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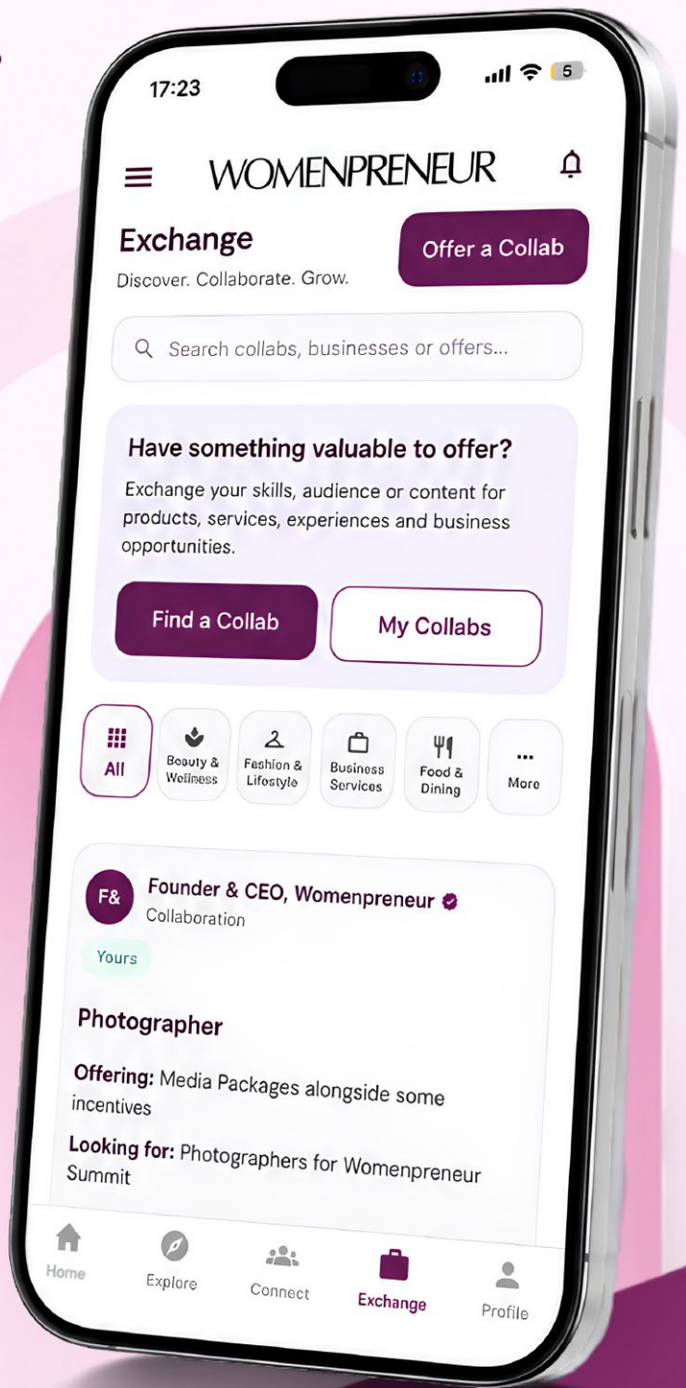

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Nisha Lamba
Editor-in-Chief
Womenpreneur India



The Courage to Build. The Confidence to Lead.

Entrepreneurship is often described through milestones: the business that was built, the challenges overcome, the growth achieved and the recognition received. But behind every milestone is a decision. The decision to begin, to take a chance on an idea, to trust one's abilities and to keep moving even when the outcome is uncertain.

For women, that decision can carry an additional dimension. It may mean challenging expectations, creating space where none existed, balancing competing responsibilities or learning to lead in environments that were not always designed with them in mind. Yet across industries, women continue to build businesses, lead teams, create employment, introduce new ideas and redefine what success can look like.

At **Womenpreneur India**, we believe these journeys deserve to be recognised not simply for the achievements they represent, but for the thinking, determination and individuality behind them.

This edition brings together women whose journeys reflect different expressions of ambition and leadership. Some have built businesses from personal experiences and identified opportunities where others saw limitations. Others have spent years developing expertise, transforming organisations and creating meaningful impact through their work. Their paths may be different, but each reflects the willingness to take ownership of an idea and turn it into something real.

What makes these stories particularly meaningful is that they go beyond the familiar narrative of success. They speak of uncertainty, reinvention, difficult decisions, persistence and the lessons that come with building something of one's own. They remind us that there is no single formula for entrepreneurship, no prescribed timeline for achievement and no one definition of leadership.

As we mark **Women's Entrepreneurship Day** through the **NariFirst × Womenpreneur India collaboration**, our intention is to create more than a moment of celebration. It is to bring women together for conversations, connections and opportunities that can continue long after the event. Recognition matters, but so do the networks we build, the knowledge we share and the doors we open for one another.

I hope these pages encourage you to look beyond titles and accomplishments and discover the people, choices and convictions behind each journey. And if there is one thought I would like every reader to take away, it is this: you do not have to wait until you feel completely ready to begin. Sometimes, the most important part of building something meaningful is having the courage to take that first step.

Here's to the women who begin, build, lead and make room for others to do the same.

Happy Women's Entrepreneurship Day!

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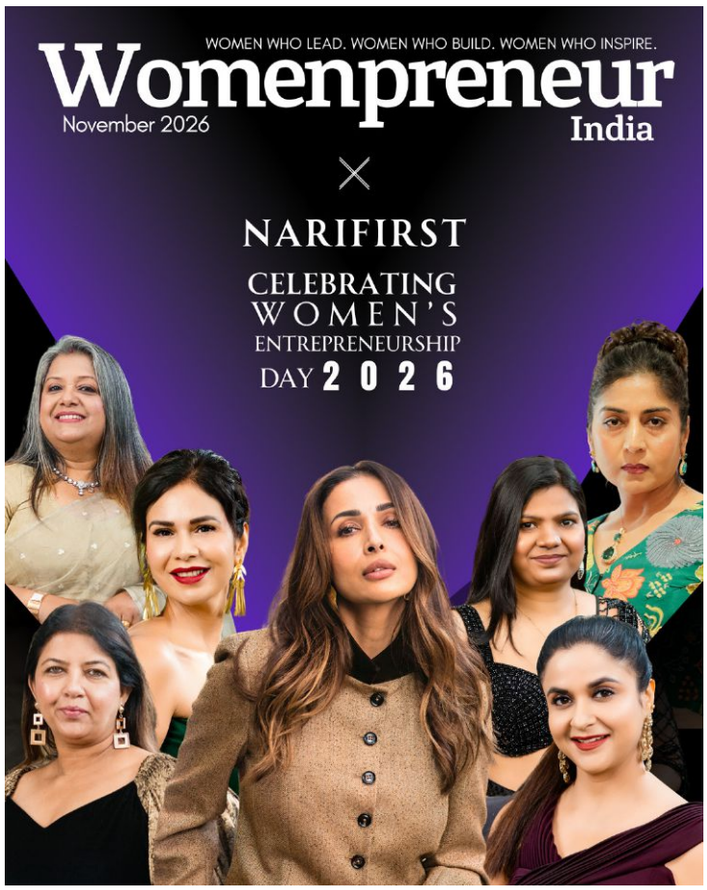





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AIKTA SHARMA

Building a Movement Beyond Beauty

In an industry that has traditionally placed narrow expectations on how women should look, Aikta Sharma is making a different proposition: a woman's worth cannot be measured by age, height, weight or appearance. Through NariFirst India, the platform she founded, she is creating spaces where women can be recognised for their individuality, confidence and stories.



At its heart is a larger question: who gets the opportunity to be seen? For Aikta, that opportunity should not be determined by conventional standards. Turning that conviction into an organisation, however, takes more than a compelling message. It requires building programmes, partnerships and experiences that make the promise tangible, season after season.

That belief shapes NariFirst's flagship initiative, Jewel of India. Unlike conventional pageants built around restrictive ideas of beauty, the platform welcomes participants from diverse age groups, backgrounds and body types, giving them an opportunity to present their talents and personal journeys. The experience encourages women to step forward, own their identities and become comfortable in their own skin.

The initiative has now completed three editions, bringing together women from across India and beyond. Its growth points to an appetite for a more expansive idea of pageantry, where participation is not limited by a predetermined image. For contestants, it can be a moment of visibility and self-discovery.

Aikta's association with Malaika Arora has been part of that journey from the beginning. The Bollywood star has served as NariFirst's brand ambassador since its first season and returns each year to crown the winners. Her presence adds to the occasion for participants and brings wider attention to a platform broadening the conversation around beauty and representation.

The idea has continued to evolve. After three editions of Jewel of India, Aikta introduced Jewel of South, the platform's first regional edition. Conceived to celebrate women from South India, it places regional culture, talent and individuality at the centre of the experience. It recognises that a national platform can become more meaningful when it makes room for the distinct identities and traditions of different regions.

To lead this new chapter, Aikta brought on board actress and classical dancer Sudha Chandran and former Miss India 2007 Sarah Jane Dias. Their association brings experience and visibility to the regional edition.

NariFirst's work has also moved beyond the pageant stage. Aikta has conceptualised advertising campaigns featuring Malaika Arora, offering women from different parts of India the opportunity to share the screen with the actor. Such initiatives require the platform to think beyond event-day visibility and create opportunities that participants can carry into their own personal and professional journeys. Participants have also been given experiences beyond the competition itself, including photoshoots in Dubai and international cultural representation at the World Island Culture Tourism Ambassador event in Mauritius. These initiatives take participation beyond the stage and into new settings.

There is a creative expression to the platform's message, too. NariFirst's anthem, Jashn-e-Nari, celebrates women's strength and resilience. Its promotion through Radio City in Delhi and Mumbai helped take that message to a broader audience. The anthem gives the organisation's message a collective voice beyond its events.

The next phase of Aikta's plans has an international dimension. She is spearheading the Global Cultural Exchange Fashion Week in London from 18 to 22 February 2027, in collaboration with Women of Wonders (WOW), UK. It takes NariFirst's interest in fashion, culture and representation into an international setting.

Closer to home, preparations are under way for Jewel of India Season 4, scheduled for April 2027 in Goa. Malaika Arora is set to return to crown the winners, continuing an association that has been part of the pageant since its launch.

NariFirst's measure cannot rest on the glamour of a stage, celebrity association or international event alone. Its larger purpose lies in the opportunities it creates and the women it encourages to take up space. In challenging narrow definitions of beauty, it is also challenging the idea that recognition should be reserved for a select few.

A movement is built when an idea is repeated, widened and made accessible to more people. Through its pageants, campaigns, cultural initiatives and expanding international plans, NariFirst is working to turn that belief into an experience women can participate in. Aikta Sharma's ambition is not simply to crown winners; it is to create a platform where more women can discover that they deserve to be seen, heard and celebrated.

RAKHEE

Taking the World by Storm, One Journey at a Time

With nearly 25 years in tourism, Rakhee has built a business around international travel, African safaris and meaningful cultural encounters. As Managing Partner of Homeaway Tours & Treks, she is connecting travellers, destinations and communities while making room for new chapters in her own life.

For Rakhee, travel has never been simply about reaching a destination. It is about understanding a place, meeting its people and discovering the stories that give it character. That perspective has shaped nearly 25 years in the tourism industry and continues to guide her work as Managing Partner of Homeaway Tours & Treks, the Kolkata-based travel company she has led since 2010.

Her professional journey began with established travel organisations, including Cox & Kings and Travel Smart. Those early experiences gave her a grounding in travel operations, client service and the relationships on which the industry depends. With a master's degree in Literature and IATA certification, she combines communication, cultural understanding and technical knowledge.

Over time, her interests developed into a specialisation in international tourism, with Africa occupying a particularly important place. From Kenya's Masai Mara to Tanzania's Serengeti, Botswana's Central Kalahari and Namibia, Rakhee has built expertise in destinations known for their wildlife, landscapes and distinctive cultures. Through Homeaway Tours & Treks, she develops tailor-made holidays, African safari itineraries and MICE programmes, while building relationships with destination management companies, hotels, tourism boards and hospitality partners.

An African safari, she understands, is about more than seeing wildlife. It is the atmosphere of a landscape, the knowledge of local guides and an understanding of the communities and conservation efforts connected to it. Creating such experiences calls for careful planning and destination knowledge, as well as an appreciation of the responsibilities that come with tourism. It also means understanding that a successful itinerary should respect the



rhythm of a place rather than simply move visitors through it.

That responsibility is central to her approach. Homeaway Tours & Treks has received recognition and appreciation from organisations including Incredible India, Magical Kenya, Kenya Wildlife Service and the High Commission of Kenya in India for its contribution to promoting Kenya and African tourism. For Rakhee, these acknowledgements underline the importance of strengthening tourism links between India and Africa while encouraging responsible travel, cultural exchange and awareness of conservation.

One particularly meaningful milestone was being part of the first Indian company to visit the grave of George Adamson at Kora National Park in Kenya. The visit brought attention to a lesser-explored part of the country's heritage and history. It also reflects her interest in taking travellers beyond familiar itineraries and introducing them to places whose stories deserve to be better known.

Yet Rakhee's own journey has not been confined to the travel business. Her participation in women's leadership and cultural platforms has opened another avenue for expression. She was recognised in the Inspiring Women Entrepreneurs category at NariFirst's Jewel of India, Season 3, and has received titles including Queen of the Heart at NariFirst and World Tourism & Culture Ambassador at WOW Mauritius. Other recognitions include Best International Image, Best Cultural & Heritage Talent Round and a Jury Award in the Empress category. She has also been Guest of Honour at NariFirst's Jewel of South.

These experiences have allowed her to represent culture and individuality beyond her professional field, reinforcing her belief that women should explore new interests at every stage of life. An active member of SKAL International's Kolkata Chapter and the Live Tourism Women Cell, she remains connected to networks within the travel industry. Her involvement in Rotary Club CSR initiatives reflects a belief that professional success should also make room for social contribution.

At home, Rakhee is a mother of two sons, aged 23 and 19. She speaks of family and entrepreneurship not as competing responsibilities, but as parts of a life that can grow together. She believes motherhood need not mean putting ambition on hold, and that personal growth has no age limit.

Looking ahead, she hopes to deepen India's connections with international tourism markets, particularly Africa, build stronger global partnerships and continue promoting sustainable travel and cultural heritage. She also wants her journey to encourage women to trust their abilities, take chances and create identities beyond the roles expected of them. For her, confidence grows when women give themselves permission to begin, even when the next step is not entirely clear.

Rakhee's personal motto captures that outlook: "Age is never a limitation. Dreams have no expiry date." It is a fitting thought for someone whose career has crossed destinations, cultures and unexpected new stages. For her, every journey creates a story, and every new chapter offers another opportunity to rise.





ARUNIMA SINGH

The Many Dimensions of Arunima Singh

With more than 25 years in advertising, media and business transformation, Arunima Singh has built a career defined by ambition and adaptability. Yet her story extends well beyond the boardroom, encompassing community leadership, lifelong learning, motherhood and an unexpected journey into international pageantry.

There are people who build a career around one defining ambition. And then there are those who keep making room for new ones. Arunima Singh belongs to the latter. With more than 25 years of experience in advertising, media, marketing and business transformation, she has established herself as a business leader while continuing to explore interests beyond the boardroom.

Today, she is Executive Director at a leading advertising and media firm. Her career has taken her through global advertising networks and leading agencies, working with brands across consumer, healthcare and financial services. She has witnessed the industry move from traditional brand-building to digital transformation, social media, customer experience and artificial intelligence, bringing strategic thinking and business development to the changing landscape.

For Arunima, marketing is ultimately about people: understanding what they need, what they value and what earns their trust. Technology may change the tools, but human understanding remains central to meaningful communication.

That curiosity has shaped her approach to learning. Alongside her management education, she has pursued executive learning at the Indian School of Business and specialisations in digital strategy, social media, public relations and design thinking. She is currently undertaking doctoral research in Customer Experience, focusing on Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. She sees AI as a powerful enabler, while believing empathy, judgement and genuine human connection will remain essential to business.

Her interest in leadership extends beyond commercial performance. A Certified Independent Director, she has developed an understanding of corporate governance,



accountability and responsible organisational leadership. Her community work has been equally significant. As President of her Rotary Club during 2024–25, she led and supported more than 100 community service projects. Her Rotary journey has also included district responsibilities in International Services and Vocational Services, with education, women's empowerment and community development among the causes closest to her heart.

She has also contributed as a speaker, mentor and jury member, sharing her experience with emerging professionals. Her recognitions include the Iron Lady title, the Social Samosa SuperWoman Awards and the Women Economic Forum's Exceptional Women of Excellence recognition. The Dadasaheb Phalke Award acknowledged her contributions across advertising and media, modelling and runway assignments, and social impact. For Arunima, recognition is encouragement rather than a destination; the more enduring measure is the trust built and the difference made.

One of the most unexpected chapters in her journey has been her move into pageantry and international cultural representation. With a long-standing interest in fashion, presentation and modelling, she decided to explore an arena she had not previously imagined as part of her path. In 2026, she represented India at WICTA, the World Island of Culture and Tourism Ambassador event in Mauritius. She returned as the Supreme Queen Winner and received the Jury Award in the Empress category, earning the distinction of International Crown Holder and Cultural and Tourism Ambassador. She credits NariFirst for giving her momentum in this chapter.

The achievement mattered not simply because of the title, but because it took her into unfamiliar territory. The crown became a reminder that personal growth need not stop at any career stage.

Family remains central to Arunima's life. She speaks proudly of her two sons: her elder son works with Amazon in Boston, while her younger son is pursuing his B.Tech at BITS Pilani, Goa, and is set to begin his professional journey with Visa. She is grateful for the support of family and close friends. Motherhood, she believes, need not mean setting aside personal aspirations. Continuing to learn and pursue new experiences can also show the next generation what an evolving, self-directed life looks like.

What connects these chapters is curiosity. Arunima remains interested in new ideas, changing trends and experiences that challenge her to grow. She is warm but decisive, and conscious of those who have supported her journey. The image of a tigress, which she embraces, speaks to instinct, courage and independence rather than aggression.

Her message to women is to avoid rejecting themselves before they have even tried. Do not let convention decide the scale of your ambition. Separate facts from fear, make the call, enter the room, begin learning and take the opportunity.

Arunima Singh has built a career, nurtured a family, served her community and represented India on an international platform. Yet she speaks of the future with the enthusiasm of someone who knows there is more to discover. She is not defined by one title or achievement. She is, above all, still becoming.



PINKY DEY

The Voice of Change in a Changing World

An enterprise consulting leader with over 25 years of experience, Pinky Dey has built her career around talent, leadership and transformation. Her journey now embraces new platforms, perspectives and possibilities.

With more than 25 years of experience across talent, learning and enterprise consulting, Pinky Dey has built a career around helping organisations and people prepare for what comes next. Today, as Associate Director - Consulting, Enterprise Solutions for India and APAC at Emeritus, she works at the intersection of leadership development, capability building and business transformation. Her journey has also taken her into the world of pageantry.

For Pinky, the world of work is constantly changing. As organisations navigate new technologies and shifting expectations, learning can no longer be a one-time intervention. It must connect business priorities with the capabilities people need to move forward.

That perspective has shaped her professional journey across IT, global capability centres, consumer businesses and life sciences. At Emeritus, she partners with enterprise clients across India and APAC to shape learning strategies, leadership programmes and talent transformation initiatives. Her focus is on aligning business needs with the skills individuals and teams will need.

Her experience has been built across several roles. Before joining Emeritus in April 2025, she served as Director - Talent Consulting at KNOLSKAPE, where she led consulting initiatives and worked on key account growth across IT, GCC and consumer sectors. Earlier, as Learning Head at Biocon, she spearheaded enterprise-wide learning and leadership development. At Infosys BPM, she designed leadership and management education programmes for global teams.

The variety of these roles has given her a broad view of how organisations develop talent. Learning strategies cannot be identical across industries or teams. They must take into account the business context, the people involved and the outcomes an organisation is trying to achieve. Leaders must look beyond immediate performance and invest in capabilities that support sustained growth.

Pinky's professional interests also extend to the individual experience of leadership. As an ICF ACC certified coach, a certified MBTI practitioner and a Dale Carnegie certified trainer, she brings coaching and people-development perspectives to her work. Together, these disciplines offer tools to understand behaviour, communication and individual effectiveness. She is also pursuing Independent Director Certification through Skill Arbitrage, adding corporate governance to her areas of development.

Her career has been accompanied by a growing public presence. In 2025, she was named Mrs. Vivacious at Mrs. World International. In 2026, she was first runner-up at NariFirst's Jewel of India and received the Best Talent recognition in collaboration with NariFirst and WICTA. She was also crowned winner at Women of Wonders -Queen 2026. The Voice of Change distinction recognises her purpose-driven leadership and advocacy.



These achievements represent a different arena from enterprise consulting, but they share a common thread: the confidence to step into unfamiliar spaces and communicate with conviction. For someone whose work centres on people and leadership, public platforms add another dimension to her journey.

The title Voice of Change carries particular resonance in a career shaped by learning and development. Change is not only technological or organisational; it also means challenging assumptions about who can lead and what a professional identity can look like. Pinky's journey across consulting, coaching and pageantry illustrates that careers need not follow a single, fixed trajectory.

For women navigating demanding professional environments, the challenge is often to keep growing while balancing competing responsibilities and expectations. There is no universal formula, but continued learning and openness to new possibilities can create room for choices that once seemed out of reach.

As Pinky continues her work with enterprise clients across India and APAC, her focus remains on helping organisations build the leadership and capabilities needed for a changing world. Alongside that work, she continues to explore new platforms through which she can share her voice and engage with wider audiences.

Her story is a reminder that professional experience need not become a boundary. It can be a foundation from which to explore new roles, ask different questions and discover new dimensions of one's abilities. For Pinky Dey, change is not simply something to advise organisations to embrace. It is also a principle she continues to practise in her own life.

RAGINI JISSO

Building Her Own Identity, One Step at a Time

From earning ₹3,000 a month to founding Amaya Homes, Ragini Jisso's journey is rooted in perseverance, professional learning and the courage to create an identity of her own. Working in the real estate and construction sector, she is building a business while encouraging other women to pursue their ambitions with confidence.

There is a particular determination required to build a career in an industry where women remain underrepresented in many visible roles: the determination to keep learning, establish credibility through work and recognise that a modest beginning need not determine what follows. For Ragini Jisso, founder of Amaya Homes in Raipur, that journey began with a salary of ₹3,000 a month.

Her early experience in real estate and construction gave her an understanding of an industry that brings together technical knowledge, practical execution and significant decisions for clients. With an engineering background, she entered a field where property, construction and interiors are often treated as separate areas of expertise. Over time, she saw the value of bringing these services together under one business.

Today, Amaya Homes offers property, construction and interior solutions under one roof. Delivering this requires an understanding of what clients seek, attention to the spaces being created and relationships that can withstand the demands of a project. A home is rarely just a transaction. It represents personal aspirations, financial commitment and the hope of creating a place that feels distinctly one's own.

That understanding informs Ragini's approach. She places importance on listening to clients, understanding their expectations and translating those aspirations into thoughtfully considered spaces. Trust is not built through promises alone. It develops through consistency, communication and an understanding of what matters to the people placing their confidence in a business.

Her progression from earning ₹3,000 a month to founding her own enterprise reflects the value of experience accumulated over time. Her story speaks to the less visible work behind entrepreneurship: learning the industry, building practical knowledge and developing the confidence to take responsibility for one's direction.

Working in a traditionally male-dominated sector has shaped her outlook. In real estate and construction, professional credibility is established through understanding the work, making informed decisions and following through on commitments. Ragini's experience has strengthened her belief in continuous learning and consistency. It has also reinforced an important lesson for women entering such industries: confidence matters, but preparation, competence and the willingness to improve give it substance.



Founding a business brings another set of responsibilities. Beyond understanding the service being offered, an entrepreneur must consider the client experience, relationships, operations and decisions that support growth. In a business spanning property, construction and interiors, these elements need to work together. The challenge is to maintain standards across different aspects of the work while keeping the client's needs central.

For Ragini, entrepreneurship is also connected to creating an identity. Her belief that a woman's success is not only about what she achieves, but also about the identity she creates for herself, reflects a wider understanding of ambition. Professional achievement can bring financial independence and recognition, but it can also give women the confidence to make choices on their own terms.

That belief is personal as well as professional. Ragini is a wife and mother of two daughters, and she does not see family and ambition as opposing forces. She believes both can grow together. Her own journey is part of the example she hopes to set for her daughters: that a woman can care deeply for her family while developing her interests, pursuing meaningful work and building something of her own.

The message she wants other women to take from her experience is grounded in self-belief. Waiting until every uncertainty has disappeared can mean never beginning. Taking the first step, learning through experience and trusting one's ability to adapt can be more valuable than waiting for perfect conditions. The path may become clearer only after the journey has begun.

Looking ahead, Ragini aims to grow Amaya Homes, explore new opportunities and create a positive impact through the work the business undertakes and the relationships it builds. The ambition is not simply to expand for its own sake, but to continue developing a business guided by client understanding and trust.

Her story is a reminder that entrepreneurship does not always begin with substantial resources or a ready-made roadmap. Sometimes it begins with a small salary, a willingness to learn and the decision to keep moving forward. For women considering a path of their own, Ragini's journey offers a simple thought: the first step does not need to be impressive. It needs to be taken.





NAMRATA KAUSHIK

Leading with Purpose, Creating Through Art

Through her association with NariFirst, her creative platform NAM24 and her distinctive approach to fashion, Namrata Kaushik brings together three expressions of individuality. Her journey reflects a belief that personal growth is not confined to one role, and that there is always room to discover something new.

For Namrata Kaushik, leadership and creativity are not separate pursuits. Both begin with the same instinct: to recognise potential, make space for expression and encourage people to discover what they are capable of. Through her association with NariFirst, a women's empowerment platform founded by Aikta Sharma, she contributes to initiatives that help women build confidence, develop their abilities and pursue new possibilities.

As a member of the NariFirst leadership team, Namrata is involved in advancing a vision that goes beyond celebration alone. The platform creates opportunities for women to connect, learn from one another and showcase their talents. Her approach places importance on listening to individual aspirations, particularly when self-doubt or uncertainty can make the next step seem difficult. Encouragement, in this context, is not simply about offering motivation. It is about helping women recognise their strengths and take practical steps towards their goals.

Through events, interactions and mentorship initiatives, NariFirst brings women together across different experiences and ambitions. Such spaces can have value beyond the occasion itself. A conversation can lead to a new connection; meeting someone who has navigated a similar challenge can offer perspective; and the opportunity to present one's work can build confidence. Namrata believes that when one woman grows in confidence, the effect can reach far beyond her own journey.

Her contribution is grounded in a view of leadership that is measured by its effect on people. A title may establish responsibility, but it is the ability to make a meaningful difference that gives leadership its purpose. For Namrata, supporting women means helping create an environment in which they can make independent choices, pursue professional ambitions and define success on their own terms.

There is another side to her identity that finds expression away from organisational work. Art offers Namrata a way to explore ideas, emotions and possibilities that do not always fit into words. Drawn to mixed-media and experimental forms, she enjoys working with textures, materials, colours and concepts. Rather than confining herself to a single medium or established approach, she is interested in the freedom that comes from combining elements and seeing where the creative process leads.



Her personal creative platform, NAM24, provides a space to share this work and develop her artistic identity. For Namrata, art is not simply about producing something visually appealing. It is a form of storytelling, an expression of feeling and an invitation for viewers to bring their own interpretations to what they see. The same piece can evoke different responses, and that openness is part of its appeal.

A particularly memorable moment came when Malaika Arora appreciated one of her artworks. The recognition was encouraging, motivating Namrata to continue exploring the possibilities of her practice. She hopes to build a stronger presence in contemporary and experimental art while developing a visual language that feels distinctly her own.

Creativity also shapes the way she approaches fashion. Rather than treating style as a matter of following trends, she sees it as an extension of personality. She enjoys experimenting with silhouettes, textures and different looks, bringing together elegance and individuality. What matters most is not whether an outfit follows a particular fashion moment, but whether it feels authentic to the person wearing it. Confidence, in her view, comes from being comfortable with one's choices.

Across NariFirst, NAM24 and her personal expression through fashion, a common thread emerges: the freedom to be more than one thing. Namrata's interests do not compete for space; they reflect different ways of engaging with the world. Leadership allows her to contribute to the growth of others, art gives her room to explore her own ideas, and fashion offers another language through which to express individuality.

Looking ahead, she wants to continue contributing to women's empowerment while giving her creative practice greater direction and reach. Her journey is still evolving, shaped by new experiences and the willingness to keep learning. She believes success should not be measured only by individual milestones, but also by the confidence one helps others discover and the opportunities one helps make possible.

Namrata's philosophy is straightforward: encourage women to believe in themselves, support them as they pursue their ambitions and allow every individual the space to define her own path. Whether through a community initiative or a work of art, the purpose is similar: to create room for people to recognise their potential and express it with confidence.

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SCAN TO CONNECT



SHE CAN START A BUSINESS. CAN SHE SCALE IT?

India has made significant progress in encouraging women to become entrepreneurs. But access to capital, markets, networks and institutional support continues to determine whether a small venture can grow into a sustainable enterprise.

A woman starts a business with an idea, a little savings and the determination to make something of her own. She finds her first customers, learns to manage expenses, builds a product and gradually earns a place in the market. Yet, somewhere between those early successes and the ambition to expand, many women-owned businesses encounter a familiar obstacle: growth requires resources that remain difficult to access.

India has no shortage of women entrepreneurs. According to a March 2026 report by Women's World Banking, women own approximately 19.2 million, or 26.2 per cent, of the country's 73.3 million nano and micro enterprises. These businesses represent a substantial part of the entrepreneurial economy. However, the same report identifies a significant financing challenge: 43 per cent of women entrepreneurs report unmet credit demand, while more than 70 per cent of their financing needs remain unserved or underserved. The gap is not simply about starting a business. It is about giving an existing business the means to grow.

This distinction matters. Starting a venture and scaling one require very different kinds of support. A home-based food business may need equipment, a larger kitchen and access to institutional buyers. A fashion entrepreneur may need working capital to increase production, hire skilled workers and fulfil larger orders. A technology founder may need investment to develop a product, build a team and enter new markets. At every stage, the financial requirements become more complex.

For many women, the first hurdle is obtaining formal credit. Business owners may have a viable product and a loyal customer base but lack collateral, a documented financial history or the records lenders expect. Some operate from home, mix personal and business finances, or rely on informal networks to fund their operations. These circumstances can make it harder to demonstrate the financial strength of a business, even when demand is growing.



The opportunity is considerable. Women's World Banking estimates that around 3.85 million women-owned enterprises actively seek credit, representing a potential market of nearly ₹75,000 crore. Much of this demand lies in the ₹5–20 lakh range. These are not necessarily businesses looking for large venture capital investments. Many need appropriately structured loans that can help them purchase inventory, upgrade equipment, employ people or reach new customers.

The challenge, therefore, is not only to increase the number of loans available to women, but to ensure that financial products reflect the realities of their businesses. Flexible repayment schedules, accessible documentation, appropriate credit assessment and financial guidance can make formal finance more useful. A business that earns revenue seasonally, for example, may need a repayment structure different from one with predictable monthly income.

There has been progress in women's participation in the formal credit system. A joint report by TransUnion CIBIL, NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform and MicroSave Consulting, published in March 2025, found that the number of women seeking credit had nearly tripled between 2019 and 2024. It also recorded growing awareness of credit scores and financial health. Yet the report highlighted that greater participation does not automatically mean that women are accessing the most suitable forms of finance. In 2024, gold loans accounted for 36 per cent of loans availed by women, compared with 19 per cent in 2019. The figures point to a continuing reliance on secured borrowing even as demand for business finance grows.

Capital, however, is only one part of the scaling equation. A business also needs customers beyond its immediate circle. Many women-led enterprises grow through personal recommendations, social media and local networks. These channels can be effective in the early stages, but expansion often requires access to distributors, corporate procurement teams, export markets and larger retail platforms.

Government procurement offers one route. The Government e-Marketplace has created opportunities for women-owned micro and small enterprises to sell products and services to public institutions. According to government figures released in 2026, women-owned MSEs received contracts worth more than ₹28,000 crore during FY 2025–26, a 27.6 per cent increase over the previous year. This demonstrates what can happen when access to buyers is built into the ecosystem. The next challenge is helping more enterprises meet procurement requirements, maintain consistent quality and fulfil larger orders.

The same principle applies to private markets. Large businesses can support women-led suppliers through vendor development programmes, mentorship and transparent procurement processes. Industry associations can help smaller enterprises understand compliance, pricing and distribution. Incubators and accelerators can provide more than a workspace; they can connect founders with customers, experienced operators and investors who understand the demands of scaling.

There is also a need to rethink how success is measured. The number of women starting businesses is an important indicator, but it does not tell us whether those businesses are profitable, employing people, expanding into new markets or surviving beyond their initial years. A small enterprise can be successful without becoming a large corporation, and not every founder wants to pursue rapid expansion. But for those who do, the ecosystem must offer a credible pathway from survival to sustainable growth.

Women entrepreneurs themselves are increasingly recognising the importance of building stronger business foundations. Financial records, cash-flow management, pricing discipline, digital systems and a clear understanding of margins are not administrative details; they influence whether a business can secure finance and take on larger opportunities. Separating personal and business accounts, maintaining reliable accounts and understanding the cost of borrowing can strengthen a founder's position when approaching lenders or investors.

Perhaps the most important shift is to stop treating women entrepreneurs as a single category. A first-time founder, a rural micro-enterprise owner, a professional building a technology company and a second-generation businesswoman have different needs. Support must reflect the stage, sector and ambition of the enterprise rather than rely on a one-size-fits-all approach.

India has made considerable progress in bringing more women into entrepreneurship. The next phase must focus on what happens after the first sale, the first loan and the first year in business. It must create the conditions for women to employ more people, enter new markets, build stronger companies and make decisions about the scale they want to achieve.

The question is no longer whether women can start businesses. They already are. The more important question is whether the financial and business ecosystem is prepared to help them grow.



WHEN WOMEN BECOME THE INVESTORS

Women are increasingly taking control of their own investments, entering the startup funding ecosystem and backing the next generation of founders. The shift could change not only who owns capital, but also which businesses receive the opportunity to grow.

For a long time, women were more likely to be discussed as beneficiaries of financial inclusion than as decision-makers in the world of investment. That picture is changing. Across India, more women are managing their own portfolios, participating in financial markets, investing in businesses and moving into roles where they decide which ideas receive capital.

The shift is visible in the numbers. According to the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), women accounted for 26.3 per cent of unique individual mutual fund investors in December 2025, compared with 24.2 per cent a year earlier. Their assets under management increased from ₹5.44 lakh crore in December 2020 to ₹17.86 lakh crore in December 2025. Women now account for 34.6 per cent of the assets held by individual mutual fund investors. The figures suggest that women's participation is growing not only in numbers but also in the value of investments they hold.

A study by DSP Mutual Fund and YouGov, released in March 2026, offers another indication of this change. It found that 56 per cent of women surveyed now take investment decisions independently, up from 44 per cent in 2022. This is an important development because financial independence is not simply about earning an income. It also involves having the confidence, knowledge and authority to decide how that income is saved, invested and used to build long-term wealth.

But the changing role of women in finance extends beyond personal portfolios. Women are also becoming more visible in India's startup investment ecosystem, where capital can determine which businesses move from an idea to a scalable enterprise.

The journey from founder to investor is becoming increasingly familiar. Women who have built companies, navigated difficult markets and raised capital themselves are bringing that experience into investment decisions. Some are investing as angel investors, others are building funds, joining venture capital firms or supporting emerging founders through networks and mentorship.

Their experience can be particularly valuable for early-stage businesses. An investor who has run a company understands that a founder's journey involves more than a compelling pitch. It requires managing cash flow, hiring people, developing products, finding customers and making difficult decisions when resources are limited. Such practical understanding can help investors assess businesses beyond the presentation and recognise potential that may not yet be reflected in financial numbers.

India has several examples of women who have moved into this space. Vineeta Singh, co-founder and CEO of SUGAR Cosmetics, has become a visible participant in startup investing. Ghazal Alagh, co-founder of Mamaearth, has also taken an interest in supporting emerging businesses. Investors and fund managers such as Archana Jahagirdar of Rukam Capital and Swati Nangalia Mehra of Sixth Sense Ventures represent another part of the ecosystem, bringing professional investment experience to the task of identifying and backing businesses.

Their presence matters in an industry where women remain under-represented in investment decision-making. A report by Kalaari Capital's CXXO initiative, covering January 2022 to October 2024, found that women accounted for only 16 per cent of active angel investors in India. It also found that just 8 per cent of capital raised by startups had gone to companies co-founded by women, despite women being part of the founding teams of 24 per cent of funded startups. The figures reveal a gap not only in who receives funding, but also in who participates in deciding where it goes.

The funding picture has shown some movement, although progress remains uneven. DealStreetAsia's Female Founders in India 2024 report found that startups co-founded by women raised $1.43 billion in 2024, a 30 per cent increase over the previous year. Yet their share of overall startup fundraising declined to 8.8 per cent. More recent Tracxn data reported in March 2026 showed that women co-founded technology startups raised approximately $1.1 billion in 2025. The number of funding rounds fell, but the median deal size increased, suggesting that investors were becoming more selective and concentrating on businesses with stronger revenue visibility.

This is where the presence of women investors could make a difference. Greater diversity in investment teams can broaden the questions asked during evaluation, the markets considered and the founders who receive attention. It does not mean that women investors will automatically fund women founders, or that gender alone should determine an investment decision. It means that a wider range of professional and lived experiences can contribute to better-informed decisions.

There is also a strong economic argument for bringing more women into investment. Women founders are building companies across healthcare, education, financial services, consumer businesses, technology, agriculture and sustainability. These sectors address substantial markets and everyday needs. When investors understand these markets and recognise their commercial potential, they can identify opportunities that might otherwise be overlooked.

For women considering angel investing, the first step need not be a large financial commitment. It begins with understanding risk, learning how startups are valued, studying business models and recognising the difference between a promising idea and a viable enterprise. Angel investing can involve the possibility of losing the entire amount invested, and returns may take years or never materialise. It requires patience, due diligence and a portfolio approach rather than decisions based solely on personal connections or enthusiasm.

Networks can make this learning process more accessible. Angel groups, investor communities, professional associations and founder networks offer opportunities to understand how investment decisions are made. Experienced investors can also mentor women entering the field, helping them develop the judgement and confidence required to evaluate businesses.

The larger opportunity is to create a more connected cycle of capital. Women who have built wealth through their careers or businesses can become investors. Experienced founders can support first-time entrepreneurs. Investors can introduce companies to customers, partners and future sources of finance. In this way, capital becomes more than a transaction; it becomes part of a wider system that helps businesses develop.

India's growing base of women mutual fund investors is an encouraging sign of financial participation, while the emergence of women in angel investing and venture capital points towards a deeper change in economic influence. The next step is to translate this momentum into greater representation in investment committees, fund leadership and ownership of capital.

When women become investors, the conversation changes. They are no longer only seeking access to opportunity; they are helping decide which opportunities are created, supported and scaled. And that may prove to be one of the most consequential shifts in the future of women's entrepreneurship.



DIMPLE FOUZDAR

Creating a Fragrance House with a Distinct Identity

From a family steeped in fragrance to building Maison De Fouzdar into a recognised name in Indian niche perfumery, Dimple Fouzdar's journey has been shaped by heritage, conviction and the resolve to begin again after a serious setback. Her ambition now reaches beyond India, with a vision to place Indian niche perfumery on the global luxury map.

For Dimple Fouzdar, fragrance was never simply an accessory. It was part of the world she grew up in. Her family's longstanding interest in collecting fragrances, together with her ancestral connection to perfumery, gave her an early appreciation of scent as an art form. What began as fascination became a serious pursuit. She went on to study perfumery formally, determined to understand the craft beyond instinct and personal preference.

That foundation led to Maison De Fouzdar, the luxury niche fragrance house she founded and leads as Founder and Creative Director. Her ambition was to create an internationally respected fragrance brand from India, one that could stand alongside established global houses while retaining a distinctive identity rooted in its heritage.

Turning that ambition into a business required more than a passion for perfume. It meant developing products, earning customer confidence and making decisions that would shape the brand's position in a competitive luxury market. Dimple built much of the venture largely on her own, growing an initial idea into a business with a presence across more than 45 locations.

The road, however, was far from smooth. Soon after starting the business, she was defrauded of almost ₹1 crore by someone she describes as a professional con man. For a young venture, the financial and emotional consequences were considerable. It was the kind of experience that could unsettle even the strongest plans.

Dimple chose to rebuild. The episode brought difficult lessons about trust, judgement and the realities of entrepreneurship. A compelling vision and a good product matter, but so do vigilance, resilience and the ability to respond when circumstances turn unexpectedly. Rather than allowing the loss to define the future of the brand, she treated it as a reason to become more determined.

Today, she measures progress not only through the brand's reach but through its relationship with customers. Maison De Fouzdar has established a strong customer base and, according to Dimple, a high repeat-purchase rate. For her, that return is especially meaningful. A first purchase may come from curiosity; a customer who comes back is making a choice based on experience and trust.



She is equally clear about the standards the brand must maintain. High perfume concentrations, distinctive creations and an uncompromising approach to quality form the basis of its positioning. Lowering standards or simply chasing price, she believes, would undermine the identity she set out to create. In niche perfumery, a product must offer a reason to be remembered, not just a name to be noticed.

Dimple does not see entrepreneurship as something defined by gender. To her, it is about competence, conviction, accountability and the willingness to make difficult decisions. Being a woman entrepreneur means having the freedom to define one's identity and build something that reflects one's vision. It also means refusing to let other people's expectations determine the scale or timing of an ambition.

That message is particularly relevant to women who feel they have missed the right moment to begin. Dimple rejects the idea that there is a prescribed age for entrepreneurship or reinvention. A meaningful venture need not start at 22, nor does success have to follow someone else's timeline. What matters is the willingness to take the first step, understand the business and remain accountable for its choices.

The next chapter for Maison De Fouzdar is international expansion. Having established a presence in India, Dimple wants to take the brand into global markets and contribute to a wider recognition of Indian niche perfumery. Her aspiration is for Maison De Fouzdar to be known as a world-class luxury fragrance house with Indian roots, rather than being defined only by its country of origin.

Her advice to aspiring entrepreneurs is practical: begin with what is available, understand the numbers, learn every aspect of the business and be prepared for setbacks. Above all, build something with substance and a genuine reason to exist. Recognition, she believes, follows the creation of real value.

Dimple Fouzdar's journey is still unfolding, but its defining quality is clear. She has taken a deeply personal interest and turned it into an enterprise, faced a setback that could have ended the story, and continued to build towards a larger ambition. Her belief is simple: women do not need permission, validation or a particular age to pursue what they want. They need to back themselves-and then do the work.

PURVA AGARWAL

Building Yara, One Better Day at a Time

After exploring fashion, travel, documentary filmmaking and the questions that shape human behaviour, Purva Agarwal is building Yara, a women's wellbeing platform rooted in a simple idea: a more meaningful life begins with understanding what makes an ordinary day feel good.

Some business ideas begin with a market gap. Others begin with a question that refuses to go away. For Purva Agarwal, that question was deceptively simple: what makes a good day?

It emerged during a period when, despite having opportunities and the freedom to explore different paths, she felt disconnected from herself. Someone who had once approached life with natural enthusiasm, she found herself struggling to feel motivated by ordinary routines. Rather than dismissing the feeling, she began examining it. What gives a day meaning? What helps us feel connected to ourselves? And why do we spend so much time preparing for life without learning how to understand ourselves?

Those questions eventually became the foundation of Yara, the women's wellbeing platform she is building around the philosophy, "Design Your Day".

Purva's route to entrepreneurship was far from conventional. She studied fashion design and initially pursued a creative career, but her interests gradually moved beyond products and aesthetics. She became increasingly curious about human behaviour, relationships, emotions and the factors that shape fulfilment. Her own experiences of navigating societal expectations and understanding her identity as a woman added another dimension to that curiosity.

A formative influence was her father, who would often tell her, "Get down in the dirt and clean the dirt." The message was clear: do not stand outside a problem; get involved and become part of the change.

Her search for perspective took her well beyond familiar surroundings. She travelled extensively, backpacked through different countries and lived across four continents, often with very little money. She encountered different definitions of success and learnt to observe, listen and question assumptions.

Along the way, she began documenting people's lives through filmmaking. One documentary project is in post-production, reflecting her belief that every individual carries a story worth hearing.

The most difficult part of her journey, she says, was losing her connection with herself. This deeply personal period made her reconsider what achievement and happiness mean. She began researching human behaviour, habits and wellbeing rather than accepting familiar ideas about success.



That experience has shaped her approach to entrepreneurship. She does not want to build something only because a market opportunity exists. She wants to address a need she understands personally and believes matters to other women. Yara is intended to bring together knowledge, practitioners, experiences and tools that help women explore their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing, understand their needs and make more informed choices in everyday life.

The idea is deliberately practical. "Design Your Day" is not about prescribing one ideal routine or suggesting that every woman should want the same things. It is about helping women recognise their needs, aspirations and strengths, then translate that understanding into small, meaningful actions. Purva sees the platform as the kind of guidance she wishes she had when she was trying to make sense of her own direction.

Her view of leadership has also been shaped by questioning expectations. Women are often asked to fulfil multiple roles, sometimes without enough space to consider what they themselves want. For Purva, leadership is not about being the loudest person in the room or having every answer. It is about listening, taking responsibility and creating conditions in which people can grow. Empathy, she believes, is essential to building solutions that respond to real lives.

Her definition of success has consequently changed. Financial sustainability matters, but so do the quality of life a business supports, the choices it makes possible and the people it affects. The ambition is to build Yara into a commercially sustainable platform without losing sight of its purpose.

For women considering a venture of their own, her advice is to begin before everything feels perfectly arranged. Pay attention to what genuinely interests you, spend time with the people experiencing the problem and understand their realities before trying to solve it. Previous education or career choices need not dictate what comes next; changing direction can be part of growth.

Purva describes herself as a seeker, still learning and still asking questions. That may be the most fitting starting point for Yara. Rather than claiming to have all the answers, she is building around the belief that women deserve the tools and space to find what makes their own lives more fulfilling. Sometimes, a bigger change begins with learning how to make one day better.





SAACHI JAIN

Finding Purpose, One Breath at a Time

From a corporate career to building a global wellness practice, Saachi Jain's journey with breathwork began with her own search for healing and evolved into a mission to help others transform their lives.

For Saachi Jain, the path to wellness began with an unexpected pause. After years of staying active, the COVID-19 pandemic and a bout of the Delta variant disrupted her fitness routine. Anxiety crept in, and persistent gut concerns affected her everyday life. The practice that helped her feel like herself again would eventually become the foundation of her work.

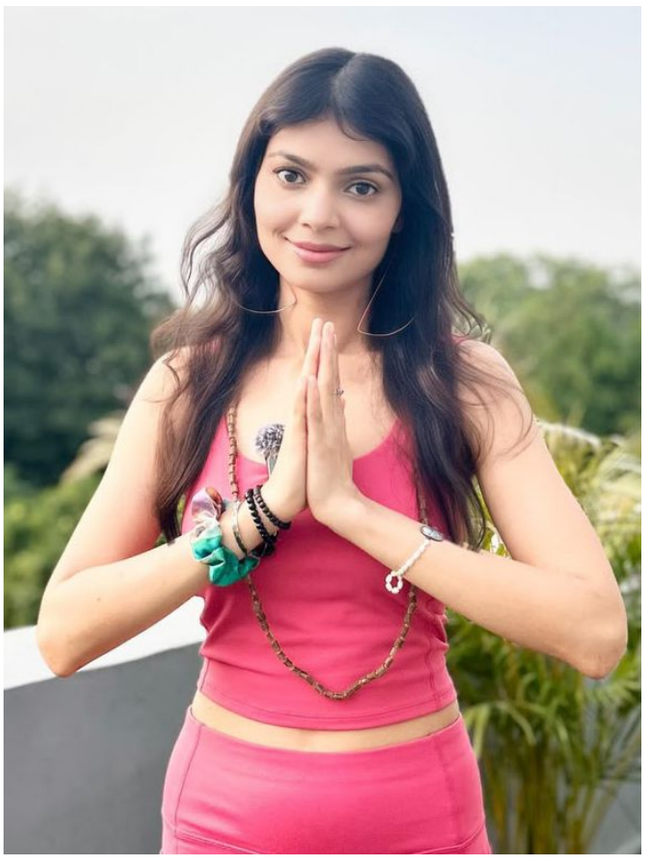
Raised in a business-oriented family, Jain began her professional career with Ernst & Young. Yet she had long wanted to build something of her own, something that could make a difference beyond her immediate world. The turning point came when she was introduced to breathwork. Regular guided sessions, she says, helped her reconnect with her physical and emotional well-being and brought a remarkable change to how she felt.

Her personal experience soon became a deeper enquiry into the relationship between breath, mind and body. The concept of Ikigai, with its emphasis on purpose, helped her bring together her interests in fitness, wellness and helping others. She began to see that what had supported her own journey could become a way of serving people. That conviction led her to establish Breathblissbysj.

Today, Jain is an internationally certified breathwork coach and holistic well-being advocate. Her practice combines conscious breathing and guided breathwork with EFT tapping, meditation, mantra chanting and nervous system reset techniques. Through sessions and coaching with clients across the world, she aims to help people become more aware of their internal state and work towards greater well-being. What began as a personal discovery has become a profession shaped by the desire to help others make meaningful changes in their lives.

Building a practice, however, has brought its own tests. Jain speaks candidly about seeing others imitate her work or present her ideas as their own. She has also encountered people who appeared supportive but, in her view, were quietly competing with her or projecting their own limitations onto her ambitions. These experiences have taught her to be more discerning about whose opinions she allows to influence her decisions.

Rather than letting such moments distract her, she has learnt to practise patience, set boundaries and trust her individuality. Healthy competition is part of professional life, she believes, but comparison can take attention away from the work that matters. A thought she now returns to is: "No one is you and that is your superpower." For Jain, the answer is to keep learning, work consistently and remain committed to the larger purpose.



Recognition has affirmed that decision. Jain counts the Radiance Women Awards among her milestones and was nominated by GlobalSPA Magazine in both the Wellness Expert and Wellness Influencer categories. She is also proud of independently curating breathwork and wellness sessions for the EO community at The Lodhi and Pullman hotels. For her, these opportunities demonstrate what can happen when someone takes the first step without waiting for support, resources or validation.

Her understanding of entrepreneurship is rooted in example, balance and resilience. She believes women leaders must be willing to adapt when plans change and accept failure as part of the process. A setback need not be a verdict; it can sharpen judgement and make the next attempt stronger. The ability to rise, reassess and continue, she feels, is as important as the original ambition.

Jain's ambitions now extend beyond individual coaching sessions. She hopes to curate wellness retreats internationally and train more people in breathwork and nervous system-focused practices. She is particularly concerned about the scale of mental health challenges and wants her work to contribute to greater awareness and support. The response of her clients keeps her motivated: seeing someone leave a session feeling lighter or more connected to themselves reminds her that the work can make a difference in an individual life.

Her advice to women considering a venture of their own is direct: do not wait for everything to be perfect. Take one small step, act on the vision and allow the journey to teach you. There may be times when others do not understand the idea or encouragement is hard to find. Jain believes grit, resilience and faith can help carry it through uncertain beginnings.

The ambition behind Breathblissbysj is expansive, but its starting point remains personal. Jain knows what it means to feel disconnected from one's well-being, and what it can mean to discover a practice that offers a way forward. Today, she hopes to help others experience that shift, one conscious breath at a time.

PREETI SINGH JATIA

Dressing Childhood with Comfort, Creativity and Confidence

Founder and Lead Designer of Fayon Kids, Preeti Singh Jatia turned a mother's search for the perfect outfit into a children's fashion brand built on thoughtful design, individual style and an enduring understanding of what children need.

Sometimes, a business begins with a problem that seems too small to become a venture. For Preeti Singh Jatia, it was finding the right dress for her one-year-old daughter. The choices available were limited, and the balance between style and comfort was difficult to find. Rather than settle for what was available, she decided to create something herself. That decision, made nearly two decades ago, became the beginning of Fayon Kids.

Born and raised in Pune, Preeti studied textile and interior design, developing an understanding of fabrics, aesthetics and the details that make a design work. An exchange programme in Paris gave her further exposure, followed by a year with an export house in Delhi. Although her professional experiences shaped her creative sensibility, it was motherhood that brought her interests together in an unexpected way.

When she could not find an outfit she liked for her daughter's first birthday, she sourced the fabric, sketched a design and worked with a local tailor to bring it to life. Friends and family appreciated the outfit, and soon requests began coming in for clothes for other children. What started with her daughter extended to nieces, friends and eventually customers. In 2006, Fayon Kids took shape as a business.

The early days were modest. According to the brand's own account, Preeti started with a small loan from her husband, which she repaid within a month, and set up the business in a single room on a terrace. There was no elaborate infrastructure or established blueprint to follow. There was, however, a clear idea of what she wanted to create: children's clothing that did not make parents choose between looking good and feeling comfortable.

That distinction became central to Fayon's identity. The brand offers Indian, Western and Indo-western styles, alongside casual, semi-formal and occasion wear for children from newborns to teenagers. Birthdays, weddings, festivals and family celebrations are important moments in its collections, but the design philosophy goes beyond dressing a child for a photograph. Comfort, fit, fabric and ease of movement remain essential considerations.

In a 2023 interview with Fibre2Fashion, Preeti spoke about breathable fabrics, adjustable designs and the importance of understanding how children's clothing needs to work in everyday life. The brand also offers personalised designs and custom-made outfits, recognising that children do not always fit neatly into standard sizing. Its approach reflects an understanding familiar to parents: a beautiful garment is only successful if a child is happy wearing it.



Building this business in the early 2000s was not without resistance. Preeti entered a market where women entrepreneurs were less visible, and getting new designs executed through traditionally male-led tailoring units could be difficult. Even experienced tailors were sometimes hesitant to experiment with unfamiliar ideas. She had to earn trust, communicate her design requirements and remain persistent until the work matched her vision.

Over time, the business grew through the relationships it built with customers. For Preeti, repeat customers are among the most meaningful measures of success. Parents returning to Fayon as their children grow, and trusting the brand with new occasions, reflect a relationship that goes beyond a single purchase. It is also why she places customer satisfaction above the temptation of rapid expansion.

The brand has since developed a wider presence through its retail and online channels, with collections spanning festive, formal and everyday styles. Its journey has also included collaborations and visibility beyond India. But the underlying proposition remains familiar: thoughtfully designed clothes that allow children to enjoy the occasion rather than feel restricted by what they are wearing.

Preeti's own understanding of entrepreneurship has evolved alongside the business. What began as a creative response to a personal need required her to become a designer, problem-solver, business owner and team leader. It called for patience when ideas were difficult to execute, confidence when the market was uncertain and the willingness to learn as the brand grew.

Her advice to women considering entrepreneurship is simple: "Most women are just scared to take that one step. Confidence should be your most powerful tool." It is a perspective shaped by her own experience of beginning without a ready-made roadmap and learning through the process.

Nearly two decades after that first birthday dress, Preeti continues to build on the idea that started it all. Fayon Kids is not simply about making children look dressed for special occasions. It is about giving parents choices that bring together design, comfort and individuality, while allowing children to remain children. For Preeti, that is the real measure of good design: when creativity meets the needs of the person who wears it.





VIBHA SARIN PRABHAKAR

From Business Transformation to Building Ecosystems

With over two decades of experience across customer experience, digital transformation and business strategy, Vibha Sarin Prabhakar is taking her leadership journey in a new direction, bringing businesses, people and opportunities closer together.

A career spanning more than two decades can offer experience. Knowing how to bring that experience together to create something meaningful is a different skill altogether. For Vibha Sarin Prabhakar, this has been the thread running through her professional journey. From customer experience and operations to digital transformation and business strategy, she has worked across functions and industries, developing an understanding of what makes organisations grow and what helps them stay connected to the people they serve.

Her professional journey includes organisations such as GE, Convergys, ICICI Bank, ABN AMRO, Royal Bank of Scotland, MMTC-PAMP, eJOHRI and Shriram Automall. Working across different business environments exposed her to challenges involving customer service, risk, operations, technology and transformation. It also gave her an appreciation of how closely these functions are connected. A business may have a strong product or an ambitious growth plan, but its success ultimately depends on how well its people, processes and customer experience work together.

After years in corporate roles, Prabhakar chose to move into independent consulting. The decision was driven by a desire to create impact at a strategic level and work with diverse businesses. In her earlier conversation with Womenpreneur India, she described wanting greater flexibility to apply her experience in ways that felt meaningful. For her, independent work was not about stepping back from responsibility; it was about choosing where and how she could contribute.

That experience has shaped her approach to business transformation. She believes customer experience cannot be improved through isolated initiatives or attractive presentations. It has to be reflected in the way an organisation operates every day: how it understands its customers, equips its teams, uses technology and delivers on its promises. The real test of a strategy is not how impressive it looks on paper, but whether it produces a difference that customers and businesses can actually see.

This practical approach has become particularly relevant as companies navigate rapid technological change. Prabhakar sees artificial intelligence as an important opportunity for businesses, particularly in areas such as customer intelligence, personalisation, predictive insights and process automation. But she believes technology must serve a clear purpose. Faster processes and better data are valuable only when they lead to better decisions and more meaningful outcomes. Human judgement, empathy and accountability remain essential.



In September 2026, she began a new chapter as Chief Growth & Experience Officer at IGEN – India Global Expo News, joining its Circle One Leadership team. Her role brings together growth, customer experience, business transformation, strategy, operations and brand. She is also contributing to the IGEN World and Viksit Bharat World ecosystem, which seeks to connect businesses, CXOs, SMEs, founders, institutions and global opportunities.

The move brings together several strands of her experience. Rather than concentrating on one business function, her work now involves looking at how different organisations and stakeholders can connect, collaborate and create value. Building an ecosystem requires more than bringing people into the same room. It involves understanding what each participant brings, identifying shared interests and creating relationships that can lead to meaningful opportunities.

Governance is another area that has become important to her professional outlook. Through her association with the Institute of Directors, India, as a Member and Independent Director, Prabhakar has continued to engage with questions of accountability and responsible leadership. As businesses grow and adapt, she believes sound governance provides the structure and trust needed to make decisions with confidence.

Away from boardrooms and business discussions, motherhood has shaped her understanding of leadership in equally important ways. In her previous Womenpreneur India feature, she spoke about the patience, empathy and perspective she had developed as a mother. She was also refreshingly honest about the idea of balance. “There is no perfect balance. I focus on being intentional,” she said. Some days require more attention at work, while others call for her presence as a mother. The important thing, for her, is to recognise what needs attention and show up fully.

Her long-term ambition is to contribute at a larger strategic level across businesses, encourage people-centric leadership and create a lasting impact. Personally, she hopes to continue growing professionally while nurturing a grounded and fulfilling life.

For Prabhakar, the next chapter is an opportunity to use everything her earlier experiences have taught her, but on a wider canvas. Her journey has moved from understanding customers and transforming business functions to bringing people and organisations together. And perhaps that is what makes this phase significant: the focus is no longer only on helping individual businesses move forward, but also on creating the connections that allow an entire ecosystem to grow.

AKSHITA RANA

The Courage to Begin Again

From a career in nanomedicine to building a hospitality venture shaped by travel, culture and thoughtful stays, Akshita Rana's entrepreneurial journey is a story of reinvention. In April 2026, she and her husband, Arjun Kapoor, a pilot, launched Ark Escapes, choosing the uncertainty of entrepreneurship over the familiarity of established careers.

Leaving behind a flourishing career is rarely a simple decision. For Akshita, it meant stepping away from nanomedicine and entering an entirely different field: hospitality. It was not a rejection of her earlier journey, but a decision to apply her curiosity, discipline and appetite for learning to an idea she and her husband had long imagined building.

The idea grew from travelling across continents and discovering places that stayed with them long after they had left. They were drawn to homes with character, destinations with a sense of place and experiences beyond a standard overnight stay. Eventually, the question shifted from where they would like to travel next to whether they could create that feeling for others.

Turning the idea into a business required careful looking and judgement. Before selecting their first collection, the couple explored nearly 50 properties. Each had to offer something distinctive and fit the experience they wanted Ark Escapes to stand for. They eventually chose six homes, each with its own character. The selection process also made clear that curation would be central to the brand: not every appealing property would necessarily be the right one.

In a crowded travel market, the difference is not always the number of properties on offer. It is the thought behind the selection and the experience a guest can expect. Ark Escapes creates and curates stays and travel experiences, focusing on homes with an individual identity rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

The work does not end once a property is selected. Hospitality is a business of details, and expectations are shaped by every stage, from the first enquiry to departure. Ark's approach involves growing thoughtfully and continually improving each home. It is an ongoing process of listening, refining and ensuring that the experience lives up to its promise.

For Akshita, one of the most important parts of that promise is the team. A memorable stay depends not on a building alone, but on the people who look after it, anticipate needs and bring warmth to everyday interactions. Their care and pride make hospitality personal. Their contribution is central to Ark Escapes, not simply an operational detail.



The response from guests has offered encouragement. With positive reviews and a growing community of travellers from India and abroad, Ark's reach is expanding through word of mouth and personal recommendations. For a young venture, this response is meaningful: guests are not only enjoying their stays but sharing the experience. Such recommendations also bring responsibility, as every new guest arrives with expectations shaped by someone else's trust.

Building a hospitality brand from the ground up is a different education from working within an established profession. It asks founders to make decisions with incomplete information, manage setbacks and learn an industry they may once have experienced only as customers. Akshita's scientific background belongs to another field, but observation, discipline and curiosity remain valuable in a new challenge.

Her journey also carries a personal significance. For women considering entrepreneurship, leaving a secure professional identity can be daunting. There can be pressure to stay on a path that appears successful, even when the desire to build independently is growing. Akshita's experience is a reminder that changing direction does not erase what came before. Skills, resilience and perspective travel into a new chapter.

She sees entrepreneurship as an act of belief in herself: the willingness to begin again, face uncertainty and build on her own terms. This does not mean the path is without difficulty. It means accepting setbacks as part of creating something new, and recognising that progress often comes through patience and repeated effort.

Ark Escapes is still at the beginning of its journey. Its next chapter will depend on how carefully it grows, how consistently it delivers and how well it preserves the individuality of its first six homes. The ambition is not simply to build a collection of places to stay, but to create experiences people remember and recommend.

Her story is ultimately about the courage to make a different choice. A scientist entering hospitality may seem an unexpected turn, but entrepreneurship often begins there: with the willingness to question an established path and the conviction to create another. Akshita Rana has taken that first step. Now, she is building what comes next.

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THE BUSINESS OF WELL-BEING:

How Women Are Shaping India's Wellness Economy

From holistic health and mental well-being to fitness, nutrition and preventive care, women entrepreneurs are building businesses around one of the world's most important emerging priorities: living better, not simply living longer.

Wellness has moved well beyond the idea of an occasional spa visit or a fitness routine. It is increasingly influencing how people eat, work, travel, manage stress and make everyday lifestyle choices. From personalised nutrition and mental health support to yoga, meditation, fitness and preventive healthcare, the business of well-being is expanding into almost every aspect of modern life. And women entrepreneurs are becoming an important part of this transformation.

The opportunity is significant. India's AYUSH services sector, which includes Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy, was estimated at US$36.92 billion in FY2024-25, according to a government-referenced assessment released in October 2026. The sector has grown at a compound annual growth rate of 16.91 per cent since FY2022-23. Within it, the wellness segment recorded a 21.29 per cent CAGR. These figures point towards growing demand for services that focus on prevention, lifestyle management and holistic approaches to well-being.

For women entrepreneurs, this is more than a promising market. It is an opportunity to build businesses around needs that have often remained under-addressed.

Consider the changing conversation around women's health. Menstrual health, fertility, pregnancy, postpartum recovery, menopause and hormonal well-being are receiving greater attention, creating demand for specialised products, services and platforms. For years, many of these subjects were discussed privately, with limited access to reliable information or dedicated services. Today, a new generation of founders is approaching them as important areas of healthcare, innovation and business development.

The emergence of femtech, which uses technology to address women's health needs, reflects this shift. Digital platforms, health monitoring tools, specialised consultations and personalised care models are changing how women access information and support. The opportunity is not limited to technology companies. Nutritionists, healthcare professionals, fitness specialists, therapists and wellness practitioners are also creating businesses that combine professional expertise with accessible services.

Mental well-being is another area gaining importance. Increasingly demanding work environments, caregiving responsibilities, financial pressures and changing family structures have brought conversations about stress, anxiety and emotional health into the

mainstream. Entrepreneurs are responding through counselling platforms, workplace wellness programmes, meditation services, breathwork sessions and retreats.

However, the expansion of this market also brings responsibility. Wellness is a sensitive sector where consumer trust matters enormously. Products and services must be supported by appropriate expertise, transparent communication and responsible claims. A meditation programme cannot replace mental health treatment where clinical care is required, just as a nutrition product should not promise medical outcomes without evidence. The strongest businesses will be those that understand the boundaries between lifestyle support, wellness services and healthcare.

Women are already playing a substantial role in this ecosystem. According to the October 2026 government assessment, women account for 43 per cent of the overall AYUSH services workforce. Their representation exceeds 60 per cent in spas and wellness resorts, stands at 58 per cent in educational institutions, 57 per cent in day-care centres and 53 per cent in hospitals. This participation creates opportunities not only for employment but also for entrepreneurship, professional leadership and the development of specialised services.

The business models are becoming increasingly diverse. Some founders are building premium wellness studios and retreats, offering curated experiences around yoga, fitness, mindfulness and traditional practices. Others are developing nutrition-led products, skincare and personal care brands, digital health platforms or specialised services for women at different stages of life. There are also opportunities in corporate wellness, where organisations are beginning to recognise the relationship between employee well-being, engagement and productivity.

One particularly interesting development is the convergence of wellness and hospitality. Travellers are increasingly seeking experiences that offer more than accommodation and sightseeing. Wellness retreats, Ayurveda-based programmes, yoga holidays and nature-led experiences allow entrepreneurs to bring together hospitality, local knowledge, health services and tourism. India's traditional wellness practices and diverse natural landscapes offer considerable potential in this space, provided that experiences are developed with credible practitioners and appropriate standards.

Yet building a wellness business is not simply about identifying a growing trend. The sector requires credibility, consistency and a clear understanding of the customer. A founder launching a supplement brand, for instance, must navigate formulation, quality control, regulatory requirements, manufacturing and consumer education. A wellness practitioner must establish professional qualifications, ethical boundaries and a service model that can operate sustainably. A retreat business must bring together trained personnel, safe facilities, thoughtful programming and reliable hospitality.

This is where entrepreneurship becomes as important as the wellness philosophy itself. A meaningful mission may inspire a business, but long-term success depends on pricing, customer retention, operational discipline and financial sustainability. Founders must understand whether customers are returning, whether the service is delivering value and whether the business can grow without compromising quality.

There is also a larger question of accessibility. Premium wellness experiences are attracting customers who are willing to invest in personalised care, but the sector cannot grow meaningfully if well-being remains available only to those who can afford luxury services. Affordable digital consultations, community-based programmes, workplace initiatives and products designed for different income groups can help expand access. The challenge for entrepreneurs is to identify business models that combine commercial viability with genuine usefulness.

Technology will further influence this landscape. Artificial intelligence, wearable devices, digital consultations and personalised health platforms are creating new ways to understand behaviour and deliver services. But technology should complement professional judgement rather than replace it. In a sector built on trust and personal well-being, the human relationship between a practitioner and a client remains important.

For women entrepreneurs, the wellness economy offers an unusual combination of commercial opportunity and social relevance. It allows founders to address everyday concerns, create employment, build specialised knowledge and develop businesses that can serve customers across markets. It also creates space for women to move from being consumers of wellness services to becoming their creators, owners and decision-makers.

The next phase of growth will belong to businesses that can distinguish meaningful well-being from passing trends. Customers are becoming more discerning. They want credible information, qualified professionals, transparent products and experiences that make a real difference to their lives.

The future of wellness will not be shaped by one product, one practice or one business model. It will emerge from a wider ecosystem of healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs, researchers, technology companies and service providers. Women are already contributing to that ecosystem in significant ways.

The opportunity now is to turn participation into ownership, expertise into enterprise and growing consumer interest into businesses built to last. Because the business of well-being is ultimately about more than selling a service. It is about understanding what people need to live healthier, more balanced lives and building responsible enterprises that help make that possible.



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