Gujarat's Anand district, banana trees are plentiful. Jayshree saw a significant amount of agricultural waste resulting from banana cultivation. She identified an opportunity and decided to use this to produce banana fibre which could be used as a sustainable alternative for polyester and nylon. Jayshree conducted six months of extensive research and frequently travelled from Ahmedabad to Anand. She interacted with local farmers who worked in banana cultivation to gain valuable insights into their challenges in waste management. She came to know how those farmers struggled with the accumulation of agricultural waste without getting any additional income opportunities.

One of the major hurdles Jayshree faced was establishing a reliable system for procuring banana stems since the process is completely manual and highly labour-intensive. The supply of stems is also highly sensitive to seasonal changes with heavy rains (during the monsoon season) significantly hindering procurement. Additionally, these stems, which weigh between 40 to 50 kilograms each, lacked efficient transportation solutions from the farmland to processing facilities. All of these called for the development of a robust supply chain which can address the logistical challenges.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

After overcoming the challenge of sourcing banana stems, Jayshree's focus was on ensuring the sustainability of her business. The production of banana fibres and other natural fibres to serve as alternatives to traditional non-biodegradable materials (like polyester and nylon) is still in its early stages in India. As a result, it was difficult to build a sustainable business from banana fibre production alone. Therefore, she decided to diversify her product range. She began incorporating pineapple fibre into her offerings and started manufacturing products such as handicrafts and handlooms. This diversification helped in mitigating the challenges related to a single source of supply and also provided an additional revenue stream, making her business more sustainable.

Jayshree also found an innovative use for a by-product of banana fibre manufacturing – banana pseudo stem sap water. Considering its rich nutritional and microbial content, she knew that it can be marketed as an organic liquid fertiliser. This provided farmers with an alternative to conventional chemical fertilisers and further diversified Esha Biodegradable's revenue streams.

Jayshree recently ventured into manufacturing handmade paper using banana fibre and rice paddy. By leveraging the eco-friendly and unique properties of these products, she is strategically positioning her offerings to gain a competitive edge over synthetic fibre-based products existing in the market. Jayshree plans to expand her operations within India and eventually beyond its borders. She is also exploring the use of pineapple fibre as another raw material to create an even more diverse range of products.



"I saw a chance to make a difference by turning waste into something valuable. We're not just offering an alternative to harmful materials but also supporting sustainability and reducing waste"

– Jayshree Shah
Founder, Esha Biodegradable

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Jayshree's venture is creating employment opportunities for women. She is actively involved in training and equipping women with the skills needed for making handicrafts and origami products from banana fibre. She also lets them work from home, which allows them to earn a living without relocating.

Jayshree encourages the younger generation to give entrepreneurship a chance as she believes that it not only allows individuals to pursue their own ventures but also helps create livelihoods and generate income for others, thereby contributing to wealth creation of the nation as a whole.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | www.eshabiodegradable.com |
| USP | Vertical integration across the supply chain from farm to the finished product and usage of fresh ingredients and sustainable methods. This supports farmers and uplifts the people who live in rural areas. |
| Mission | To combat environmental challenges by creating natural, biodegradable alternatives to common non-biodegradable materials and using banana fibre and pineapple fibre from agricultural waste, Esha biodegradable offers sustainable substitutes for polyester and nylon. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Team size | 10–15 |
| Headquarter | Ahmedabad, Gujarat |
| Next big milestone | Establish partnerships and distribution channels in key regions across India and conduct feasibility studies for international expansion. At the same time, conducting research and development to incorporate pineapple fibre products in the company's portfolio. |
| Qualifications | Post-graduate Diploma in Computer Application, Diploma in Mechanical Engineering |

11. Dr K Indumathy

Managing Director, Elies Biotech

How it began

Eroplants Laboratory for Industry and Environmental Solutions (ELIES) Biotech, co-founded by Dr K. Indumathy and her husband Dr Aravindh S., began as a venture driven by their expertise in biotechnology. Initially, they ventured into academia, working as assistant professors, before transitioning through the MSME–Unemployed Youth Employment Generation Program (UYEGP) scheme. However, soon their decision to change the course stemmed from a desire to address agricultural and environmental challenges prevalent in their district. Through extensive research and surveys, they identified key issues such as agricultural productivity and industrial effluent treatment. Leveraging their backgrounds, they developed mixed microbial consortia (custom made microbial bio cultures) tailored to agricultural and industrial needs and eventually expanded their organisation's offerings into three domains – food, environment, and agriculture. Indu's journey is marked by strategic partnerships, trademark registrations and academic collaborations. They soon secured the trademark for their brand and logo – 'Microrapid', which was synonymous with the company's focus on rapid results from their microbial solutions. Based in Erode, Tamil Nadu, their commitment to innovation is evident in ongoing patent processes and numerous memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with universities, educational institutes, and incubation centres. The company was incubated at BIRAC BioNEST Bio incubation facility at PSG-Science and Technology Entrepreneurial Park (STEP). This partnership not only facilitated manpower acquisition but also fostered research and product testing, driving the company's evolution from academia to entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The growth trajectory of the company demonstrates a strategic and effective evolution in their product offerings. Initially, the company was focused on mushroom tissue culture and spawn production with a particular emphasis on microbial solutions for agriculture. However, it has now expanded its portfolio to include environmental solutions, particularly in waste management for industries like textile, tannery, paper and pharmaceuticals. This expansion was driven by market demands and collaborations with tanneries. The interactions with farmers have led to a shift towards sustainable agricultural practices, reflecting the changing dynamics of the market. In the face of competition, Indu continues to prioritise constant product innovation and technical support to differentiate the company and create a niche for itself in the market. She also leverages government grants and bank loans for product development and is expanding the company's presence in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Empowering the employees of the company and addressing industry challenges have been crucial aspects of Indu's entrepreneurial journey. This includes creating widespread awareness and phasing out harmful agricultural substances. With a modest team size of eight consisting of biotechnologists and engineers, the company prioritises technological advancements and product development. The company's innovative approach extends beyond product offerings to encompass technical assistance solutions and aims to address a critical gap in the market. Its participation in apprenticeship programmes highlights its commitment to talent development.



"It is important that we learn to apply the knowledge that we gain. Once we start showing commitment to our entrepreneurial venture, then the people around us, especially our family members, will provide a helping hand."

– K. Indumathy
Managing Director, Elies Biotech

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Indu's vision extends beyond the business's success to empowering aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly women. She advocates government schemes and funding opportunities and mentorship and networking support, and the company is a member of CII – Southern region and Indu is also a member of IWN – Tamil Nadu. Through partnerships with colleges and internships, her team provides hands-on guidance to future entrepreneurs, fostering a culture of innovation and risk-taking. Furthermore, their commitment to sustainable agriculture is aligned with societal shifts towards organic farming, facilitated by affordable and accessible bio inputs.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | www.eliesbiotech.co.in |
| USP | Their mixed microbial consortia are custom-made, cost-effective, user-friendly and result oriented. It can be used for various applications like improving soil fertility, sewage treatment, composting of organic waste, biogas production, etc. |
| Mission | To touch more lives through their initiatives and to have a more sustainable and healthy soil and healthy water. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Co-founder/s | Dr Aravindh S. |
| Team size | 8 |
| Headquarters | Erode, Tamil Nadu |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Best Women Entrepreneur Awardee 2019 – Social Welfare Board, Erode Collectorate.• Successful Women Entrepreneur Awardee 2022 – Canara Bank – RSETI, Erode.• Sustainability Innovator Award 2023 – Guardians of the Green |
| Qualification | M.Sc., Alagappa University; Ph.D., Anna University |
| Investment/grant/funding | Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan under Karnataka Govt. (RUSA 2.0), DST Nidhi Prayas Grant from Department of Science and Technology, Tamil Nadu's flagship seed fund initiative for Startups (TANSEED 5.0), grant from Startup TN |

12. Khyati Maheshwari

Co-founder, Stocktick Capital (a venture of Waymark Enterprises Pvt Ltd)

How it began

Both Khyati Maheshwari and Vijay Maheshwari always had a keen interest in the domain of finance and prior to starting their venture, they aimed to become bankers or financial specialists. The main focus of Stocktick Capital is to employ emotional quotient (EQ) based strategies, as opposed to the conventional intelligence quotient (IQ) based solutions available in the market, to provide comprehensive financial services to their clients. They initially began by providing financial services to individual clients and then graduated to mid-sized corporate clients, while remaining bootstrapped throughout the growth phase of their venture.

Stocktick Capital boasts a high client retention rate of 95%. Led by Rumpa Das (Tech Co-Founder, Stocktick Capital), the platform has incorporated an intuitive software known as the Wealth Robotic Assistant Programme (W.R.A.P.) for enhancing client engagement and providing personalised investment advice.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The founders were very clear about building long-term relationship with their clients from the beginning and factored in profits accordingly. By including more corporate treasury services, they managed to acquire wealthy and high net-worth individuals (HNIs) in their business as new customers. Utilising EQ based strategies, they managed to shield themselves against market risks during unprecedented times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The integration of their signature product 'W.R.A.P. – the robotic assistant for EQ investing' into their platform underlines their commitment to the use of modern technologies while ensuring that customers are offered exceptionally personalised services.

Post the inception of the company, the founders came across multiple challenges. Two major challenges were obtaining finance and managing costs, which were solved by adopting a lean model that laid a strong foundation for a reliable brand. Owing to the EQ-based formulation of the brand, customers who invested in the firm had the choice to stay with it for a longer period and generate more profits.

The founders also hold workshops and awareness programmes quite frequently. Their most notable tie-ups have been with law enforcement agencies and educational institutions. This can be seen as a part of their market acquisition strategy. Strategically, they're targeting to achieve an asset under management (AUM) of INR 1,000 crores while forging partnerships with more financial institutions to improve the brand and funding momentum. Another major initiative undertaken by Stocktick Capital is empowering women financially.

Khyati recognises that women are often not the primary decision-makers in the households when it comes to finances. Through her platform, she aims to increase financial awareness and confidence among women and help them attain financial independence. Her company is also addressing the wider issue of financial literacy by assisting clients with their post-retirement planning and overall financial stability. They ensure that their clients' financial plans align with their emotional and risk profiles, creating a more inclusive and supportive financial environment.



“Even in today’s day and age, most women are not prominently involved in financial decision-making. Our goal is to raise awareness and empower them, fostering personal and financial independence.”

– Khyati Maheshwari
Co-founder, Stocktick Capital

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Stocktick Capital's business strategy looks beyond client investments and gives women a way to manage their finances and create an income on their own, thereby making them self-sufficient and fostering a more inclusive financial ecosystem.

Khyati and her co-founders conduct awareness programmes aimed at educating and involving women in financial decision-making. Their approach is oriented towards investing in clients while creating opportunities for women to earn and manage their finances independently.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | www.stocktick.in |
| USP | The platform differentiates itself by offering EQ-based financial strategies, catering to a broad client base ranging from individuals to corporate treasuries. The firm's W.R.A.P software enhances client engagement and investment personalisation. |
| Mission | To provide comprehensive financial services, helping clients with wealth creation and its transfer across generations |
| Founded in | 2017 |
| Co-founder/s | Vijay Maheshwari and Rumpa Das |
| Team size | 5–10 |
| Headquarters | Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra |
| Next-big milestone | The founders aim to build an AUM of INR 1,000 crores and are working towards partnerships with financial institutions to strengthen their brand and funding. |
| Qualification | MBA in Finance |

13. Kohima Dhandhanian

Co-founder, EPR Recycler

How it began

Inspired by the environmental impact of plastic pollution and supported by her husband's existing business in packaging and the encouragement she received from her father-in-law, Kohima ventured into the plastics business. Her journey began humbly when she observed a cow eating plastic waste and was deeply moved by this episode which prompted her to start the recycling plant.

Kohima focused on multilayer plastics (MLP), with an aim to create value from a type of plastic which is typically neglected by ragpickers and other vendors. She developed a patented technology for converting MLP into outdoor furniture making her venture a pioneer in the segment and fulfilling her vision of contributing to environmental sustainability.

Kohima's journey into entrepreneurship stemmed from a desire to address plastic pollution. Through collaboration with many NGOs and leveraging existing business networks, she positioned herself as a forerunner in recycling MLP.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Her business model targets business-to-government (B2G) sales, prioritising government recognition and support for their environmentally friendly products. While she aspires to expand her business to business-to-business (B2B) and direct-to-consumer (D2C) models, she acknowledges the necessity of government backing for scalability. Challenges also include sourcing MLP waste, navigating regulatory compliance and obtaining financial support. Despite efforts to engage with government bodies and authorities, Kohima is yet to secure substantial support or mandates for purchasing recycled products.

Scaling the business involves collaborations with NGOs for marketing, leveraging existing industrial networks and tapping into the furniture market. Her approach includes engaging with producers through extended producer responsibility (EPR) compliance and fostering awareness among consumers (especially those from the middle-income bracket) about the environmental impact of their choices.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Kohima emphasises the importance of women's empowerment and has hired a majority of female workers in cleaning and processing plastic waste at her organisation. However, obstacles due to limited resources for community initiatives are still a challenge for her organisation. While she has donated products to public spaces, she highlights the need for sustainable partnerships and financial backing to expand her organisation's impact. Her suggestion includes incentivising public and private sectors to support recycled products through mandates or standards, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility. She also highlights the importance of empowering women to drive social change and advocates for the need for a behavioral shift towards waste segregation. Her involvement in startup organisations reflects her commitment to mentoring aspiring entrepreneurs, especially women.



"I strongly believe that women have the ability to excel in any field and lead in every aspect of life. Empowering women is essential to realise their full potential."

– Kohima Dhandhanian
Co-founder, EPR Recycler

In a nutshell

| | |
|---------------|--|
| URL | www.eprrecycler.com |
| USP | EPR Recycler is one of the few recyclers which recycles MLP waste. This prevents plastic waste from getting accumulated in landfills or getting into rivers and water streams which could have resulted in damage to various ecosystems. |
| Mission | Recycling MLP plastic waste and changing it into sustainable outdoor furniture, thereby creating value from waste to protect the planet from plastic pollution. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Co-founder/s | Jaikishan Dhandhanian |
| Team size | 10–15 |
| Headquarters | Kanpur |
| Qualification | B. Sc (Science) |

14. Kriti Choudhary

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Kritech Technologies Pvt Ltd

How it began

Kritech Technologies initially offered IT consultancy in software and hardware services with a vision to provide comprehensive end-to-end services to its clientele. With the accelerating pace of change, they stepped out with the consolidated concept of IT Managed services along with their ongoing vision, focusing on cost efficiency & tailored solutions. It follows a five-step process to:

- 1) conduct a thorough analysis of client operations, market and competition to identify the best solutions
- 2) develop a customised plan for its services and solutions
- 3) begin the design and development process for specific business needs
- 4) implement the customised solution into business operations and integrate them with other systems and platforms
- 5) provide comprehensive post-sale services to seamlessly integrate the solution.

Kriti says that the company takes a comprehensive approach towards client interactions through social bonding. She reflected on her journey and recounted the initial challenges of starting a company like competing on cost and scaling it through providing custom post-sales solutions catered to the individual needs of clients.

The firm's commitment to gender diversity is evident through its hiring practices. It targets 33% of the workforce to be comprised of women. The company's growth plans include going for an initial public offering (IPO) within the next five years. The company is also delving into various aspects of AI related services like robotic process automations, AI security solutions, data analytics, integration, maintenance and support of existing AI systems. Kritech Technologies will also be entering the realm of social service for education sector and upliftment of women from a grassroot level.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The organisation faces several challenges stemming from market competition and client acquisition strategies. Notably, the competitive bidding landscape poses hurdles in offering competitive quotations while ensuring quality services. The company navigates these challenges by prioritising client interaction, understanding their needs and providing customised solutions while maintaining cost-effectiveness. Kriti also stresses on continuous adaptation to technological advancements and employee training as integral components for staying abreast with the latest developments in the dynamic IT sector – which in turn helps her firm to maintain their competitive edge. The founder's hands-on approach to leadership, involving herself in all aspects of the business, from technical to HR functions and the company's commitment to diversity and women empowerment enabled Kritech Technologies to offer an inclusive and tech-enabled workplace.



“Learn every day, grow every second and explore as much as you can.”

– **Kriti Choudhary**
MD and CEO,
Kritech Technologies Pvt Ltd

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Kriti's focus on empowering women, both within the organisation and the broader community can be observed in the women-centric hiring practices, fostering an inclusive work culture and adopting a proactive stance towards gender diversity and empowerment. The company also seeks to incorporate sustainability practices, feedback mechanisms and fostering long-term relationships with a focus on client satisfaction.

Kriti actively mentors and leads the teams across various departments and encourages the adoption of strategies which promote gender diversity and providing training. She also says that the vision of her company is to have a long-term impact on society, particularly through education and outreach programmes.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | https://kritechtechnologies.com/ |
| USP | Kritech Technologies is a system integrator that specialises in IT managed services and consulting. The company provides services with a focus on cost-effectiveness and time efficiency using advanced technologies to keep the customers up to date. |
| Mission | Comprehensive and innovative solutions, cost-effective module to retain the clientele with growth-oriented strategies. |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Team size | 59+ |
| Next-big milestone | IPO in 5 years |
| Headquarters | Navi Mumbai |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PM Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan Award 2022 for “Entrepreneur of the year” in the startup category• The award of ‘Exceptional Women of Excellence’ from Women Economic Forum in 2022 |
| Qualification | MBA (HR) – Bharathi Vidyapeeth |

15. Kunjpreet Arora

CEO, Angirus Ind Pvt. Ltd

How it began

Kunjpreet Arora, the founder of Angirus, was born in Udaipur. She is a civil engineer by training who has a master's in sales and marketing from IIM Indore. Since she was young, she had witnessed the increasing amount of garbage being disposed of in the landfills and dumpsters – particularly plastic waste – in the city as well as its surrounding, impacting its image as a popular tourist destination. Motivated to confront this issue, Kunjpreet meticulously explored potential solutions, eventually gravitating towards the concept of repurposing plastic waste into construction materials. Recognising the potential of this idea, Kunjpreet, in collaboration with her co-founder Lokesh, embarked on a concerted effort to actualise it. Initially, they attempted to integrate waste plastic directly into conventional construction materials such as sand, cement, and mortar. However, this approach proved unfeasible. Drawing inspiration from a successful international technology, they devised an innovative solution: melting plastic, amalgamating it with waste construction materials and subsequently shaping them into bricks.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Following extensive experimentation and testing, once they were confident in the commercial viability, they started the production of 'Wricks'. These innovative bricks boasted of favourable and useful attributes, like being 30% lighter, 20% stronger and 80% more waterproof than conventional red clay bricks. Houses constructed with Wricks provided enhanced comfort, with interior temperatures significantly cooler compared to those built with regular clay bricks. Another advantage was the remarkably shorter manufacturing time of Wricks in contrast to conventional bricks, with the former being ready in just one day, compared to the several days taken by regular bricks to bake in kilns.

In 2020, Kunjpreet and Lokesh established Angirus and set up a pilot manufacturing unit in Udaipur to produce their flagship product 'Wricks'. Spanning approximately 4,000 square feet, this unit utilises three specialised machinery equipment sourced from vendors from various parts of India. With a much smaller footprint compared to traditional kilns which span 4–6 acres, they were still able to efficiently supply Wricks to clients nationwide, from Srinagar to Chennai.

While the initial demand for sustainable construction materials fuelled the business's growth, Kunjpreet soon encountered various challenges. The COVID-19 lockdown disrupted the sourcing of raw materials and securing funding for setting up the manufacturing unit proved challenging. Additionally, regulatory hurdles, particularly the absence of the recognised certification standards for bricks made from waste plastic and construction materials in India were yet another obstacle to market acceptance.

However, Kunjpreet's resilience and determination enabled her to navigate through these challenges. Despite the initial setbacks, she remained undeterred and is currently strategising



“As a native of Udaipur, I’ve witnessed the detrimental impact of plastic waste on my city’s environment and its allure as a tourist destination firsthand. I was determined to convert this challenge into an opportunity by repurposing plastic waste into innovative construction materials, paving the way for a greener and sustainable future for Udaipur and beyond.”

– Kunjpreet Arora
CEO, Angirus Ind Pvt. Ltd

the expansion of their manufacturing operations to Bengaluru. To facilitate rapid expansion into tier 2 and tier 3 cities, she plans to adopt a franchise model to accelerate business growth as well as foster entrepreneurship at the grassroots level and provide healthier working conditions for labourers in those regions.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Kunjpreet strongly believes that one should not wait for the opportune moment to pursue one's passion. In her own life as well, she had the chance to secure employment elsewhere upon completing her graduation, but she knew that it might divert her from addressing the pressing issue she was determined to solve. Bolstered by her conviction, she embarked on her entrepreneurial journey to tackle the problem she felt strongly about, and she advises budding entrepreneurs to do the same.

Throughout her journey, Kunjpreet has experienced that the construction industry poses some distinctive hurdles, particularly for women. She grappled with scepticism regarding her foundational knowledge of the industry as well as the preference among stakeholders to engage with their male counterparts within her company. Despite these obstacles, she has resolutely carved a niche for herself.

Kunjpreet established a supportive community in her Udaipur Startup Club, offering guidance and encouragement to aspiring female entrepreneurs. Through these efforts, she plans to empower and uplift younger women striving to realise their entrepreneurial aspirations.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | https://www.angirusind.com/ |
| USP | Angirus Ind revolutionises brick manufacturing by utilising patented Wricks technology to convert industrial waste, including single-use plastic into premium, eco-friendly building materials at a fraction of the cost. |
| Mission | To revolutionise the brick industry in India by mitigating carbon emissions, conserving fertile soil and resources, eradicating labour exploitation, and combating oceanic plastic pollution through innovative and eco-friendly solutions. |
| Founded in | 2020 |
| Team size | 5–10 |
| Headquarters | Udaipur, Rajasthan |
| Awards/accolades | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Top UpLink Innovator and winner of global plastic waste challenge by UpLink- World Economic Forum 2. First runner-up of TiE University global pitch competition where more than 1,400 startups participated across 30 countries and Angirus Ind was the only winner from India. 3. Featured by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Netflix India in 'Azadi ki Amrit Kahaniya' |
| Next big milestone | Establish a robust franchise network in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, leveraging the model to accelerate growth, empower local entrepreneurs and improve working conditions for labourers. |
| Qualifications | Bachelors in civil engineering |



16. Manishaa Soin

Founder, Aica Health

How it began

Manishaa's entrepreneurial journey started with a deeply personal experience related to her mother's diagnosis. During this phase, she recognised the challenges that are associated with managing healthcare needs across the span of a large and socially diverse country like India. She founded Aica Health to address the prevalent gaps in healthcare access for India's diverse population. She focused on making the platform user-friendly. Her company's healthcare platform leverages conversational AI and natural language processing to meet the needs of patients and caregivers across different regions of India. It utilises small language models and open-source datasets to tackle chronic care and other caregiving challenges. Manishaa plans to eventually offer her platform's services and other product offerings for free to the end users. In order to keep her business sustainable, she is exploring revenue opportunities through tokenisation and partnerships with other stakeholders in the healthcare industry. She believes that it is absolutely necessary to make healthcare solutions accessible and inclusive, particularly in a country like India, where significant healthcare disparities exist.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Manishaa's journey has been riddled with challenges, but she has always remained committed to her vision. She has spent countless hours in various efforts and has left no stone unturned to bring her vision to life. She worked hard to secure funding to scale her venture. She has always been involved in doing due diligence to ensure that at all times, her team's activities are aligned with her vision. She also worked on garnering support from key stakeholders in India's fragmented healthcare market. She created a robust ecosystem to facilitate collaboration among doctors, hospitals, insurance companies and pharmaceutical firms to ensure her platform's success. She is continuing to explore different avenues to improve the technological infrastructure that she has built using innovative solutions.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Manishaa is also passionate about empowering women. Within her team, she champions gender diversity and actively strives to provide leadership opportunities to women. She strongly advocates for the participation of women in entrepreneurship and frequently dedicates time to mentor aspiring female entrepreneurs. She shares her invaluable insights and experiences with them. She understands the potential and the transformative power of women-led businesses in driving social and economic progress. Manishaa aims to build an ecosystem that supports women to excel in entrepreneurship and leadership roles through her various initiatives and partnerships.

Manishaa is also involved in initiatives which are focused on educating women about sexual wellness and reproductive health. She aims to make Aica's healthcare platform a source of reliable information for women, empowering them to make informed decisions about their health and bodies. By addressing these often-taboo topics and providing accessible information, Manishaa seeks to break barriers and establish a more supportive and inclusive environment for women's health.



“Stay committed to your endeavours despite encountering setbacks; persist in your efforts knowing that each day presents a fresh opportunity and recognise the significance of the time you invest.”

– Manishaa Soin
Founder, Aica Health

In a nutshell

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|--------------------------|---|
| URL | www.aicahealth.com |
| USP | AICA is a personal digital care assistant developed by Aica Health, aimed at improving patient healthcare. It engages with patients through conversations in their local languages. AICA serves as an always-available care assistant and advisor, supporting patients when they are most vulnerable. It provides guidance and handholding, and helps them navigate their healthcare journeys with ease and it reduces stress for caregivers and support systems alike. Aica Health's AI technology continuously analyses conversations to make them as close to human interaction as possible. |
| Founded in | 2022 |
| Co-founder/s | Anisha Soin |
| Team size | 5–10 |
| Headquarters | Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forbes – Top 100 startups to watch out for by IDFC • 100 Women Transforming India • National Award Finalist by the Government of India |
| Qualification | Bachelor of Science, St Stephens College |
| Investment/grant/funding | Incubator Grants CSR – 8550000 - Amity, Meity, IIT Mandi |



17. Manya Gupta

Founder, M Truck (Cheval Courant Logistics Pvt Ltd)

How it began

From an early stage in her life, Manya harboured a clear ambition to venture into entrepreneurship. Coming from a well-respected business family, entrepreneurship has always been in her blood. Before starting M Truck, she was engaged in her family's export business where she assumed the responsibility for overseeing the marketing operations. During this period, she noticed that logistics posed a significant challenge for the supply chain within the country, especially the supply chain for full load truck transportation, which suffered from fragmentation. The persistent scarcity of drivers emerged as a recurring issue and most drivers considered delivery contracts as unprofitable because they never had return cargo bookings. These challenges in the supply chain for land transport inspired Manya to start her own business, M Truck.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The initial business model of M Truck can be compared to existing popular vehicle aggregators, as it served mainly as an aggregator of trucks. It assisted the various companies in locating nearby drivers for delivering their products within cities. However, this model did not receive the desired response in the market. Some of the reasons for this were the slow rate at which the technology was being embraced by the truck drivers and the long periods that they had to wait for payment from small businesses. Such barriers restricted growth and expansion of the business, and the drivers were not inclined to go through the platform due to the consideration on the legitimacy of it. This added a third layer of difficulty in establishing a good driver base which was a critical success factor for the firm.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic there was a great demand of inter-city product transportation, especially within the foods and beverages industry. M Truck, led by Manya, successfully obtained contracts with key players in the food and beverages industry for inter-city transportation. This proved to be advantageous for drivers, as it guaranteed return bookings and prompt payments, ultimately improving operational efficiency.

At present, Manya aims to expand M Truck's position in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi NCR and Punjab. She wants to occupy a large portion of this market in these regions. This strategy has been used to ensure that there is a constant supply of orders to minimise the issue of return trips with little or no loads. Using the Internet of Things (IoT) to get real-time updates on the availability of drivers and loading status of trucks M Trucks ensures that their processes are more efficient.

Manya stresses that the company's growth needs to be asset-light and acknowledges the importance of technological development for the logistics sector. According to her, the use of messaging applications and e-mail eases the process of onboarding drivers. This approach allows the company to allocate more time



“We saw how the logistics industry was stuck in the past and was plagued by inefficiencies and a lack of customer focus. We knew we could disrupt this traditional model by bringing technology, transparency and a commitment to exceptional service at the forefront”

– Manya Gupta,
Founder, M Truck
(Cheval Courant Logistics
Pvt Ltd)

integrating the driver network, establishing trust, conducting background checks, facilitating online payments, and fostering a collaborative partnership ethos for mutual benefit.

In the coming years, Manya wants to extend her business to newer heights and to explore new customer bases in other states in India. Her long-term plan is to turn the firm into a full-fledged third-party logistics company and deliver integrated solutions.

Besides growth, Manya has been focused on sustainability and she intends to incorporate electric trucks. This is the mark of her ambition, in which she outlines a clear plan to grow, but more importantly, to grow with cutting-edge and environmentally friendly solutions in the logistics sector.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Beyond her entrepreneurial ventures, Manya is also dedicated to advancing women empowerment initiatives. As an active member of the Young India Organisation, the youth arm of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), she serves as the Chairperson of the Entrepreneurship vertical. In this role, Manya organises regular leadership sessions to promote dialogue and mentorship opportunities for aspiring women leaders. These sessions feature accomplished women from various fields who share their professional journeys and insights. It provides young women the required guidance and encouragement they need to pursue their dreams.

Central to Manya's philosophy is the idea that when faced with daunting challenges, young aspiring entrepreneurs should not ask 'why?' but rather 'why not?'. She urges fellow women entrepreneurs to cultivate a resilient mindset and a proactive attitude. She emphasises that these qualities are crucial for building the confidence and determination necessary to achieve one's goals.

In a nutshell

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|--------------------|--|
| URL | https://www.getmtruck.com/ |
| USP | Technologically driven, customer-centric solution with scalable flexibility, enabling logistics operations to commence in any location within three days of contract signing, underpinned by a commitment to innovation and continuous improvement. |
| Mission | To revolutionise logistics by providing efficient, hassle-free trucking services enhancing driver income, optimising routes, ensuring compliance, reducing costs and guaranteeing the safety of goods for the clients. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Team size | 15–20 |
| Headquarters | Gurgaon, Haryana |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerator: Google for startups and 91 springboards • Awarded Top 10 women leaders In Logistics by Women entrepreneur India |
| Next big milestone | Electrifying the future of logistics by building a fleet of electric trucks to provide low-cost, sustainable transportation to corporate clients. Lead the change in making electric commercial transportation the new standard, significantly reducing the industry's carbon footprint along with transitioning her company into a comprehensive third-party logistics (3-PL) entity. |
| Qualifications | Chartered Financial Analyst - Indian Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts, Master of Business Administration – Indian Institute of Finance, Economics (Hons.) – Hindu College, University of Delhi |



18. Meghna Saraogi

Founder and CEO, mirrAR

How it began

Meghna started her career as a graphic designer after graduation. In order to pursue higher studies, she relocated from her hometown Indore, a tier 2 city, to Delhi. During this phase, she found herself experiencing self-doubt and seeking validation from other people on matters of appearance and fashion. Motivated by her own experiences, she aspired to instil confidence in women facing similar challenges. This catalysed her vision to revolutionise the way in which women share and receive fashion-related knowledge.

Departing from her conventional career path in graphic designing, Meghna founded 'Styledotme'. She was driven by the mission to democratise fashion advice. However, her lack of technical expertise posed a formidable obstacle at the outset. Nevertheless, with guidance from her mentor, she pieced together a team by recruiting a couple of fresh graduates and other resources to develop her vision into a viable application. Despite its initial success, the company's scalability as a B2C platform that provided fashion advice proved to be limited. This prompted a strategic pivot towards the B2B operating model, coupled with the growing advent of augmented reality (AR) technologies.

Thus, mirrAR was born. Meghna envisioned mirrAR to be a pioneering force in the realm of AR technology, which could fundamentally reshape the consumer experience of retail and online shopping. Initially, Meghna partnered with jewellery brands. By introducing live AR capabilities, mirrAR enabled consumers to virtually try on various jewellery pieces, which turned out to be a disruptive move in the industry. This innovation proved highly advantageous for jewellery companies as it obviated the need for extensive inventory stockpiles because customers could gain comprehensive insights into products via the 'Try on' feature. This increased customer confidence and informed decision-making.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Through strategic partnerships with numerous jewellery brands, mirrAR facilitated notable reductions in return rates and simultaneously enhanced sales conversion rates and buyer confidence. Building upon this success, Meghna went ahead to expand the platform into additional sectors such as makeup, skincare and watches.

However, Meghna did encounter significant hurdles on her journey. Many companies initially resisted embracing technological innovation and were hesitant to allocate resources to AR integration. Persuasive advocacy on Meghna's part was required to overcome this challenge. She demonstrated the tangible benefits of adopting AR technology to these enterprises. As a result, more than 50+ global enterprises use the technology at present, to significantly improve their overall customer experience.

Meghna successfully navigated the complexities that came as part of the journey and mirrAR was successfully established as an innovator in experiential shopping. Its USP is that it allows its clients to concentrate on their core competencies while reaping the benefits of enhanced consumer experiences.



"I founded MirrAR with the vision to pioneer the realm of augmented reality (AR) technology and fundamentally reshape the consumer experience in retail and online shopping."

– Meghna Saraogi
Founder and CEO, mirrAR

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Reflecting on her journey, Meghna highlighted the importance of seeking assistance proactively. She advocated that one should pursue their vision tenaciously in the face of adversity. She also imparted a crucial piece of advice, particularly to women entrepreneurs, that they should harbour unwavering confidence in their dreams and aspirations. While obstacles are inevitable, perseverance coupled with support from family and friends is more than enough to navigate through adversities and ultimately achieve success.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | https://www.mirrar.com/ |
| USP | MirrAR's USP are: 1) Its revolutionary blend of a DIY platform featuring an extensive inventory and provision to try on items virtually 2) AI-driven emotional analysis 3) patented and precise face-tracking technology. |
| Mission | Their mission is to bridge the gap between online and in-store retail, empowering customers to visualise and try products before purchasing. This will reduce uncertainty and return rates, and enhance overall customer satisfaction across channels. |
| Founded in | 2015 |
| Team size | 25+ |
| Headquarters | Bengaluru, Karnataka |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IReC Best In-Store Innovation of the Year 2023• IGSC – Women in Business Awards 2017• The Fashion Awards 2017 (Meghna Saraogi)• Headline speaker - Retail Jeweller India Forum, 2023• NASSCOM Emerge 50 2023 winner |
| Next big milestone | Revolutionise global shopping experiences using new-age innovative technologies such as AR, VR, AI and the metaverse |
| Qualifications | Masters in Visual Communication Design, Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology |

19. Monika Jain

Founder, Dparth Tech

How it began

Monika's journey started with the Bharat Net Project under the Digital India programme, which was the flagship initiative to provide broadband connectivity in rural India. Initially, she was associated with a major conglomerate that was looking to provide technical advisory services for the implementation of Bharat Net in Chhattisgarh. The experience she gained while aiding in the implementation of broadband services during her tenure there, laid the foundation for her entrepreneurial venture. Her husband also partnered with her in starting Dparth Tech later. Monika enumerated the main services provided by her firm, which cover everything from technology advisory to strategy consulting, right down to end-to-end implementation in areas like e-governance, e-health, e-banking and e-commerce-related projects. She especially highlighted the need to reduce the number of physical visits to Government offices for rural folk by providing access to services online, through a robust broadband infrastructure, which would facilitate delivery.

She said that her firm was deeply involved in the conceptualisation of Government projects and had strong linkages with the central and state Government agencies, PSUs and international consultancy firms. This meant that their credentials and achievements were endorsed, as they were recognised as a startup consultancy firm by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Monika's transition into entrepreneurship was full of challenges – from the stability of a corporate job to the uncertainties of a new venture. Shifting from the fast-paced metropolis of Gurgaon to a rural area of Chhattisgarh added further complexity, as Monika and her husband did not have to just adapt their work but also their personal life. Financial constraints were high due to a dearth of external funding and savings. Building a network and clientele from the ground up was also a tough job for Monika.

While Monika is proud of her strong background in information security and consultancy, developing the trust and credibility of the clientele in the rural development sector was only possible through persistence and hard work. More importantly, regulatory and bureaucratic challenges, especially for Government projects like Bharat Net, were tough to handle. Professionally, the competitiveness of the consultancy sector needed some strategic positioning that would enable the new entrant to be differentiated from the incumbents. Moreover, combining work commitments with family responsibilities was another challenge. However, it was her resilience, determination and strategic acumen that set her on the path to establishing a successful consultancy practice in the domain of using technology solutions to drive rural development. Monika stated that her firm is expected to be a major player in bringing about a solution that bridges the digital divide and empowers rural communities by ensuring that every village becomes well-equipped with a digital infrastructure. She said this could only happen through working in partnership with self-help groups and institutions promoting entrepreneurship at the village level.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Monika mentioned projects in which she invests through mentorship programmes and projects that encourage women in leadership roles. She said that the key to becoming a successful entrepreneur lies in continuous learning, clarity in articulating objectives and having self-belief. One must genuinely believe in oneself and their vision and keep moving forward continuously, while committing to lifelong learning.



“Persist unwaveringly in your endeavours until you triumph, while being anchored by a clear understanding and indomitable commitment to your mission and vision.”

– Monika Jain
Founder, Dparth Tech

In a nutshell

| | |
|---------------|--|
| URL | https://dparthtechnologies.com/ |
| USP | Dparth works to build up an ecosystem where the ICT infrastructure and the Rural Livelihood Mission can assimilate into rural India and provide intellectual and innovative technical services to clients. |
| Founded in | 2018 |
| Co-founder/s | Rohit Srivastava and Richa Srivastava |
| Team size | 11–20 |
| Headquarters | Noida, Uttar Pradesh |
| Qualification | MBA, IIIT Allahabad |

20. Dr Monika Jain Agrawal

Founder, SMSV Education

How it began

Monika, raised in a family of entrepreneurs, always had a flair for entrepreneurship. The exposure from her background in biomedical science instilled a deep respect for knowledge and inquiry for excellence in her. Combining her interest in education with the aspiration to become an entrepreneur, Monika embarked on the journey of starting the Indian Online School

The birth of the Indian Online School can be traced to Monika's vision to be able to afford students unbeatable opportunities, both in terms of international exposure and academic excellence. Initially, she was inspired by the power of education as a key to transformation and now is guided by her belief in its potential to shape lives and unlock boundless possibilities. She also believes in India's outstanding talent pool whose potential for global competitiveness often goes unexplored due to the lack of appropriate and comprehensive international platforms.

Indian Online School wants to fill this gap by providing a knowledge platform that specialises in providing learning opportunities for aspiring Olympiad champions. Indian Online School, through providing world-class education and opportunities, will create a fraternity of learners motivated towards academic proficiency with a global perspective. This strong emphasis being strategically developed by Indian Online School into Olympiad preparation not only instils intellectual inquisitiveness but also redefines the concepts of problem-solving, being resistant in the face of challenges, the capability of teamwork, and inculcating a spirit of healthy competition – which are vital attributes for success in academic undertakings in the real world. Monika wishes to empower the students at Indian Online School to become global professionals and have a successful future.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

One of the most difficult challenges that Monika had to face during the initial stages of SMSV was to make parents and students believe that the platform designed by her was efficacious. She had a tough task in hand, explaining how this platform would benefit students in terms of their academic results and building logical reasoning and analytical thinking. For this, there was always a continuing need to gain trust and show verifiable results.

Another difficult challenge was to ensure that technology was leveraged in the best way possible to provide a holistic and impressionable learning experience. Monika achieved this by getting technologically skilled people on board in order to deliver an optimised learning experience to both students and educators. While planning how to make her venture grow further, she realised that the collaboration and commitment of her team was of utmost importance. Thus, her efforts were more directed towards securing talent that had the needed capabilities as well as the same sense of passion for driving the company's mission. She designed various programmes for gaining a competitive advantage in the EdTech domain, catering more to the module of Olympiad coaching for students. This entailed bringing all the prep involving numerous Olympiad exams under one platform, virtual classes, one-on-one guidance for the students and well-informed decision support for parents.



“As the founder of SMSV Education, I’m committed to providing our students with unparalleled international exposure and cultivating a culture of academic excellence. Education transformed my life, and I believe it holds the key to unlocking limitless global opportunities for all the talented Indian students.”

– Dr Monika Jain Agrawal
Founder, SMSV Education

The company's USP is its Olympiad Mastery Navigator tool, a proprietary resource designed to provide students, teachers, and parents with invaluable insights, analysis and advice. Through data-driven analytics, the tool performs a cumulative, holistic assessment of the student's strengths and weaknesses, which helps stakeholders to develop pointed strategies towards optimising performance in Olympiad examinations. Monika intends to make her company a leader in the educational technology landscape, providing unparalleled support and resources for Olympiad aspirants.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Monika is actively championing gender diversity and inclusion within her company by extending employment opportunities to women across various departments, including operations, finance, and other functional areas. By embracing remote work arrangements, Monika accommodates women who aspire to pursue professional careers while honouring their familial commitments, thereby fostering a conducive work environment that promotes gender equity and work-life balance.

One of the major learning directions Monika has attempted to convey to aspiring entrepreneurs is patience and openness to customer feedback. Having patience acts as a growth enabler and puts a premium on listening to the perspectives of customers and thereafter using those insights to improve products and services. She believes in staunch commitment and perseverance towards her goals, insisting that it is through being consistent and relentless that one's entrepreneurial dream catalyses into reality.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | www.indianonlineschool.com |
| USP | SMSV Education is the one of the few online institutions for Olympiad aspirants which provides meticulous benchmarking of competitors, creative curriculum development and seamless technology integration. |
| Mission | It aims at encouraging students to excel in the international and national Olympiad examinations by developing not only academic skills but also critical thinking, which is particularly important for further studies. |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Team size | 10–15 |
| Headquarters | Bengaluru |
| Incubator | NSRCEL, IIM-Bengaluru |
| Next big milestone | Strategically recruit people whose expertise and passion are aligned with our mission |
| Qualifications | PhD in biomedical sciences, Delhi University |



21. Neha Shah

Mentor and Director, MMB Advisors Private Limited

How it began

Neha Shah's journey into entrepreneurship began during her sabbatical after a successful five-year career in the human resources domain. With over a decade of experience, she is proficient in handling compliance matters for companies, preparing essential reports for loan sanctions and ensuring legal adherence. She witnessed a significant gap in governance education, especially among the directors in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). This realisation led her and her business partner Divya Momaya to launch MentorMyBoard – a platform designed to provide tailored mentoring and networking opportunities for board leaders in the SME and MSME segments.

Initially, Neha and Divya conducted training sessions for directors of private limited companies within the SME and MSME segments to gauge the feasibility of launching a full-fledged startup and the probability of its success. The positive feedback from these sessions confirmed the necessity of MentorMyBoard's services.

Their platform offers a wide range of solutions to cater to various types of directors, including independent, promoter, nominee and women directors. Through MentorMyBoard, directors can access mentoring programmes, self-evaluation tools and curated learning resources, which are designed to enhance their skills and knowledge in governance and compliance. It also serves as a networking hub, facilitating connections among directors and enabling the sharing of best practices and insights.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Setting up MentorMyBoard proved to be quite challenging for the founders. One of the major problems was the lack of technical expertise needed to develop a platform that could integrate various functionalities like mentoring, networking and learning resources. It took the founders 9 to 10 months to find a suitable technology partner who understood their vision and had the expertise to bring it to life.

Another challenge was gaining traction and credibility in a market with established players like the Big Four consulting firms and Institute of Directors. Neha and her team had to invest considerable time and effort in organising events, conducting training sessions and engaging with potential clients to demonstrate the unique value proposition of MentorMyBoard. Furthermore, strategic planning and resource allocation for the scaling of the venture nationwide was difficult as well.

Despite these challenges, MentorMyBoard was propelled forward by Neha's resilience and determination, who turned obstacles into opportunities for its growth and success. Looking ahead, Neha aims to make MentorMyBoard a leading platform for boardroom education and networking. Her next big milestones are to:

1. build a community of 1,00,000 directors on the platform within the next three years
2. get the company listed on the stock exchange within the next five years.



“Observing the lack of tailored governance education for SMEs and MSMEs, I founded MentorMyBoard to fill the gap and provide essential mentoring services to empower directors in these segments.”

– Neha Shah,
Mentor and Director
MMB Advisors Private Limited

She is also planning to collaborate with colleges to provide education and training to students who aspire to be in leadership roles – particularly in finance and management. Her goal with this initiative is to bridge the gap between the conventional teachings provided in an academic institution and the practical skills needed in boardrooms.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

One of MentorMyBoard's flagship initiatives is the Women on Management and Boards (WOMB) programme. This programme is specifically aimed at empowering women directors. Neha recognised the unique challenges women face in boardrooms, of being relegated to roles of rubber stamps rather than active contributors. The WOMB programme seeks to equip women directors with the skills and knowledge they need to excel, thereby promoting gender diversity and inclusion in corporate governance.

Beyond training and mentoring, MentorMyBoard organises events such as the Women Directors Conclave to raise awareness about the importance of diversity and inclusion in boardrooms. These events feature prominent speakers and thought leaders who share their experiences and insights, encouraging dialogue and collaboration among directors.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | http://www.mentormyboard.com/ |
| USP | MentorMyBoard is dedicated to empowering directors in the SME and MSME sectors. Its mission is to provide expert guidance, mentorship and support to help directors, board leaders and senior management executives in these segments excel in board roles. The company believes that diversity in leadership is essential for driving innovation and growth in SMEs. Through its tailored programmes and experienced board mentors, it aims to foster inclusive and effective leadership, ensuring that businesses in these sectors thrive with the right talent at the helm. |
| Mission | To create a platform that enables directors to enhance their skills for board roles and provide them access to a community of 1,00,000 directors. |
| Founded in | 2018 |
| Team size | 31 |
| Headquarters | Navi Mumbai |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nari Shakti Puraskar awarded to Neha Shah Best Community Platform awarded to MentorMyBoard in Women's conclave and awards 2023 |
| Next-big milestone | To become a one-stop solutions provider for Directors and Boardrooms worldwide. |
| Qualification | PGDHRM, Welingkar Institute of Management |



22. Niharika Jalan

Founder and Chief Growth Officer, Indicold Pvt Ltd

How it began

Indicold's founder Niharika Jalan has a decade-long experience in marketing and sales. In 1946 her grandfather had started a cold storage business. Subsequently, her father sustained operations for a brief period before exiting the business. Because of this, Niharika gained firsthand insight into prevalent deficiencies and challenges within the cold storage supply chain, especially the sluggish response to customers' demands by unorganised competitors and the lack of sound operating protocols in cold storage facilities which compromises product quality.

Collaborating with her husband, Kartik, who also has previous experience in the cold chain business, Niharika, identified the potential to build a business of their own and thus, Indicold was founded. They decided to combine their efforts to work towards correcting the existing issues related to cold storage with new ideas and standards.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Indicold aims to change the face of the cold chain industry in India through its end-to-end solution which looks into inventory control and standardisation of services. Their technological advancement in cold chain logistics and quality assurance is exemplified in the standard operating procedures that they have developed and the routine assessments of cold storages. It covers all integrated solution services, from cold stores to transportation across the country and quality preservation assurance from the point of production to the final consumer. Indicold's mission focuses on trust and clarity in the cold storage process with the help of real-time tracking and data analytics which enables them to gain full visibility of the various steps of the supply chain.

Though the cold chain industry in India is evolving rapidly, it is nowhere near the maturity levels compared to the global standards. Innovation, particularly in the aspect of automation has been the major focus for Indicold through its journey. Minimising human intervention within cold rooms where temperatures can reach as low as -20 degrees Celsius and automated solutions have been the major focus of the organisation to enhance both human safety and workforce well-being. In order to reduce the company's carbon footprint, sustainability efforts are of also of significant importance for the organisation and automation holds a lot of promise in bolstering these efforts. Indicold has established a subsidiary focused on research with the aim of enhancing the feasibility of widespread commercial adoption of automated solutions.



“At Indicold, our aim is to revolutionise India's cold storage infrastructure to global standards with focus on providing our customers an excellent experience in each and every aspect of the cold chain industry.”

– **Niharika Jalan**
Founder and Chief Growth Officer,
Indicold Private Limited

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Niharika's entrepreneurial journey provides valuable insights into the importance of maintaining resilience in the face of setbacks. Recognising failures as an integral part of the entrepreneurial path, she advocates viewing them as opportunities for growth and refinement. Niharika underscores the significance of fostering a supportive community, particularly for women in entrepreneurship by facilitating open dialogue and mutual learning from shared experiences. She encourages women to embrace vulnerability, acknowledging that moments of uncertainty and challenges in balancing personal and professional obligations are inevitable. Niharika also asks budding women entrepreneurs to seek assistance from one's network, both personal and professional, and emphasises the value of leveraging support when necessary, and encourages the culture of collaboration and empowerment among women in entrepreneurship.

In a nutshell

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| URL | www.indicold.in |
| USP | Indicold has built a full-stack B2B cold supply chain company which specialises in cold warehousing, refrigerated transportation and value-added services. Indicold seamlessly connects the dots from farm to fork and manufacturing to consumer. It is a one stop solution provider for controlled logistics. |
| Mission | Transform the fragmented Indian cold chain industry by delivering world-class, end-to-end cold chain solutions. |
| Year in which it was founded | 2019 |
| Co-founder/s | Kartik Jalan |
| Team size | 75+ |
| Headquarters | Gurgaon |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Startup Woman Entrepreneur of the Year – Business World• Excellence in Supply Chain-Cold Chain Logistics – spaceLogimat, India, Britannia Business Partner Recognition• Tech 30 by Your Story, Best Cold Chain Company – Institute of Supply Chain Management (ISCM)• Startup50 Trailblazers – Dun Bradstreet• Among Top 16 selected at the National Logistic Policy (NLP) Launch by Government Of India Under40• Supply Chain Super Achiever Award• Top 5 startups in Indian Logistics Sector-SCALE¹ |
| Next big milestone | Driven by empathy and innovation, Indicold aims to improve the sustainability aspect of the cold storage infrastructure by launching India's first ever Frozen Automated Storage and Retrieval Systems (ASRS) in Gujrat in July 2024. |
| Qualifications | Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM), Marketing and Operations – Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow |

¹ Supply Chain Association of Leaders & Expert

23. Nikita Shriyan

Founder and CEO, Elvitron Technologies Pvt Ltd

How it began

Nikita Shriyan, a student of biomedical engineering, was inspired by her experiences during clinical trials and customer interviews in hospitals to develop a patient-centric healthcare solution. Identifying the rising number of diabetic patients in India, she invented a self-adhesive patch for glucose monitoring. With a vision of 'healthcare for all' and leveraging new-age printing methods for cost-effective manufacturing she patented the technology. Aware of the impact of chronic diseases especially in rural areas, she aims to distribute the product through government and NGO initiatives, supported by a white-label business model.

Elvitron technologies focuses on healthcare devices. Their primary product is the wireless screen patch for glucose monitoring and Nikita plans to branch out into other sectors as well. She emphasises the significance of customer discovery and challenges of navigating regulatory compliance while patenting. As a long-term goal, she eyes expansion into electronics, robotic, hardware and the defence industry by utilising her optical nano sensors.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Elvitron technologies, started at the Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE) IIT Bombay, where Nikita learned about entrepreneurship through the SINE START programme. She was able to learn about customer discovery and market opportunity in depth through the GDC-IIT Madras I-NSPIRE programme and was able to uncover different market segments and application of her technology in different fields. Despite pre-incubation status, she was awarded government funding and mentorship aid, which greatly accelerated her path towards success. Even though it is difficult to compete with famous brands, her product's cost-effectiveness, self-assembly, long sensor lifespan and strategic distribution channels are its USP. By using the resources provided by IIT Madras, she was able to navigate the hurdles of setting up and scaling her company.

Currently a team of five, Nikita prioritises hiring research interns for customer discovery, identifying market segments and expanding the product development process. Her strategic plan for expansion includes leveraging her network for market exploration while carefully balancing regulatory approvals and patenting processes. Some of the challenges in her entrepreneurial journey have been regulatory restrictions and determining whether the product falls under healthcare or wellness categories, but she focuses on meticulous planning and collaboration to work through the challenges and expand her business.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Empowering patients and improving healthcare accessibility drives Nikita's mission. She faced challenges such as market competition and improving rural outreach. To overcome these, she advocates for government and NGO collaborations, prioritising affordability, and longevity. Her suggestion involves leveraging institutional support for entrepreneurship, emphasising mentorship, and milestone tracking.

She hopes that her journey inspires other women entrepreneurs to blend research with entrepreneurship, emphasising the impact of innovation on the economy. She encourages aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly women,



"I suggest all the budding entrepreneurs to take up research as a career option and then add entrepreneurship into the mix."

– Nikita Shriyan
Founder and CEO,
Elvitron Technologies Pvt Ltd

to embrace entrepreneurship alongside research careers. Her key message revolves around making choices aligned with one's passion and guiding others to pursue interdisciplinary paths, driving innovation and societal impact.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| USP | This next generation technology is divided into three novel technologies, the ultrasensitive quantum nano-sensor system, wireless skin patch, and mobile application for complete point of care diagnosis. The product is affordable and has a high longevity before it needs to be replaced. |
| Mission | With the vision of ‘#healthcareforall’ and recognising the impact of chronic diseases, especially in rural areas – Nikita aims to create a patient-centric, affordable product and distribute it through government and NGO initiatives, supported by a white-label model. |
| Founded in | 2024 (legal company registration date) |
| Team size | 0-5 |
| Headquarters | Navi Mumbai |
| Representative partners | Pre-incubatee SINE IITB |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gandhian Young Technological Innovation Award (GYTI) • 2017 - Polymer Microneedle for Transdermal Vaccination • Stanford MedTech Award, 2016-“Most innovative field-tested prototype of a concept”- Polymer Microneedle for Transdermal Vaccination |
| Next big milestone | To shift to B2G model, supported by white label and make the product available through the government and NGOs in rural areas |
| Qualification | B. Tech Biotechnology, Senior Research Associate - Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai (Bombay) |
| Investment/grant/funding | MeitY TIDE 2.0 |

24. Niveda R

Co-founder, Greendelight Innovations

How it began

Niveda and Gowtham, founders of Greendelight, embarked on their entrepreneurial journey in 2018, driven by a desire to address real-life problems. Originally from a fashion technology background, they identified an opportunity to utilise *kenaf*, a sustainable fiber derived from a leaf (*pulcha kira* in Tamil) which is commonly used to make 'gongura chutney', to manufacture eco-friendly fabrics. Their shift in focus towards feminine hygiene stemmed from environmental concerns and market demand, backed by extensive surveys revealing dissatisfaction with existing products. Overcoming initial challenges, including product development and team building, they transitioned from a student startup to a thriving company garnering national-wide recognition and achieving significant revenue growth.

Greendelight utilises direct to consumer strategy both online and offline. Difficulties in the distribution involve translation and consideration of attitudes across various places inclusive of language differences. Marketing, especially offline marketing, is challenging due to the social barriers associated with body products especially products related to female hygiene. However, owing to the robust strategies in place, the company has been able to create its market and enter tier 1 and tier 2 cities with the help of awareness campaigns and product differentiation.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

New challenges related to defining the growth strategies and the use of offline marketing emerged as the company expanded its operations. In addition to customer loyalty, new customer acquisition became a focus for the organisation. However, lack of adequate and formal mentorship as well as having a small team to run the operations presented several challenges. Moving from B2B to the D2C model helped the company enter the market along with implementing social media campaigns to attract and engage the client base. Through strategic fundraising and product diversification the organisation was able to sustain the growth and achieve differentiation in the competitive market environment.

Maintaining regional diversities as well as trying to increase the distribution channel are constant challenges for Niveda. Government grants and schemes have played a significant role in the development and expansion of the business. However, at that stage, minimising cost was a priority for her. According to Niveda, two of the major lessons in her entrepreneurial journey are the act of taking risks and the management of expenses as a business owner.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Greendelight's motto is that if society's needs are to be met, then people should employ business solutions especially in the realm of women's health and environmental responsibility. Challenges such as product visibility, team building, and growth strategies highlight the need for mentorship and strategic partnerships. Embracing innovation and market insights, coupled with a



"The next day, I must be better than the present day."

– Niveda R
Co-founder, Greendelight Innovations

commitment to quality and affordability, was instrumental in establishing a niche and in driving customer loyalty. As the business continues to evolve, maintaining a customer-centric approach, and fostering a diverse and skilled team is essential for sustained empowerment and impact.

Greendelight prioritises inclusivity and female empowerment with 85% of its workforce comprising women and initiatives to employ transgender individuals. Despite strides in gender diversity and inclusivity, societal barriers persisted, hindering the full integration of marginalised groups like transgender individuals into the workforce. Government initiatives for the advocacy of women entrepreneurs is the primary support for their endeavour. Their focus on continuous professional improvement and personal growth reflects the organisation's commitment to excellence and resilience in the face of challenges.

Niveda advises the budding entrepreneurs especially women to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | www.blisspads.com |
| USP | Blisspads' raw material is unique since it provides itch free and rash-free feminine hygiene products to the customer. It's also comfortable to use and affordable. |
| Mission | To make good quality affordable feminine hygiene products which are comfortable to use and are suitable for women from all classes of society and to tackle the issue of plastic pollution. |
| Founded in | 2018 |
| Co-founder/s | Gowtham S |
| Team size | 40 |
| Headquarters | Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu |
| Awards/accolades | 5 National Awards and 10 + innovation awards |
| Qualification | M. Tech in Apparel Technology, Kumaraguru College of Technology |
| Investment/grant/funding | Tanseed 3.0 from TN govt, Yash Entrepreneurship grant from USAID and Jhpiego, Swachhta startup challenge from MOHUA and AFD, HDFC parivartan grant, TVARAN grant from CISCO CSR |

25. Pavani Lolla

Founder and CEO, Future Step Enterprise

How it began

Pavani Lolla's entrepreneurial journey began during her B.Tech days when she ventured into student entrepreneurship, driven by a desire to pursue a different path from the traditional career trajectory her family expected. Despite opportunities in corporate jobs, Pavani was drawn to entrepreneurship due to her risk-taking nature and passion for making a meaningful impact. Future State Enterprises' flagship product, Vapra, addresses the organic waste crisis through various solutions, including domestic composters, community composters, and green mix powder. Pavani's decision to focus on this problem stemmed from the dire need to tackle waste management issues in India, particularly in a price-sensitive market where investing in composters may be perceived as a barrier. By offering affordable solutions like green mix powder, which allows composting for less than a rupee per day, Future State Enterprises aims to make composting accessible to all segments of society.

Apart from their in-house composters and green mix powder, Future Step Enterprises provides customised community composters as per the requirements of a local area, primarily in Hyderabad, as logistics continue to be a limitation. The company also has two recycling plants in Hyderabad, which recycle wastes from vegetable and farmers' markets, in association with the government of Telangana. This all-encompassing approach shows the commitment shown by Pavani towards the organic waste crisis that emanates from the individual households to the community and national levels.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Pavani faced multifaceted issues while setting up her venture – financial constraints compounded by the unavailability of external support in the initial phases, relocation from a metropolitan city to rural Chhattisgarh, working to develop trust and credibility in the rural development sector, and finally, navigating regulatory hurdles – especially in Government projects like BharatNet. Pavani had a purpose of making an impact, and she chose to do so in a gradual way that demanded persistence and dedication.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Pavani ensured inclusivity and diversity in gender within her firm. Participation of women in deciding and sharing their thoughts on the firm's success brings in gender equality in an otherwise male-dominated sector.

Pavani believes that in order to be successful, all aspiring young women entrepreneurs must understand the importance of extreme clarity of thought and determination. She believes that women can overcome adversities to thrive and lead a happy life through purposeful stubbornness in achieving their goals, once they identify their strengths. Her journey is an inspiration to every young woman who wants to break barriers and create an impact.



“Maintain clarity of thought and steadfast determination, and do not allow any room for doubt in the pursuit of your goals.”

– Pavani Lolla
Founder and CEO, Future Step Enterprise

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | http://www.futurestep.com |
| USP | Vapra efficiently composts organic waste into nutrient-rich compost within seven days and combats issues like chemically grown food, landfill overflow and soil infertility from burning plastics and chemicals. This portable, user-friendly system is within the reach of every house/farm owner. Vapra's green mix powder is a natural microbial accelerator that ensures swiftness without any odours during the process. Vapra promises eco-living and aims to reduce landfills for a healthier planet. |
| Mission and vision | Future Step is doing its part towards its aim of effectively recycling organic waste produced at every doorstep and decreasing landfill waste. |
| Founded in | 2020 |
| Co-founder/s | Mahesh U |
| Team Size | 10–15 |
| Headquarters | Hyderabad |
| Awards/accolades | Winner of Waste to wellness Advocate; Winner of Digital women Awards for social impact |
| Qualification | MBA, Amity University |
| Investment/grant/funding | Incubator : Shakthi-The empathy project, Punjab Agri Business Grants – INR 22,00,000 – WE Hub, Telangana; |

26. Pooja Maheshwari

Founder and CEO, Smarg Technologies

How it began

Pooja embarked on her corporate journey after completion of her masters in computer science in 2001. Over 15 years, she garnered extensive experience by working with MNCs specialising in diverse sectors, ranging from system-level programming to mobile application development, and extending to AI and cloud computing. As her career progressed, she transitioned into a hybrid pre-sales and managerial role, ultimately assuming the role of an intrapreneur in her last corporate position.

It was during this pivotal phase of her professional trajectory that Pooja harboured aspirations of venturing into entrepreneurship. Shaped by enduring values of prevention, protection and care instilled since her formative years, she sought to incorporate these principles into her venture. She conceptualised the integration of innovative video analytics with conventional CCTV surveillance systems, with the overarching goal of augmenting the safety and security of women, children and the broader public.

While building Smarg, Pooja tackled various problem statements, initially focusing on issues such as parking availability detection and management, and later moving on to surveillance and monitoring of specific locales such as airports, ports, mines and highways. In recent years, the company has transitioned towards broader commercial deployments. Presently, its visual analytics solutions are adept at scrutinising over a million objects daily, facilitating incident monitoring including instances of wrong-side driving on highways, accidents, alerts for fallen objects, and crowd alerts.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Pooja first started a software consulting firm SRS Valutech Systems (www.srsvalutech.com) single-handedly, with no employees at the outset. Her company marked a significant milestone by becoming the inaugural incubated at the Srijan Incubation Centre of Madhya Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). The venture yielded immediate profitability with expert consulting and outsourced development projects done in enterprise mobility and artificial intelligence.

Later, she started Smarg, which focused on video analytics-based parking management products and later added surveillance and traffic monitoring products. The proceeds generated from the consulting venture were strategically reinvested to foster the growth and expansion of Smarg Technologies.

At the inception of Smarg, Pooja commenced the process of recruitment, gradually assembling a team of final-year interns to collaborate on pioneering a smart parking solution within a remarkably brief span of less than two months. Additionally, the city collector awarded her with the honour of winning the hackathon.

Despite garnering acclaim for their innovative parking solution, the business struggled to generate substantial revenue. Numerous pilot projects were undertaken for smart city initiatives in cities like Pune, Indore and some public sector entities. However, it remained difficult to convert those opportunities into significant tenders, posing significant challenges to the growth of Smarg.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a blessing in disguise, allowing Pooja and the team to diversify into the surveillance domain. Leveraging their expertise, Smarg started to provide surveillance solutions tailored to malls and public spaces, focusing on crowd management and compliance with regulatory directives.



“I have always believed in the power of prevention, protection and care. By merging these values with my passion for technology, I envisioned a future where innovative video analytics could enhance safety and security for women, children and society at large.”

– Pooja Maheshwari
Founder and CEO,
Smarg Technologies Pvt. Ltd

Concurrently, it was hired by Bengaluru International Airport and a leading construction industry participant to provide products to manage cargo traffic flow and detect signs of danger. The solution that was delivered on that project was highly appreciated by various stakeholders. Few years later, her husband Amit joined the venture on a full-time basis, bringing with him expertise in finance and operations to complement Pooja's technological acumen and expedite the scaling of the enterprise. While the company's reach expanded further in areas like traffic management, mall surveillance and other retail sectors, it launched related services such as offering a complete video analytics solution capable of monitoring parking lot occupancy, moving cars, pedestrian count and relaying the information in real time to their customers.

To maintain its competitive advantage, Pooja's company tries to remain consistently innovative with several live patents encompassing their inventions. Two of these are worth mentioning – their footfall analytics system with a claimed precision rate of >95% across demographic differences in India, and a sophisticated accident detection system with a claimed accuracy of >95% in identifying accidents and fallen objects.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Pooja underscores a crucial lesson for aspiring entrepreneurs: the importance of embracing failure as a catalyst for rapid learning and growth. Reflecting on her own experiences during the nascent stages of her startup, she emphasises the imperative of prioritising market alignment over product-centric approaches. Rather than attempting to force-fit her product into the market, she recognised the significance of tailoring her offerings to meet market demands effectively.

Pooja holds the opinion that the development of attributes such as determination and patience, as well as the establishment of a strong set of core values are essential for succeeding as an entrepreneur. She also believes that it is extremely crucial to foster a team culture that encourages collaboration, innovation and adaptability.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | www.smargtech.com |
| USP | Smarg's innovative, edge-based video analytics platform offers real-time insights, unparalleled business intelligence, seamless multi-location access, and superior customer experiences, boasting an accuracy rate of more than 95%. |
| Mission | Smarg aims to eradicate traceability gaps in resource usage, unanticipated incidents and marketing outcomes, thus improving the optimisation of resource deployment, minimising revenue loss, and ensuring stress-free user experiences. |
| Founded in | 2018 |
| Team size | 10–15 |
| Headquarters | Indore, Madhya Pradesh |
| Awards/accolades | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Top 16 Indian CleanTech startups selected by British High Commission, India-UK Partnership for CleanTech Accelerator 2. DIPP-recognised Indian startup under the AI category 3. Stood among the Top 3 Social Impact startups at the national level, recognised by MeitY, NASSCOM 4. Selected by NASSCOM DeepTech Club among the top 350+ DeepTech Startups at the national level 5. Selected by NVIDIA among 5k+ AI global startups as a proud member of the inception program, and got awarded USD 100K+ worth of cloud and GPU credits 6. Finalist in IITB Eureka 2021 for Business Model Competition 7. Recognised as one of the Top Women Entrepreneurs of Indore by Patrika newspaper 8. Recognised by Policy Times for Award-winning innovation at the national level |
| Next-big milestone | Securing patents for the following technology being developed by the company: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced footfall analytics tool which boasts an accuracy of >95% across diverse Indian demographics • Accident detection system capable of identifying accidents with >95% accuracy • Footfall demographic analytics (Asian population) with 95%+ accuracy • Eye gazing analysis for advertisement screen views |
| Qualifications | B.E.(Hons), CSE, M.Tech. CSE, Computer Science and Engineering (IIT Bombay) 2001 batch |

27. Preeti Sinha

Founder, Greens and More

How it began

Before starting her own venture, Preeti spent several years in the banking sector as an IT officer. She then shifted her career to consulting and later to business analytics where she learnt organisational business operations. While working, Preeti observed a gradual decline in her health and started experiencing weight-related issues. It was this which prompted her to conceptualise Greens and More during her personal weight loss journey. She observed that there was a lack of healthy food options in offices and identified the opportunity to address this gap by providing convenient access to nutritious meals during working hours.

Preeti commenced her entrepreneurial journey by preparing and delivering a variety of delectable, nutritious salads from her home on a small scale. Initially, she was managing orders through a group she created in a messaging application and she was supplementing her services by including a nutritionist who would provide dietary advice and gather feedback from customers. As demand steadily increased, growing from 30 to 100 customers, the limitations of the subscription-based model and WhatsApp group management became apparent. Recognising the burgeoning potential based on the positive feedback she received; Preeti made the strategic decision to pivot to a quick-service restaurant business model.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Preeti encountered several challenges during the early stages of her venture. Initially, she faced the hurdle of persuading and educating potential customers on the health benefits of consuming nutritious food. Ensuring a consistent and uninterrupted supply of fresh ingredients posed a logistical challenge for Preeti along with the shortage of skilled staff. Hence, Preeti focused on training her staff and optimising resources in order to maintain the freshness and quality standards of her offerings. Price sensitivity among Indian consumers turned out to be another significant obstacle. Preeti carried out a thorough market analysis to set competitive prices for her products and align them with the prevailing rates in corporate sector food outlets. She did this to avoid deterring potential customers. Right from kitchen equipment design to menu design, everything was done from scratch. For consumers who understand nutritional requirements well, she designed nutritious meals like protein power salad, high fibre salad, low carb meals and iron booster salads. Preeti wanted to expand her product's appeal to a broader audience. To achieve that, she introduced a range of signature salads such as kebab salad, potato pop salad and burger salad for people who wanted to eat healthy without compromising on their taste. Preeti further diversified her menu with Indian options like multi-millet khichdi, millet biryani and quinoa-based curry bowls to cater to varied preferences and dietary requirements.

Currently, Greens and More operates four outlets in Hyderabad. Each outlets employs a distinct business model namely:

- 1) franchise-owned company-operated (FOCO)
- 2) company-owned company-operated (COCO)



“I realised the value of health during my own weight loss journey. Greens and More is not just a business venture for me. It is my passion to ensure that people have access to nutritious food, especially during busy days at the workplace, where healthy choices are often not available.”

– Preeti Sinha
Founder, Greens and more

- 3) dine-in
- 4) food court.

Preeti is strategically assessing the performance of these outlets to determine the most effective model for scaling her venture, leveraging revenue data as a primary metric. Greens and Mose has adopted a hub and spoke model supply chain for her venture. All the quick-service restaurants act as spokes and are connected to a central kitchen hub. The main food processing and preparation occurs in the central kitchen and the final touches are applied at the individual store.

Preeti is actively pursuing technological advancements to streamline operations and to support scalability. This includes using modified atmospheric packaging (MAP) and individual quick freezing (IQF) technology. She is also working on integrating automation into food manufacturing processes to minimise the reliance on manual labour.

Preeti is further planning to distinguish her offerings by implementing certain unique selling propositions. One such proposition is to make the menu options customisable which will allow customers to tailor the nutritional content of their meals to their personal preferences. Another proposition is to provide quantified nutritional information to further enhance transparency and help consumers make informed choices. For example, their Protein Power Salad guarantees 70 grams of protein, making it especially appealing to health-conscious customers.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Preeti is committed to promoting women empowerment within her organisation. She offers flexible working hours to female employees and regularly includes them in boardroom discussions. This inclusive approach aims to create a supportive and empowering work environment for women, valuing their insights and addressing their challenges.

A key message that Preeti wants to share with aspiring entrepreneurs is the importance of having a clear understanding of their business idea and the problem which they aim to solve. She emphasises the need for a passion for problem-solving and believes that challenges are an inevitable part of the entrepreneurial journey, however, developing a genuine love for tackling problems is crucial for long-term success.

Preeti encourages women entrepreneurs to pursue their ambitions boldly, advocating for a mindset free from societal constraints. She highlights the importance of chasing one's goals and encourages women to do the same.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | www.greensandmore.in |
| USP | Greens and More distinguishes itself by offering ready-to-eat, nutritious salads at an affordable price, addressing the laborious nature of preparation of such meals and attracting a devoted customer base who seek convenience without sacrificing their health. |
| Mission | To combat the rise of lifestyle disorders in India by promoting healthy and clean eating through convenient access to nutritious food options, addressing the root cause of non-communicable diseases prevalent in the communities. |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Team size | 20-25 |
| Headquarters | Hyderabad |
| Awards/accolades | Stree Shakti Awardee 2020 |
| Next big milestone | Leveraging technological advancements such as MAP and IQF to enhance operational efficiency, scale the operations effectively and minimise dependency on manual labour in food manufacturing processes. |
| Qualification | Post Graduate Diploma in Banking Technology Management |

28. Prerna Kalra

Director, HanuAI

How it began

Prerna Kalra started her career in the oil industry but switched to the software industry to get business and HR experience in distinct roles. This eventually led to the foundation of HanuAI, a technology company that uses AI to provide assessment and monitoring of road conditions in India. The motivation behind HanuAI came from a personal tragedy that involved a friend's devastating accident due to bad road conditions. Prerna realised that not much technology had been employed in this sector even though India is globally known to have the second-largest network of roads. Therefore, one of the core competencies of HanuAI is its capability and commitment to providing accurate and reliable road condition assessment to its clients – the Government or private players.

AI-based surveillance systems, mounted on vehicles, provide HanuAI with real-time data related to road deformities like potholes, wear and tear indications, and other defects. The data is then processed and analysed to output comprehensive reports that can help in the process of decision-making about maintenance, budgeting and policy decisions. The business model of HanuAI is built around a SaaS framework; hence, it is scalable and cost-effective. This way, HanuAI's platform and services are available on a subscription basis to relevant agencies, including the Government, where they only pay for the length of the road assessed.

By doing so, the cost of the technology becomes inexpensive, and it gets adopted easily by government departments to be integrated into their systems. Moreover, HanuAI continuously innovates and is committed to the client, going the extra mile to enhance customer satisfaction. It has, therefore, managed to earn a reputation as a new-age reliable partnership by listening to the needs and adapting its technology to answer specific challenges in road network management and safety.

HanuAI's achievements in the management of road networks and safety are enviable, especially when considering the cost savings for Government agencies and private cooperations. Through its innovative AI-powered surveillance systems and data analysis capabilities, Hanu AI has enabled significant cost savings for government departments by optimising road maintenance processes and facilitating timely interventions. In one such instance, HanuAI saved a considerable amount of money for clients by detecting defects in roads and prioritising maintenance activities. Subsequently, HanuAI has been recognised by numerous national bodies in Washington DC, where it demonstrated this technology.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Prerna had to face enormous challenges in the form of establishing credibility and acceptance for her venture because the technology used was not previously experienced by users. But she had a resolve to deliver value to her clients. Prerna asked aspiring entrepreneurs, especially women, to make the first move with courage, bolstering the fact that hard work and consistent mental stamina will do the rest of the work, while traversing through a path of entrepreneurship.

HanuAI aims to revolutionise road asset monitoring and management, while leveraging indigenous AI technology for improved road safety and infrastructure maintenance. In the long term, Prerna plans for HanuAI to be a global leader in its domain.



“There is no substitute for diligent effort and perseverance in achieving one's goals. Hard work remains the quintessential path to success in any endeavour.”

– Prerna Kalra
Director, HanuAI

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Beyond her company, Prerna advocates for women's empowerment through mentorship and support. She always maintains adequate gender diversity within her team and encourages women to get hands-on experience in active fieldwork to build confidence and competence. This forms the perfect example of creating an environment where workwomen could grow and provide meaningful input.

Prerna also mentors and supports women's empowerment with her work at HanuAI. She shares her experience and knowledge with budding female business visionaries and drives confidence and encourages them to pursue their goals relentlessly.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | https://hanuai.com/ |
| USP | HanuAI has an indigenous technology which is used to capture road conditions through an integrated device and the captured data is parsed through the company's AI model to provide pavement conditions and road assets reports and dashboards |
| Founded in | 2022 |
| Co-founder/s | Manav Singal, Dr Rahul Kalra |
| Team size | 15–20 |
| Headquarters | Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ESC National Winner Ubharte Sitare• Most innovative idea in TiECON Chandigarh 2023• Winner of Emerge 50 in Deep Tech by NASSCOM• Selected to represent the company in Tie Global in Singapore among 31 chapters globally• Finalist in the Startup India award• STPI tech startup in Tie 50 winners, Silicon Valley |
| Next big milestone | Unleash the potential of computer vision technologies to transform the industry – from highly accurate object detection to image classification. HanuAI's VisionAI promises to unlock new possibilities in visual data analysis and decision-making for all businesses. |
| Qualification | BSc. (Hons.) Delhi University; MBA Amity Business School |
| Investment/grant/funding | Debt, bootstrapped grants, INR 25 lakh as optionally convertible debt (OCD) Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) and INR 10 lakh as grant under NMICPS (The National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems); around INR 10 lakh CSR fund, INR 3 lakh grant state government |



29. Priya Singh

Co-Founder, Chalo Mobility Private Limited

How it began

Chalo Mobility was inspired by a strong desire to address the pressing issues in public transportation in India and beyond. Priya Singh, Co-Founder of this venture, has built India's leading automotive portal CarWale. While building CarWale, she realised that solving transportation challenges requires a focus on public transport, which led to the foundation of Chalo Mobility.

Chalo is now India's leading bus transport technology company that enables 1.8 billion rides annually, live tracks 18,000 buses, and has a presence in 61 Indian cities, along with Thailand and the Philippines. Chalo is improving the experience of taking city buses, as its users wait 30 minutes less each day, travel more safely with contactless digital tickets, and even save money with Chalo Super Saver plans.

In this regard, Chalo, through its technology products, is enabling bus operators to reduce leakage, increase operational efficiency and attract more passengers, leading to enhanced revenue and profit.

In the first decade of her career, Priya worked in development organisations and the government sector for initiatives such as the UNESCO World Food Programme in six tribal districts of MP, Maternal and Child Health by Care India, 'Avahan' for HIV/AIDS by Population Services International (PSI), and the National Health Mission in Madhya Pradesh. Following such significant positions, she established CarWale, one of the leading automotive sites in India, and Rangrezza, which is working to make a change in the clothing sector by lowering its carbon footprint. Priya has always been passionate about serving society and bringing about human and economic development. She derived the idea for Chalo Mobility from the gaps in the public transport sector and her ambition to offer value-added and effective solutions for operators as well as consumers.

Chalo Mobility's business model is oriented to meet the many-sided demands of public transportation in India. The focus of this model is on enhancing the utilisation of technology to improve public transport services. Since Chalo Mobility provides real-time bus tracking and digital ticketing services, among other features, it helps in making public transport more efficient and thus appealing to users. The company earns its revenue through the provision of services to both government and privately owned bus operators, who pay to access the platform's technology. Besides, Chalo Mobility partners with BEST to run over 140+ luxury buses in Mumbai and has placed more than 1,000 e-bikes for hire to make journeys easier during the first and last kilometres. Digital buses with no human intervention are being implemented on select routes in Mumbai. On these buses, commuters can enter with a tap in and exit by a tap out.

Chalo Mobility aims to deliver a standardised public transport system without the additional aid of an intermediary. It seeks to build a future where public transport becomes the key mode of transport in urban areas, thus significantly decreasing the effect of carbon emissions and providing an improved travel experience for commuters. The vision entails the addition of administrative facilities as part of the digitisation process: for instance, ticketless systems, real-time Indian Telecommunication Service (ITS) services, and multimodal transport solutions that interconnect transport subsystems. The company's ultimate vision is to make public transport the first choice for the majority of the population to meet their mobility needs.



1. The power of hard work.
2. Read a lot to scale up.
3. Never say no to any opportunity.
4. The power of the right company, i.e. team and people.

– Priya Singh Dubey
Co-founder, Chalo Mobility Private Limited

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Every business has its share of challenges, and it has been a bumpy and rough road for Priya's startup venture. One of the main challenges has been the highly unsystematic nature of the bus industry in India and the fact that a majority of the buses are owned by independent parties. This situation presented problems in terms of consistent adoption of fresh technologies at the various lines. Another pressing problem has been the unavailability of sufficient seating facility on buses, especially in overpopulated cities. Further, countering resistance from traditional bus operators and persuading them that digitisation and optimisation would be advantageous to them was another major challenge. This hampered the implementation of incentive schemes for conductors to deter revenue loss and improve service delivery.

Chalo Mobility was initially established as a small business and has expanded over the years. To begin with, Priya planned to address some of the problems that existed within the transportation sector, specifically live tracking of buses. This innovation was important to change the perception and use of buses in society. The company's success was primarily due to the change in the company's policies which helped them in embracing digitisation to enhance the public transport system. Technological innovation such as the incorporation of live tracking was instrumental in improving the organisational performance of bus services, which translated into better public transport service delivery.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Priya Singh's personal experiences and commitment to social causes have influenced the inclusion of women's empowerment as a critical aspect of the organisation's objectives. Chalo has 43% women participation in top management (3 women out of 7). Chalo had a minus (-17%) Gender Pay Gap at the March 2024 exit. This suggests that women, on average, are earning 17% more than men in the organisation. Women's participation is also encouraged on the field, and one entire video auditing team comprises only women. Providing above and beyond support to working mothers through flexible hours, sabbaticals and including kids in work meetings are some of the other initiatives by Chalo.

Chalo Mobility is equally dedicated to uplifting the position of women and society in general. It focuses on employment assignment for women in the transport system – a sector that has typically been considered more suitable for males. Apart from addressing the problem of gender discrimination, this approach promotes women's participation, and also enhances the development of public transportation system. In addition to employment, Chalo Mobility also encourages women to use public transport importantly and also provides vocational training to women to enable them to improve their professional skills.

The social impact of the company is that it offers women safe and easy access to transportation. In addition, navigation aids and safety measures enable women to travel and look for employment on their own.

Thus, Chalo Mobility aims to transform public transport solutions in India by increasing efficiency, affordability, and eco-friendliness. At the same time, it focuses on boosting the usage of public transport while solving problems such as like pollution, traffic jams and high fares. The company's mission is to ensure that public transport is accessible and a preferred choice for the people of India.

2 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294230520_Urban_Public_Transport_in_India_Trends_Challenges_and_Innovations

3 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10089696/>

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | www.chalo.com |
| USP | Chalo seeks to enhance the availability and quality of city bus services such that they are more convenient to use and less time consuming. The current strategy also addresses passenger requirements in addition to focusing on operators. |
| Mission | Buses account for over 90% of public transport in Indian cities. ² Public transport services are mostly owned by state government-owned transport corporations. The core purpose at Chalo is to give everyone the company interacts with a better travel experience. About 85% of Indian population rely on public road transport in India, with buses being the preferred mode of transport. ³ By increasing the dependability of buses through live tracking and making ticketing more seamless through smart ticketing, Chalo aims to create a dependable transportation system, thus increasing daily usage of buses. Additionally, integration of all means of transport will assist the commuter in better planning their travel. Ensuring that operators, the government as well as all partners have effective and profitable buses is also important to the company. Its ultimate vision is to positively impact 100 million consumers or more with its solution so that they travel better. |
| Founded in | 2014 |
| Co-Founder(s) | Priya Singh |
| Team size | 750+ |
| Headquarters | Navi Mumbai |
| Awards/accolades | Emerging Woman Entrepreneur Awardee of 2022, SISTec Tejomay Award 2023; listed in Hurun India's Top 200 Self-made Entrepreneurs of the Millennia 2023 and Top 10 Women-led Future Unicorns in India |
| Next big milestone | To solve public transportation for 100 million lives |
| Qualifications | Master of Arts (MA) in Social Work – 1999 from DAVV (Indore), Executive Leadership Development Program, Stanford GSB |
| Investment/grant/funding | Equity/debt – INR 991 crore – Seed Fund, Series A, B, C, and Series D Lightrock India, Avataar Ventures, WaterBridge Ventures, Raine, Filter Capital |





30. Punita Khatter

Managing Director, Senocare Services Pvt Ltd

How it began

The inspiring story of Senocare began with Punita's commitment to caring for her aging parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that period, she realised the importance and the need for an organised elder care service and she started Senocare to address this problem. Her unwavering dedication, meticulous planning and passion propelled her to design impactful support programmes for the elderly.

Senocare has evolved from a crisis response service to a structured care provider thus leveraging technology for emergencies and partnering with innovators (local and global) to create unique solutions. Their commitment to personalisation is evident in their 'health passport' application that houses vital medical data and emergency contacts for each elder. Continuous improvement and adapting to diverse needs are core to their mission.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Punita stresses on the vast potential and importance of providing eldercare services. This industry needs participation from individuals from all walks of life including medical professionals who are passionate about caregiving, 'technopreneurs' with a vision in this sector and people with business acumen. In India, approximately 10.5% of the population is elderly,⁴ therefore, there is a burgeoning demand for innovative approaches to eldercare services. Their needs are driving a surge in demand for good care taking services. Current studies of diseases such as Alzheimer's, dementia, and Parkinson's can positively change the lives of millions of people. With the aging population, the eldercare sector has massive potential for fulfilling the growing population's needs of elderly care.

Punita emphasises organic growth driven by genuine care. Despite the positive feedback she has received, there are still a lot of challenges that remain, especially in terms of hiring qualified professionals. She mentions that the lack of awareness and scarcity of trained providers in geriatric and palliative care, as well as the need for infrastructure improvements are the major hurdles in scaling her venture. She mentioned that there is still much that needs to be done to address the shortcomings in the society, and that support through workforce and infrastructure must come from both the society and the government.

She underscores our collective responsibility to address this issue and rejects the ethics of untrained youth care. Senocare addresses this by empowering marginalised communities through employment opportunities.



"I literally held tears of joy in my eyes when one of the elderly people we were attending to started painting again after she was not able to move her hands for years. That experience was no less than divine for me."

– Punita Khatter
MD, Senocare Services Pvt Ltd

4 <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/indias-elderly-population-to-double-by-2050-surpassing-number-of-children-warns-report-11695865492972.html>

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Punita dispels the guilt many children carry when pursuing their dreams, reminding us that our parents wouldn't want us to sacrifice our happiness. She advocates for a paradigm shift which is centred around planning for our elders just as they did for us when we were children. Their physical and emotional needs will change, requiring cultural adaptation that values and invests in elder well-being. Senocare tackles this challenge through personalised care plans and fostering a strong sense of community.

Punita encourages younger generations, especially women, to prioritise elder care alongside personal and professional aspirations. She has also established a foundation to raise awareness about elder care, the importance of palliative care and other related initiatives and champions employing 'not so elderly' individuals, retirees with valuable skills and experiences.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | www.senocare.in |
| USP | Senocare's approach to senior care is different from that of others. Senocare addresses not just healthcare needs but also takes care of all the myriad day to day problems that cause unimaginable stress and anxiety to senior citizens. |
| Mission | Empowering the elderly by providing quality care and understanding their unique needs, thereby ensuring dignified care for elders across the nation. |
| Founded in | 2020 |
| Team size | 15–20 |
| Headquarters | Gurgaon, Haryana |
| Qualification | BA Psychology (Hons.) |
| Investment/grant/funding | Equity shareholding |

31. Rachna Vyas

Co-founder, Mild Cares Private Limited

How it began

Rachna Vyas describes the innumerable challenges faced by women in India when it comes to menstrual health. She says that many women are not aware of menstrual cups or are hesitant to use them due to stigma. She also discusses that most of the cups in the market are made in China and are not safe for use due to leakage issues. Citing her personal experience, she also stressed upon how limited availability of good quality cups in the market led her to order one from Switzerland, which took two months to reach her.

Motivated by the shortcomings of existing options, she envisioned a superior menstrual cup. This innovation, in addition to having an improved design, would also use high-quality materials – and be manufactured in India. Her goal was to empower women experiencing PCOD and other health concerns by offering a more effective and comfortable product at an accessible price. This is how her entrepreneurial journey began. Through extensive research on material and consultations with medical professionals, she laid the foundation of Mild Cares Private Limited – which encompasses two brands: GynoCup and MildCares.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Rachna shared that starting a venture with menstrual cups was particularly challenging due to the lack of awareness and education about menstrual health among women in our country. To ensure the success of unique and innovative products like these, it was important to put in extensive efforts to educate people and create awareness. She also discussed the number of iterations done by the research and development team and the vast number of trials they went through to address the shortcomings of other cups in the market. Rachna mentioned that finding the right materials and designing a leakproof cup was also a challenge initially.

Rachna acknowledged that affordability is a major issue. She highlighted the cost of sanitary napkins, estimating that they could cost anywhere between INR 18,000-20,000 over five years. In contrast, menstrual cups were a more economical solution. Her reusable menstrual cups are priced at INR 499, which last for five years. The significant cost reduction makes this an affordable option for most of women. At the same time, these cups are eco-friendly.

Rachna confirmed that their products are being delivered in India and have also reached international markets including Canada. This expansion indicates a growing demand for and acceptance of the product. Additionally, Rachna emphasises that because these products are manufactured in India, she is able to ensure good quality as well as support local manufacturing. This aspect further differentiates their product in the market, providing consumers with a dependable and domestically produced option. She mentions that many competitors' products suffer from leakage issues, leading to numerous customer complaints. The cup, with its redesigned and innovative structure, effectively addresses this problem. A customer who switched to their product reported a positive experience, reinforcing its reputation for comfort and reliability.



"I founded Mild Cares Private Limited with a mission: to empower women in India with a superior menstrual cup solution, to address its stigma, safety, and accessibility concerns."

– Rachna Vyas
Co-founder, Mild Cares Private Limited

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Rachna outlined a clear and an ambitious vision under MildCares - to address women's issues from puberty to menopause. This vision is why she expanded her product portfolio from GynoCup to a range of products in women's health and wellness. Rachna highlighted that despite the presence of sanitary napkins in the market for over 70 years, only a small percentage of women use conventional menstrual products. The company's long-term aim is to make the cups accessible for use to every woman. Rachna also underscored the importance of raising awareness about menstrual health. She addressed that while women in urban areas might be familiar with menstrual cups, there is a significant lack of awareness in tier 2, 3 and 4 cities. The company is actively engaged in educational programmes which help spread awareness among women about the product. This educational outreach is essential for increasing adoption. Rachna also adds that simply selling the products does not create a significant social impact unless there is an educational component.

She explains that her team conducts educational sessions, which are often facilitated by a specialist who explains the benefit and usage of menstrual cups. They provide free samples to encourage women to try the product and give feedback. In the past few years, there has been a positive response from rural women who are becoming increasingly open towards using new products and participating in the discussion about menstrual health.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | https://www.gynocup.com |
| USP | Mildcares revolutionises women's health with the GynoCup menstrual cup, addressing societal taboos through education campaigns and breaking barriers in menstrual hygiene. Its eco-friendly solutions combat UTIs, providing access to sustainable products for over 63% of women lacking sanitary pads. Community engagement and global partnerships amplify its impact, fostering positive health practices worldwide. Beyond products, Mildcares embraces a holistic approach, redefining women's health narratives through innovation, education, and global collaboration. |
| Mission | The company aims to improve women's health from puberty to menopause. After starting its journey with GynoCup, the company now offers a range of products in women's health and wellness. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Co-founder/s | Sandeep Vyas |
| Team size | 20 |
| Headquarters | New Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | The Industry Disruptor: UN Women, UK |
| Qualification | Bachelor of Computer Applications, All India Society for Electronics and Computer Technology – AISECT |
| Investment/grant/funding | Incubator grants CSR equity INR 1 crore |



32. Raji Venkataraman

Founder and CEO, Digi Vet Care Pvt Ltd

How it began

The founder of Digi Vet Care (DVC), Raji Venkataraman's background is a journey in itself. Starting with a career in economics, she later transitioned into social welfare— both domestic and international. Her passion for animals' well-being and her knowledge about societal impact led her to identify the gaps in the veterinary sector. The company's inception stemmed from a personal experience of calf mortality and the subsequent realisation of the lack of proper veterinary care and the absence of digitalisation in the sector. In 2019–2020 Raji developed an app to provide real-time data for cattle health records akin to those used by humans, leading to the inception of DVC in 2021.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Raji mentions that the primary challenges while she was scaling her business were scarcity of skilled veterinarians in rural areas, financial constraints faced by farmers and raising awareness about digitalisation in the veterinary sector. Her innovative approach, including AI-driven technologies was implemented in their proprietary Smart Muzzle ID which helped Raji in distinguishing her company against other players in the competitive market.

The founder addressed the challenges related to the livestock healthcare domain by offering nominal charges for services and spreading awareness about the importance of timely vaccinations and deworming. The technology implemented, including the mobile app and AI-driven techniques like the aforementioned Smart Muzzle ID, aims to enhance efficiency and provide real-time monitoring of cattle health. Despite initial resistance, the founder's innovative solutions gradually gained acceptance among farmers which helped Raji in scaling her business.

One of the main hurdles that Raji had to overcome was the reluctance of the market's acceptance of digitalisation in veterinary care. Despite initial scepticism, her relentless efforts have garnered interest from both rural and urban markets. DVC's future expansion plans encompass a household pet segment which targets both domestic and international markets with a focus on leveraging technology to address global veterinary health challenges.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Raji's approach focuses on bridging the gap between farmers and veterinary care through digitalisation. She aims to empower the farmers by bolstering their knowledge of their animals with access to technology-driven solutions for livestock management. Through real-time data and facilitating remote consultations, the company enables farmers to make informed decisions about their livestock's health. The implementation of AI and ML technologies is a prime example of innovation for social impact, which not only helps the farmers but supports the entire rural community as well in improving their livelihood through sustainable livestock management practices.

Raji's initiatives empowers rural women and Asha Anganwadi workers who are associated with her venture as incentivised volunteers where Raji engages them in the digitalisation process and provides them with monetary incentives. Adequate training is provided to these women to enhance their technical skills and knowledge of the Digi Vet Care application, with the overarching aim of building their confidence and equipping them with an additional skill. Raji's commitment to raising awareness about animal health risks, such as AIDS transmission through cattle goes beyond her business goals and highlights the company's broader aim of driving social impact. She hopes that her journey inspires budding entrepreneurs in not only the livestock sector but in any domain they wish to engage with.



"I really love to do whatever I can for animals. I also seek ways in which I can leverage digitalisation. I'm exploring that every single day."

– Raji Venkataraman
Founder and CEO,
Digi Vet Care Pvt Ltd

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | https://digivetcare.in/ |
| USP | AI/ML-driven, patented technologies such as Smart Muzzle ID (which acts as a unique identification of the animals), real-time data collection (to build a health database of cattle) and making it accessible through a mobile app. |
| Mission | Leveraging technology to address global veterinary health challenges and raise awareness regarding various issues related to livestock. |
| Co-founder | Venkataraman Sambandhamoorthy |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Team size | 25+ |
| Headquarters | New Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | Showcased at G20 and National Digital Livestock Mission; state governments |
| Next big milestone | Expansion plans include tapping into international markets, with a focus on leveraging technology to address global veterinary health challenges. |
| Qualification | Background in Economics |
| Investment/grant/funding | Equity/debt |



33. Richa Bansal

Founder and CEO, Saarathee CRM

How it began

Starting her career in the corporate world over a decade ago, Richa's projects often involved engaging with persons with disabilities and covered topics related to women's empowerment at grassroots level. Transitioning to the social sector with CRY, she gained deeper insights into the challenges of the social sector. Later, after a sabbatical, she struggled to choose between corporate and social sectors, which led her to establish Saarathee (CRM) in 2018, with the aim of bridging the gap between her corporate skills and her passion for social impact. Prior to COVID-19, a project to create livelihood for women with vision impairment helped Saarathee create a work from home model at scale during and post pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated Saarathee's growth from 20 to 100 employees, allowing them to tap into regional diversity. Currently, the venture operates across 13 states and has employees who can speak nine languages.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Starting Saarathee as a business enterprise rather than an NGO posed initial challenges in communicating its value proposition. The business model of Saarathee revolves around providing employment opportunities for differently abled persons through skill development and consulting. Initially focusing on BPO services, they later expanded into consulting, recognising the need to include differently abled people for other organisations. Their platform helps mobilise, upskill and connect persons with disabilities to job opportunities, primarily in executive roles (initiatives like 'enablers' and 'mentors'). Partnerships with NGOs and corporates facilitate training and job placements and help in addressing gaps in both technical and soft skills training for differently abled persons. The venture emphasises creating inclusive employment opportunities to empower differently abled persons economically and socially. Saarathee's long-term vision is to impact 5,00,000 differently abled persons over a span of seven years and with a focus on practical inclusion solutions beyond the realm of employment. The unique aspects of their services include practical experience, showcasing work quality through the 'show and tell' method and leveraging best practices from corporate and social sectors. Grassroots outreach is facilitated through partnerships with enablers, ensuring inclusivity from rural regions through accessible platforms and tailored support programmes.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Richa was from IIM-Bangalore's cohort of the Goldman Sachs Entrepreneurial programme. She supports women entrepreneurs, and speaks about the importance of sponsors, networking and continuous learning as well as the passion of an individual to drive their entrepreneurial initiative for their entrepreneurial endeavour.



“When entrepreneurs, particularly women entrepreneurs, choose to start a business, it stems from a place of passion and purpose – two essential elements that contribute to entrepreneurial success.”

– Richa Bansal
Founder and CEO,
Saarathee CRM Pvt Ltd

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | www.saarathee.com |
| USP | The unique aspects of Saarathee CRMs' skill development and consulting services include providing practical experience to the differently abled people, showcasing their work quality through the 'show and tell' method and equipping them with the best practices from corporate and social sectors. |
| Mission | Create equal economic opportunities for differently abled persons by enabling corporates to offer equitable employment to them. |
| Founded in | 2018 |
| Team size | 75+ |
| Headquarters | Gurugram |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India Inclusion Fellowship 2018 • Aspire Global Women Cohort 2023 • NSRCL Goldman Sach's 10,000 Women COHORT 18 - IIM B Top 3 pass outs • TIE GLOBAL Women Finalists 2023 |
| Next big milestone | To enable 5,00,000 differently abled persons over seven years, emphasising practical inclusion solutions beyond employment. |
| Qualification | Post Graduate Diploma in Advanced Computing, Amity Business School |
| Investment/grant/funding | No funding |



34. Rini Bansal

Director - Business Development, Carbon Light Pvt Ltd

How it began

Rini hails from a business family and is a graduate in electrical and electronics. Following her graduation, she gained three years of experience in a consultancy firm. Rini's husband has a passion for engineering and problem-solving, while her own passion lies in business management and innovation. Together, they wanted to address a significant gap in certain industries wherein a few companies hold a monopoly on the manufacturing of key products leading to an over-reliance on them within the global supply chain. The Indian Government's recent emphasis on domestic manufacturing as a part of the 'Make in India' initiative, further highlighted the need for local production.

With the aim of solving this problem, Rini and her husband founded Carbon Light, a venture which specialises in the production of carbon fibre-based lightweight products. Their company caters to various sectors, including medical, industrial, aerospace and defence.

Carbon Light manufactures a wide range of products. For example, the company makes lightweight, portable antennas for military use, facilitating closed-loop communication between soldiers and military bases in war zones. These antennas, crafted from Carbon Light's composite carbon material, ensure smooth transmission of radio frequencies, enabling seamless communication.

Carbon Light holds a significant market share in the aerospace sector, particularly in manufacturing drone frames. With approximately 300 drone manufacturers in India, Carbon Light commands around 70% of the market share for drone frame production, supplying frames to both domestic and international clients.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

An initial challenge for Rini was convincing customers in the aerospace and defence sectors that Indian products could match or exceed foreign counterparts in quality and performance. This challenge was amplified by the critical nature of these products' applications. By diversifying into industrial and medical applications, Carbon Light generated revenue to support product development and testing for defence and aerospace sectors. This strategy allowed them to build confidence in their products' quality and compete effectively on a global scale.

To enhance her management skills, Rini pursued a management course at IIM Bengaluru (Bangalore). She applied her learnings to build a highly skilled and dependable team, on which she could rely for realising her vision. To maintain a competitive edge, Rini prioritises continuous innovation and ongoing research and development efforts. This strategic approach ensures a diverse product portfolio, reducing dependence on any single offering and enabling the company to consistently address customer needs effectively.



"I embarked on this venture fuelled by a dual passion for innovation and to disrupt existing monopolies while providing innovative, indigenous product to our armed forces. With my engineering background and entrepreneurial spirit, I aim to reshape industries and foster a more diverse and resilient global supply chain."

– Rini Bansal
Director – Business Development,
Carbon Light Pvt Ltd



Looking ahead, Rini aims to take her venture public in the near future. Her focus remains on sustained growth and increased revenue. Additionally, she is committed to fostering self-reliance in India's defence sector. Rini aims to reduce the dependency on foreign technologies and emphasises the importance of improving India's ability to independently manufacture defence products like missiles, rather than relying on imports.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Rini suggests that focus and perseverance are essential qualities for aspiring entrepreneurs. She recommends these qualities to budding entrepreneurs and asks them to show unwavering dedication to their venture's vision and advises against succumbing to distractions. Rini also emphasises the value of fostering a robust ecosystem among entrepreneurs. This involves mutual support, collaborative learning from shared experiences and the cultivation of enduring relationships. By adhering to these principles, entrepreneurs can enhance their chances of success and collectively realise their visions.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | https://www.carbon-light.com/ |
| USP | Delivering cost-effective products of exceptional quality, manufactured with advanced techniques, driven by customer-centric values, employing stringent quality control measures and proprietary technology to serve as import substitutes and promote Make in India. Proprietary technologically driven advanced solution for defence sector, solving problem of our front runners i.e. the Indian Army and delivering cost-effective products of exceptional quality, manufactured with advanced techniques, driven by customer-centric values, |
| Mission | To provide upgraded solutions for our armed forces for their ease of operation and provide indigenous affordable and consistently high-quality carbon fibre-based products as import substitutes for various products across industries, meeting customer timelines. |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Team size | 50+ |
| Headquarters | Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh |
| Awards/accolades | JEC Innovation Award 2023 |
| Next big milestone | Take the company public, prioritise sustained growth and revenue expansion while concurrently advancing efforts to enhance self-reliance within India's defence sector. |
| Qualifications | Bachelor of Technology in Electrical and Electronics Engineering – Krishna Institute of Engineering and Technology, Executive Master of Business Administration – Indian Institute of Management Bengaluru (Bangalore) |

35. Rupal Ralph

CEO, stonesoup.in

How it began

Before embarking on her entrepreneurial journey, Rupal started her career in 2002 as a criminal lawyer and she conducted her practice in Gujarat. In 2007, she relocated to Bengaluru (Bangalore) and took some time off from her professional career. In 2015, when a complete plastic ban was announced in Karnataka by the state government, she began volunteering and going door-to-door in her locality with waste collection vehicles. Around the same time, her husband was diagnosed with cancer, which Rupal mentioned, was primarily caused by exposure to harmful chemicals that are present in disposable teacups. This personal experience, along with witnessing the difficulties faced by waste pickers, motivated Rupal to get involved in waste management and segregation initiatives. She also participated in educational sessions to raise awareness about effective waste management practices. It was during this period that she became associated with stonesoup.in.

Rupal's focus area was sanitary waste management. While food waste was composted and recyclables were collected at dry waste centres, sanitary waste was handled sparingly and disposed of mostly through landfills or through incineration. As most disposable pads are produced using chemicals and microplastics that are non-biodegradable, the disposal methods increased air and land pollution.

Realising the importance of the issue, stonesoup.in conducted extensive research to find practical solutions to address the problem. They developed a distinctive design for menstrual cups, improving upon existing conventional cups in the market. The company introduced cloth pads specifically designed to cater to the needs of women in both rural and urban areas. These reusable cloth pads provided an affordable and sustainable alternative, promoting better menstrual hygiene practices.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The biggest challenge Rupal faced while growing her business was having to educate women about menstrual cups and cloth pads – how to use them and their advantages. It was extremely challenging to undo existing myths about using reusable cloth pads. These misconceptions were deeply entrenched even among the investors she approached to fund the business.

Such barriers could be overcome only after a proper awareness drive against myths and misunderstandings among consumers and investors. Through sustained advocacy and education, the organisation was able to overcome this challenge over time and to win the acceptance and faith of its target customer segment.

Certain aspects of stonesoup.in's products give them an edge over others available in the market. For one, its menstrual cups are made of medical-grade silicone and have a smooth finish due to the meticulous process of diamond polishing and platinum curation. Most significantly, these cups do not need any additional sterilisation procedures, which increases ease of use for consumers. Moreover, the packaging is made of tin, thus preventing rodent damage to stored products, while the breathable cotton pouches protect the cups against fungal infections due to ease and speed of drying. Moreover, the cloth pads stonesoup.in produces are made out of pure cotton and do not contain a single strand of plastic microfibre which aligns with the company's objectives of sustainable production and reducing environmental pollution. stonesoup.in has a strong customer focus and offers 24x7 customer support services to address the concerns related to their product's use both in urban and rural areas.

When it comes to the distribution strategy, most of the sales are made through online marketplaces. The remaining sales are in the form of supplying the product to government and NGO-led initiatives by way of donations, which



“The lack of good sanitary waste disposal options for women inspired me to embark on a journey to find a way to empower women and protect our environment. That's what drove me to create a company focused on innovative menstrual hygiene solutions.”

– Rupal Ralph
CEO, stonesoup.in

helps in widening the company's mission of menstrual hygiene and environmental sustainability.

The biggest challenge for Rupal in the near future would be matching up to cheaper options. Setting up an in-house manufacturing unit for menstrual cups in order to bring down costs is her immediate plan. The second challenge would be sustained adoption of reusable cloth pads. This has resulted in the creation of the Saathi network, an army of stay-at-home, part-time and small entrepreneurs – mainly women – who take on awareness campaigns in regional languages.

In place of centralised factories for cloth pads, Rupal wants decentralised production units at the district level, where local women can find employment. She has used corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for the distribution of free samples and creation of local manufacturing units. She aims to eventually stop the supervision and let these manufacturing units be run independently once the production process is well established and the demand is sustainable.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Rupal's unwavering dedication has paid rich dividends as it has provided the company an opportunity to collaborate with the government through various campaigns and promote its core values of 'Rash-free, cash-free and trash-free'. These values emphasise the benefits of using safe and reusable cloth pads. By promoting these products, the initiative not only enhances personal well-being and long-term cost savings but also contributes to effective waste management, thereby reducing environmental impact.

Rupal encourages aspiring female entrepreneurs to stay committed to their vision, overcoming obstacles with determination and unwavering belief in their dreams.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | www.stonesoup.in |
| USP | stonesoup.in offers innovative menstrual hygiene solutions with patented menstrual cups that enhance safety and hygiene, and reusable cloth pads featuring global design aesthetics. |
| Mission | Its mission is to address waste management, women's health, and economic empowerment through sustainable practices, innovative solutions and inclusive policies, fostering a more resilient and equitable future. |
| Founded in | 2018 |
| Team size | 10–15 |
| Headquarters | Koramangala, Bengaluru |
| Awards/accolades | 1. 20th Beti FLO GR8 Awards 2018 - Special Mention- Sanitation and Menstrual Hygiene for Women 2. UN SEED Finalist 2019 3. Flipkart Flipstar Award for most trusted seller 2019 under Samarth seller 4. SABERA Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award 2019 5. Namma Bengaluru Award |
| Next big milestone | Establish decentralised production units across districts, creating local employment for women and leveraging CSR funds to distribute free samples and build sustainable local manufacturing operations. |
| Qualifications | LLB, Gujarat University; PGDMM, Apex Institute of Professional Training |

36. Dr Saakshi Dhanekar

Founder, Sensekriti Technology

How it began

Dr Saakshi Dhanekar's entrepreneurial journey began during her tenure at IIT Delhi, where she worked on sensor development at the Centre for Applied Research in Electronics (CARE) and later at the Centre for Biomedical Engineering (CBME). The venture germinated from a grant she received, called the Biotechnology Initial Grant (BIG) BIRAC, for developing a product. This grant provided vital funding of around INR 50,00,000 for her work on sensor technology – particularly, breath-based diagnostics.

The core technology revolves around developing indigenous sensor systems capable of detecting various health conditions from breath samples. One notable application is the alcohol breath analyser, which uses gas sensors to detect alcohol in breath, helping in assessing intoxication levels. Dr Dhanekar explains the complexity of human breath and how they utilise sensor arrays coupled with machine learning algorithms to create an electronic or artificial nose capable of identifying specific gases indicative of different health conditions.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Transitioning from academia to entrepreneurship posed several challenges for Dr Dhanekar and her team. There were also challenges such as labour availability and restrictions in material resources including forging and fabrication facilities, mainly due to the non-availability of a commercial foundry in India for the company's expansion needs. Relying on funding from external organisations to ensure the smooth operation of the company proved to be another significant challenge. Funding also proved to be a challenge, with reliance on grants from organisations like the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and Nidhi Praiyas's (by DST) for financial support.

While Dr Dhanekar's venture is still in the prototype testing phase and has not yet entered the supply chain, the team is working diligently towards commercialisation. Their immediate focus lies in bringing alcohol breath analysers to market, aiming for broader breath diagnostics for various health conditions in the future. The goal is to develop non-invasive diagnostic systems that can detect a wide range of health issues from breath samples, offering a convenient and accessible healthcare solution.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

According to Dr Dhanekar, making it as an entrepreneur boils down to two things – perseverance and self-belief. According to her, one is bound to face many setbacks and failures but should learn to believe in the idea and keep pushing. Apart from this, Dr Dhanekar is keen on promoting women in entrepreneurship and academia. She mentors many female students and is involved with various initiatives that offer a platform to women working in STEM fields for networking and mutual support. Looking forward, Dr Dhanekar sees the prospect of using their sensor technology for applications in wellness. She believes that her invention could be improved further if they collaborate



“Believe in yourself; this confidence is key to achieving success. While outcomes may be delayed, it's important to persist in pursuing your goals without wavering.”

– Dr Saakshi Dhanekar
Founder, Sensekriti Technology

with computer science departments to develop IoT-enabled sensors to track various parameters of individual wellness. By integrating sensor systems into smartphones or wearable devices, individuals could be empowered by being able to track their health and wellness in real time and promote preventive healthcare practices.

In a nutshell

| | |
|---------------|---|
| URL | https://www.intellosensor.com/ |
| USP | Building indigenous systems to develop breath-based diagnostics |
| Founded in | 2023 |
| Team size | 0–5 |
| Headquarters | New Delhi |
| Qualification | PhD, Jamia Milia Islamia |

37. Sandhya Nagavarpu

Founder, Rev Your Soul

How it began

For Sandhya Nagavarpu, fighting against the odds has been synonymous with adaptation and innovation since she pioneered the collaboration with Telangana Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism India in 2021. The campaign was tagged 'Dekho Apna Desh' and spotlighted lesser-known remote destinations which were totally accessible by bike, syncing perfectly with the prevalent social distancing norms. Knowing that people would opt for solo bike rides to get out and de-stress from a socio-distant perspective, Sandhya and her partner were quick to tap into this niche to their advantage by promoting solo rides to remote places. This resonated in states like Hyderabad the most.

The duo started 'breakfast rides' and 'weekend rides', which slowly picked up momentum and saw riders and brands coming in from all over the country to support them.

With increased visibility, Sandhya drove up brand tie-ups with several industry leaders. This further consolidated her position within the biking fraternity. The revenue came primarily from the rides, events and commissions from the associated brand tie-ups.

The company's success underlined the power of strategic alliances and focused marketing, making Sandhya one of the leaders in facilitating unique biking experiences.

The app created by Sandhya is an all-in-one platform for both consumers and businesses. Events listed in the app allow brands to create tickets for specific audiences they want to target and sell to. The platform's aftermarket segment facilitates users to buy and sell biking gear and accessories seamlessly. The user interface is easy, approachable and usable with gloved hands, considering safety features such as real-time trackability and emergency assist. All these features made a significant dent in the market and were highly appreciated by the users.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Of all the challenges that presented themselves during the inception of this project, one of the major ones was technology development, which was crucial for handling the gap between conceptualising something and getting it done. Rigorous testing and refinement were required to bring out nuanced biking needs into application technology features. An unwavering commitment from Sandhya and communication with her development team was thus immensely important to solve these problems and develop a product that would meet their objectives.

Looking towards the future, Sandhya aims to expand the company in international, biking-culture-rich markets like the UAE, Thailand and the Philippines. She is exploring various collaboration opportunities with other biking associations to enhance the biking system holistically. She is also attuned to the vertical integration opportunities like providing white-label solutions for cycling communities.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Beyond business objectives, Sandhya remains dedicated to making the biking community inclusive and safe for women riders. Conducting workshops with organisations like Moving Women (MOWO), combined with incorporating safety features within their app, demonstrates a commitment to providing meaningful support and safety for bikers of all genders. To this end, tackling specific challenges women riders face helped Sandhya ensure a more inclusive and warm biking culture, thereby enriching the community.



“Failure, although often feared, serves as an invaluable instructor, guiding us towards growth and enlightenment through its lessons and insights.”

– Sandhya Nagavarpu
Founder, Rev Your Soul

For any aspiring entrepreneur, there is much to learn from Sandhya's journey – more so for women moving into traditional male bastions such as biking. The fact that she insists on in-depth research and knows all the technicalities of product development shows the knowledge and preparation required to get through entrepreneurial ventures successfully. Her indomitable spirit makes her an example of tenacity and practicality in facing the everyday challenges of a startup venture.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | http://www.revyour soul.com/ |
| USP | Navigation and SOS services are built in the app to keep riders and the community safe. Riders can look up rev riders nearby. |
| Mission | To establish a dedicated platform for bikers nationwide, enabling the community to connect, ride together, and share their experiences, thereby promoting safer rides and encouraging more exploration |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Co-founder/s | Anand Mohan Murthy |
| Team size | 11–20 |
| Headquarters | Hyderabad |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incubated at NASSCOM in 2019 • Won the IWIL and iAspire |
| Next-big milestone | To build one of the world's largest biking communities and promote India on the global stage as a Bikers Destination and pursue the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme to host the MOTO GP, SBK in India. |
| Qualification | Chartered accountant |
| Investment/grant/funding | Debt-3600000-Mohammed Arif - CCD |



38. Shahnaz Khalil Shaikh

Founder, AI-GENIX International

How it began

In 2001, Shahnaz embarked on a mission to revolutionise agricultural crop protection by addressing prevalent issues of acute infestation and synthetic pesticide toxicity plaguing farmers and founded AI-GENIX International. Leveraging a background in microbiology and her colleague's expertise in computer and industrial electronics engineering, Shahnaz set out to develop environment-friendly and non-toxic crop protection solutions to safeguard crops and improve farming practices.

Her journey began with the realisation that existing market solutions, such as basic solar light traps, were inadequate in effectively managing pest infestations without having to resort to chemical pesticides. This led her to the realms of entomology, which focuses on developing AI-enabled insect communication technology capable of altering insect behaviour without the need for harmful chemicals. After rigorous research and development, her team successfully created next-generation insect communication technology and devices, which were tested and validated through field trials spanning five years across various geographical locations in India and multiple crops.

The venture, driven by a commitment to reduce farmers' input costs and minimise their exposure to toxic chemicals, led to the establishment of Microbiz Network India in 2014. This served as a platform to market and distribute their innovative products. Alongside their flagship insect communication and extermination devices, the company expanded its offerings to include a range of solutions aimed at optimising agricultural practices. These include Prolab – a portable laboratory to precisely measure soil, water and leaf compositions – and Smart Pro fertigation advisory software – designed to cater to the specific needs of over 230 crops and their varieties. Additionally, PathoShield, one of their highly innovative inventions, offers a non-chemical, non-biological solution for controlling plant pathogens – particularly fungal, bacterial and viral diseases.



“Nothing can stop a woman who is focused on her vision.”

– Shahnaz Khalil Shaikh
Founder, AI-GENIX International

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Despite their innovative solutions, the venture faced many challenges in gaining traction in the market. Initial scepticism regarding the efficacy of their products prolonged the customer acquisition period. Furthermore, funding was another constraint which became an obstacle in scaling up their business operations. However, Shahnaz's perseverance and commitment to her vision kept her and her team focused on overcoming these challenges.

To address customer acquisition challenges, the company adopted a strategy to target corporate customers with a large farmer base – both domestically and internationally. This approach leveraged existing networks to penetrate the market more effectively.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Shahnaz emphasised the importance of empowering women pursuing entrepreneurship. She highlighted the plethora of schemes and programmes offered by both Government and private sectors to support women entrepreneurs, particularly in metro and tier 1 and 2 cities. Additionally, she highlighted the significance of believing in oneself and seizing opportunities, regardless of geographical constraints. Furthermore, her company is actively involved in initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment as well, such as collaborating with women's self-help groups in rural areas to train them and promote their products.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | https://ai-genix.com/ |
| USP | The company addresses insect/pest management issues successfully by developing and using BraveHawk Artificial Intelligent Pest Management Technology, which helps to protect all kinds of crops without using any chemical pesticides. |
| Mission | To make agriculture more sustainable, revolutionise crop protection and support farmers by offering them advanced AgriTech solutions that reduce the need for harmful chemicals. The company's mission is to set new industry benchmarks by prioritising environmental stewardship and fostering a future where agriculture coexists seamlessly with sustainability. Driven by innovation, consumer safety, and a responsibility to future generations, it cultivates a world where agriculture thrives harmoniously with nature, ensuring a bountiful and sustainable future for all |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Co-founder/s | Shahnaz Shaikh and Khalil Shaikh |
| Team size | 10 |
| Headquarters | Mumbai |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SKOCH Merit Award for Top Hundred projects in India, SKOCH Foundation Delhi, 2016 • Best Indian Social Enterprise Award, IIT Hyderabad, 2019 • Best Women Entrepreneur Award, IIT Hyderabad, 2019 • Promising Entrepreneur Award from Asian Association of Business Incubation supported by China Torch High Technology Industry Development Center and Shanghai Technology Innovation Center, China, 2020 • Won gold medal on Indonesia Inventors Day during the World Invention and Technology Expo 2021, Indonesia • TiE Sustainability Summit Women Social Entrepreneur of the year Award, TiE Hyderabad, 2021, TiE Hyderabad • Winners of Asia's Largest Business Model Competition 'Eureka 2022', conducted by E-Cell IIT, Mumbai (Bombay) and sponsored by Gulf Islamic Investment, 2022 • Finalist of Dell Technologies presents Entrepreneur Challenge powered by CNBC TV-18, Bengaluru, 2024 |
| Next-big milestone | <p>AI-Genix International Private Limited focuses on the global agricultural transformation towards sustainability. Committed to revolutionising crop protection and empowering farmers worldwide, it provides cutting-edge AgTech solutions that minimise reliance on harmful chemicals.</p> <p>The company's mission is to set new industry benchmarks by prioritising environmental stewardship and fostering a future where agriculture coexists seamlessly with sustainability. Driven by innovation, consumer safety, and a responsibility to future generations, it aims to cultivate a world where agriculture thrives harmoniously with nature, ensuring a bountiful and sustainable future for all.</p> |
| Qualification | Master of Science - Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded |
| Investment/grant/funding | AIC Banasthali Vidyapith, Ministry of Electronics and Information technology, FASAL CoE, STPI, Land Accelerator etc. |

39. Shivali Sugand

Co-founder, GreenGrahi Solutions Pvt Ltd

How it began

Shivali Sugand always believed in implementing solutions on the ground and scaling them up. Since she comes from an environmental studies background, she is aware of the challenges that countries across the world are facing regarding food insecurity, food waste, wastage and climate and how there is a vast scope for technology to transform these areas. Growing up in Delhi, she witnessed environmental issues firsthand and what grabbed her attention was the increasing size of landfills. By the time she became a consultant they increased further, leading her to take up environmental studies in TERI University where she focused on solving problems on ground. She got the opportunity to take part and consult in different projects primarily in the waste recycling sector in India and abroad and got chance to interact with hundreds of stakeholders including businesses, institutions and NGOs to understand what was happening on the ground.

She was selected for the prestigious Humboldt fellowship in Germany. Being one of the top countries in the world for their recycling initiatives, technology and facility, Germany was a perfect springboard for her. While she was in Germany, she also came across their legislative frameworks, their inclination towards pay-as-a-service model and how technology not only solved problems but also added value to the environmental solutions. After familiarising herself with emerging technologies in the field, she supported important Indo-German projects in India during the initial years and then finally decided to implement circular economy solutions herself and co-founded GreenGrahi in 2021, along with her husband, Siddharth Sharma.

Insects have an extremely low carbon footprint and are one of the most sustainable livestock for protein. Through them, GreenGrahi was able to solve three major problems. First, turning food waste into high-quality food and preventing it from ending up in landfills. Second reducing pressure on conventional natural sources of protein like wild fish (deteriorating marine ecosystem), chicken meal (high resource footprint), soymeal (water intensive crop). Finally, they were also contributing to reducing GHG emissions. In addition, they are also aiming to create social impact by providing opportunities to rural youth in their area, raising farmers' income by using insect-based fertilisers and feed and by creating a secondary market for waste workers.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Transitioning from initial tinkering with composting and biogas to pioneering insect biotechnology in India was no easy feat. Understanding the entire science of the insect lifecycle, creating controlled environments with specific humidity and temperature requirements posed significant challenges, which were eventually resolved through meticulous adjustments. Siddharth utilised his network with investors and industry experts and collaborated with other players both within the industry and in related industries to them in their budding phase. The source of the food of the insects was agrarian waste, waste from food processing industries, expired products and vegetable market residues which are available in great quantities in India. They also collaborated with various institutes for trial runs before achieving a high-quality amino acid and fatty acid profile in their insects. Shivali also emphasises the importance of selecting and maintaining the niche they want to sustain their businesses in while looking for opportunities to grow her business.

Shivali's entrepreneurial journey focuses on the evolution of their flagship product and strategies for expansion. Key components include refining their insect-growing chamber for efficiency, developing scalable technology and leveraging networks for growth. As a B2B insect bioprocessing player, GreenGrahi offers basic insect products like insect protein, oil and insect frass but they prefer to focus on developing offering new formulations and biologicals that can help them keep their customers ahead of competition. To achieve this, they prioritise two things – first, substantial research and development (R&D) efforts and second, collaboration with industry partners to develop



“Don't be obsessed with the idea of solving it. Obsess with the workability of it.”

– Shivali Sugand
Co-founder,
GreenGrahi Solutions Pvt Ltd

products that give them visibility and competitiveness not just in the domestic market but also on the international stage. Their commitment to quality and innovation to meet market demands is always at the forefront of all their ventures.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

GreenGrahi exemplifies entrepreneurship's potential to address environmental as well as societal challenges. Shivali's ability to overcome technical hurdles showcases her resilience and the importance of innovation in realising impactful solutions.

For empowering women entrepreneurs and aspiring business leaders, Shivali encourages budding entrepreneurs to solve real-world problems and prioritise practical solutions over mere ideas. Building a strong team and fostering passion among the team members is also something she considers to be an important part of entrepreneurial ventures. Additionally, she stresses the importance of supporting women in entrepreneurship through mentorship programmes and fostering the right ecosystem for their growth. She emphasises the need for a supportive ecosystem to encourage more women to pursue entrepreneurship, the significance of building a strong and passionate team and fostering autonomy and ownership among its members.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | https://www.greengrahi.com/ |
| USP | Greengrahi Solutions Pvt Ltd uses its proprietary climate-controlling technology called climate cubes to breed insects all year-round. This technology allows them to produce insect protein, oil, and organic fertilisers consistently. They sell organic fertilisers to farmers to help them improve crop yields. Additionally, they sell insect proteins and oil to aquaculture farmers, which helps in achieving better animal growth due to their high protein content. |
| Mission | Solving three biggest challenges – conversion of food waste into quality food, relieving the pressure on other protein sources and chemical fertilisers and combating high GHG emissions. |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Co-founder/s | Siddharth Sharma |
| Team size | 20–25 |
| Headquarters | Roorkee |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villgro Tvaran Top 7 women • World Resources Institute (WRI) India - The Land Accelerator South Asia Cohort top 7 • Kellogg's Social Impact Program winner in US • Zell fellows' programme • Zone startups Empower 2022 winner |
| Qualification | MSc. Environmental Studies and Resource Management – TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute) School of Advanced Studies |
| Investment/grant/funding | Grant, equity and debt |



40. Sruthi Babu

Founder and CEO, Sahayatha Healthcare

How it began

Sruthi was inspired by a poignant incident in her life when she observed a paralysis patient struggling with personal hygiene due to mobility issues. Determined to address this unmet need, Sruthi Babu, and her father, an innovator himself, developed a wheelchair integrated with a toilet and cleaning system. This unique solution, later named Sahayatha wheelchair, involved extensive prototyping, and was launched two years ago. Initially a medical coder, the founder's passion for entrepreneurship and innovation was influenced by her father's work with special-purpose machinery.

Sahayatha (Dhanvantri Biomedical Pvt Ltd.) was conceived to address a critical gap in the market for wheelchairs that caters to the hygiene needs of immobile individuals. Unlike cheaper alternatives in the market, Sahayatha-wheelchair integrates a unique after-defecation or urination cleaning assistance, distinguishing it from competitors. The company operates out of Coimbatore with a team of 15, overseeing the fabrication and pan-India delivery of the product. This innovation has allowed the company to attract customers who are seeking a more comprehensive solution for their daily needs.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

The journey from inception to launching the product in the market involved overcoming multiple phases of challenges – prototype development, market readiness, customer acquisition, sales, manufacturing and scaling. Currently, the company faces the challenge of scaling its business and expanding into export markets. Another significant hurdle is securing substantial funding from impact-oriented investors to facilitate growth and market penetration. Despite these challenges, the business model has shifted from primarily B2B to a more successful D2C strategy.

The long-term vision for Sahayatha is to significantly enhance the quality of life for at least 10,000 immobile persons over the next five years. Their goal is to redefine mobility, restore dignity and improve the overall well-being of people affected by various medical conditions or accidents. This vision is driven by a commitment to innovation and societal impact, with an aim of offering solutions that enable people to live a more fulfilling life despite their physical limitations.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Sruthi's entrepreneurial journey is marked by passion, persistence, perseverance and spirituality. She advises aspiring entrepreneurs to stay committed and resilient. As a female entrepreneur, she emphasises the importance of supporting women who are stepping into a traditionally male-dominated world of business. In her company, in which 13 out of 15 employees are women, many have been trained in fabrication and other non-traditional tasks. Her winning pitch in Shark Tank highlights the need for better mentorship to help entrepreneurs understand valuations and investments. She believes that comprehensive mentorship and better communication of available grants are essential for the success of new startups.



“Being an entrepreneur is a very lonely journey, but if you're in it then you have to have 4Ps - passion, persistence, perseverance and prayers.”

– **Sruthi Babu**
Founder and CEO,
Sahayatha Healthcare

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | https://sahayathahealthcare.com/ |
| USP | Sahayatha's integrated cleaning system redefines wheelchair hygiene. It prioritises the user's health with seamless, built-in hygiene. This innovative feature sets a new standard for accessible, clean mobility solutions. |
| Mission | A commitment to innovation and societal impact which aims to offer solutions that enable people to live more fulfilling lives despite their physical limitations. |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Co-founder/s | Late K.K. Babu |
| Team size | 15 |
| Headquarters | Coimbatore |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognised for innovative biotech product by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) • Shark Tank India deal, top women entrepreneur. • Awards from Femina, Mamaearth, ATF, IIT Madras, medical industry, CavinKare, Brand Avathar, World Malayali Council (WMC), International Federation of Inventors' Associations (IFIA), Patent Magazine, Sharjah RTI Park |
| Next big milestone | To enhance the quality of life for at least 10,000 immobile individuals over the next five years. |
| Qualification | B.E. Biomedical Instrumentation Engineer – Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, MBA International Business – Alliance University |
| Investment/grant/funding | BIRAC Government of India - Social innovation immersion program (SIIP), Biotechnology innovation Grant (BIG), Department of Science & Technology (DST) Government of India (Nidhi4covid2.0) ⁵ and bootstrapping |

5 (<https://nidhi.dst.gov.in/nidhi4covid2-0/>)

41. Shweta Deshmukh

Principal Architect and Founder, Dezinebox SpaceLabs Pvt Ltd

How it began

Shweta Deshmukh, a seasoned architect with over two decades of experience, was always passionate about her profession and strived to ensure excellence in every project she undertook. About a decade ago, she noticed a change in thinking in how businesses operated – this change highlighted how companies were moving their services online and embracing digital platforms. At the same time, there was a rising demand for standalone interior design solutions compared to the bundled packages. Inspired by these shifts, Shweta founded Dezinebox, an online design consultancy firm with a goal to reach clients across regions.

She temporarily stepped away from her venture after her daughter's birth, choosing to prioritise her family. Her husband Abhijit took up a job in a startup at that time. However, a couple of years later, both Shweta and Abhijit revitalised Dezinebox. They meticulously built an ecosystem of product and execution partners to enhance their service offerings.

Product partners supply interior materials such as furniture and paint, while execution partners are the local contractors in the region of the customer, and they handle implementation tasks like carpentry and painting. This strategic alliance ensures that Dezinebox delivers holistic design solutions to its clientele.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Dezinebox was incubated at IIM Bengaluru, where Shweta found invaluable support in refining her ideas and honing the execution strategy of her business concept. Recognising the potential of emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR), Dezinebox integrated them into design services to offer clients a vivid visualisation of their homes. Through interactive online sessions, Dezinebox aimed to engage customers and instil a sense of ownership in the design process.

Utilising innovative tools such as 360-degree views, walkthroughs and VR, Dezinebox enables clients to experience their future spaces from the comfort of their homes – a service that is typically associated with excessive costs but was offered by Dezinebox at an affordable rate. Their comprehensive design packages include 3D models, detailed plans and shopping lists, ensuring smooth execution, budget control and quality assurance.

To further establish Dezinebox in the market, Shweta is strategically pivoting towards sustainability and promoting a circular economy. She envisions collecting waste generated from interior development sites and collaborating with recycling businesses to repurpose these materials, aligning her venture with eco-conscious practices.



“Witnessing the digital transformation and evolving client preferences, I founded Dezinebox with the vision to provide online design services transcending geographical barriers, providing bespoke interior design solutions to meet the diverse needs of clients worldwide.”

– Shweta Deshmukh
Principal Architect and Founder,
Dezinebox SpaceLabs Pvt Ltd

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Shweta urges women to pursue activities that give them joy and fulfilment without feeling the need to sacrifice personal goals for family obligations. With the right balance, she believes that women can conquer both worlds. She encourages young individuals to build resilience, stressing the importance of not allowing personal challenges to impede the pursuit of their aspirations. Despite contending with epilepsy from an early age, she refrained from using it as an excuse. Instead, she transformed it into a source of motivation, demonstrating through her journey that a fulfilling life is attainable despite the array of obstacles one may encounter. She also believes in the power of spirituality and discipline, advising the youth to focus on the important matters in life. By channelling their energy positively and doing charitable deeds, they can set themselves up for success in future.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | www.dezinebox.io |
| USP | Dezinebox harnesses VR technology to deliver immersive experiences while leveraging local ecosystems of labour and vendors, thereby promoting job creation in respective regions, rendering their model asset-lite and community-centric. |
| Mission | To empower individuals to realise their dream spaces within their budget by providing affordable Online Design Services with VR technology |
| Founded in | 2020 |
| Team size | 5-10 |
| Headquarters | Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Women of Excellence by Women Economic Forum 'Most Innovative Firm in Maharashtra in 2019' award2. 'Most Promising Consultancy of 2021' award by Indian Achievers Forum3. 'Woman Power-Entrepreneur of the Year' Award by Billennium Divas powered by NSE |
| Next big milestone | Establish a sustainable framework by collecting waste from interior development sites and partnering with recycling businesses to repurpose materials, thereby fostering a circular economy and promoting eco-conscious practices |
| Qualifications | M. Arch., Construction Management NICMAR, Women Leadership Program, IIMA |



42. Shweta Thakur

CEO, Wildermart

How it began

The inception of Wildermart was driven by its founder's concerns about inefficiencies in the food system, rising lifestyle diseases and a lack of sustainable and healthy product options in the market. Starting as a conscious grocery store, the company transitioned into an e-commerce model which focused on healthy foods sourced locally and sustainably. Over time, it evolved into a tech-enabled marketplace for healthy foods, leveraging AI-powered algorithms for label checking and personalised food recommendations based on customer goals and health conditions. Despite initial challenges with the traditional inventory model and capital constraints, Wildermart adapted its business strategy to meet the changing consumer demands and market dynamics.

Shweta acknowledged the challenges in logistics technology and operational backend for e-commerce as some of the significant challenges she faced while setting up Wildermart and emphasises the importance of technology for managing inventory efficiently. She worked with existing solutions due to monetary constraints and struggled with low shelf-life products. Additionally, she also acknowledges revenue-related challenges in the direct-to-consumer (D2C) ecosystem due to high delivery costs and low margins for companies. Wildermart's business model focuses on operational and customer-facing strategies such as curation, personalisation and label checking. The business primarily targets urban areas with high discretionary spending.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Shweta's entrepreneurial journey reflects the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in customer acquisition and raising awareness about healthy food choices, particularly in a cost-conscious market like India. She struggled with high customer acquisition costs and faced difficulty in convincing customers to prioritise healthy food purchases. Operational challenges, including managing small and micro suppliers and disruptions in supply chains further intensified them. However, she overcame those challenges through resilience and technological innovation which, according to her, are essential traits for navigating the complexities of the marketplace.

Shweta faced many emotional and financial challenges during her journey and highlighted the need for resilience, support systems and financial preparedness in overcoming these hurdles. She cautions people against quitting their jobs impulsively and acknowledges the importance of gaining a thorough understanding of the arduous nature of entrepreneurship before a person decides to start a venture of their own. Wildermart's short term objective is to focus on expanding into new markets, particularly in the Philippines while their long-term vision is to create a global presence in the healthy food ecosystem.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Shweta urges the youth to carefully consider the personal, financial and emotional implications of entrepreneurship before taking a leap into the sector. She reiterated the importance of letting go of one's ego, understanding all aspects of the business and being prepared for setbacks. She encourages budding entrepreneurs to create a robust support system and to prioritise their mental health to navigate the competitive marketplace. Furthermore, she also discussed the importance of learning through mistakes and one's practical experiences because the educational institutions are not designed to have us fully prepared person for the real-world scenarios



"I founded Wildermart fuelled by my concerns about inefficiencies in the food and growing lifestyle diseases. Beginning as a conscious grocery store, we shifted to an e-commerce model, prioritising locally sourced, sustainable foods. Our journey evolved into a tech-driven marketplace, utilising AI algorithms for label scrutiny and personalised food suggestions tailored to individual goals and health conditions."

– Shweta Thakur
CEO, Wildermart

Shweta has been able to create social impact through her efforts to empower consumers with knowledge about healthy food choices and by supporting small suppliers in the supply chain. Despite challenges, Wildermart remained committed to its mission of promoting healthy eating habits and supporting local businesses

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | www.wildermart.com/ |
| USP | Wildermart adds value through a tech-enabled marketplace for healthy foods, leveraging algorithms for label checking and personalised food recommendations based on customer goals and health conditions. |
| Mission | To be a health-conscious, tech-enabled grocery store which focuses on healthy foods sourced locally and sustainably. |
| Founded in | 2021 |
| Team size | 0–5 |
| Headquarters | Bengaluru (Bangalore) |
| Next big milestone | Focusing on expanding into new markets, particularly in the Philippines and subsequently aiming for global growth in the healthy food ecosystem. |
| Qualification | MBA, XLRI |
| Investment/grant/funding | Angel investing |

43. Sri Sailaja Nori

Co-founder and Chief Scientific Officer, Sea6 Energy Pvt. Ltd

How it began

Sailaja possesses a strong technical background and a steadfast dedication to leveraging technology for innovation. During her penultimate year at IIT Madras, she and her colleagues conducted research aimed at identifying viable alternatives to traditional biofuels, seeking to diminish overreliance on crude oil and fossil fuels for non-electrifiable energy needs. While progress has been made in land-based renewable feedstock, it remains constrained in addressing this crisis on a large scale due to limitations such as arable land availability, freshwater accessibility and nutrient availability – all of which are increasingly strained due to global population growth.

In pursuit of alternative solutions, Sailaja and her colleagues turned their attention to the exploration of oceanic resources, seeking novel concepts and methodologies to satisfy escalating energy demands. At the same time, Sailaja contemplated various career paths, including pursuing a PhD abroad to continue her research endeavours. However, she was inspired by a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform the fossil crude value chain.

Sailaja and her co-founders made the decision to embark on an entrepreneurial venture, establishing Sea6 Energy to tackle energy crisis through sustainable means. The company's mission is to address pressing global challenges in food, feed and fuel by pioneering innovative technologies for large-scale, mechanised farming of tropical red seaweeds. Sea6 Energy aims to disrupt the fossil crude value chain by converting sustainable and renewable blue carbon feedstock into plant growth stimulants, food and animal feed additives, bioplastics, sustainable chemicals and biofuels.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

During its initial phase, Sailaja primarily focused on establishing the foundation for oceanic agriculture. Seaweed farming, which is largely dependent on manual labour, presented ample opportunities for innovation and automation. Therefore, the conversion of seaweed into commercially viable products posed a huge challenge during the company's early days.

Through sustained partnerships with academic institutions, patent development and rigorous experimentation across various crops, the company successfully transformed red seaweed, found in tropical regions, into efficacious plant bio-stimulants. These bio-stimulants markedly enhanced plant health and yield by 15–20%. Improved agricultural output not only curtailed farmers' expenditure on fertilisers, but also increased their incomes because of the enhanced yields. Furthermore, using seaweed obtained plant bio-stimulants improved agricultural sustainability and soil health by diminishing reliance on chemical fertilisers.

Post 2018, Sea6 Energy directed its efforts towards leveraging proprietary molecular formulations to bolster plant resilience and mitigate virulent diseases. The accumulation of research insights and scientific acumen by Sea6 Energy, coupled with ongoing



“Sustainability hinges on innovative technology. At Sea6 Energy, our vision is to pioneer solutions beyond traditional biofuels, alleviating reliance on crude oil and fossil fuels by harnessing untapped resources like seaweed, in order to address the constraints of land and freshwater scarcity.”

– Sri Sailaja Nori
Co-founder and Chief Scientific Officer, Sea6 Energy Private Limited

innovation and new product development initiatives, underpinned its commitment to ensuring product quality, consistency and reliability for its clientele. The company is now looking to venture into large-scale manufacturing of bioplastics, sustainable chemicals and biofuels from seaweed as a part of its long-term vision. These endeavours will differentiate Sea6 Energy from its competitors and fortify its position within the market.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Sailaja advises aspiring entrepreneurs to be versatile. Transitioning from a technical background, she acquired expertise in business operations, contract negotiations, cash flow management and fundraising. She emphasises the importance of maintaining a drive for continuous learning.

Sailaja also advocates for the establishment of robust support systems among women to foster mutual encouragement and inspiration throughout their entrepreneurial endeavours. She contends that enhancing female representation in leadership positions can significantly enhance corporate governance by promoting inclusivity and diverse perspectives. Addressing crucial policies regarding maternity leave and postpartum support for women to prevent workforce attrition can be more effectively managed with women occupying leadership roles, as they can draw from their own experiences and are in a much better position to make decisions in these matters.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| URL | https://www.sea6energy.com/ |
| USP | Sea6 is a leader in the industry with its pioneering mechanised farming and processing of seaweed, fostering a vertically integrated supply chain that ensures unparalleled control over quality, quantity and pricing, thereby establishing a distinct competitive advantage. |
| Mission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To become a pioneer in the field of ocean agriculture. • To leverage the oceans to create environmentally sustainable, commercially viable products and solutions, thereby improving agriculture and food production, mitigating global warming creating biodegradable alternatives for plastics and replacing fossil fuels as a source of energy and chemicals. |
| Founded in | 2010 |
| Team size | 100+ |
| Headquarters | Bengaluru |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinkers of Tomorrow – Agriculture and Farming 2023, News18 Network and Symphony • Featured in India's Top 10 Innovative MSMEs 2021, ET Rise • One of the Top 11 Ocean Innovators 2021, UpLink – World Economic Forum • Promising AgriTech Startup by NABARD |
| Next-big milestone | Producing bioplastics, sustainable chemicals and biofuels on a large-scale using seaweed |
| Qualifications | B. Tech. and M. Tech. (IIT Madras) |

44. Srishti Sharma

Founder, Shakti Wearables

How it began

Srishti Sharma commenced her entrepreneurial journey when she was 16 years old with a social project which addressed issues related to children's education. With time, she worked on various startups, before finally arriving at Shakti Wearables. Srishti then embarked on extensive research aimed at finding a solution to one of the most pressing issues in society – women's safety, which resulted in the development of a wearable device that can help protect the wearer. It electrocutes an attacker when the user turns the button attached and releases a small non-lethal current while keeping the user safe due to its insulation inside.

Through her product, Shakti Wearables, she aims to empower women all over India as well as the rest of the world. Her goal is to ensure that no woman, even in the most distant locations across the world feels unsafe. When asked about her venture's unique position in the market, she highlighted the absence of direct competitors primarily due to the nature of the problem they are aiming to solve. While all their competitors may have similar SOS features and existing products like pepper spray have the capability to thwart the wrongdoer, her product has an advantage due to the ease of using the product in such emergency situations. While other products depend on the responsiveness of the law enforcement, her product is swift, easy to use and effective.

In future, Srishti aims to establish a new product category, highlighting the potential for widespread adoption and expansion of wearables. She also believes that her product may have a possible use in the defence industry which can strengthen our armed forces. Srishti also acknowledged the challenges in scaling her venture, particularly in reaching remote areas, and how the product depends on government collaborations for enhanced distribution.



“Don't be attracted by the glamour of startup culture – that should not be your end goal. You should know what you are signing up for. Always start off for the right reasons.”

– Srishti Sharma
Founder, Shakti Wearables

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Srishti faced numerous challenges while scaling her venture, from societal taboos surrounding issues like harassment to the capital-intensive nature of her business. Technological innovation, navigating government endorsement and societal acceptance were integral to overcoming these challenges. Collaborations with government bodies and securing capital through funds like the Nirbhaya Fund have also been important for ensuring the sustainable growth of the product amidst challenges.

Beyond the hurdles specific to her business, she also cautioned budding entrepreneurs against the allure of glamour and emphasised the importance of understanding the journey's realities. She highlighted the changing landscape for women entrepreneurs, advocating for increased participation and dispelling gender stereotypes. She also addressed challenges related to acceptance and government endorsement and believes that a strategic approach is needed for the scalability and sustainability of her product.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Srishti's journey highlights the importance of challenging the norms and advocating change. Her emphasis on technology's role in addressing societal problems highlights the potential for empowerment through innovation. The company's vision extends beyond just women safety in India, aiming to leverage technology for broader societal benefits, including the aforementioned applications of the tool and how it can help global citizens. She also acknowledges the potential misuse of her product, but she assures that it can be remedied through robust measures, including stringent verification processes and technical safeguards, ensuring responsible deployment of the technology.

Regarding insights and encouragement for aspiring entrepreneurs, Srishti emphasises the need for perseverance and purpose-driven entrepreneurship. She highlighted how slowly but steadily there is a societal shift towards embracing women in leadership roles while acknowledging ongoing gender disparities. Through her engagements, including TED talks and college visits, she aims to inspire and empower women to pursue entrepreneurship. The venture's tagline, 'fashion meets safety', reflects their commitment to merging style with functionality, catering to diverse user preferences while ensuring safety.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | www.shaktiwearables.com |
| USP | Shakti Wearables has an electrification device installed in a wearable format with a regulator and a button to regulate the emitted current and prevent crimes. Unlike other similar products which have only SOS features and depend on the reaction of law enforcement, Shakti Wearables can protect the user on its own using the aforementioned electrification, making it a far better solution. |
| Mission | To make sure no woman, even in the most distant locations across the world feels unsafe. |
| Founded in | 2022 |
| Team size | 5-10 |
| Headquarters | Gurugram |
| Awards/accolades | Asia's most innovative women entrepreneur |
| Next big milestone | To leverage technology for broader societal benefits, including defence applications and global citizen safety |
| Qualification | Economics (Hons.), Delhi University |
| Investment/grant/funding | Grants/equity |



45. Sumita Tulsiani

Founder, TravelDilSe

How it began

With more than 17 years of experience in the travel industry and driven by her passion for providing seamless travel experiences, Sumita Tulsiani embarked on her entrepreneurial journey with TravelDilSe.

Her prior experiences in operations, product management and leadership roles in many renowned organisations in the tourism sector laid a robust foundation for her venture, TravelDilSe. However, despite witnessing substantial revenue growth, there was a significant increase in costs to handle customer inquiries and bookings. This observation led her to identify a crucial gap in the market – lack of automation and personalisation in holiday package bookings.

Realising the idea of eliminating human interference in the comprehensive process of building and selecting an optimal holiday package, Sumita, with the support of her colleagues, used her contacts and working experience in the sector to leverage supplier chains like flights, accommodation services, transfers and tours. As a result of her efforts, her platform now proactively adjusts user itineraries according to the users' preferences and the unprecedented contingencies that may come up during the journey – making the booking process efficient.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Overall, Sumita faced many difficulties regarding recruiting a competent workforce and figuring out the finances. About the former, Sumita agreed that it is sometimes challenging to recruit suitable technical talents from outside and hiring mobile developers, which requires years of painstaking internal search. However, her determination played a key role in overcoming all these problems and soon enough, TravelDilSe managed to receive two rounds of funding.

In the future, Sumita sees TravelDilSe as a major player in the experiential holiday's domain, with an emphasis on the perfect execution of the client's experience. For its first few years of operation, she wants to focus on increasing the platform's potential and make it more recognisable by applying marketing and visibility strategies as well as introducing new and ambitious applications such as travel friendly apps and prediction engines for the successful and satisfactory operation of the company.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Sumita's advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly women, revolves around resilience and self-belief. In her own life as well, she was determined to always remain focused on her endeavours despite the situation. She also encourages everyone, especially women entering the business world, to learn to believe in themselves. As in her life and struggles, she emphasised that it is never too late to focus on one's priorities and that one should never give up.

Apart from her business, Sumita's mission is to support women and help them become more independent. In addition to her entrepreneurial responsibilities, she plays the role of an activist, focusing on the enhancement and advocacy for women in the labour market. She continues to be an active member of the 10,000 women programme sponsored by Goldman Sachs along with NSRCEL, IIM Bengaluru, in which she voices her opinions and knowledge to support other young and budding women entrepreneurs to overcome the hurdles in entrepreneurship. She calls for women to have individual and career objectives, advising that women should be composed and challenge themselves. Through mentoring programmes and her interaction with different women, she creates a positive environment that encourages and helps other women get to the top in their business endeavours. Sumita is also



“Find that one compelling reason to persevere through hurdles and challenges, for it will serve as your guiding light and motivate you to achieve your goals.”

– Sumita Tulsiani
Founder, TravelDilSe

sensitive about women's rights. She wholeheartedly believes that the leadership and representation of women in the business world can bring notable change.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | https://www.traveldilse.com/ |
| USP | TravelDilSe is a full-stack product for leisure travellers, giving them the liberty to take control and fully customise their itineraries or holiday packages as per their budgets, requirements and interests in India and abroad. It is an AI-powered platform, e-customised holiday planning and price comparison booking engine that uses a unique matching algorithm to deliver tailor-made holidays with itinerary management. |
| Mission | Their mission is to deliver best travel experiences and make destinations available any time for the travellers. |
| Team size | 5–10 |
| Co-founder/s | Natesh Rajagopalan |
| Headquarters | New Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognised by Tally Solutions as the Impactful Women Entrepreneur on International Women Entrepreneurs Day in November 2022 • Winner of Asia's 1,000 Women Awards in Travel and Tourism by Women-novator Global Summit 2021 • Finalist at Times Group She UnLTD Entrepreneur Awards 2020 in Travel and Experiences • Incubated by NSRCEL - IIM Bengaluru (associated with them since 2020) • Incubated by NASSCOM and IAMAI - Mobile 10x, Hartron |
| Qualification | PGDBA, Symbiosis Pune and incubated at NSRCEL, IIM Bengaluru |
| Investment/grant/funding | Angel investors |



46. Surabhi Agarwal

Founder, LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services

How it began

Surabhi is a public health management professional with over 12 years of experience. She is an occupational therapist and holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Public Health Management from the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare in New Delhi. Her inspiration to start a rehabilitation-based business came from her own family's experience. After her mother suffered a stroke, her father had to take extended leave from work and move to a metropolitan area to find accessible rehabilitation services. This highlighted to her the challenges people face during recovery.

Motivated by this experience, Surabhi founded LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services. Her vision was to integrate rehabilitation services with technology to make it more accessible and effective. LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services offers a wide range of therapeutic services using a multidisciplinary clinical approach focused on early intervention and child development assessments. The company provides personalised home-based rehabilitation services, including speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychology and special education. All of these services are delivered by licensed therapists.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services programmes are carefully designed to meet the unique needs of each patient. The programmes utilise latest technology, play activities and involve parents in the rehabilitation process. The therapists adopt individualised education plans (IEPs) to suit the home environment and specific needs of the customers. They incorporate interactive elements like games, puzzles and music to boost motivation and participation to promote functional independence. This personalised approach not only reduces costs and the need for hospital visits, but also allows LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services to provide services to remote areas.

LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services operates as a subscription-based service. This subscription encompasses a set number of rehabilitation sessions, which can be chosen according to the client's preference and needs. The package includes at-home child assessments, rehabilitation sessions, psychologist reviews and supplementary materials to support play activities. The pricing of the subscription varies depending on the number of hourly sessions selected by the client as well as the geographical region in which the service is provided. LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services strives to provide a transparent pricing structure, providing clients with a clear understanding of the costs involved to empower them to make informed decisions about the services they wish to receive based on their desired frequency of care and financial considerations.

Surabhi has implemented a customer-centric approach to ensure that the best possible services are provided to clients. LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services evaluates its impact by assessing improvements in a child's ability to perform daily activities, maintain independence and engage socially. An area that LFL gives high significance to is the well-being of caregivers, who play a crucial role in the home-based rehabilitation process. LFL's programmes and interventions focus on evaluating metrics like caregiver burden, stress levels, knowledge and capacity through surveys, interviews and assessment tools. Based on the feedback, LFL provides tailored training, skills development and psychologist sessions to enhance caregiver participation in the rehabilitation process.



“Starting a rehabilitation services company is not just about providing services; it is our commitment to ensure that every individual, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to thrive. My vision is to provide rehabilitation services for all in need and make India truly inclusive.”

– Surabhi Agarwal
Founder,
LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services

Surabhi has positioned her venture as an enterprise that delivers social value and aligns with the international agenda of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). LFL actively supports SDG3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 4 (Quality education) and SDG 10 (Reduced inequality).

Another major impact of this start up is employment generation among women as majority of therapists working with the organisation are women. LoveForLife Rehabilitation Services gives them the flexibility to schedule sessions as per their availability, keeping client's/patient's comfort in mind.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Surabhi advises budding entrepreneurs to gauge the success of their startups by not its revenue or profits but rather by the impact on society and the people's lives that they bring value to. She advises them to utilise technology as a means to raise awareness about the impact being created by their venture. She draws from her own experience of using technology to raise awareness among people about the detrimental effects of screens and mobile devices on the brain development of young children.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| URL | www.loveforlife.in |
| USP | LoveforLife distinguishes themselves through their commitment to cost and time efficiency, fostering superior recovery outcomes within the comfort of clients' homes. Tailored to individual needs, their approach integrates cutting-edge research-driven techniques, providing holistic care for optimal development of children. |
| Mission | LoveforLife's mission is to bridge the gap in accessing early diagnosis, healthcare, and rehabilitation services for children with disabilities across India, particularly in remote areas. Through comprehensive support for conditions including autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy and learning disabilities, it aims to alleviate the financial burden of the families and empower them to improve the quality of life of the clients. |
| Founded in | 2017 |
| Team size | 25+ |
| Headquarters | Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh |
| Awards/accolades | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Zero Award 2024 for Innovative solution by Zero Project at the United Nations, Vienna. 2. Exceptional Women of Excellence Award at Women Economic Forum 2022 3. Home HealthCare Brand Award 2021 by IHW Council |
| Next big milestone | Continue innovation in healthcare, providing holistic care for children with special needs through early intervention in speech therapy, occupational therapy and special education to positively impact a million lives within the next decade. |
| Qualifications | Post Graduate Diploma in Public Health from The National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi |

47. Sweta Prajapati

CEO, CerboTech Education Private Limited

How it began

Sweta Prajapati's entrepreneurial journey began from her personal struggles with mental health during her bachelor's to overcoming it and achieving success by establishing CerboTech. Her experience with anxiety and depression sparked a desire in her to understand and address mental wellness issues, but in a tangible manner, which led her to research cognitive skills and brain enhancement. Through collaboration with experts in neuroscience (including those from IIT Gandhinagar) as well as networking, she developed a revolutionary concept utilising brain-computer interface (BCI) technology. Working with such a new technology was not easy, but she persevered and after several years of research and partnerships, she and her four co-founders built the company's foundation, emphasising the importance of addressing mental health challenges, especially among children.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Sweta says that her company's approach is based on technology backed mental health solutions – personalised mental health programmes powered by BCI technology integration. Her company's revenue model focuses on B2B partnerships with schools, coaching classes and franchises. By offering tailored solutions and leveraging innovative technology, the company has seen tremendous growth driven by word-of-mouth marketing and strategic partnerships.

However, the road was not easy especially since her endeavour dealt with the challenge of destigmatising mental health issues, particularly among parents and children. In the beginning, CerboTech also struggled to build new technology without existing baselines to create a competent and skilled team and to raise awareness about the societal stigma around mental health. At present, however, Sweta's company successfully creates awareness through orientation programmes and collaborations with institutions which cater to children with severe mental challenges. Her business thrives on a mission to destigmatise mental health, provides scientifically validated solutions and offers free programmes to affected families.

Sweta emphasises the importance of understanding children's cognitive skills and offers tangible solutions through technology and personalised programmes, making it possible to choose the career that is better suited for the child. For example, scoring high or low in a particular aspect of mental health is not always good or bad – but it varies on case-by-case basis. By empowering parents with real-time insights into their children's mental wellness, Sweta aims to bridge the gap between traditional assessments and modern technological advancements to foster a healthier, more supportive environment for mental health awareness and encourages timely intervention.

With 14 franchises in India, her vision for scaling the venture involves expanding services to cater to various age groups and sectors, and making mental health programmes accessible to people of all ages and walks of life.



“Young entrepreneurs should have 5ps to achieve success - they have to be purposeful, passionate, persistent, patient and should have perspective of their action and its impact.”

– Sweta Prajapati

CEO,
CerboTech Education Private Limited

Empowerment - suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Sweta's advice for aspiring and budding entrepreneurs is realising the importance of identifying problems and purposefully working towards finding solutions. To do that, she stresses the significance of passion, persistence and patience, encapsulated in her '5P' approach. Her message extends beyond gender biases and aims to empower all youth who aspire to venture into entrepreneurship. While acknowledging the obstacles that come with startup endeavours, she encourages individuals to leverage networking opportunities effectively, turning connections into valuable resources for their businesses.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | www.smartkids.cerbotech.in |
| USP | CerboTech's unique solution employs BCI technology, offering personalised mental health training through real-time feedback and data-driven insights. |
| Mission | <p>CerboTech aims to bridge the gap between traditional assessments and modern technological advancements, fostering a healthier, more supportive environment for mental health awareness and interventions required to remedy them.</p> <p>It also aims to break the stigma surrounding mental health through awareness programmes and scientifically proven solutions.</p> |
| Founded in | 2018 |
| Team size | 5-10 |
| Next big milestone | CerboTech's vision for scaling their venture involves expanding services to cater to various age groups and sectors and making mental health programmes accessible to people of all ages and from all walks of life. |
| Qualification | Master of Computer Application – Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar |
| Investment/grant/funding | Grants |

48. Thilakam Rajendran

Founder and Director, NEDAR Foundation

How it began

With over three decades of experience as a special educator, Thilakam Rajendran had garnered extensive insights into the differently abled population. Throughout her tenure, she observed a gap wherein NGOs were able to help in rehabilitating differently abled individuals by providing them vocational training, particularly in handicraft production; however, many of these products, while sold within local communities for charitable causes, lack market appeal and viability. Moreover, very few NGOs venture into creating enterprises which are capable of generating substantial revenue and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Recognising the need for transformative initiatives to address the underserved segment of society, Thilakam started her mission to establish a venture with a vision to create equitable solutions and opportunities for promoting entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurship, and access to financial and marketing linkages for differently abled persons to empower them and enable their integration as productive members of the society.

In pursuit of this vision, Thilakam Rajendran founded the NEDAR Foundation (as a Section 8 Company) in 2021. It was established with the ambitious goal of becoming the country's premier virtual incubator, dedicated to supporting and promoting differently abled entrepreneurs in starting, sustaining and scaling their enterprises.

The acronym NEDAR, derived from the Hindi word '*nidar*' which means 'fearless', symbolises the spirit of entrepreneurship embodied by individuals who bravely navigate challenges, regardless of their disabilities, in pursuit of their dreams. NEDAR, which stands for Network of Entrepreneurs with Disabilities for Assistance and Rehabilitation, encapsulates the foundation's commitment to providing NEDAR network a vital platform for entrepreneurs with disabilities to access support services and have a collective voice to advocate for their business growth and be 'at par' with other entrepreneurs in the country.

Their endeavour encompasses the development of

comprehensive and accessible pre-incubation, incubation and accelerator programmes delivered through both virtual and direct modes to cater to individuals with disabilities residing in remote regions in collaboration with mainstream incubators.

Recognising the power of networking in fostering entrepreneurship, the foundation launched the country's first-ever business network for entrepreneurs with disabilities, named the NEDAR network which currently comprises over 220 members hailing from 18 states.

Entrepreneurship - growth and challenges

Thilakam acknowledges the significant hurdles in her entrepreneurial venture and aims to overcome them and help over 10 million individuals with disabilities who are currently sidelined from the job market. She focuses on a few strategic areas to address this disparity. First, she aims to tackle the pre-conceived societal perceptions through advocacy and education, fostering a more inclusive mindset toward persons with disabilities in entrepreneurship.



"Our foundation strives to be India's leading virtual incubator, championing differently abled entrepreneurs in starting, sustaining and scaling their enterprises. Through accessible programmes spanning pre-incubation to acceleration, we are reaching out to individuals even in remote regions of the country."

– **Thilakam Rajendran**
Founder and Director,
NEDAR Foundation

Secondly, the foundation prioritises strengthening the entrepreneurial skills of persons/entrepreneurs with disabilities by offering business coaching, skills development and mentorship programmes and networking opportunities so that they are recognised and included in the MSME sector. The foundation is also working on breaking down financial and market access barriers by collaborating with stakeholders to provide equitable funding and market entry support to these ‘invisible contributors’ of the society who also contribute to national wealth. By championing these efforts, Thilakam and her foundation aspire to create lasting socioeconomic impact, empowering differently abled people and fostering a more inclusive society.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Thilakam urges India’s younger generation to recognise and capitalise on the nation’s rich demographic dividend. Beyond her companies focus on PwD, she emphasises the importance of encouraging young women to step forward and seize the myriad opportunities available to them. Furthermore, she underscores the importance of youth engagement to play a pivotal role in volunteering and skills sharing with organisations like NEDAR and its members to enable them to become independent and urges members of industry associations to play a major role in supporting small entrepreneurs by providing jobs, mentorship opportunities and promoting employment opportunities through them. Through such collective efforts, Thilakam envisions a society where all members are empowered to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the progress and prosperity to create ‘a world for all’.

In a nutshell

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| URL | www.nedarfoundation.com |
| USP | An inclusive virtual incubator for promoting startups and supporting differently abled entrepreneurs by providing a range of holistic services like incubation and accelerator programmes, business coaching, financial and market linkages, ecosystem engagement and membership in the NEDAR entrepreneurs’ network. |
| Mission | NEDAR Foundation works with differently abled persons across the country, their networks, and other marginalised groups and organisations with similar objectives, to empower them to be part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem through capacity building and access to business opportunities to conduct and grow their businesses at par as contributing citizens and to achieve the main objectives for their economic empowerment, social inclusion and rehabilitation. |
| Year in which it was founded | 2021 |
| Team size | 0-5 |
| Headquarters | Kalkaji, New Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For her work in ARUNIM as one of the World’s Best Social Enterprise she was chosen to become an Unreasonable Fellow 2011 Boulder, Colorado and also Awarded as the Most Innovative Projects in the world in 2013 by ZERO PROJECT, Vienna (www.zeroproject.org) Recipient of NCPEDP-SHELL Helen Keller Award in 2011 as Role Model Professional for Promoting Employment and Livelihoods of Persons with Disabilities Awarded as Woman Entrepreneur ‘ACHIEVER’ by DMA(Delhi Management Association) in 2018 Awarded as ‘Leader of Change 2020’ by PVR Nest under ‘Collective of Leader’s Program’ for Championing Inclusion for the specially abled |
| Next big milestone | To enable and empower over one lakh persons/entrepreneurs with disabilities through an accessible inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem so that they can be seen as contributing members of the society. |
| Qualifications | Masters in Human Resource Management from University of Madras and Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education, Delhi University |

49. Tripti Shinghal Somani

Founder, Womennovator (Global incubator for women)

How it began

Tripti Shinghal Somani's entrepreneurial spirit and desire to make a social impact led her to establish Womennovator, a platform dedicated to supporting and empowering women. This venture was born out of her belief in collaboration and community-building, as evidenced by her emphasis on creating a supportive ecosystem for all professional women. This zeal led her to work towards creating supportive conditions to empower women. The amount of time she devoted to accounting and auditing organisations equipped her with the knowledge and skills she needed to overcome the challenges she encountered along her entrepreneurial journey. Right from her childhood, Tripti Shinghal Somani wanted to be a chartered accountant after being inspired by her uncle who was one. Throughout her career, Tripti Shinghal Somani has held various strategic roles. She has served as an Advisory Council Member of the National Startup Advisory Council, Ministry of Commerce and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. She is an Executive Committee Member at Shri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi. She is also a board member of DSL (Dharampal Satyapal Limited) Group's Centre for Entrepreneurship at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

Tripti Shinghal Somani has worked on making Womennovator's business model sustainable in the long run. The company leverages community engagement and corporate partnerships to generate revenue. By offering services such as social media management and website creation to its community members, Womennovator earns a commission alongside supporting women-owned businesses. In this way, Tripti Shinghal Somani has ensured financial sustainability for her clients as well as her own firm. Additionally, the platform collaborates with corporate partners to facilitate gender-responsive procurement, promoting supplier diversity and CSR.



“Continuity, Collaboration, and Community form the cornerstone of a successful entrepreneurship venture, fostering resilience, synergy, and a supportive environment for growth and innovation.”

– Tripti Shinghal Somani
Founder, Womennovator

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Tripti Shinghal Somani faced various challenges in her journey to establish Womennovator and empower women. Initially, societal expectations and norms posed hurdles as Tripti Shinghal Somani navigated the transition from science to commerce, defying the conventional career path expected of her.

The pressure to conform to expectations, particularly in academic and professional spheres, presented a significant challenge, highlighting the need to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Additionally, Tripti Shinghal Somani's endeavour to establish Womennovator required overcoming financial constraints and securing support from stakeholders.

Tripti Shinghal Somani also faced several hurdles in recruiting more women as part of her workforce, e.g. lack of resources and mentorship. Bridging the gender gap in entrepreneurship required a lot of brainstorming with universities and companies to garner much-needed support for future women entrepreneurs. Overcoming societal barriers, financial constraints and resource limitations required persistence, resilience and strategic partnerships.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Tripti Shinghal Somani has significantly empowered women through her platform, Womennovator. By setting up a nurturing community, it promotes collaboration among its members, thereby providing networking opportunities as well as mentorship programmes where different skills can be acquired by women interested in venturing into business. According to Womennovator, one way of achieving this goal is increasing women's labour workforce participation rate (LFPR) by partnering with universities or other tertiary institutions offering higher education to organise guidance seminars. Not only does this encourage self-employment among women but it also addresses

the root causes hindering female participation in economic activities.

Additionally, the push for gender-sensitive purchasing policies is designed to provide greater access to opportunities for female-owned enterprises by getting big companies and the government to reserve some contracts specifically for them. The company has also been championing the need for changes in certain laws in order to ensure the establishment of an environment where women-led businesses can prosper without any form of discrimination. Combining innovative methodologies with strategic alliances can significantly advance the improvement of women's livelihoods. This positive impact extends to for-profit organisations, social enterprises and cooperative societies, benefiting everyone involved.

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| URL | https://www.womennovators.com/ |
| USP | WE NEST – a unique marketplace dashboard designed to bridge corporate procurement needs with women-owned businesses and MSMEs. The platform drives procurement diversity and enhances ESG commitments, making WE NEST a partner and catalyst for change. |
| Mission | To build the largest community of women innovators and entrepreneurs, supporting supplier diversity by helping women-owned businesses excel, generate revenue for women owned businesses and support organisations meet the 3% procurement goal and increase their ESG Ratings |
| Founded in | 2019 |
| Team size | 25 |
| Headquarters | Delhi |
| Awards/accolades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Times 40 under 40 award • Mahila Shakti Award – Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) • SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) Intelligence Award • Economic Times Inspiring Leader Award • She's a two-time TEDx speaker • Tripti Shinghal Somani has held significant roles such as Advisory Council Member in the National Startup Advisory Council, Ministry of Commerce, and DPIIT. • She is an Executive Committee Member at SRCC, Delhi. • She's also a Board Member at DS Group's Center of Entrepreneurship at IIT Delhi • She has served in leadership roles in various councils of PHDCCI, Assocham, and FICCI. |
| Next big milestone | To be the largest and most impactful community of women innovators and entrepreneurs. To foster a supportive ecosystem, providing resources, mentorship and platforms to help women-led businesses thrive. Through strategic partnerships and targeted programmes, Womennovator aims to bridge the gender gap, enabling women to excel, generate revenue and make a significant impact. |
| Qualifications | B.Com – Shri Ram College of Commerce, Master of Business Law – National Law School of India University, Chartered Accountant – Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. |
| Investment/grant/funding | Grant received from Housing Development Finance Corporation Parivartan |



50. Vidhya Sridhar

Founder and CEO, CareEver Digitech

How it began

Vidhya Sridhar grew up in Chennai and later moved to Singapore. Losing her father-in-law due to pancreatic cancer ignited her passion for creating something impactful in the healthcare sector. Vidhya observed that India attracts many international patients due to the combination of affordable treatment costs and the availability of highly specialised doctors. She embarked on the journey to establish CareEver Digitech, a platform which is aimed at providing healthcare solutions which focus on reliable care at an affordable cost. Driven by a desire to make a difference in people's lives, she left her career in IT consulting and moved to the healthcare industry.

Vidhya considers patient care and satisfaction as the most important aspect of a healthcare solutions platform. She highlights how meticulous attention is given to every aspect of the patient's journey through CareEver's platform, from initial consultation to post-treatment follow-ups. She underscored the need for structured processes and clear communication channels to ensure a seamless experience for patients.

Entrepreneurship – growth and challenges

Vidhya had to tackle financial constraints, gain the trust of international insurance companies and establish partnerships with hospitals. Despite these challenges, she remained resolute in her vision and determination to succeed.

Vidhya has big dreams for CareEver. She wants to see it grow in the coming years. She's working on ways to use technology to reach patients all around the world and make things run more smoothly. Vidhya believes that teaming up with the right partners is crucial for this growth. She's been actively building relationships with important players in the healthcare field. She's also dedicated to keeping CareEver innovative, always looking to add new services which can address the changing needs of the patients. Vidhya's ambitious plans show her strong determination to make CareEver a global leader in healthcare and leave a lasting mark on the healthcare industry.

Vidhya wishes to take CareEver beyond India, with a focus on the Middle East and Africa. She explained her strategy of working with insurance companies to make cross-border healthcare services easier. Her goal is to make India a top choice for medical treatment.

Empowerment – suggestions for budding entrepreneurs

Vidhya believes that it is important to give back to society and help empower people, particularly through education and skill development. Niyama Foundation, which she founded in 2015, illustrates her deep commitment to English language education. She formed a four-member team to teach and has been funding English tuition for underprivileged students. Inspired by her time in Singapore, she partnered with a global tech company to develop a curriculum and worked with multiple schools to boost English proficiency.

Vidhya has also dedicated time to teaching English in several orphanages, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, she had to pause these efforts as her responsibilities increased. She expresses a strong desire to resume her educational initiatives in the future and believes that language education can make a significant impact in the society.



“With the right mindset, anyone can accomplish anything they set their sights on, unlocking endless possibilities and realising their full potential.”

– Vidhya Sridhar
Founder and CEO, CareEver Digitech

In a nutshell

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| URL | https://mycareever.com/ |
| USP | CareEver has created a transglobal platform to provide access to hospitals in 16 countries, insurance companies, facilitators, counsellors and the patient. The platform acts as curator and regulator, adhering to all the international healthcare norms enabling seamless access to anyone looking for surgery care at affordable cost across the globe. |
| Mission | To pioneer affordable, quality treatments across the globe |
| Founded in | 2020 |
| Team size | 20-25 |
| Headquarters | Chennai |
| Award/accolades | Recognised as third best facilitators in UAE Insurance conclave |
| Next big milestone | CareEver envisions a world where healthcare is empowered by innovation and is accessible to all. |
| Qualification | Master of Business Administration – Indian Institute of Management Bengaluru (Bangalore) |
| Investment/grant/funding | Equity and Debt worth INR 1 crore from Viruksham |



Conclusion

As we conclude this edition of 'Leading the change : 50 inspirational women in innovation' we acknowledge and applaud the transformative journeys and remarkable achievements of these women entrepreneurs. The edition not only showcases their innovations and hard work but also underscores the significant challenges women have faced in their entrepreneurial journey.

The stories shared in this compendium demonstrate determination, persistence and creativity of these women entrepreneurs who have broken barriers, set new benchmarks in their respective fields and have showcased remarkable instances of ingenuity by leveraging technology to tackle complex problems and build sustainable business models.

Though their entrepreneurial journeys were filled with challenges, including obstacles related to funding and societal biases, their stories of resilience and determination serve as motivation for aspiring entrepreneurs everywhere. These women have shown that, with the right support and resources, they can achieve remarkable success and make significant contributions to both economic growth and social progress.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to all the women featured in this edition. Your achievements are not just personal milestones but also pave the way for future generations of women entrepreneurs. Your success stories are powerful narratives that can inspire countless others to pursue their own entrepreneurial dreams.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the mentors and supporters who have played a crucial role in the success of these entrepreneurs. The collaborative ecosystem that supports and nurtures innovation is essential for the growth and sustainability of startups. We hope that this compendium serves as a catalyst for further collaboration and for supporting women-led ventures in the future.

These pioneers will undoubtedly inspire more women to venture into entrepreneurship where women entrepreneurs are not anomalies but a formidable force driving innovation and fostering economic growth. Let us continue to celebrate and support women in innovation as their success will lead to a brighter and more inclusive future.

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About CII CIES



Centre of Excellence for Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Startups

CII Centre of Excellence for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Startups (CIES) serves as a catalyst for fostering innovation, driving entrepreneurship, and bridging the gap between corporates and the dynamic startup ecosystem in India. Through a comprehensive suite of services, CIES aims to elevate organisations in innovation, technology adoption, and investment potential, thereby contributing significantly to the growth of the startup ecosystem. CII is a force multiplier, uniquely positioned to catapult growth in the country by leveraging its 300,000 members connect, 500+ sectoral councils, 65+ offices in the nation, 8 international offices, and 300+ MoU's with international partners from over 100 countries.

Mission:

Empower corporates to thrive by embracing innovation through startup connect, simultaneously guiding startups to grow into renowned corporate leaders.

Vision: To be a world-class, state-of-the-art, corporate-driven, startup resource platform that enables growth of successful startups in India.

Key Services:

1. Capacity Building Programs: CIES offers meticulously curated programs aimed at addressing the unique needs of startups, providing them with the tools and resources necessary for sustainable growth.

Family Offices | C-Suite Executives | Government Officials

2. Market Access Initiatives: Facilitate market access programs for startups by leveraging our extensive network of corporate members and employing the Open Innovation Paradigm to create opportunities for collaboration and growth.

Corporate Accelerator Program | Open Innovation Program | Corporate Pitching

3. Summits: Our flagship events bring together high-impact companies, thought leaders, and stakeholders to foster collaboration, share insights.

Unicorn Summit | Investor Summit | Startup Summit | Social Entrepreneurship Summit

4. Academic Collaboration: Collaborate with academic institutions to establish incubation centres, fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among students and faculty.

5. Policy Advocacy: Regular and active engagement with central and state governments to represent diverse policy-related issues. Regular policy roundtables are held for key sectors for advocacy to promote ease of doing business.

6. Awards and Recognitions: Through initiatives, CIES recognises and celebrates the achievements of India's top startups, unicorns, fostering meaningful partnerships between established corporations and innovative startups.

Startuppreneur Awards | Women in Innovation | Unicorn Awards

7. Community Building: ICONN is an industry connect platform to catalyse strategic interactions between key stakeholders in the ecosystem to create an integrated, inclusive, and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country.

ICONN Alpha is a dedicated mobile app for connecting with CII CIES startup and innovation community.



8. Bilateral Engagement: The overarching objective is to empower businesses by providing exposure to international markets and facilitating connections with innovation ecosystems worldwide.

International Delegations | Institutionalised Framework | Inbound and Outbound

9. Startup Affiliation Framework: Enabling growth stage startups in the ecosystem to be affiliated by CIES for enhanced market access opportunities.

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About CII



Confederation of Indian Industry

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering Industry, Government and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.

CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organisation, with around 9,000 members from the private as well as public sectors, including SMEs and MNCs, and an indirect membership of over 365,000 enterprises from 294 national and regional sectoral industry bodies.

For more than 125 years, CII has been engaged in shaping India's development journey and works proactively on transforming Indian Industry's engagement in national development. CII charts change by working closely with Government on policy issues, interfacing with thought leaders, and enhancing efficiency, competitiveness, and business opportunities for industry through a range of specialised services and strategic global linkages. It also provides a platform for consensus-building and networking on key issues.

Through its dedicated Centres of Excellence and Industry competitiveness initiatives, promotion of innovation and technology adoption, and partnerships for sustainability, CII plays a transformative part in shaping the future of the nation. Extending its agenda beyond business, CII assists industry to identify and execute corporate citizenship programmes across diverse domains including affirmative action, livelihoods, diversity management, skill development, empowerment of women, and sustainable development, to name a few.

For 2024-25, CII has identified "Globally Competitive India: Partnerships for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth" as its Theme, prioritising 5 key pillars. During the year, it would align its initiatives and activities to facilitate strategic actions for driving India's global competitiveness and growth through a robust and resilient Indian industry.

With 70 offices, including 12 Centres of Excellence, in India, and 8 overseas offices in Australia, Egypt, Germany, Indonesia, Singapore, UAE, UK, and USA, as well as institutional partnerships with about 300 counterpart organisations in almost 100 countries, CII serves as a reference point for Indian industry and the international business community.

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About PwC

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Notes

Notes



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