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Clockwise from top left: Merin Joseph, Yami Gautam, Vanlitha Jalin, Neeru Yadav, Anahat Singh, Yamini Reddy, Dalaphi Lamare (Reble)

50 UNDER 50

The She List

SELF-MADE WOMEN UNDER 50 YEARS OF AGE WHO ARE REDEFINING INDIA'S FUTURE IN KEY FIELDS

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OC

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AUR POWER
MILE HAR ROZ

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AUR MINERALS
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SUNDAY HO YA MONDAY
ROZ KHAO ANDE.

FROM THE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THE SHE LIST
UNDER 50

Fifty years of INDIA TODAY. While India enters its 80th year of Independence. It is the world's largest democracy but women hold barely 13.8 per cent seats in the Lok Sabha. Female voters make up 49 per cent of the electorate. They have out-voted men in two consecutive general elections. They are in every meaningful sense equal participants in the democratic exercise. What they are not is equal beneficiaries. The 2023 Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam became law to correct this old skew in political representation. A third of the Lok Sabha seats will be reserved for women. It is an overdue correction and Panchayati Raj experience over 33 years tells us that affirmative action of this kind actually works. There are today 1.45 million elected women representatives in village institutions across India. That process has been truly transformative. Sarpanch Dolly has created a quasi-judicial mechanism in her Sadipur village in Bihar so that locals do not have to approach the courts for dispute resolution. In Rajasthan's Lambi Ahir village, the *ghaghra*-clad sarpanch Neeru Yadav has set up an entire hockey training ecosystem for girls, overcoming stiff opposition and centuries of stifling patriarchy. They symbolise what can happen when women are given the space and chance to lead.



▲ Jan. 1, 2024

As INDIA TODAY completes 50 years of its publication, this Independence Day special issue is our tribute to that possibility. We are calling it the 'She List: 50 under 50'. Fifty self-made women under the age of 50 who represent what Indian women are capable of when the odds, though rarely removed, are at least partially navigated. The selection criteria are deliberate. This is not the place to look for a rich heiress, a big corporate honcho's wife or a nepo kid from Bollywood. These women came up by dint of their own effort, their ingenuity, their insistence on altering the status quo. We have kept the cutoff age at 50, acknowledging the time it takes for most women to make the lonely trek uphill, against odds. This list presents a gallery of role models for the nearly 560 million women under 50 in India, who form 78 per cent of the country's female population. We exclude those affiliated to political parties. That is not to devalue that field but it's complicated to make a fair assessment of personal achievement and empowerment there. We have chosen five categories: entrepreneurs, innovators, professionals, artists and sportswomen.

These 50 women are the face of representation beyond politics. For them, freedom means economic independence, an ability to pursue and excel in professional opportunities, and expressing themselves creatively, breaking the shackles that Indian society imposed historically. The life trajectory of Farzana Afridi typifies this. Going against their insular social milieu in Bihar, her father encouraged her to pursue higher studies. She became the first in her family to obtain a PhD from a foreign university. Now a professor at the Indian Statistical Institute, Afridi's pathbreaking research on women's economic empowerment has shaped public policy in India in the past decade. As she points out, "Young women in India have to remain single-minded in their focus and seize opportunities that provide a sense of purpose beyond traditional expectations. A woman's life never stops being challenging, mine certainly hasn't."

Afridi is right. Though India's gender indices have improved vastly since Independence, we must temper our elation in the face of chastening numbers. Women are still born unequal. Literally. At 939 females to 1,000 males, our sex ratio is among the lowest in the world. The female literacy rate, at 74.9 per cent, still leaves out a full one-fourth—and lags behind men by nearly 13 points. Women make up only 5.21 per cent of CEOs in listed companies and commit only 40 per cent to the labour force, mostly in low-paying farm jobs. Crime against women remains a national shame, recording 1,200 cases every day. Campaigns such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao have made a difference but not enough. The recent Gen Z agitation was a social expression of those statistical gaps. The strong female participation reflects their dissatisfaction at the existing order.

Against this sobering backdrop, these stories reveal, uniformly, an inner determination to succeed. A scientist who shines the torch on how DNA repairs itself. A conservationist who modifies rural psychology as part of a dramatic species rescue. Two naval officers who circumnavigate the world. A fighter pilot. Hip-hop star Daiaphi Lamare aka Reble, who scored the foot-stomping number 'Main Aur Tu' in *Dhurandhar*, told us, "When I discovered music, I discovered confidence." Exceptional individuals can seem like exceptions. This list suggests they are not. They are the visible edge of a much larger shift happening across India, in small towns and metros, in the fields and factories and court rooms and laboratories, wherever Indian women are choosing to live on their own terms.

This special issue is our celebration of that choice, and of the fifty years this magazine has spent bearing witness to an India in the process of becoming what it promised to be.

Happy Independence Day.

(Aroon Purie)

15+ YEARS OF VISION

A Story Written in Skylines

Over the last 15 years, Mr. Ajay Chaudhary, Founder, Chairman & Managing Director of ACE Group, has built a reputation for identifying tomorrow's growth corridors before they become today's hotspots. Under his leadership, ACE Group has delivered over 18 million sq. ft. while taking another 32+ million sq. ft. under development. His philosophy has remained remarkably consistent identify locations with strong long-term fundamentals, create developments that enhance the urban fabric and build communities that continue to create value for generations.
Looking back, he says the journey has reinforced one belief above all else.

"Success isn't measured by the number of projects you build. It's measured by the trust you earn, the communities you create and the legacy you leave behind. Those are the benchmarks that continue to guide every decision we make at ACE Group."

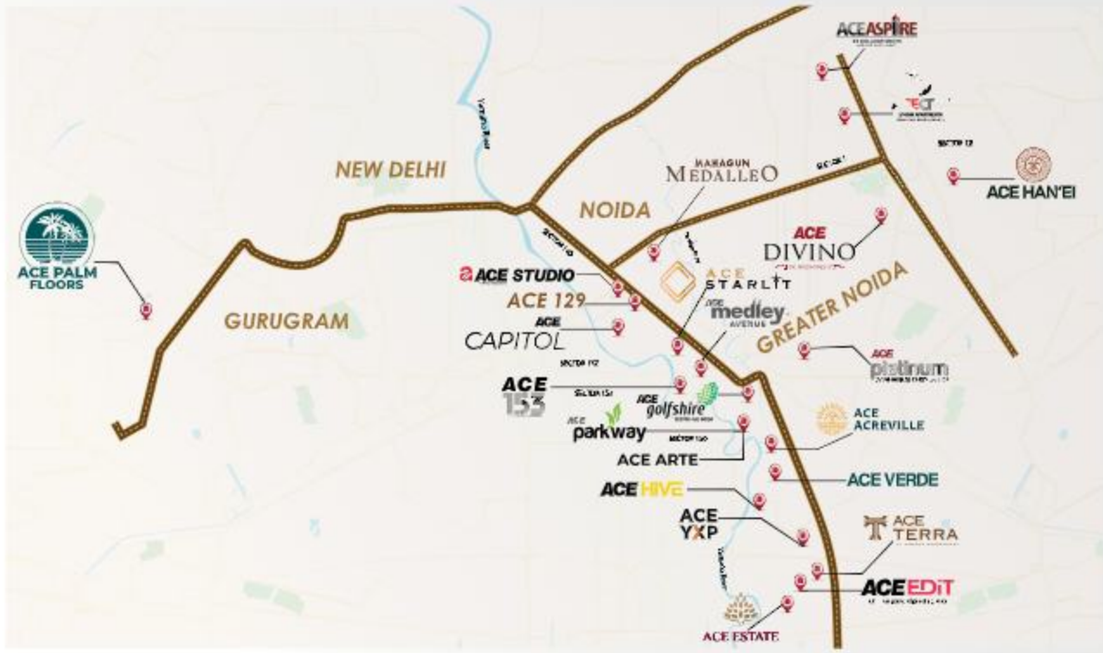
He believes infrastructure will continue to reshape where people choose to live and invest, while developers will increasingly play the role of city builders rather than just builders of homes.
"Every project eventually becomes part of a city's identity. Our responsibility is to create spaces that continue adding value for generations not just financially, but socially and environmentally."
As India's urban landscape enters one of its most transformative decades, Mr. Ajay Chaudhary remains focused on the philosophy that has guided ACE Group since its inception: identifying tomorrow's opportunities today and building developments that don't just follow the skyline but help define it.



Ajay Chaudhary -
Founder, Chairman and
Managing Director, ACE GROUP

ACE fulfilling ACEpirations

For over 15 years, ACE Group has emerged as one of Delhi NCR's most respected real estate developers, setting new benchmarks in quality, innovation, and timely delivery. From luxury residences and integrated townships to premium commercial developments, the company has consistently transformed the region's skyline with thoughtfully designed spaces that balance architecture, functionality, and lifestyle. Built on a foundation of trust and customer-centric values, ACE Group's portfolio reflects a commitment to excellence that has earned the confidence of thousands of homeowners and investors. Today, its developments stand as enduring landmarks across Delhi NCR, symbolizing a legacy of vision, craftsmanship, and sustainable growth.



25
Landmark Projects

~18
Million Sq.Ft. Delivered Area

~32+
Million Sq.Ft. Area Under Development

~denotes approximately

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- E-1, Ground Floor, Videocon Towers, Jhandewalan Extn, New Delhi.
- Door No: 630, 630A, 632, 5th Floor, Block A, Imperial Chakanya Building, Anna Salai, Teynampet, Chennai, Tamilnadu-600018.
- 201-204 Richmond Towers, 2nd Floor, 12, Richmond Road, Bangalore-560025; Phones: 22212448, 22213037, 22213843; Fax: 22216335;
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Clockwise from top left: Merin Joseph, Vaniitha Jaiin, Yami Gautam, Anahat Singh and Reble

Photo Montage by **BANDEEP SINGH**

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Women, Warriors, Winners

A worthy ensemble of 50 young, self-made female icons whose achievements can serve as a template for women across India and a beacon of hope for the nation

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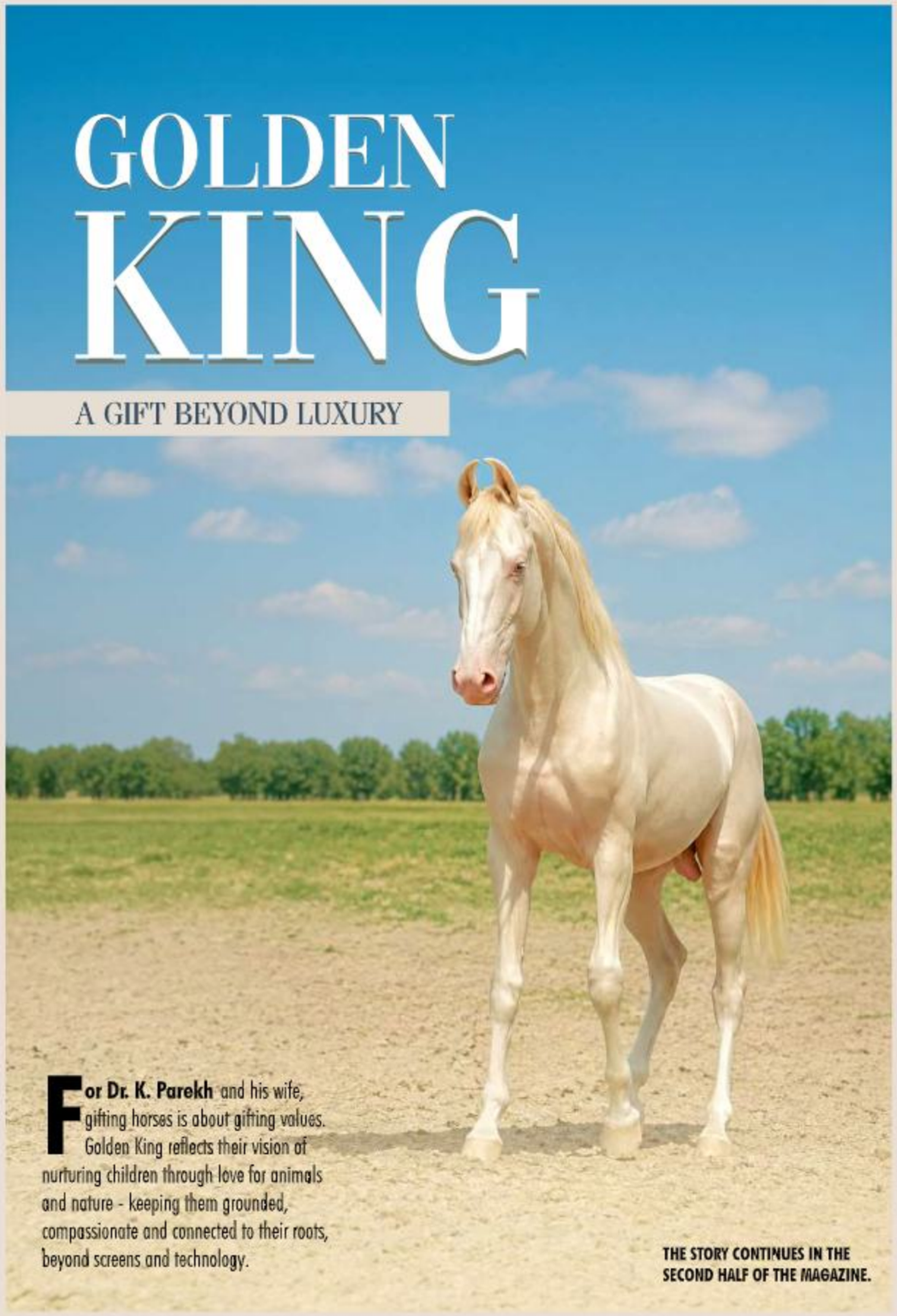
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GOLDEN KING

A GIFT BEYOND LUXURY



For Dr. K. Parekh and his wife, gifting horses is about gifting values. Golden King reflects their vision of nurturing children through love for animals and nature - keeping them grounded, compassionate and connected to their roots, beyond screens and technology.

THE STORY CONTINUES IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE MAGAZINE.

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MICHAL WALUSZA / FIDE





ITC: Partnering India in its Defining Decade

Excerpts from the Address by

Shri Sanjiv Puri, Chairman & Managing Director, ITC Limited

115th Annual General Meeting, ITC Limited | 23 July 2026

ITC Enduring Value

We meet today at a time of deep significance — for the world, for India, and for enterprises that aspire to create enduring value. The prolonged uncertainty arising from the West Asia crisis has severely impacted the global economy, threatening energy security and trade. Indeed, the multitude of events in the recent past only reinforce the fact that **global volatility is no more sporadic; it is now systemic.** Last year, in my address, I had described this as an era of **TURN** — a world constantly confronted by **Turbulence, Uncertainty** and **Rapid change**, calling for **Novel strategies** to reimagine our tomorrows. Today, that reality stands even more pronounced, as a deeper structural shift reshapes the future of nations, societies and enterprises.

What makes this juncture a perfect storm of exceptional complexity and consequence is the confluence of multiple forces at scale. On the one hand, global progress is challenged by the catastrophic climate emergency, widening inequality and advances in disruptive technologies like AI. On the other hand, decades of hyper-globalisation have given way to fragmented multi-polarisation — creating a world that is still deeply connected, but less trusting; still trading yet marred by weaponisation of supply chains; still global, but increasingly nationalistic. These tectonic shifts are being felt across everyday lives — through volatile commodity prices, inflationary pressures, disruptions in trade and the rising vulnerability of food, energy and supply chains.

> India's resolute fortitude in accelerating the journey to a competitive, resilient and inclusive nation has earned it widespread trust, respect and admiration.

It is said that crisis challenges the status quo like no other and spurs innovation to forge new pathways for growth, competitiveness and resilience. We stand today at such an inflection point with an unparalleled opportunity to make a meaningful difference to all our shared tomorrows.

It gives us immense pride, therefore, that India's resolute fortitude in accelerating the journey to a competitive, resilient and inclusive nation has earned it widespread trust, respect and admiration.

India's Ascent: A Beacon of Hope and Progress

Against this backdrop, the Hon'ble Prime Minister's powerful clarion call for an **Aatmanirbhar** and a **Viksit Bharat** assumes even greater significance. It has inspired multidimensional interventions enabling India to emerge as the fastest-growing major economy in the world. The far-reaching measures announced in successive Budgets have provided strong foundations to unleash growth. India's ascent is not merely about outpacing other large economies. **It has demonstrated that a nation of continental scale, democratic depth and extraordinary diversity can drive momentum with stability, pursue reform with inclusion, and convert aspiration into resilient growth.**

The India story is indeed an inspiring example of how the Government is creating an all-pervasive Bharat Capability Stack through exemplary foresight and foundational action to reinforce competitiveness for today, resilience for tomorrow and strategic readiness for the decades ahead.

Role of Business: Responsible Competitiveness

It is my deep conviction that businesses, as a crucial organ of society, serve a larger transformational purpose by contributing meaningfully to **national competitiveness, sustainable and inclusive development.**

This philosophy is reflected in your Company's ethos of **Responsible Competitiveness**, which has guided our thought, strategy and action over the years and inspires our commitment to be **a national value multiplier.** To my mind, businesses make a lasting contribution to the nation when they frame their growth agenda around three imperatives.

First, as engines of national competitiveness, it is mission critical for Indian enterprises to be **future-ready and globally competitive.** This calls for trusted Indian brands that anchor domestic ecosystems and retain value in the country; investments in state-of-the-art national assets that support India's ambition to become a global hub for manufacturing, services and exports; a deeper focus on cutting-edge innovation and R&D as well as capabilities for AI-led transformation. **The Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of Build More, Produce More and Export More raises our collective aspirations to even bolder heights to craft products and services of world-class quality and trust, that earn their rightful place in households and markets across the world.**

Taking this tenet further, the **second imperative** is for businesses to evolve as architects of **national resilience and anti-fragility.** While resilience sharpens the capacity to bounce back amidst adversity, anti-fragility goes beyond, to convert adversity into future opportunities. Strengthening resilience calls for locally anchored value chains, stronger MSME partnerships, diversified and trusted sourcing, import substitution, climate stewardship and robust digital adoption. However, the winners of tomorrow must also thrive amidst adversity, nurture new competencies, accelerate innovation and spur new engines of growth. Resilience is no longer the dividend of efficiency nor is anti-fragility a distant objective, they are the very foundation of our

right to grow. **When enterprises embed resilience and embrace anti-fragility, they fortify the nation's foundation and position it to rise stronger with every adversity.**

Third, businesses must advance a paradigm of Compassionate Capitalism. Competitiveness gives enterprises the power to win, anti-fragility the right to win the future and purpose the legitimacy to win. Businesses exist to serve both an economic and social purpose. The enormous climate risks, livelihood challenges, inequality and regulations **make it a crucial responsibility of businesses to embed sustainability and inclusion as an integral component of strategy.** This belief lies at the core of your Company's approach.

> When enterprises embed resilience and embrace anti-fragility, they fortify the nation's foundation and position it to rise stronger with every adversity.

A few years ago, your Company laid the foundations of the **ITC Next strategy** to drive scale, accelerated growth and profitability and make the enterprise even more future-ready. Guided by the Company's credo of **"Nation First, *Sab Saath Badhein*", our north-star is to create growing value for all our stakeholders — by building national competitiveness that is globally benchmarked, resilience that is locally anchored, and growth that is anti-fragile, inclusive and sustainable.**

ITC: Ushering in NextGen Agri, Strengthening Rural India

I begin with agriculture — the lifeline of our economy and the foundation of rural India. India possesses vast arable land, diverse agro-climatic zones and leadership in several commodities. Yet, low productivity, fragmented holdings, limited value addition, climate vulnerability and inefficient market access continue to constrain its potential. This points to a defining opportunity to **transform Indian agriculture from volume-led production to value-led competitiveness,** not only to fortify food security but to raise farmer incomes, deepen rural capability and enhance exports.

The Government has spearheaded several commendable measures to support growth of the agri-food sector. Higher farmer incomes can trigger a virtuous cycle of consumption, investment, employment and rural prosperity. This requires a structural shift to shape **NextGeneration Agriculture** — from fragmented productivity to integrated competitiveness, from undifferentiated commodities to high-value agriculture, and from vulnerable farming systems to climate-smart, technology-enabled rural ecosystems.

> There is a defining opportunity to transform Indian agriculture from volume-led production to value-led competitiveness.... ITCMAARS has onboarded over 2.6 million farmers across 11 States, with the ambition to benefit 10 million farmers by 2030.

With over a century of engagement with agriculture, 94% of your Company's businesses are linked to agri-crops or plantations, generating substantial livelihoods. ITC nurtures **21 value chains across 23 States to source nearly 6 million tonnes of agri-produce.** In this address, I will focus on ITC's Agri Business, which is now the country's largest private sector agri-enterprise, **doubling segment revenue in just over 5 years to nearly ₹20,300 crore** in FY26. The **ITC Next strategy** is today transforming the Agri Business, while ushering in NextGeneration farming and rural empowerment.

At the core of this transformation is the **ITCMAARS** phygital ecosystem, designed to empower FPOs with digital technologies, hyper-personalised advisories, quality inputs, market linkages, scientific agronomy and climate-smart practices to improve farm competitiveness and resilience. In a short span, ITCMAARS has onboarded **over 2.6 million farmers** across 11 States, with the ambition to benefit 10 million farmers by 2030. Initial estimates indicate **crop yield gains of 15–20% and improvement in net returns by 25–30%.**

Building on a recent horticulture pilot, anchored by FPOs, for the supply of high-quality fruits and vegetables, ITC plans to develop 4 additional hybrid Open-to-Sky and Controlled Environment Agriculture clusters to create a reliable, traceable supply chain for fresh produce. Progressively, **ITCMAARS is introducing precision-led agriculture and advanced agri-tech solutions, like IoT-enabled weather tracking, remote-sensing, drone-based services, to promote smart farming.**

A vital component of your Company's agri strategy is to promote **Value-Added Agriculture** to enable farmers scale the next horizon of profitable growth. This portfolio, which has grown at a CAGR of 33% over five years, today encompasses **certified organic crops, processed agri-products, such as food-safe spices, horticulture, premium coffee, aquaculture and attribute-specific commodities, like high-starch maize and high-gluten wheat.**

Taking this further, ITCMAARS will drive a Farming as a Service (FaaS) ecosystem to 'Grow the Buy', where crop value chains are customised to meet specific buyer needs. Certifications, traceability and responsible sourcing establish **trust systems at scale,** linking Indian farmers to domestic and global export markets. ITC's Spices Business, for example, is today the country's leading exporter of organic spices, supported by certified cultivation, backward integration and **one of Asia's largest spices processing facilities at Guntur.**

In an era of climate stress and rising food security imperatives, production of **high-quality, resilient seeds and hybrids** is vital to enhancing productivity, improving quality, increasing climate resilience, strengthening nutritional security and raising farmer incomes. Your Company's wholly owned subsidiary **Technico, a global leader in pre-basic potato seeds, is investing in the world's largest state-of-the-art aeroponic facility** with 60 hi-tech controlled-environment greenhouses, taking the combined capacity to 100 million TECHNITUBER®s.

Fostering an effective **science-to-farm ecosystem**, ITC's LSTC is leveraging advanced breeding technologies, molecular genetics and digital tools to develop higher-yielding, climate-resilient, hybrid and disease-resistant varieties across crops such as tobacco, wheat, potato, eucalyptus and subabul. **These have led to yields improving by 15-50%.**

Your Company is making appreciable progress in high-value, future-facing categories, such as **Biological Extracts,** with the commencement of a US FDA-compliant, export-oriented, pharmacopoeia-standard **nicotine derivative** processing facility, serving customers in Europe, USA and South Korea. In addition, ITC's **medicinal and aromatic plant ecosystem** is developing high-active varieties and proprietary formulations, besides manufacturing high-purity extracts for domestic and global markets together with farmer training in best practices.

As we look ahead, ITC will continue to work towards shaping a more competitive, resilient and inclusive Agri Business, which is not only **creating new growth drivers but also contributing to enriching rural India, raising farmer incomes, fortifying food and livelihood security, and establishing globally trusted value chains.**

ITC: Proudly Indian Brands — Creating and Retaining Value in India

In a growing consumption-led economy, strong domestic brands assume strategic importance because they channel consumer aspiration into national value. Brands are vital **repositories of trust, quality, innovation and intellectual property.** When successful Indian brands win consumer preference at scale, they **retain larger value within the country.**

That is why **'Vocal for Local'** is not merely a sentiment; **it is a strategy to reinforce domestic capability, create and nurture brands that are born in India but made for the world** with impeccable quality and trust that can delight consumers globally.

Your Company's aspiration to be India's No. 1 FMCG player is anchored on this larger vision. Today, ITC's portfolio of over 30 world-class FMCG brands represents annual consumer spends of **nearly ₹37,000 crore** and reaches around **280 million households** while being exported to over **70 countries.** It is indeed difficult to find parallels globally of an enterprise that has launched so many large, successful and trusted home-grown brands in a relatively short period.

> ITC's portfolio of over 30 world-class FMCG brands represents annual consumer spends of nearly ₹37,000 crore and reaches around 280 million households while being exported to over 70 countries.

ITC's brands enrich everyday moments in Indian homes — from **Sunfeast** biscuits in the morning, to breakfast choices of **Aashirvaad Besan** *chillas* and **Yoga Bar** cereals, to **Fiama** bathing experiences, **Mangaldeep** devotional moments and **Classmate's** joy of learning, from baby and pet-safe clean homes with **Nimyle** to meals with **24 Mantra Organic, Aashirvaad** staples and **Sunrise** spices, to fun times with **Bingo!, ITC Master Chef** and **Prasuma** snacks, mini meals with **YiPPee!** and ending the day with **Fabelle** for luxurious indulgence and **Pranah** for relaxation.

The Indian FMCG market is poised for significant expansion, with your Company's addressable market estimated at around ₹8 trillion by 2035, pointing to the immense headroom to grow. The consumer landscape in India is also evolving rapidly. The rise of Aspirational Bharat, premiumisation, Gen Z and Gen Alpha consumers, expanding digital access and the growth of quick commerce are reshaping categories, channels and expectations. Today's **'maximiser consumer'** simultaneously seeks taste and nutrition, convenience and trust, indulgence and wellness, value as well as premium experiences.

In line with the **ITC Next strategy,** your Company is making rapid progress in not only scaling its core power brands but developing a future-ready portfolio that is constantly alive to evolving consumer needs. A critical foundation is ITC's **AI-led consumer insight ecosystem,** that drives **targeted micro-segmentation** to help craft a pipeline of differentiated offerings — be it by life stages, lifestyle, channel, occasion, shelf-life requirement and health need, among others. This vibrant portfolio has been enriched with new acquisitions in areas of promise that are already clocking an ARR of around ₹1,350 crore, effectively synergising the entrepreneurial energy of start-ups with ITC's scale and institutional strengths. These differentiated products reach millions of homes through your Company's smart omni-channel network with unique multidimensional capabilities across ambient, chilled, frozen and perishable supply chains.

India today faces the twin challenges of adequate nutrition and rising lifestyle-related health concerns. Aligned to ITC's **'Help India Eat Better'** Mission, a **Good-for-You** portfolio is being built to address **deficiencies in protein, fibre, micronutrients and gut health.** These include the **Yoga Bar protein range** for Gen Z, **Sunfeast Breakfast protein-rich shakes** for early jobbers and **Aashirvaad Protein Atta** for the entire family. The **Right Shift** range for the **40-plus cohort** is fortified with fibre, protein and micronutrients. **24 Mantra Organic** provides trusted organic products, while **Aashirvaad Millet Flour, Multigrain Flour, Sunfeast Farmlite biscuits,** and **Yoga Bar** high-fibre breakfast cereals serve the growing need for better fibre intake and gut health.

Leveraging emerging spaces such as wellness and naturals, your Company's Personal Care portfolio reflects the convergence of nature, and science. **Nimyle** brings the goodness of Neem into homecare, while **Savlon** continues to expand its trusted hygiene equity across personal wash, germ protection, surface disinfection and medicated skincare. The acquisition of **Mother Sparsh** marks ITC's strategic presence in premium natural baby care, rooted in traditional Indian knowledge for new-age mothers seeking specialised solutions. Building on **Flama's industry-first gel bar technology, the new Japanese Hokkaido Milk range,** which is being patented, reflects sensorial innovation that promises non-sticky moisturised skin.

Innovation is at the heart of your Company's future-ready portfolio, which is powered by **ITC's Life Sciences and Technology Centre,** with over 400 world-class scientists. **What sets the Centre apart is not just its deep research capabilities and future-ready platforms, but its focus on end-to-end value chains, from seed to fork and tree to paper, enabling your Company to craft winning products of impeccable quality.**

We recognise that **business innovation is as crucial as product innovation.** Consumers increasingly seek fresh cooked food solutions where freshness, speed, quality and trust converge. Responding to this, your Company launched the **Fresh Food Business**, leveraging ITC's institutional strengths in trusted brands, food sciences, cuisine expertise and digital capabilities. With over 70 cloud kitchens across five cities, the business has grown over 100% in the last three years through a delectable portfolio comprising **Aashirvaad Soul Creations, ITC Master Chef Creations, Sunfeast Baked Creations and Sansho from ITC Master Chef,** which have consistently received top consumer rankings.

> **In the true spirit of Make in India, nearly 90% of ITC's value addition takes place within the country.... ITC's Bharat Built Manufacturing endeavour is to build globally competitive domestic manufacturing assets, substitute imports, enrich the environment and support sustainable livelihoods.**

Your Company's growing standing in FMCG, powered by the trust of millions of consumers, gives us the confidence to dream boldly — of a future where an ITC product adorns every household in India and makes its mark across continents. ITC's world-class Indian brands will continue to be a significant enduring strength, creating larger value for the enterprise and its stakeholders.

ITC: Powering Make in India for a Viksit Bharat

Your Company's **Bharat Built Manufacturing architecture** has created world-class national assets across **FMCG, Paperboards & Packaging and export-oriented value-added Agri Processing.** Today, ITC's manufacturing ecosystem spans **over 300 factories**, including 45 owned plants, engaging with more than **9,500 MSMEs.** These large investments in modern facilities provide strong levers of competitiveness, resilience and local value-chain development.

In the true spirit of Make in India, nearly 90% of ITC's value addition takes place within the country. The agri and food processing industry has high employment-to-capital intensity. Therefore, your Company's 170 factories in this sector **are a powerful economic multiplier, deepening inclusive farm-to-consumer value chains and linking farmers to domestic and global markets.**

Your Company's confidence in the India story is reflected in its proposed medium-term capex of ₹20,000 crore for the Group in areas that have a multiplier impact. Close on the heels of 8 recently commissioned facilities, 6 new projects are in the pipeline. Your Company's leadership as **India's largest integrated paperboards and paper business** will be reinforced by the forthcoming acquisition of Century Pulp & Paper, raising capacity by over 50% to 1.5 million metric tonnes. The newly established **state-of-the-art Moulded Fibre Products** facility is pioneering complex engineered compostable solutions for single-use plastic substitution for both domestic and global markets. As each of your Company's businesses scales up in line with the ITC Next strategy, its manufacturing ecosystem is poised to expand further, contributing to India's aspiration to be a global manufacturing powerhouse.

Your Company's distributed manufacturing network is also a **vibrant hub of innovation, quality, sustainability and safety besides providing structural competitiveness.** An AI-first digital backbone in ITC's manufacturing facilities enhances efficiency, cost optimisation and responsiveness. Several units now meet nearly 100% of their electricity needs from renewable sources, are Platinum-rated green buildings or have achieved global AWS standards.

In line with ITC's deep commitment to an **Aatmanirbhar Bharat**, your Company is also placing sharper thrust on indigenisation and import substitution **to build structural competitiveness.** Your Company pioneered the **Bharat Fibre chain for its Paperboards business through massive afforestation, substituting imports and saving foreign exchange while creating a green cover, substantial rural livelihoods and larger value in India.** Today, this initiative has greened **nearly 1.5 million acres, generating over 270 million person-days of employment.**

ITC also established the **first-of-its-kind Bleached Chemi-Thermo Mechanical Pulp** Plant at Bhadrachalam, creating domestic capability in specialised pulp, and is now investing in a second BCTMP mill. Additionally, investments have also been made in domestic capsule manufacturing capacity and a Décor Paper plant to substitute imports. These interventions will significantly enhance cost competitiveness while also enabling foreign exchange savings exceeding **₹17,500 crore over the next decade.**

For us at ITC, this is the larger meaning of **Bharat Built Manufacturing** in action — **to build globally competitive domestic manufacturing assets,** substitute imports, enrich the environment and support sustainable livelihoods.

ITC: Supporting Climate Action & Inclusive Growth

I now turn to two defining imperatives of our times — **climate resilience and livelihood generation** — both vital for a sustainable, inclusive and competitive future. For India, climate risks are acute, severely impacting agri-food security, livelihoods, productivity and infrastructure.

While the Government has spearheaded world-leading efforts, the consequences of the climate crisis demand far more urgent, collective and sustained action at scale — globally, nationally and locally.

To my mind, enterprises can take transformational measures to combat climate change and also foster inclusive development. ITC's comprehensive approach addresses climate risks through large-scale programmes aimed at decarbonisation, adaptation, nature-based solutions and circularity, while also implementing a mosaic of solutions for rural empowerment.

What differentiates ITC's sustainability journey is a triad of achievements. First, **Longevity,** that is reflected in decades of sustained environmental impact. Second, **Scale,** which is demonstrated through the massive creation of ecological capital and support to millions of livelihoods. Third, **Integration,** through a distinctive model where sustainability and inclusivity are core pillars of strategy, governance and programmes.

ITC is the only company in the world to be carbon positive, water positive and solid waste recycling positive for around 2 decades now. ITC's businesses support nearly 9 million sustainable livelihoods.

Decarbonisation remains an important element of our climate action. Over the years, your Company has made significant investments in areas like renewable energy, green infrastructure and mobility. It is a matter of immense satisfaction that ITC has **surpassed several of its ambitious 2030 Sustainability 2.0 targets,** even as our businesses have expanded considerably. We are now committed to achieving **Net Zero Operations by 2050,** entailing a reduction in GHG by over 85% in the next 25 years.

> **What differentiates ITC's sustainability journey is a triad of achievements. First, Longevity, that is reflected in decades of sustained environmental impact. Second, Scale, which is demonstrated through the massive creation of ecological capital and support to millions of livelihoods. Third, Integration, through a distinctive model where sustainability and inclusivity are core pillars of strategy, governance and programmes.**

While Decarbonisation has gained significant traction globally, **Adaptation** measures have not drawn the attention they deserve. The world, after breaching the 1.5°C threshold last year, is headed towards 2.8°C warming in this century if stronger pathways are not pursued. This is clearly alarming and calls for decisive and urgent action.

Recognising this, ITC has implemented impactful **Adaptation** and **Nature-based Solutions** for ecosystem restoration that strengthens climate resilience, enhances farm productivity, water availability, green cover and biodiversity while supporting rural livelihoods. ITC's **Climate Smart Agriculture**, which now spans nearly **32 lakh acres** across 17 States, benefits over **12 lakh farmers**. It is premised on focused programmes that **build strong capabilities through skilling, technology adoption and development of institutional linkages.** We propose to cover **40 lakh acres under this initiative by 2030.** Impact studies have shown that CSA practices in rice and wheat have reduced costs **by over 20%, improved yields by around 10% and enhanced net returns by over 23%** compared to conventional practices.

Your Company has built deep capabilities in water stewardship, afforestation and biodiversity conservation. ITC's **large-scale water management interventions** follow a three-pronged approach — community-led watershed programmes, demand-side agricultural water management and revival of river sub-basins. Demand-side initiatives, focussing on **"more crop per drop"**, cover over 20 lakh acres, creating annual water-saving potential of **up to 50% across 15 crops, aggregating to 1.5 billion cubic metres.**

Supply-side watershed projects cumulatively span nearly **20 lakh acres**, helping around **90% of farmers** in catchments to cultivate through the year. Four river sub-basins have been made water positive, with work under way on the fifth. Such water stewardship interventions have improved gross cropped area by as much as 12%, cropping intensity and groundwater levels by up to 14 and 15% whilst delivering larger benefits for communities.

Biodiversity conservation is a key priority area for sustaining natural ecosystems, strengthening agri-food security, supporting rural livelihoods and building long-term resilience. Your Company's programme focuses on restoring ecosystem services that support agriculture. This is expected to cover **nearly 10 lakh acres by 2030.**

Your Company's **Social Investments Programme spans 275 districts in 20 States,** cumulatively benefiting over **10 million people**, including **6 million women** while amplifying impact with 98 public-private-people partnerships. While the scale and outcomes are deeply satisfying, what inspires us to do more are the human stories behind the numbers.

It is heartening to **witness farmers with better incomes, women with greater economic agency, children with stronger learning foundations and youth with improved employability.** This larger purpose to make a meaningful difference defines the core of our social endeavours.

India's ancient wisdom enshrined in ***Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*** reminds us that the world is one family, and the responsibility to protect our only home — the planet as well as its people — rests on all of us. We believe that our **'dharma' of Responsible Competitiveness** and the spirit of **'Aparigraha' to mindfully use resources** as well as **'Abhyudaya' which is premised on simultaneous economic and societal progress,** are timeless principles that will continue to inspire us in creating enduring value for all stakeholders.

In Conclusion

As India advances towards becoming a developed nation, ITC will remain steadfast in its commitment to serve with purpose, innovate with responsibility, grow with the nation and multiply value for our country. **Our heart and soul have always belonged to India. This has been our legacy. It will remain our promise.**

It is a privilege for ITC to be part of this momentous journey — powered by an inspiring Vision, guided by unshakeable Values, and energised by renewed Vitality.

As I conclude, I would like to reaffirm my belief that your Company's greatest and most enduring asset is its people. It is their dedication, ingenuity and unwavering commitment that give wings to our ambition, resilience to our efforts and purpose to our progress. Their dedication gives us the courage to dream boldly and shape ITC as an exemplary institution of a new India with **passion, performance and purpose.**

On behalf of the Board and myself, I thank all our stakeholders for their continued trust, support and encouragement.

Together, let us partner India and help build a future worthy of the aspirations of this great nation.



BANDEEP S NOH

POWER EQUATION
N. Chandrasekaran, Chairman, Tata Sons; (right) Noel Tata, Chairman, Tata Trusts



VIANDAR DEODHAR

TATA GROUP

SEARCH FOR A SUCCESSOR

N. Chandrasekaran decides to step down as Tata Sons chairman in February 2027, ending months of speculation and bringing the group's leadership question in focus

By M.G. ARUN

NATARAJAN CHANDRASEKARAN will step down as chairman of Tata Sons when his current term expires on February 20, 2027, ending months of speculation over whether he would be reappointed after a decade at the helm. The issue gained urgency because his reappointment as a director of Tata Sons, the holding company of the Rs 26.5 lakh crore Tata Group, was due to come up at the August 18 annual general meeting and was necessary for him to continue as chairman.

In a statement on August 12, Chandrasekaran, 63, said that the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Sir Ratan Tata Trust—the two principal trusts of Tata Trusts, which owns 66 per cent of Tata Sons—had unanimously recommended a five-year extension for him. The resolution had been placed before the Tata Sons board on February 24. "However, the proposal was not carried through because one of the board members did not support it; and in the absence of unanimous support, I chose to defer the decision," it read.

Although Chandrasekaran did not name anyone, the reference was widely seen as pointing to Tata Trusts chairman Noel Tata. Having initially backed a third term for Chandrasekaran, Noel later reportedly raised concerns over the performance of several group companies, heavy capital spending on new ventures such as semiconductors, and the group's broader strategic direction.

The split within the group's top leadership became public last year when trustees Mehli Mistry, Pramit Jhaveri, Jehangir H.C. Jehangir and Darius Khambata opposed the reappointment of veteran industrialist Venu Srinivasan and former defence secretary Vijay Singh to the boards of the two principal trusts. The Centre had to intervene, with home minister Amit Shah and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman calling Noel, Chandrasekaran and

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IS ONE THAT GROWS WITH US

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TATA GROUP'S PERFORMANCE

N. Chandrasekaran made Tata larger and more profitable, but growth lost pace in recent years

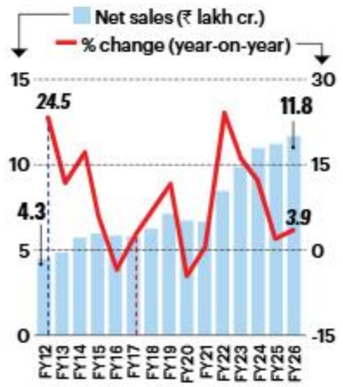
MARKET CAP
₹26.5 lakh cr.
(as on Aug. 12, 2026)

- **Dec. 2012:** *Ratan Tata steps down as Tata Sons chairman*
- **Feb. 2017:** *Chandrasekaran takes over after Cyrus Mistry's removal*

NET SALES

Weakening Momentum

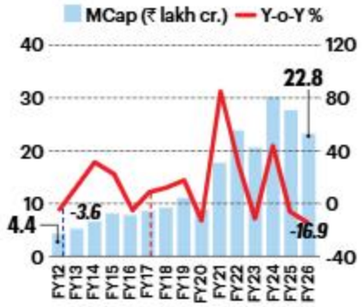
Under Chandra, net sales doubled, but y-o-y growth has now dipped



MARKET CAPITALISATION

Uneven Growth

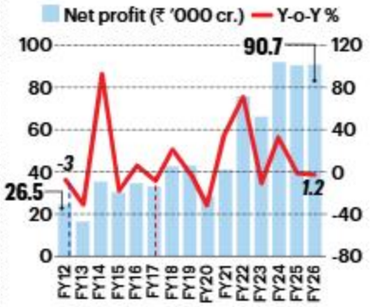
Market cap trebled, but y-o-y growth has now become negative



NET PROFIT

Tapering Gains

Net profits increased threefold, but gains have now plateaued



Note: Cumulative figures for all listed firms excluding Tata Capital and subsidiaries of listed firms
Source: Capitaline / Business Standard

others to New Delhi for talks. Days later, Mistry resigned from key trusts.

A major fault line within the Tata Group has been the proposed listing of Tata Sons. The RBI had classified Tata Sons as an "upper-layer" non-banking financial company (NBFC) in 2022, which would normally require listing within three years. Both Srinivasan and Vijay Singh are said to have been in its favour to raise the capital needed for the group's expansion. So are shareholders such as the Shapoorji Pallonji Group, which owns over 18 per cent of Tata Sons. Others, including Noel, want to preserve the company's private character to protect the group's philanthropic legacy. In June 2026, the RBI retained Tata Sons on a new list of 17 upper-layer NBFCs, while noting that this does not affect the group's pending application to surrender its NBFC registration.

CHANDRASEKARAN'S STRATEGIC BETS FALTERED. AIR INDIA POSTED A ₹22,238 CRORE NET LOSS IN FY26, TATA NEU SUPER APP FAILED TO GAIN TRACTION DESPITE HEAVY INVESTMENT

The question now is who will lead the Tata Group through this phase of uncertainty. In a statement, the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust said it "respects" Chandrasekaran's decision and has begun the process of forming a selection committee to find a successor. Under Tata Sons' amended Articles of Association, the Tata Trusts chairman cannot simultaneously serve as Tata Sons chairman. That rules out Noel unless he relinquishes his other role. This leaves the field open to an internal executive or an external professional.

GROWTH AND ITS COSTS

Chandrasekaran took charge of Tata Sons in February 2017, months after the acrimonious removal of Cyrus Mistry. He oversaw a sweeping restructuring that regrouped similar businesses through mergers and demergers to improve the operational synergy across the group, including the merger of Vistara with Air India in 2024. He also pushed the group into new-age sectors. Tata Electronics committed Rs 50,000 crore to a semiconductor plant; Tata Power outlined plans to invest Rs 75,000 crore in renewables by 2030.

"When Chandrasekaran assumed leadership in 2017, the Tata Group was already one of India's most respected business houses. Yet what followed was a remarkable re-rating of its public market value," says Deven Choksey, MD, DRChoksey FinServ. The market value of the group's listed companies nearly tripled and revenues doubled by FY26 (see *Tata Group's Performance*). Yet the impressive headline numbers conceal a more nuanced reality. "While the listed operating companies generated record profits, several of the group's strategic investments continued to absorb substantial capital," notes Choksey.

The most demanding of these has been Air India, brought back into the Tata fold in 2022. In FY26, it reported a net loss of Rs 22,238 crore. The crash of its London-bound flight shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad in June 2025 intensified scrutiny of the airline's legacy challenges, including years of underinvestment, labour unrest and an ageing fleet. More recently, on August 4, a Phuket-New Delhi flight suffered a sudden loss of altitude, and the pilot-in-command reportedly tested positive for marijuana. Air India has thus emerged as the clearest symbol of both Chandrasekaran's ambition and the risks that came with it. ■



Inside IRFC's Transformation into a Diversified Infrastructure Financier



Manoj Kumar Dubey
Chairman & Managing Director and CEO
IRFC

Manoj Kumar Dubey, Chairman & Managing Director and CEO of Indian Railway Finance Corporation, on record FY26 profits, the IRFC 2.0 strategy, Navratna status, and steering India's railway financing arm into power, ports and renewable energy

Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC), the dedicated market-borrowing arm of the Indian Railways under the Ministry of Railways, has just closed its strongest financial year yet. For the year ended 31st March 2026, IRFC posted a record profit after tax of Rs. 7,009.17 crore grew its assets under management to Rs. 4,84,616.77 crore and maintained a spotless zero-NPA record — all while undertaking the most significant strategic shift in its four-decade history. The growth story continues with all-time high Q1 results for FY 27. Under the leadership of Manoj Kumar Dubey, Chairman & Managing Director and CEO, IRFC is repositioning itself from a single-purpose railway financier into a diversified infrastructure financing institution — without losing sight of the Railways at its core. A 1994-batch Indian Railway Accounts Service officer and former Director (Finance) & CFO of CONCOR, Dubey took charge as CMD/IRFC in October 2024 and has since steered the company toward Navratna status and what he calls the "IRFC 2.0" era. In an exclusive conversation, he discusses the company's record-breaking year, its diversification strategy, and its road ahead:

Q: Mr. Dubey, FY 2025-26 has been described as a defining year for IRFC. Could you walk us through the key highlights of this year's performance?

A: FY26 has indeed been a defining year for IRFC. We closed the year with our highest-ever profit after tax of Rs. 7,009.17 crore, up 7.80% over the previous year, on a revenue from operations of Rs. 27,284.15 crore. Our assets under management crossed an all-time high of Rs. 4,84,616.77 crore, and our net worth rose to Rs. 56,748.76 crore. What I find most satisfying is that this growth has come alongside continued discipline: a NIL Gross NPA position, and a capital adequacy ratio of 110.91%, among the highest in the NBFC space. Our net interest margin improved to 1.50% on an annualised basis, up from 1.42% the previous year, reflecting the early impact of our diversification strategy. We have built a diversified infrastructure financing portfolio while remaining firmly aligned to our core mandate of supporting the railway ecosystem.

Q: IRFC has long been synonymous with railway financing. You have spoken about 'IRFC 2.0' as a structural shift in the company's business model. What exactly does this transformation involve, and why was it necessary?

A: For nearly four decades, IRFC's business model was straightforward — we raised money from domestic and international markets and financed



rolling stock and railway infrastructure assets for the Ministry of Railways on a cost-plus basis. That model served the country well; over 92% of our AUM today is still exposure to the MoR, and that relationship remains the bedrock of our business. But over the last couple of years, the Railways have not drawn fresh disbursements from us in the same way, majorly because of the Gross Budgetary Support for capex. Rather than let that translate into stagnant growth, we took a conscious decision to widen our canvas under what we call IRFC 2.0. As per our charter, we are permitted to fund activities with backward or forward linkage to the Railways — and that opened substantial opportunity. We now finance power generation and transmission, renewable energy, fertilizers, metro rail, ports and waterways, mining, dedicated freight corridors and multi-modal logistics parks. The audited FY26 results reflect this structural shift, from a traditional railway financier to a diversified infrastructure financing institution — keeping Railways at its centre.

Q: How meaningful has this diversification been in actual numbers, and which sectors have seen the strongest traction so far?

A: The numbers have moved faster than even we anticipated. In FY26, our non-MoR business saw agreements executed worth Rs. 72,949 crore and disbursements of Rs. 35,067 crores, exceeding our annual guidance. Railways and allied sectors constitute a key area of financing, followed by power generation, fertilizer and other sectors. On disbursements, the split is more even across the three. We have also executed four marquee transactions of roughly Rs. 10,000 crore each across power, fertilizers and rail infrastructure, and signed twelve financing agreements beyond conventional railway financing. We acquired over 70% of this new business through RFP-based competitive bidding, which tells you these are genuinely competitive wins on pricing and structuring, not relationship-driven deals. We have entered into MoUs with entities like VOCPA, SFCL, RITES, DMRC, IIFCL, REMCL, MMRDA and JNPT to build out this pipeline further.

Q: IRFC was conferred Navratna status in 2025. What has that designation meant in practical terms for the company's strategy and operations?

A: Navratna status was a watershed moment for us. It is not just a label — it confers genuinely enhanced financial and operational autonomy, which allows our Board to take investment and joint-venture decisions at a scale and speed that simply wasn't possible before. As a Navratna CPSE, IRFC has been entrusted with a larger responsibility in supporting nation-building infrastructure. It has also strengthened our hand in the capital markets — between our domestic AAA ratings from CRISIL, ICRA and CARE, international ratings at par with India's sovereign ratings, and Navratna status, we access funds at very competitive cost across instruments like Global Medium Term Notes, green bonds and commercial ECB loans. This year, our Board approved a market borrowing programme of up to Rs. 70,000 crores for FY27, which will support both the Railways' funding requirements and our continuing diversification under IRFC 2.0.

Q: A natural question for any lender stepping outside its traditional comfort zone is risk. How is IRFC ensuring that this diversification doesn't compromise the asset quality and zero-NPA track record the company is known for?

A: This is a question we ask ourselves before anyone else does, and it shapes every decision we make. Our diversification is deliberately not a leap into unrelated businesses — we choose sectors with strong backward and forward linkages to the railway ecosystem, and increasingly, we have adopted a whole-of-government approach, largely funding government entities or organisations with strong government linkages. That is a very different risk profile from, say, an unsecured retail or corporate book. We also rely heavily on competitive, RfP-based bidding rather than bilateral negotiation, which keeps our underwriting disciplined. The proof is in the numbers: despite this expansion, we closed FY26 with a Gross NPA of NIL, a cumulative asset-liability gap of NIL over the last five years, and a capital adequacy ratio of over 110%, multiples of the regulatory requirement. We intend to keep zero-NPA status non-negotiable, even as we scale.

Q: You have spoken about renewable energy as one of the new growth avenues, including IRFC's collaboration with Railway Energy Management Company. How does this fit into the larger national agenda around clean energy?

A: Renewable energy is one of the more exciting pieces of our diversification story, aligning directly with India's commitment to achieve 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2070. With 99.6% of the Broad-Gauge network already electrified, Indian Railways is now advancing from large-scale electrification towards a broader transition from brown to green energy solutions. As one of the country's largest energy consumers, the Railways present a natural opportunity for us to finance renewable energy capacity that supports its evolving energy requirements while also contributing to the broader power ecosystem. Our partnership with Railway Energy Management Company Limited is a good example — it combines our financing strength with REMCL's domain expertise in railway energy procurement and renewable projects. We've also extended credit facilities to renewable energy arms of larger power players, and going forward you will see us deepen our presence in this space, both because it serves national priorities and because it gives us access to long-tenure, high-quality assets that suit our balance sheet.

Q: Looking ahead to FY27 and beyond, what is your vision for IRFC, and how do you see the company's role evolving within India's broader infrastructure financing landscape?

A: Our ambition for FY27 is to sustain double-digit growth across our key indicators — revenue, EPS and net interest margins — while pushing our assets under management toward Rs. 5 lakh crore. We have a steady pipeline and emerging opportunities in sectors such as urban mobility and ports that we expect will further accelerate this growth. At the same time, we remain firmly committed to our founding purpose. India is on the cusp of significant economic advancement, and as the Railways continue their rapid expansion under the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, IRFC will remain a dedicated financing partner to the Ministry of Railways. The next phase of railway infrastructure development, including future Dedicated Freight Corridors and High-Speed Rail projects, presents significant long-term financing opportunities as India builds the capacity and connectivity required to meet the mobility and logistics needs of the world's largest population.

What's changing is the scope of what 'partner to the railway ecosystem' means. We are evolving from being purely a railway financier into a diversified infrastructure financing institution that keeps Railways at its centre, while extending our expertise to the power, logistics, ports and renewable energy sectors integral to the same national growth story. With a strengthened balance sheet, a diversified portfolio, the autonomy that comes with Navratna status, and a culture of financial discipline, I am confident IRFC is well-positioned to play a much bigger strategic role in India's infrastructure financing landscape in the years ahead.

Under Manoj Kumar Dubey's stewardship, IRFC's journey from a single-mandate railway financier to a diversified, AAA-rated infrastructure financing powerhouse encapsulates a broader story of India's public sector enterprises reinventing themselves for a new economic era. With record profitability, a zero-NPA legacy intact, and an expanding footprint across broader railway eco-sytem including power, renewable energy, ports logistics and last mile connectivity IRFC's future, much like the Railways it was built to serve, remains firmly on track.

▼ GLASSHOUSE



GANDHIS GO GEN Z

After the July protests by Gen Z at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, Rahul Gandhi arrived in Prayagraj on August 8 for the Congress's 'Chhaatron Ki Goonj' programme with niece Miraya Vadra. At Anand Bhavan, the family's ancestral home that is now a museum, the 23-year-old daughter of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra joined Rahul in paying floral tributes. And at the programme, Miraya sat among the students, speaking to them and drawing considerable attention from the young crowd. Having graduated from a university in Scotland in 2025, Miraya is said to be an adventure enthusiast and is currently pursuing an instructor-level diving course. She was previously seen alongside Rahul during the Bharat Jodo Yatra and also participated in her MP mother's Wayanad poll campaign. There is no indication yet of a political debut, but her increasingly public presence is fuelling speculation of Miraya being cast as the Gandhi family's Gen Z face.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

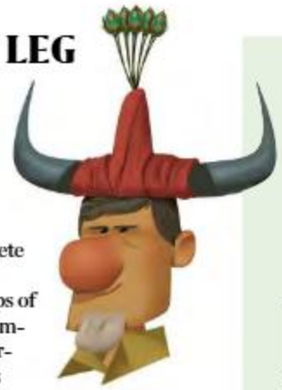
▼ TEJ-MALLIKA JUGALBANDI

MYSTERY DATE

What are Bollywood actor **Mallika Sherawat** and Bihar's perennial mystery man **Tej Pratap Yadav** doing together? A video posted on X shows Lalu Yadav's eldest son alongside Sherawat, promising, 'Coming soon...*kuchh bahut bada aane wala hai*.' After losing the assembly poll and, more recently, spending time in jail following his arrest for allegedly 'inciting' the student protests, Tej Pratap's latest has got his Bihari followers guessing again. But then, over the years, he has worn various hats, party chief, Shiv *bhakt*, Krishna *bhakt*, blogger, protester, TV personality.... Guess this is just the latest episode in the Tej Pratap reality show.



NAIDU SHAKES A LEG



Andhra Pradesh CM **N. Chandrababu Naidu**, better known for his staid demeanour, briefly broke character on August 9 as he joined the dancers at a World Tribal Day event in Vijayawada. Wearing traditional headgear complete with horns and bird feathers, Naidu beat a drum and even tried a few steps of Dhimsa, the folk dance of tribal communities along the Andhra-Odisha border. The performance came just days after the state organised a Guinness record-setting Dhimsa dance at the inauguration of Vizag International Airport at Bhogapuram on August 1. More than 13,000 tribal women and girl students participated in the 'largest Dhimsa dance' then.



MIDNIGHT PLOT

Cricketer **Rishabh Pant's** late-night appeal to Uttarakhand CM **Pushkar Singh Dhami** for land to build a house in his 'home state' produced an unusually entertaining exchange. At 12.46 am on August 8, Pant tagged Dhami on X, saying he had been trying for three years and sought the government's help in finding a suitable plot. By morning, Dhami had responded in earnest, calling Pant Uttarakhand's pride and directing officials to contact him. A midnight plea had turned into a government assurance by breakfast.

STUTTER DISGRACE



Uttar Pradesh basic education minister **Sandeep Singh** has landed in a social media storm after a video of him struggling to read a Hindi passage in the assembly went viral. In the clip, Singh falters over words, and appears to struggle to complete the passage. The video quickly drew ridicule online, with viewers questioning how he could be in charge of the education portfolio. Opposition leaders, too, seized on it to target the BJP government over the state of school education in UP. Sandeep, though, seems unaffected. He is, after all, the grandson of late CM Kalyan Singh and son of BJP MP Rajveer Singh.

Kaushik Deka with Ashish Misra, Amitabh Srivastava, Prasad Nichenametla and Avaneesh Mishra

ECO WATCH

INDIA'S ELECTRICITY SUPPLY STILL LOW ON CLEAN POWER

By **Jumana Shah**

India has crossed a milestone it had promised for 2030. In late July, the government informed Parliament that non-fossil sources made up 54.2 per cent of the country's installed electricity capacity. Of the total 548.9 GW, clean sources account for 297.4 GW. Solar alone contributes 162.2 GW, followed by wind (57.4 GW) and large hydro (52.1 GW).



The government also said the 'emissions intensity' of India's GDP fell 37.4 per cent by 2022 (from 2005 levels), against a 2030 target of 45 per cent.

But installed capacity is only the ability to make power. It is not the power actually produced and utilised. Central Electricity Authority (CEA) figures for April to June 2026 show that thermal plants, mostly coal, produced 70.3 per cent of India's electricity. All non-fossil sources together produced 29.5 per cent. The reason: a coal plant can run day and night while a solar panel works only when the sun shines.

The gap shows up most sharply when demand peaks. On May 21 this year, India hit an all-time peak of 270.8 GW. Renewables, including hydro, met 34 per cent of it. The remaining 66 per cent came from coal, gas and nuclear. Closing that gap needs storage, which India has very little. Batteries in operation stood at 8.7 GWh at the end of June, roughly a quarter of what the National Electricity Plan says the country needs by March 2027. Rating agency ICRA also found that a third of the 54.8 GW of recently commissioned renewable capacity is being evacuated on temporary grid access, leading to curtailment in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The easier bit of installing RE capacity is done. Now comes the tough part.

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म्युचुअल फ़ंड निवेश बाज़ार के जोखिमों के अधीन हैं, योजना से जुड़े सभी दस्तावेजों को ध्यान से पढ़ें.

THE AI EYE ON JANTAR MANTAR

Text by **PRADIP R. SAGAR**
Graphic by **TANMOY CHAKRABORTY / AI**

UPFRONT

DURING THE COCKROACH JANTA PARTY PROTEST AT JANTAR MANTAR, DELHI POLICE DEPLOYED A LAYERED SURVEILLANCE NETWORK OF AI-POWERED FACIAL-RECOGNITION CAMERAS, DRONES, SMART GLASSES AND MOBILE COMMAND SYSTEMS TO MONITOR CROWDS IN REAL TIME. OFFICIALS DESCRIBED IT AS A LAW-AND-ORDER MEASURE; CRITICS ARGUED THAT THE SCALE OF BIOMETRIC TRACKING, VIDEO RECORDING AND DATA RETENTION RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT PRIVACY AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS TO ASSEMBLE AND EXPRESS FREELY

AERIAL DRONES

- Operated by personnel positioned at nearby intersections, including Tolstoy Lane and Sansad Marg
- Carried out overhead crowd sweeps
- Real-time monitoring of surroundings

FACIAL RECOGNITION SYSTEM

- Fixed and mobile units with high-resolution cameras

100+
Cameras deployed across New Delhi district

2,800+
Individuals with criminal history flagged

- Installed at entry and exit points and other crowded areas
- Captured faces from a distance, converted them into biometric templates
- Matched against Delhi Police's Crime-Kundli database and other records, triggering alerts



WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY

AI-ENABLED SMART GLASSES

- Developed by Pune-based startup AjnaLens, first deployed during the 2026 Republic Day parade
- Integrated facial recognition, thermal imaging and live database linkage
- Instant alerts through earpiece or phone to senior officers wearing the glasses

BODY-WORN CAMERAS

- Compact, wearable devices that recorded audio, video and still images from the wearer's perspective
- Ensured independent video record of police interactions

OTHER MEASURES

- **SURVEILLANCE TOWERS:** Elevated watchtowers provided 24x7 camera coverage of the protest site
- **PRIVATE VIDEOGRAPHERS** Around 30 videographers were stationed on the ground for continuous photography

SURVEILLANCE ON WHEELS

IKSHANA

- Sanskrit for "seeing with intent", this AI-powered mobile CCTV surveillance vehicle was inducted ahead of the 2023 G20 Summit

8 Roof-mounted cameras with full rotation for 360-degree live coverage

80% Facial-match similarity threshold for flagging potential database matches

- Real-time crowd and traffic analytics
- AI face detection and recognition
- Automatic number-plate recognition
- Onboard command-and-control centre

The images have been created using AI and are for representational purposes only

DP-DRISHTI

- Mobile facial-recognition vans with high-definition CCTV cameras

3 Vans deployed in high-footfall protest zones

- Scanned dense crowds in real time
- Flagged individuals with criminal records

VINFAST | INDIA TODAY GROUP

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Electrifying India

From Mumbai's Art Deco avenues to Ahmedabad's timeless pols, we drive through two cities where history meets reinvention, discovering how India's past and electric future take shape around us

Mumbai

If you want to understand Mumbai—not the postcard version, but the real, living, breathing maximum city—you don't start at the Gateway of India. Instead, you jump into the quiet cabin of the VinFast VF 6, weave past the chaotic traffic, and meet up with Viveck Vaswani, a man who has lived, breathed, and practically produced the modern memory of this city.

Ballard Estate is where the real story of Bombay's economic engine kicked off. Built entirely by the British over a century ago around a massive shipping pier, it's a stunning labyrinth of grand colonial structures, streets with names like Calicut Street, and weathered brass nameplates still screwed into the stone. Back when commerce depended entirely on maritime traffic, this was the nervous system of the city.

As we quietly glide down the sweeping crescent of Marine Drive, the sheer visual variety of the buildings hits you. This is one of the largest clusters of Art Deco architecture in the world, and as Viveck points out, no two buildings are identical. Each facade features a distinct geometric pattern, porthole windows, and nautical lines.

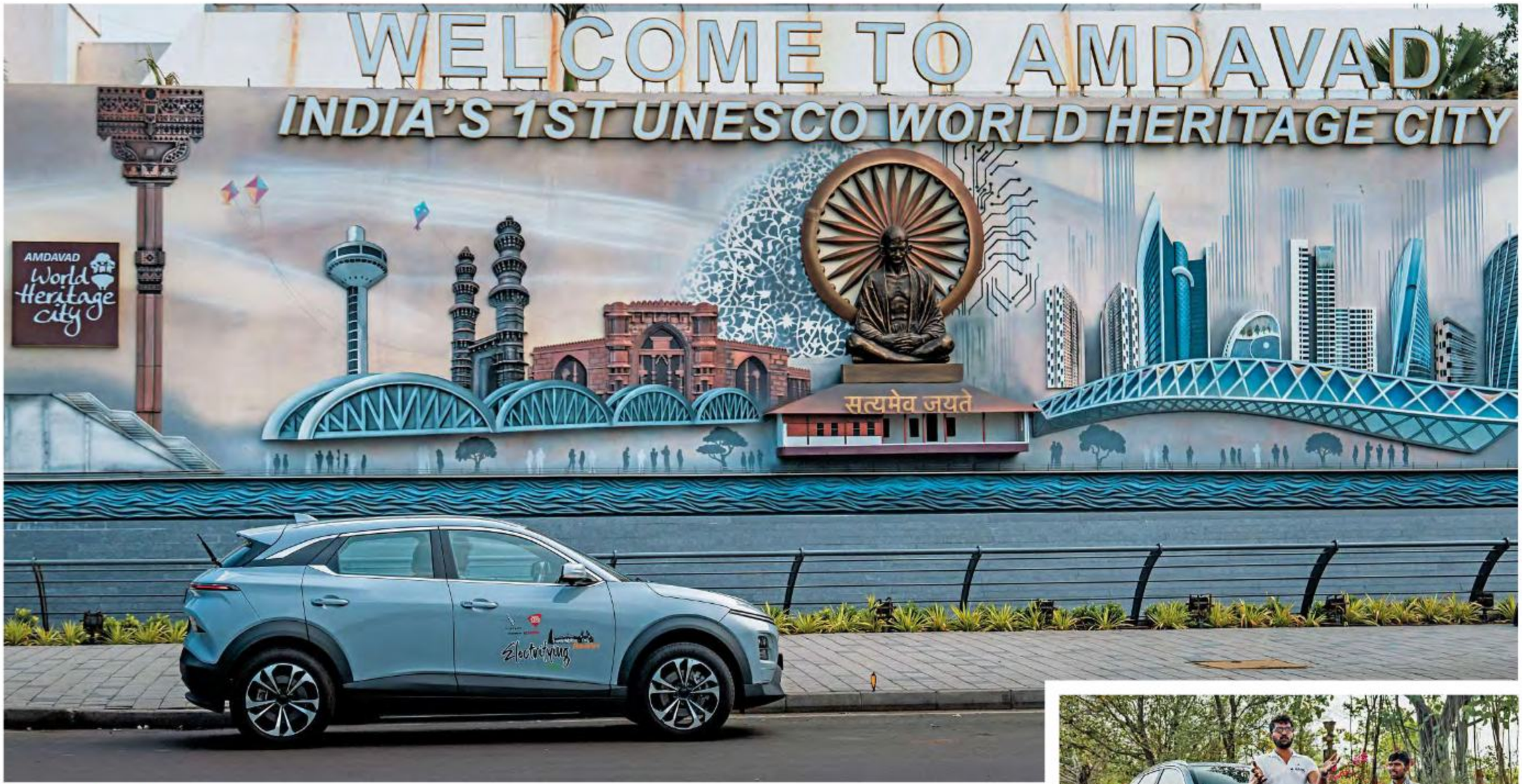
Cutting back through Churchgate, the journey enters the cultural heart of the city: Kala Ghoda. Flanked by the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya museum and the Jehangir Art Gallery, this corner became the haunt of the city's creative community, eventually evolving into a bustling art district.

To top off a morning of driving and storytelling, Viveck insists on the ultimate South Bombay culinary pilgrimage: Britannia & Co. restaurant in Ballard Estate. Over bottles of Pallonji's raspberry soda, we feast on their signature mutton berry pulao, Patra Ni Machhi and famous caramel custard. It is the perfect end to a journey that proves Mumbai isn't just an island city; it's a beautifully preserved collection of stories that never stops inspiring.



We had the priviledge of exploring Mumbai through the screens of film-maker and Bombay elite Viveck Vaswani





Ahmedabad

Imagine a city that handles a massive modern metro expansion with one hand while holding a 600-year-old architectural masterclass with the other. We're talking about Ahmedabad, India's first UNESCO World Heritage City. To get under its skin—and to see if the rather sharp VinFast VF 6 can handle the chaotic poetry of its historical heart—we teamed up with Aniruddh Thakore, the man behind the 'Apni Dharohar' Instagram handle that aims to preserve the heritage of this city's evolution through walking tours.

Our first proper pitstop is the grand gateway of the old walled city. Tucked into a dusty corner is a flickering flame, the Akhand Jyot, dedicated to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Aniruddh retells the local lore—a royal guard caught a mysterious woman trying to sneak out of the gates late at night.

As we silently cruised across the Sabarmati river in the VF 6, Aniruddh dropped a brilliant bit of philosophy. He reckons the river is the absolute present tense. Cross it one way, and you are stepping out of a time machine into the ancient past; cross it the other, and you are launching straight into a futuristic metropolis.

In the old city, we parked up and went on foot into the Pols—these tightly packed, labyrinthine housing clusters that make up the Old City. Here, we stumbled upon a "live memorial" for Dalpatram, a legendary 19th-century Gujarati poet and social reformer. Instead of some unapproachable bronze statue on a high pedestal, this lifelike figure sits casually on a traditional porch—Otlo.

To wrap up the journey, we drove out of the city limits to witness the spectacular Adalaj Stepwell—Adalaj ni Vav. Built over 450 years ago by Queen Rudabai, it's essentially an upside-down underground temple built five stories down into the earth to give weary travellers a cool sanctuary and a drink of water. It is stunning, engineered to perfection, and proof that while the cars might be switching to electricity, Ahmedabad's unmatched spirit of hospitality remains the same as it was centuries ago.



ADANI FOUNDATION AT 30:
DR PRITI ADANI ON HOW *SEVA* MUST KEEP EVOLVING



Marking the Adani Foundation's 30th anniversary, Chairperson Dr Priti Adani reflects on its journey and the evolving purpose of seva

Dr Priti Adani, Chairperson, Adani Foundation, with participants of Swabhimaan at the "Swabhimaan – The Rise of She" event in Mumbai on March 12.

Three acres of land once defined the limits of Mahadev Jana's future.

In Tentuliadia village in Odisha's coastal Bhadrak district, seasonal paddy cultivation and labour-intensive shrimp farming kept the family afloat but left little room to plan beyond the next harvest. That changed in 2022 when the Adani Foundation's livelihood intervention reached his village.

With technical guidance from the Foundation, the social welfare and development arm of the Adani Group, Mahadev adopted natural farming and diversified into horticultural crops. Three acres that had barely sustained his family became a productive farm. An investment of ₹40,000 in vegetable cultivation earned him a net profit of ₹1.3 lakh within a year. Today, farmers from neighbouring villages visit his fields to learn from his experience, and Mahadev has become a mentor to others embracing sustainable agriculture.

His story reflects the purpose behind the Adani Foundation's work: not simply to address today's needs, but to build the confidence, capabilities and opportunities that help individuals and communities shape a better tomorrow. When one farmer discovers a more resilient way to cultivate, the impact reaches beyond a single family to neighbours, future generations and the land itself.

Mahadev's farm is one of thousands of places where that change has taken root.

Growing with India

Over the past three decades, the Foundation has expanded its work across more than 7,200 villages in 22 states, positively impacting over 13 million lives. The numbers tell one part of the story. Mahadev's thriving farm explains the rest.

When the Shri Shantilal Bhudarmal Adani Charitable Trust was established in Mundra, Gujarat, in 1996, many communities were still waiting for schools, healthcare and basic infrastructure. Three decades later, aspirations have evolved. Families seek opportunity. Parents want their children to go further than they could. Young people pursue meaningful careers. Farmers look for livelihoods resilient to changing weather, while women seek financial independence and a stronger voice in shaping their families' futures.

The Foundation has evolved alongside these aspirations, guided by the belief of Shri Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group, and Dr Priti Adani, Chairperson of the Foundation, that progress becomes meaningful when it strengthens people and communities. Rooted in the spirit of *Seva*, its work creates pathways to dignity, self-reliance and lasting opportunity.

Building Human Potential

Education remains at the heart of the Foundation's work because every child who learns today is better equipped to shape tomorrow. Across 42 Foundation-run schools in 13 states, including four Adani Vidya Mandirs providing free quality education to academically gifted children from underprivileged families, more than 33,000 students are preparing for brighter futures.

The effort extends beyond Foundation schools. Through Project Utthan, more than 1,200 government schools are strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy for over 1.78 lakh students.

Learning also extends beyond the classroom. Through Project Udaan, more than 6.5 lakh students across 24 locations have visited Adani Group businesses, often seeing a port, airport, refinery, defence facility or power plant for the first time. Inspired by Shri Gautam Adani's childhood visits to Kandla Port, the initiative broadens horizons by exposing young minds to careers they may never have imagined.

Health is equally essential to unlocking opportunity.



"When I look back at these 30 years, I remember people, not numbers... That is the true meaning of *seva*."
– Dr Priti Adani,
Chairperson, Adani Foundation

Across 14 states, Mobile Health Care Units bring doctors and essential healthcare closer to remote communities, serving more than five lakh people annually. Rural clinics, preventive health camps and specialised eye care programmes improve access to quality healthcare while Project SuPoshan has helped more than 90,000 children overcome undernutrition, giving them a healthier start to life.

Where Opportunity Takes Root

Education and healthcare can change the course of a life. A dependable livelihood gives families the confidence to plan for the future.

Today, more than 57,000 farmers have adopted natural farming across 49,800 acres, improving soil health, lowering cultivation costs and making agriculture more resilient. Along India's coastline, fishing communities are strengthening livelihoods through skill development and alternative income opportunities.

For many young people, that journey begins with employable skills. Across 15 states, Adani SAKSHAM has equipped more than two lakh youth with industry-relevant technical and entrepreneurial skills through 35 training centres, enabling many to secure employment while others have built enterprises of their own.

In Churdi village of Maharashtra's Gondia district, Kiran Harinkhede has experienced what sustainable livelihoods can achieve. Scientific breeding, better animal healthcare and technical guidance through the Foundation's Livestock Development Centre transformed a modest dairy operation into a dependable enterprise. Her livestock now produces 25 to 28 litres of milk daily, earning ₹20,000 to ₹22,000 every month. The additional income enabled her son to complete college, while her daughter is pursuing higher education. Across its areas of operation, the Foundation's dairy initiatives now facilitate the collection of more than 22,000 litres of milk every day, supporting a value chain with an annual turnover of ₹96.6 crore.

Hundreds of kilometres away in Kutch, Gujarat, Devalben Gadhvi represents another dimension of transformation. Since joining the Foundation in 2012, she has helped establish 80 Self Help Groups, creating livelihood opportunities for more than 5,000 women through embroidery, handicrafts, food processing and pottery.

What began as small savings groups has grown into a network of women who earn incomes, access government schemes, make financial decisions and lead within their communities. Her journey reflects the Foundation's evolution from enabling women's empowerment to championing women-led empowerment, where women are not participants of change but its architects.

That philosophy underpins Swabhimaan, the Foundation's flagship women-led entrepreneurship programme. Launched by Dr Priti Adani in Maharashtra, it enables women to save collectively, access formal credit, build enterprises and support one another's growth. Building on its early success, the Foundation has committed to empowering 10 lakh women entrepreneurs across India, with the goal of helping one lakh women become Lakhpati Didis over the next five years.

Building Resilient Communities

The same long-term approach shapes the Foundation's work on climate action and community development. Through water conservation initiatives, it has created 16.57 billion litres of additional water storage capacity, helping several villages become water positive. It has also planted 23 lakh saplings, strengthening biodiversity, restoring ecosystems and creating healthier environments for future generations.

Alongside environmental initiatives, the Foundation has improved rural infrastructure by building roads, renovating government schools, establishing smart classrooms and creating community assets that enhance connectivity, learning and quality of life.

Reflecting on the Foundation's three-decade journey, Dr Priti Adani says the greatest privilege has been witnessing ordinary people achieve extraordinary things when given an opportunity.

"When I look back at these 30 years, I remember people, not numbers. I remember a child who stayed in school, a woman who found the confidence to earn and a farmer who looked at the next season with hope. That is the true meaning of *Seva*."

Ultimately, the Foundation's legacy is measured not only in statistics but in families who now see opportunity where they once saw only limitations.

1996-2026 Three Decades of Seva. Millions of Lives Transformed.

Education

43	33K+	1.78	6.5+
Foundation-run schools	students	lakh students reached through Project Utthan	Lakh students inspired through Project Udaan

Health

27	5+	90K+
Mobile Health Care Units	lakh people reached annually	children moved out of undernourishment

Livelihoods

2+	57K+	24K+
lakh youth skilled	farmers supported	women empowered

Climate & Communities

16.57	23	229
billion litres water storage created	lakh saplings planted	km of rural roads built



13,000,000+ lives impacted

7,200+ villages across **22** states

Safeguarding a Coastal Sentinel



Along Odisha's coastline, home to one of the world's largest mass nesting events of endangered Olive Ridley turtles, science is helping secure the future of an iconic marine species. The coastline is also home to the Adani Group-operated ports at Dhamra and Gopalpur, with the globally significant Rushikulya rookery located near Gopalpur. Against this backdrop, the Adani Foundation is supporting a three-year study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, to understand the turtles' movements, breeding behaviour and nesting habitat dynamics. Using advanced tracking technology, researchers are studying migration routes, dive behaviour, ocean currents and changes along the Gahirmatha coastline. The findings will help strengthen conservation planning, improve nesting habitats and support sustainable coastal management for one of India's most important marine ecosystems.

THE SHE LIST
UNDER 50

LEAD ESSAY

Women, Warriors, Winners

A worthy ensemble of 50 young, self-made female icons whose achievements can serve as a template for women across India and a beacon of hope for the nation

By **MANISHA SAROOP**

IN **a country where women form nearly half the population**, they may soon get a third of political representation in Parliament, the nation's highest legislative body. The implementation of the 2023 Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam could do more than bolster women's faith in Indian democracy. As more young women assume positions of power, they will not only shape the politics of today, but also the India of tomorrow.

Just look at grassroots institutions across the country to see the transformation women's empowerment can bring. Currently, India has some 1.45 million elected women representatives in its Panchayati Raj Institutions. That is 46 per cent of the total, the highest for women in local governance in the world. Dolly, the 36-year-old sarpanch of Sadipur village in Bihar, remembers only too well when she took over the *gram kachahari* (village court) to resolve local disputes. People would initially walk past her and toward her husband, assuming he was in charge, given how common proxy representation is a reality across India's rural swathes. But Dolly let her work speak for itself and soon left no one in doubt who was calling the shots.

In another Bihar village—Tilkari in Munger district—Bina Devi first discovered the value of financial independence herself and then proceeded to share it with women in a hundred other villages. When scientists from a neighbouring agricultural university came to train women in mushroom farming, the then Tilkari sarpanch turned the skill into an engine of enterprise not just for her own family but for women across the region.

Sometimes, a seemingly small intervention by a woman in power can go a long way in improving the everyday existence of women around her. IAS officer Hari Chandana Dasari played that role in Telangana. As district collector of Narayanpet, she observed how the local women had stopped going to the weekly market because there was nowhere for them to relieve themselves during the day. Hari Chandana had a 'She-toilet' installed at the market, and the locals can't thank her enough for it.

Dolly, Bina and Hari Chandana are among the 50 women under 50 we are featuring in our Independence Day special issue this year. As INDIA TODAY magazine completes 50 years of publication, we decided to celebrate



Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**

a different kind of national achievement this time: the rise of self-made women who are shaping and redefining India's future. These are women who have created their own success stories, with a novel idea, an innovation, a new approach, or the courage to challenge convention—all before hitting the half century mark of their lives. To get here, they have risen above their circumstance, whether of income, education, gender bias, family responsibility and, at times, self-doubt. Across domains as varied as business, science, sport, governance and cinema—they have not only broken barriers but also shown what is possible when women have the freedom to shape their own destinies. For these 50 women under 50, freedom means more than political or constitutional rights—it means economic independence, professional opportunity, creative expression and the freedom to lead. All of which makes them the ideal role models for the nearly 560 million women under 50 in India, 78 per cent of the 715 million women in India, according to UN projections.

Her Time Has Come

The writing is on the wall. Women in India have been ready for a while now to occupy their place in the sun—and mere tokenism will no longer suffice. Their struggle has always been harder, starting from birth (India has historically had an adverse sex ratio for girls) to the right to a school or college education (their literacy rate of 74.9 per cent remains lower than the 87.5 per cent for males). Campaigns such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao have gone some way in dispelling darkness, but against the entrenched patriarchy of millennia, they are destined to come up short. Life gets no better in adulthood. The old curse of child marriage persists in the country's rural hinterlands, varying from 20 per cent to 23 per cent, compared to 50 per cent a few decades ago. Crime against women remains a blot on the nation, with 1,210-1,220 such complaints being filed every day, or roughly 51 every hour.

Yet resilience is an attribute hardwired into the Indian woman, and it helps her survive the most overwhelming odds. Nowhere is it more apparent than in sports. The grind begins early, as it did for 21-year-old wrestling champ Antim Panghal, who as a 10-year-old child would wake up every day at six in the morning, travel 20 km from Bhagana in Haryana to train for 3-4 hours and then make the same journey back home. Today, she is world no. 1 in the women's 53 kg category. And who would have known that a girl from the rustic Barki Chhapar in Jharkhand, who'd win goats and chickens for her exploits with the hockey stick at the local games, would one day captain the Indian hockey team. Salima Tete did exactly that.

Success, though, is the visible part of the story. Failure is a lonelier place, and the more familiar one. But women know how to negotiate it too. They perhaps tell themselves what Indian women's cricket star all-rounder Shafali Verma tells others: "Always believe in yourself. There will be difficult times, not everything will go your way, but don't let one setback decide your future." She has been there. Excluded from the team for the 2025 ODI women's World Cup, returning as an injury replacement, and helping India win through fantastic displays with bat and ball.

HOLDING UP HALF THE SKY

715
MILLION
Number of women in India, nearly half the country's population

78
PER CENT
Women less than 50 years old, numbering around 557 million

1.45
MILLION
Elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions, 46 per cent of the total

Getting Down to Business

Success is not the first thing a woman entrepreneur chases. All she starts with is an idea, born perhaps out of an unmet need, and the conviction to pursue it. For Vineeta Singh, it was the lack of beauty products made for Indian skin tones and capable of withstanding Indian heat and humidity that became the motivation for starting a cosmetics firm, SUGAR. It wasn't easy—Vineeta had to go through rejection by a hundred investors before global private equity firm L Catterton and actor Ranveer Singh put their faith and their money in her brand. Today, she has more than 2,000 self-made women working for her and her company sells 550 products across lips, eye and skin care across 45,000 retail outlets in the country as well as online. Her lesson? "There will be enough people underestimating you. Make sure you're never one of them." In Gurugram, engineering graduate Upasana Taku's quest for a quick and easy online payments system culminated in the hugely successful MobiKwik wallet firm that she and her husband set up together.

The victory of women like Vineeta Singh and Upasana Taku is a victory for all women, as India becomes the second country in the world where women-led start-ups at-



tract the highest funding—$26 billion, to be precise. This, when, according to NASSCOM numbers, women-led start-ups comprise just 18 per cent of the entire ecosystem. This, despite gender-based discrimination, limited access to capital, underrepresentation in high-growth sectors and societal scepticism. Female labour force participation in India is still 40 per cent, well below the 79.1 per cent for men. Women aged 15-59 spent about 305 minutes per day on unpaid domestic services in 2024; 41 per cent of women aged 15-59 participated in caregiving for household members. What gender parity can achieve bears repetition—it can boost India's GDP by 27 per cent, says the IMF; bringing 50 per cent of women into the active workforce can spike annual GDP growth by 1 to 1.5 percentage points, rules the World Bank.

Breaking the Mould

There are other areas where women are still ploughing a lonely furrow. Like in science and technology. Female presence in the country's research workforce remains woefully inadequate at a mere 18.6 per cent of the total—in China, it is 45.8 per cent; in the US, 27-35 per cent. But then some women prefer the quiet. Like in the wilderness. Barkha Subba found her calling there, taking up the cause of saving the Himalayan Salamander, the small, brightly-coloured lizard-like semi-aquatic amphibian. Ornithologist Parveen Shaikh did the same for the endangered Indian Skimmer, a riverine bird with its bright-orange scissors-bill, and both won the prestigious Whitley Awards this year. "Science and conservation need more women, not only as participants, but as researchers, leaders and decision-makers," says Dr Subba.

Women are indeed breaking barriers everywhere, even in our male-dominated defence forces. Theirs may currently be just a foot in the door: 3.8 per cent officers in the Indian army, 6 per cent in the Indian Navy and 13 per cent officers in the Indian Air Force. For context, the US has 19 per cent, or 400,000 women, serving in active duty and reserve roles. But Indian women are now getting out there on the scene of battle, whether as fighter pilots or as soldiers. Squadron Leader Bhawana Kanth recently became a one-woman elite club of 'Top Gun' fighter pilots eligible to lead combat missions. Her compatriots in the navy—Lieutenant Commanders Dilna K. and Roopa A.—conquered a frontier on the high seas, becoming the first women to circumnavigate the world on a double-handed voyage.

MILES TO GO

18
PER CENT
Share of women-led or -founded startups in the entire ecosystem

16.7-20
PER CENT
Female presence in the country's research workforce, compared to 45.8 per cent in China and 27-35 per cent in US

11,000
WOMEN
officers in the Indian defence forces: 3.8 per cent of them in the Indian army, 6 per cent in the navy and 13 per cent in the air force

12-15
PER CENT
Key creative and leadership positions women hold in the Indian media and entertainment industry

The Creative Cohort

When it comes to the arts, women play an outsized role in keeping alive a nation's cultural heritage, whether it is popular entertainment or the classical arts. Kapila Venu is doing exactly that with Koodiyattam, a 2,000-year-old Kerala theatre tradition that is not just physically demanding but also a test of endurance, with a single performance sometimes going up to a month. In cinema, voices from the margins are increasingly making themselves heard, like the award-winning northeastern filmmakers Tribeny Rai and Rima Das. Also breaking Bollywood's stranglehold are heroines of south Indian cinema—Rashmika Mandanna and Kalyani Priyadarshan—who are seamlessly wooing audiences across linguistic barriers.

But while much has changed, much has also remained the same. An outsider in Bollywood still has to work doubly harder than a child born in the industry. #MeToo is a reality that has not gone anywhere. Pay parity with male counterparts remains a distant dream, especially for the countless artistes who work behind the scenes. The situation is no better at the leadership level; women hold only about 12-15 per cent of key creative and leadership positions—such as heads of department, directors, writers, and senior executive roles—in the Indian media and entertainment industry. It's a situation that women have long accepted. Many have chosen the indie route, others are going OTT, and a select few are fighting it out. Like Sanya Malhotra. She has built enough equity through grit and gumption to be her own woman in the big bad world of Bollywood. "Most women often suffer from the imposter syndrome," she says. "Kick it away. Trust yourself and your gut feeling." It's a worthy thought for women across the country this Independence Day, and in the years to come. ■

CCRUM TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT@2047

Advancing Evidence-Based Unani Medicine through Innovation, Research and Integrative Healthcare



Shri Prataprao Jadhav
Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Ministry of Ayush and Minister of State in Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

India's vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 envisages a nation that is not only economically strong and technologically advanced but also healthier, self-reliant, and globally respected for its knowledge systems. As healthcare evolves towards a preventive, personalized and integrative model, India's traditional systems of medicine are poised to play an increasingly important role in addressing emerging health challenges. Among these, the Unani System of Medicine, with its holistic philosophy, individualized approach and centuries-old clinical wisdom, offers immense potential to complement conventional healthcare in promoting wellness, preventing disease and managing illnesses.

The Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine (CCRUM), an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, has been at the forefront of translating this potential into scientific reality. Since its establishment in 1978, the Council has built a national network of 24 peripheral institutes dedicated to multidisciplinary research encompassing clinical, preclinical, fundamental, literary, drug standardization and medicinal plant research.

Today, the Council's vision extends beyond preserving traditional medical heritage. It seeks to position Unani medicine as a scientifically validated, globally recognized healthcare system capable of contributing meaningfully to national priorities and the objectives of the National Health Policy, 2017.

Expanding Access through Integrative Healthcare

As India progresses towards Viksit Bharat@2047, under the visionary leadership of Shri Narendra Modi Hon'ble Prime Minister, equitable access to quality healthcare remains a national priority. CCRUM has expanded the reach of evidence-based Unani medicine through its 24 peripheral institutes, which serve as centres for patient care, clinical research, education and public health. With a special focus on rural populations, urban slums and socially disadvantaged communities, the Council delivers healthcare through mobile OPDs, health camps, school health programmes and community outreach initiatives.

CCRUM has also strengthened the integration of Unani medicine with mainstream healthcare through multidisciplinary research and collaborations with premier scientific institutions, creating an evidence-based framework that combines traditional knowledge with biomedical sciences.

Building Scientific Credibility through Evidence-Based Research

Scientific validation remains the cornerstone of CCRUM's mission. Clinical research has generated evidence on the safety and efficacy of Unani interventions, particularly for chronic and lifestyle disorders, while preclinical research has established scientific evidence for numerous single drugs and compound formulations through pharmacological, toxicological and safety evaluations.

Strengthening Quality Assurance through Modern Infrastructure

To enhance quality, safety and global acceptance, CCRUM has strengthened its research and healthcare infrastructure. Several hospitals and laboratories have received NABH and NABL accreditation, while pharmacies at NRIUMSD, Hyderabad and RRIUM, Chennai have received GMP certification. Advanced In-Silico Drug Discovery Laboratories and state-of-the-art Preclinical Research Laboratories, equipped with modern technologies including AI-assisted computational tools, are further advancing drug discovery and scientific research.

Advancing Standards and Innovation

Standardization has been central to CCRUM's efforts to mainstream Unani medicine through pharmacopoeial standards, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Standard Treatment Guidelines (STGs). Evidence-based STGs for Musculoskeletal and Metabolic Disorders have been developed, while STGs for Dermatological Disorders are under publication by Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The Council has also published SOPs for Hijāma (Cupping Therapy) and other regimens under Ilāj bi"l Tadbīr, reinforcing safe and uniform clinical practice. A standardized Mizāj (Temperament) Assessment Tool, developed through expert consultations, validation and pilot testing, is now ready for multicentric validation studies.

Innovation Driving the Future of Unani Medicine

Innovation has become a defining feature of CCRUM's research strategy. The Council has secured 19 patents, while additional patent applications have received approvals from the National Biodiversity Authority. Recent provisional patents cover novel Unani formulations for glaucoma management, hepatoprotective and antioxidant therapies, and herbal vaginal insertable capsule compositions.

Digital Transformation and Global Collaboration

Digital transformation is a key pillar in the modernization of Unani healthcare. The implementation of the Ayush Hospital Management Information System (A-HMIS) and NAMASTE Portal across peripheral institutes has streamlined patient care, hospital management and health data generation. Mobile and web-based applications covering single drugs, compound formulations, treatment guidelines, Mizāj assessment, common remedies and Unani Aahar are also empowering practitioners, students, researchers and the public with reliable information.

At the global level, CCRUM is positioning India as a leader in evidence-based traditional medicine through international collaborations with academic and research institutions in Bangladesh, Tajikistan,



Dr. N. Zaheer Ahmed
Director General, CCRUM

South Africa, Iran and the UAE. Through the Ministry of Ayush, the Council has also contributed to WHO initiatives related to global benchmarks for Unani training and practice, international Unani terminologies, integration of AYUSH morbidity codes into ICD-11 and the ongoing development of traditional medicine intervention code sets for the International Classification of Health Interventions (ICHI).

Promoting Healthy Living & Nurturing Future Unani Researchers

CCRUM is advancing preventive healthcare through Unani Aahar products, including Qahwa, Hareera and barley-based foods, while strengthening research and commercialization. Simultaneously, it is nurturing the next generation of Unani researchers through M.D., Ph.D., UG-SPUR and PG-SPUR programmes, fostering scientific aptitude, research capacity and evidence-based advancement of Unani medicine.

As India moves towards Viksit Bharat@2047, CCRUM remains committed to building a future where Unani medicine contributes meaningfully to universal health coverage, preventive healthcare and global health. By bridging tradition with technology and research with clinical practice, the Council is positioning Unani medicine as a scientifically validated and globally relevant healthcare system for the twenty-first century.



THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **ENTREPRENEURS**

Lab to Landmark

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Ameera transformed Metropolis from a single laboratory in Mumbai into India's second-largest diagnostics chain, and champions women entrepreneurs

When Ameera Shah joined her father's pathology practice in 2001, it was still a doctor-led business built from a single laboratory in Mumbai. Shah, a finance graduate from the University of Texas at Austin, began in customer service, learning the business from the ground up. Over the next two decades, she transformed it into Metropolis Healthcare, currently India's second-largest diagnostics chain, operating across more than 750 towns. Along the way, she raised three rounds of private equity and took the company public in 2019. In FY26, group revenue grew 23.6 per cent to Rs 1,646 crore.

The past couple of years, however, have seen Shah step back to focus on more strategic decisions. In 2024, she moved from managing director to executive chairperson. "There were years when I worked 15-16 hours a day," Shah recalls. "Stepping back was difficult, but I felt that what the company needed from me now was different." Her job, she says, is increasingly to provide direction for the next chapter. "When a company is as old as Metropolis, you have to keep innovating."

That vision is already visible. Metropolis has been pushing deeper into genomics, next-generation sequencing and specialised diagnostics, while expanding through three acquisitions—Core Diagnostics in Delhi-NCR, Scientific Pathology in Agra and Dr Ahuja's Pathology & Imaging Centre in Dehradun.

Stepping away has also made room for a life beyond the laboratory. Shah has many interests—tennis, trekking and sailing, learning Kathak and being an enthusiastic reader. There is also another pursuit increasingly competing for her attention: creating opportunities for other women. As co-founder and chair of women's entrepreneurship at the Udaiti Foundation, Shah has been working since April 2025 to get more Indian women into the workforce and help women-led businesses grow. The foundation, set up in 2002, uses data, policy and partnerships to address the barriers that prevent women from participating fully in the economy.

AMEERA SHAH, 46
Executive Chairperson, Metropolis Healthcare Ltd
Mumbai

For Shah, those barriers often begin long before a woman enters an office. Metropolis, where around 44 per cent of the workforce is female, has given her a place to put some of her thinking into practice. Education, however, is what she believes is the starting point. "Women also need the confidence to use it," she says, recalling a time when she introduced herself as a businesswoman only to hear, "But why do you work when you are so pretty?" That is the mindset her work promoting young women to start and lead their businesses is striving to change. ■

— Sonali Acharjee

HER TAKE

"A working woman is still not mainstream in India. Girls get great degrees, sometimes only as part of marriage negotiations. We need women to be educated, but also bold enough to pursue their professional ambitions"

Photograph by **MANDAR DEODHAR**



MANDAR DEODHAR

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE ENTREPRENEURS

The Wealth Builder

RADHIKA GUPTA, 42
MD & CEO
Edelweiss Asset Management
Mumbai

For Radhika Gupta, the journey to leading one of India's fastest-growing asset management companies (AMCs) began long before she entered the world of finance. The daughter of an Indian Foreign Service officer, she spent much of her childhood moving across countries. The turning point came when she landed a job at McKinsey in the US after seven job interview rejections. A few years later, she married Nalin Moniz, whom she had met while studying economics at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. The couple moved to India in 2009 to start Forefront Capital Management, an alternative asset management boutique. Edelweiss Financial Services bought the company in 2014, and in 2017, at the age of 33, she became CEO of Edelweiss Asset Management, one of the youngest CEOs in the country's BFSI (Banking, Financial Services and Insurance) sector. Ever since, the company has grown nearly 30 times, making it one of the fastest-growing AMCs.

"What makes me the happiest is not just the numbers but the consistency with which we have delivered, both in terms of investment performance and customer experience," she says. That has been done on the back of a wide product range, from actively managed and passive funds to global offerings, Specialised Investment Funds (SIFs) and GIFT City products. This love for variety is evident in her collection of 300-plus saris, each representing a different handloom and craft tradition of India. Bringing the same breadth to investment opportunities has helped the company evolve from a fixed-income-focused AMC into a much more equity-focused one. Its SIP (Systematic Investment Plan) book, in fact, is among the fastest-growing in the industry, crossing Rs 700 crore as of July 31.

Beyond Edelweiss, Gupta is passionate about simplifying finance for the *aam janata*. She believes asset management is a profession with a larger purpose. "We are not only responsible for building businesses but also for educating and engaging investors," she says. That philosophy has led her to coin relatable concepts such as "*dal-chawal* investing", even as her book, *Mango Millionaire*, went on to become a national bestseller.

Her biggest challenge, however, has been to innovate while operating at scale and in the public eye. Post the *Shark Tank* era, Radhika has become a well-known public figure. "Balancing growth, responsibility, visibility and innovation has, therefore, been one of my most significant leadership challenges," she says. ■

— Sonal Khetarpal

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

From the time she took over in 2017, Radhika led Edelweiss from strength to strength, its assets under management touching over Rs 1.80 lakh crore as of Mar. 31, from around Rs 6,000 crore as of Mar. 31, 2017

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"The glass ceiling is often much bigger in our minds than it is in reality. Don't spend too much time worrying about it. Go out there, challenge your own limitations, and break the barriers you have created for yourself. Most importantly, develop a positive relationship with ambition"

BEYOND LOVE: WHY PRECISE NUTRITION AND PAEDIATRIC CARE SHAPE YOUR PET'S LIFETIME HEALTH

Bringing home a new puppy or kitten is a joyous milestone. As pet owners, our first instinct is to shower our pets with love, warmth, and comfort. However, when it comes to their health and daily feeding, love alone is not enough to sustain their rapid physical and cognitive development.



In India, where packaged pet food adoption remains at less than 15%, most puppies and kittens are raised primarily on home-cooked meals. While these meals are prepared with the utmost affection, scientific research reveals a critical gap: up to 95% of home-cooked meals are nutritionally incomplete for pets[1]. While a standard home-cooked bowl of chicken and rice may seem like a wholesome choice, it typically provides only 10 to 15 essential nutrients in the right balance[2] – whereas puppies[3] and kittens[4] need 35+ essential nutrients to support healthy growth and development.

The Critical Growth Window

The first year of a pet's life represents a period of extraordinary growth, and their nutritional requirements look vastly different from those of human infants or adult pets.

Key milestones during this critical window include:

Brain Development: Nearly 80% of a pet's brain development happens within the first 4 months of life. To support this rapid cognitive growth, precise levels of Omega-3 Fatty Acid (DHA) is absolutely essential.

Immune System Support: During **first 4-12 weeks age,** maternal antibodies provided through "Coloustrum" naturally decline and fall even below the protective threshold making puppies & kittens highly vulnerable to acquiring the infection. Science-backed nutrients like **Vitamin C, Vitamin E, Lutein,** and **Taurine** act as an antioxidant and along with **L-arginine & Beta-carotene** support to bolster their developing natural defences and helps to bridge this **"Immunity-Gap".** Puppies and kittens develop nearly **80% of their immune system** in their first year. Nutrients like **Beta-glucans** help to enhance the antibody production to ensure greater immune response.

Digestive Health: A pet's gut does far more than digest food; a significant portion of their immune system is linked to the digestive tract. Building a healthy gut environment early in life prevents chronic digestive sensitivities down the road.

Bridging the Gap: The Paediatric Approach

Recognizing the critical need for early-life awareness, Royal Canin has launched a nationwide 360-degree campaign with a thoughtful provocation: *"Love is the #1 ingredient, but your puppies & kitten need 35+ nutrients more."* The campaign urges pet owners to transition from reactive care to proactive, science-backed prevention.

To support this journey, Royal Canin has partnered with veterinary professionals through the **Paediatric Veterinary Care Program.** This initiative encourages new pet owners to schedule early vet visits by offering a free or discounted first consultation. During these visits, veterinarians employ structured paediatric protocols—such as growth charts, Body Condition Scoring (BCS), Muscle Condition Scoring (MCS)—to monitor growth, check weight, administer timely vaccinations, and recommend tailored diets.

Investing in science-backed precise nutrition and professional guidance during the pets' start of life stage is the greatest act of care we can offer, ensuring our companions grow into healthy, thriving partners for life.

— By Dr. Vishal Dangle,
Scientific Communication Manager, Royal Canin



1. (Stockman J, 2003)
2. (disclaimer.findroyalcanin.com, n.d.)
3. (ROYAL CANIN®, n.d.)
4. (ROYAL CANIN®, n.d.)

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE ENTREPRENEURS

An Inner Statement

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

A trailblazer in retail who transformed lingerie into fashion, Kar is one of India's most successful female entrepreneurs and a mentor to newbies

Few entrepreneurs can lay claim to ushering in transformation in their chosen fields. Richa Kar did exactly that. In 2011, when she set up Zivame, an e-commerce venture for women's lingerie, not only was the idea unheard of, no one spoke about lingerie in the open. In fact, even getting customer reviews was difficult. "Nobody wanted others to know what you bought, right? It was such a taboo," she recalls.

There were other hurdles for Kar, who grew up in Jamshedpur, earned a BE in Civil Engineering from BITS Pilani and completed an MBA at Narsee Monji Institute of Management Studies in 2007. Before she started out, the product line-ups in the market were few and choice was limited. Besides, quality products made of polyamide and with high workmanship were available only as imports by western brands. "Now, all of that is made in India. Manufacturing capability has grown in the past 10 years," she says. "There's enough and more choice right now."

Essentially, Kar brought lingerie out of the closet and made it into a fashion category. "Now, it's no longer taboo. Women have made it into how they want to express themselves. To be able to go on social media to make reels about what they are buying is a huge change," she says. "Leave aside the business, the socio-cultural change that Zivame brought about to say it is OK to talk about this, it's not a taboo, not *'chhi-chhi'* or something like that, is a big transformation. To me, anything else I do will never ever come close to this. That's my biggest win."

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"Don't wait till you feel fully confident. Often, confidence and clarity come with action, not before it"

Kar exited Zivame in 2020 when Reliance Retail acquired the business. She subsequently founded a neutraceuticals venture, but later exited that as well. Her story, though, remains an inspiration for budding entrepreneurs, many of whom reach out to her for advice or mentorship. "A lot of women entrepreneurs reach out to me on how to navigate when things are a little challenging," says Kar, who became an entrepreneur at age 30 after stints in brand marketing and in retail consultancy. "Once you've built a business, you have a different perspective, which people value. I'm happy to contribute." The startup ecosystem has changed, she acknowledges, but adds that the current crop of entrepreneurs is also a savvy lot. ■

— Ajay Sukumaran

RICHA KAR, 46
Founder, Zivame
Bengaluru

Photograph by **ANIRUDDH KAUSHAL**



UPASANA TAKU, 46
Co-founder, Executive Director & CFO, MobiKwik
Gurugram

—ARDIK OHHABRA

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE ENTREPRENEURS

Queen of Payments

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"Believe in your ideas and pursue them with confidence; view obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow; surround yourself with mentors and peers who support and challenge you; persevere through setbacks and remain focused on your goals; and share your experiences to inspire and guide the next generation"

Working as a senior product manager at PayPal in San Jose, Upasana Taku witnessed first-hand how online payments were evolving in the US. So, when India began seeing a boom in e-commerce, she was ready. The Stanford graduate, born into a middle-class Kashmiri Pandit family settled in Gujarat's Gandhidham, went to school in Surat and studied engineering at NIT Jalandhar before moving to the US for a master's. She eventually returned to India in 2008 to set up an online payments system that would be quick and easy. That became the wallet firm MobiKwik, which she founded in 2009 with Bipin Preet Singh, whom she had met while watching a play in Delhi.

From co-founders, Bipin and Upasana soon became life partners too. In the early days, Upasana took on multiple roles—from writing website content and product specifications to coding, drafting press releases and even making offer letters. Even today, the couple continue to switch responsibilities; what hasn't changed is Upasana's focus on how the company manages its own finances and the people it hires. As CFO, she has ensured strong financial fundamentals for the business. It culminated in MobiKwik's blockbuster IPO in December 2024, which was subscribed nearly 120 times. The company's operating revenue for Q1FY27 rose to Rs 281.5 crore from Rs 271.4 crore in the same period last year.

A multitasker who enjoys swimming, cycling and reading, Upasana is leading the financial services firm to profitability. "Despite losses in the first three quarters due to headwinds in the consumer lending sector, we have been able to turn around the situation completely. In the past three quarters, we have had a hat-trick of profitable quarters at the PAT level," she says.

The company also received four new licences over the past year, two for its existing online merchant acquiring and offline payment aggregator businesses and two for its next phase of expansion—stockbroking and an NBFC, expected to start contributing from FY27 and broadening MobiKwik from a payments platform into a financial services provider. "It's a big vote of confidence from the regulator for our company," she says. Her next milestone? Making MobiKwik one of the top 10 UPI apps in the country from No. 12 currently. ■

— Sonal Khetarpal

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Upasana is one of India's earliest women fintech entrepreneurs who helped build the country's digital payments ecosystem

GMDC
Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation Ltd.
(A Government of Gujarat Enterprise)
FUELING THE GROWTH

FOCUS MINERALS



EMPOWERING WOMEN ENRICHING COMMUNITIES

The true strength of a community is reflected in the opportunities available to its women. Better healthcare, education, skills and livelihoods create a ripple effect that extends to families, villages and future generations. At Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation (GMDC), this belief shapes our approach to inclusive growth. By placing women at the centre of these efforts, we are helping remove barriers to opportunity, strengthen families and contribute to more inclusive development.

Transforming Lives Through Women's Healthcare



Women specific healthcare has become an integral part of GMDC's effort through CSR that transforms lives.

Gynaecological consultations, menstrual health awareness initiatives and the presence of female healthcare staff have helped create a more approachable healthcare environment, encouraging greater participation by women.

Today, women account for 59.1% of all consultations through our Mobile Medical Units, reflecting the confidence these services have earned within the communities we serve.

We also believe that good health begins with awareness. Alongside medical services, we conduct Social Health Education programmes covering maternal health, nutrition, anaemia, diabetes, menstrual hygiene, breastfeeding, oral hygiene and healthy lifestyles, helping women and families make informed health choices and adopt preventive healthcare practices. Menstrual hygiene awareness programmes, complemented by sanitary pad distribution initiatives benefiting more than 13,000 women and adolescent girls, are further encouraging healthier practices within communities.

Creating Opportunitiesfor Unrealised Potential

We believe meaningful development begins with education and grows through skills, livelihoods and equal access to opportunity. Through partnerships with institutions such as Atul Vidyalaya and DAV Schools, we support stronger learning environments for children living around our areas of operation.

Dedicated transport facilities help ensure that distance and safety do not become barriers to education, particularly for girls, allowing them to continue their studies with greater confidence. Learning is further strengthened through the Samarthya Skill Development Programme, which equips young people with practical skills that improve employability and prepare them for future opportunities. We are also working towards creating greater opportunities for women through entrepreneurship initiatives that encourage financial independence and sustainable livelihoods, enabling them to participate more actively in local economies. Street lighting and community infrastructure further improve safety and mobility, creating environments where women can learn, work and participate more confidently in community life.

Women Leading Change

Our commitment to inclusion extends beyond the communities we serve. Women contribute across healthcare management, environmental functions and leadership roles within our Environmental, Social and Governance initiatives, bringing diverse perspectives to programmes that shape both community wellbeing and responsible mining practices.

Every woman who gains access to healthcare, every girl who continues her education, every young person who develops new skills and every family that builds a more secure future becomes part of a larger story of progress. We continue to contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, ensuring that responsible mining goes hand in hand with responsible upliftment of women across the areas we operate.



DR. NAFEESA AHMED: REDEFINING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITH PURPOSE, PASSION AND POSSIBILITY

"Leadership is not about preserving institutions as they are; it is about preparing them for the future while staying true to the values that built them." **This philosophy defines the journey of Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed, Vice Chairperson of the Presidency Group of Institutions, one of India's most respected educational institutions.**

At a time when education is being reshaped by technology, changing aspirations, and global perspectives, Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed represents a new generation of women leaders who are redefining what leadership looks like. She seamlessly blends tradition with innovation, strategy with empathy, and institutional excellence with a deeply human approach to leadership.

As Vice Chairperson of the Presidency Group of Institutions, she is responsible for guiding one of India's largest education ecosystems, overseeing multiple campuses, thousands of students, educators, and support staff. Yet, beyond the titles and responsibilities lies a leader who believes that the true measure of success is not merely the number of institutions built, but the number of lives transformed.

Carrying Forward a Legacy While Creating Her Own

For many second-generation leaders, the greatest challenge is stepping out of an established legacy while honouring it. Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed has accomplished precisely that.

Inspired by the vision of her father, **Dr. Nissar Ahmed,** Founder and Chairman of the Presidency Group, she embraced stewardship over inheritance. Rather than simply preserving what already existed, she has thoughtfully reimagined it for a new era.

Under her leadership, the Presidency Group has strengthened its focus on holistic education, global exposure, innovation-driven learning, sustainability, and future-ready curricula. She has championed experiential learning, technology integration, student wellbeing, international collaborations, and continuous curriculum renewal, ensuring that Presidency remains relevant in an increasingly dynamic educational landscape.

Her strength lies in understanding that educational excellence is never static. Schools must evolve as society evolves.

A Leader Who Never Stopped Learning

One of the defining characteristics of Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed's journey is her unwavering commitment to lifelong learning.

Recently, she completed the prestigious **INSEAD Leadership Programme for Senior Executives,** one of the world's most respected executive leadership programmes. Learning alongside global business leaders, entrepreneurs, and policymakers expanded her perspective on organisational transformation, innovation, and leadership in a rapidly changing world.

Instead of viewing education only through an academic lens, the programme strengthened her understanding of building agile institutions capable of responding to future challenges.

Her academic journey reflects the same curiosity and commitment to excellence. She holds degrees in Business Management, International Management, English Literature, and a Bachelor of Education from IGNOU. She has further enhanced her expertise through executive programmes at Harvard University and the Wharton School.

Her Ph.D. in Education Management from ESRDS, France, conferred at the House of Lords in London, reflects a rare blend of academic scholarship and practical leadership.

For Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed, learning has never been a milestone—it is a continuous journey.



Building Institutions Through People

While infrastructure, technology, and academic results often define educational success, Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed believes institutions are ultimately built by people.

Her leadership philosophy places teachers at the heart of transformation.

Recognising that empowered educators create empowered students, she has invested significantly in faculty development through continuous professional learning, international exposure, leadership training, pedagogical innovation, and mentoring initiatives.

She encourages teachers not merely to deliver lessons but to become facilitators of curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking.

Within the Presidency Group, leadership is intentionally distributed rather than concentrated. Department heads, school leaders, coordinators, and faculty members are encouraged to take ownership, innovate confidently, and contribute meaningfully to institutional growth.

This culture of trust has strengthened collaboration while creating resilient institutions capable of adapting to change.

Entrepreneurial Thinking in Education

One of Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed's most significant contributions has been bringing entrepreneurial thinking into mainstream education.

She believes today's students must graduate not only with academic knowledge but with the confidence to create opportunities, solve problems, and lead change.

Under her leadership, innovation labs, startup mentoring, industry partnerships, entrepreneurship initiatives, and experiential learning programmes have become integral components of the educational experience.

Students are encouraged to think independently, experiment fearlessly, embrace failure as learning, and develop solutions that address real-world challenges.







This entrepreneurial mindset also shapes her own leadership. Whether introducing curriculum reforms, investing in sustainable infrastructure, strengthening global collaborations, or integrating emerging technologies, her approach reflects thoughtful risk-taking grounded in long-term vision.

Leading with Empathy

In conversations about leadership, qualities like decisiveness and authority often dominate.

Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed offers a different perspective.

Her leadership is characterised by empathy, collaboration, communication, and inclusion.

She believes that listening is one of a leader's most powerful skills.

Whether interacting with teachers, students, parents, or leadership teams, she actively encourages dialogue, feedback, and shared ownership of decisions.

This people-first approach has cultivated an organisational culture where individuals feel valued, heard, and empowered.

For her, sustainable leadership is never about individual success—it is about enabling collective growth.

Balancing Leadership and Family

Behind every professional milestone lies another equally significant role—that of being a wife, daughter, and mother.

Like countless women balancing multiple responsibilities, Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed understands that leadership does not end when the workday finishes.

Managing a large educational institution while nurturing family relationships requires discipline, resilience, careful prioritisation, and unwavering support from loved ones.

She views work-life balance not as the pursuit of perfection but as the practice of being fully present wherever she is.

Her family remains her greatest source of strength, grounding her amidst the demands of leadership and reminding her of the values that shape every decision she makes.

For young women aspiring to leadership, her journey sends an important message: it is possible to build a meaningful career without losing sight of the relationships and values that matter most.

Recognition That Reflects Impact

Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed's contributions have earned widespread recognition across the education sector.

Among numerous honours, she has received the **Naari Narayani Award, the Times Power Women Award,** the **ET Power Icon Award**, and recognition from CIO Times. She was honoured as Education **Leader of the Year** by EducationWorld in 2024, **Education Icon** by Education Today in 2024, and received the **Editor's Choice Award** from Women Entrepreneurs.





While these accolades celebrate her achievements, she considers them reflections of the collective efforts of thousands of educators, staff members, students, and families who form the Presidency community.

Inspiring the Next Generation

As one of India's prominent women leaders in education, Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed believes leadership carries a larger responsibility—to inspire others.

She is passionate about encouraging young women to pursue ambitious goals with confidence, resilience, and authenticity.

Her own journey demonstrates that leadership today is no longer defined by hierarchy or authority. It is defined by purpose, continuous learning, courage, compassion, and the ability to create opportunities for others.

She believes the future belongs to leaders who can combine emotional intelligence with strategic thinking, innovation with ethics, and ambition with service.

A Story Still Being Written

Dr. Nafeesa Ahmed's story is not simply about leading one of India's premier educational groups.

It is about demonstrating how women can transform institutions while remaining deeply connected to their values.

It is about embracing lifelong learning, challenging conventional definitions of leadership, nurturing future generations, and proving that success is most meaningful when it creates opportunities for others.

As she continues to shape the future of the Presidency Group of Institutions, her influence extends far beyond classrooms and campuses. She is helping redefine educational leadership for a new India—one where institutions thrive because people do, where innovation coexists with compassion, and where women lead not by imitation, but by creating their own path.



MASABA GUPTA, 37
Fashion designer, entrepreneur and actress
Mumbai

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **ENTREPRENEURS**

A Brand of Her Own

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Masaba launched her own label, House of Masaba, in 2009, at age 19. In 2022 came her beauty and wellness brand, Lovechild by Masaba. This year, she was India's only representative on the international panel at the RLC Fashion Summit in Milan

A biracial child, born of celebrity parents, and raised in an unconventional family unit, Masaba Gupta challenges pretty much every assumption of normalcy. "I don't think people who are privileged should speak about privilege as a challenge. Pressure is a privilege, and I've always seen it that way."

Despite inheriting a life that wrote itself more like a soap opera than a fairy tale, Masaba chose to be destiny's child. The daughter of Indian actress Neena Gupta and former West Indies cricketer Viv Richards, Masaba grew up in the lap of Maximum City. "I was impatient, hungry, very keen to prove myself at a very young age, and very sure of myself. I think that's why I decided to launch my own label," she explains.

At age 19, when most young women are still figuring out love and life choices, Masaba launched her own fashion label. "I don't think this was really my calling right at the top of my head. I think it found me rather than me finding it," she says. "While I didn't know that I wanted to be an entrepreneur back then, I knew that I wanted to build a brand. Even though my mother let me experiment a little with singing and dancing, she was very clear that I should do something that had longevity attached to it. So, when I finally decided to take her advice, she was very happy."

While her mother funded everything in the beginning, Masaba admits taking decisions like these while still young has a lot to do with having the financial freedom to do so. "Many people don't have the opportunity to try different things or spend money discovering what they're good at because they need to start earning immediately and contribute to their families. I was fortunate that my mother could support me."

In the early years, she believes she may have been taken a little lightly because people assume that famous parents come with accompanying benefits, but, "over time," she says, "people respect consistency. I have continued building this brand consistently for 17 years, and I intend to keep going for as long as I can."

HER TAKE

"Your identity is beyond the kitchen, the home and managing other people's lives. We are multitaskers by nature and can do anything we set our minds to"

Among what she counts as the milestones in her journey are the Kareena Kapoor Khan bridal campaign in 2023; dressing legendary French footballer Zinedine Zidane ("I had the opportunity to dress him in an Indian sherwani"); the Aditya Birla Group's acquisition of House of Masaba in 2022, which is currently valued at Rs 360 crore and runs 20 retail stores across the country; launching LoveChild by Masaba; acting in *Masaba Masaba* ("It was incredibly fulfilling because I got to make my acting debut exactly the way I wanted to").

Marriage and a baby heading for the terrible twos keep Masaba busy these days, but not enough to forget her first love. "For House of Masaba, I see a lot more luxury and a lot less noise," she says. "We'll be sharper in our product offering and define our identity much more distinctly as we move ahead." ■

— Chumki Bharadwaj

Photograph by **MANDAR DEODHAR**

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

In a market dominated by global companies, Vineeta changed how beauty products are designed and sold to Indian consumers

Beauty, Made in India

An alumnus of IIT Madras and IIM Ahmedabad, Vineeta Singh, who was raised in Delhi, walked away from a Rs 1 crore campus placement in 2007. She was 23, and determined to build her own company. Her first two ventures—one in background verification services for recruiters and the other a monthly beauty subscription box—didn't take off. But failure perhaps taught her how to be third time lucky. SUGAR, which she started in 2015 with her husband, Kaushik Mukherjee, broke through the clutter with beauty products for Indian skin tones that could withstand Indian heat and humidity.

But it has been a rollercoaster ride. Her elder son and SUGAR were born just two months apart, and Singh recalls how tough it was to balance both roles, with Kaushik a strong source of support. Rejected by over 100 investors, Vineeta says it was particularly tough for a woman-led startup catering to women customers. The turnaround came in 2022, when global private equity firm L Catterton and actor Ranveer Singh invested in the company. "We proved that a homegrown brand could lead, not follow," she says. "We have been bold, unapologetic in our messaging that we cater to Indian skin and Indian attitude. My job is to keep pushing what 'Made in India' means in beauty—not the cheaper option but the aspirational one."

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"Be outrageously ambitious. There will be enough people underestimating you. Make sure you're never one of them"

What also helped was their early bet on social media. "That one call let a young brand reach the whole country without a war chest," says Vineeta. One of the sharks on the reality show *Shark Tank India*, her proudest milestone was when SUGAR successfully expanded offline. "We believed that Indian women want to shop for their makeup both on their phone and in their neighbourhood. So, during the COVID years, when most brands were giving up shelf space, we took the call to go offline, and that changed everything for us," she says. Today, SUGAR's 550 products across lip, eye and skin care besides other categories sell online as well as through 45,000 retail outlets—over 50 per cent of the company's business now comes from offline sales.



VINEETA SINGH, 43
Co-founder & CEO, SUGAR Cosmetics
Mumbai

HARDIK CHHABRA

Where does she find the resilience to keep moving forward or the perseverance to navigate chaos? They come from her passion for running, says Vineeta. A triathlete and ultra-marathoner, the experiences have taught her how to keep her eyes on the road and never lose sight of the finish line.

That is also what makes her an inspiration for the 2,000 ambitious, self-made women who work at SUGAR, comprising 70 per cent of the company's strength. The marathon continues, and Vineeta plans to leave behind a "bold, profitable, proudly Indian organisation that employs thousands of women". ■

— Sonal Khetarpal

The Next Indian Revolution: From Preventive to Predictive healthcare

Healthcare has traditionally been about dealing with the symptoms of sickness. This approach has contributed to saving millions of lives and will continue to do so. However, the next revolution in healthcare will not be just about improved treatments; it will also be about prevention and early detection and will be increasingly personalized as well. As India moves toward its vision of Viksit Bharat, this paradigm shift from reactive to predictive healthcare will shape the future of healthcare delivery.

From Reactive Care to Predictive Health

Healthcare in India has been rightly centered on access to medical care, but the changing disease profile in India has made it imperative that preventive medicine should receive greater importance now. Non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease are increasing steadily, making it essential that early detection and preventive medicine be emphasized. Digital health will be at the heart of this transformation. Through connected health systems and the integration of digital health records, care can move out of hospitals and become an ongoing collaboration between patients and healthcare professionals. The goal is not only about treating diseases but detecting risks early enough so that they can be prevented.



"India has the opportunity to redefine healthcare from a system that responds to disease to one that anticipates it. By combining the power of AI, data and precision medicine with the judgement and compassion of clinicians, we can move from treating people when they fall ill to helping them stay healthier for longer."

DR. AZAD MOOPEN
Founder & Executive Chairman, Aster DM Quality Care Ltd.

AI and Precision Medicine

Artificial intelligence is already changing the way in which clinicians diagnose and treat diseases, through the analysis of medical images and recognition of complex patterns. However, the future is not in the replacement of doctors by technology; rather, the future lies in providing better tools for clinicians. At Aster DM Quality Care, this philosophy is reflected through our AI Lab in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), alongside continued investments in precision oncology and advanced radiation therapy. These initiatives aim to combine technology with clinical expertise so that patients receive faster diagnoses, more personalised treatment and better outcomes.

This kind of development goes beyond oncology. Innovations in genomics, molecular diagnostics, and data-driven medicine have made it easier to deliver customized care, as opposed to just sticking to conventional care models.

Beyond Hospitals: Building Continuous Care

The future of the healthcare system is going to go well beyond the confines of a hospital environment. Future healthcare delivery is going to involve home-based care, health programs, telemedicine, and community outreach among others.

While technology can assist in bridging inequalities in access, especially among disadvantaged communities, it is crucial to have a well-developed primary care system as well as competent healthcare professionals. The community outreach programs of Aster DM Quality Care, conducted via Aster Volunteers, have benefited over eight million people. We believe that healthcare starts way before one steps into a hospital.

Technology Needs Human Expertise

Every healthcare innovation ultimately depends on the people who use it. Artificial intelligence requires clinicians who can interpret its insights responsibly. Robotics requires skilled surgeons. Precision medicine depends on researchers, pathologists and multidisciplinary teams working together.

Thus, India's chance lies not just in embracing new technology but also in improving medical education, research, and training. Success cannot merely be measured in terms of the number of procedures carried out, but how efficiently diseases can be prevented, treatments personalized, and patients made healthier for longer periods of time.

The future of healthcare does not lie in an increasingly technological hospital, but rather in a healthier society that benefits from technology, led by competent clinicians who operate in an environment where prevention holds equal importance to treatment. This is the revolution that India must take the lead in.

GUJARAT ENERGY

INDIA'S *Energy* CATALYST

- Avantika Singh Aulakh, IAS
Managing Director
Gujarat Energy Limited



As India enters 80th Year of Independence, we have less than 20 Years to achieve our common target of Viksit Bharat @2047.

How we address the aspect of ensuring India's energy security and how we innovate and diversify India's energy basket by increasing cleaner fuels such as natural gas will be a key to achieving our target of Viksit Bharat @2047. Gujarat, under the able leadership of the then Chief Minister of Gujarat and current Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, has led by example in last two and a half decades in promoting "Natural Gas Based Economy".

Gujarat has a robust Natural Gas Based Economy with natural gas making up approx. 25% of Gujarat's energy mix compared to the national average of around 6.5%, thus making Gujarat the largest natural gas consuming state in India. Gujarat also houses approx. 62% of India's LNG Terminal Capacity with operational LNG Receiving and Regasification Terminals at Dahej, Hazira, Mundra and Chhara (76% in terms of total capacity utilization as of Jan'26).

Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation Limited ("GSPC") which now stands merged into Gujarat Energy Limited is the catalyst through which the Government of Gujarat sowed the seeds of developing Gujarat as a Natural Gas Based Economy.

Building up from our presence in upstream oil and gas segment, in 1998, we promoted Gujarat State Petronet Limited ("GSPL") as a Midstream Gas Transmission Entity operating on an open access basis. GSPL began its journey with Hazira-Mora Pipeline – a 14 KM Low Pressure Pipeline which was just the beginning of what is currently a more than 2700 KM strong natural gas pipeline network in Gujarat.

In 2004, we took a small step which proved to be a giant leap for developing Gujarat as a Gas Based Economy – we ventured into Gas Trading Business and in no time, emerged as India's Second Largest Gas Trading Company. Since then, we have procured close to 500 LNG Cargos from various international suppliers.

In 2005, we carved out retail gas distribution business into GSPC Gas Company Limited which went on to become India's Largest City Gas Distribution Company in terms of volume. In 2012, we acquired Gujarat Gas Company Limited from British Gas Group and in 2015, GSPC Gas Company Limited and Gujarat Gas Company Limited were merged to create Gujarat Gas Limited (which is now Gujarat Energy Limited) – which is today India's Leading City Gas Distribution Company.



LNG terminal at Mundra



CNG station

We thus developed the whole of Natural Gas Based Energy Value Chain in Gujarat – from E&P to gas trading to gas transmission to ultimate gas distribution under the single roof of GSPC Group.

In May 2026, we have completed a landmark corporate restructuring leading to creation of two independent listed entities – Gujarat Energy Limited (housing Gas Trading and CGD Businesses) and GSPL Transmission Limited (housing the Gas Transmission Business). This will enable each of the two companies to pursue their respective businesses in a more focused way making them ready to make the most of what lies ahead in India's energy industry space.

Our commitment to being India's reliable energy partner was particularly evident during the recent LPG Supply Crisis caused by the geo-political situation in the Middle East. Responding to Government of India's call to prioritize PNG Connections so as to ease constrained LPG Supply, we took several measures which resulted into hundreds of new gas connections provided to customers in essential category as well as making more than 2000 residential societies in Gujarat housing close to 5 Lakhs households as LPG Free Zones.

Our successful supply strategy has provided significant support to the Morbi ceramic industry. The number of units off taking gas increased from 83 units (with gas consumption of 0.36 MMSCMD) in March 2026, to 675 units (with gas consumption reaching 7.8 MMSCMD) by the last week of May 2026.

As of early 2026, natural gas accounted for approximately 6–7% of India's primary energy supply. The Hon'ble Prime Minister has set a target of increasing share of natural gas in India's primary energy mix to 15% by 2030. This is part of a broader plan to transition to a cleaner energy system and reduce reliance on polluting fossil fuels. The Government of India is pursuing several initiatives to boost natural gas consumption, including expanding the National Gas Grid, expanding the City Gas Distribution Networks, setting up Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminals, promoting Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and Piped Natural Gas (PNG) as primary fuels.

Gujarat Energy Limited is fully committed and ready to take a lion's share in contributing to such visionary targets. Recent Middle East crisis has shifted the focus on energy security and the role of demand aggregators, like GEL, become crucial in such times. GEL continues to scout for opportunities to source LNG from newer markets and also market gas to newer segments, thereby reducing country's reliance on other imported and less environment friendly fossil fuels.



Ship carrying LNG cargo

GEL aims to accelerate core business growth (e.g., CNG, PNG, gas trading, LCNG and LNG for long haul trucks, etc), define expansion opportunities in adjacencies and emerging energy segments and create a future-ready portfolio. The initiative seeks to strengthen organizational capabilities and build a structured implementation engine to translate strategy into measurable outcomes.

Looking ahead, while global energy markets continue to face uncertainty due to geopolitical developments, GEL remains confident with diversified sourcing portfolio, strong infrastructure base, disciplined capital allocation and customer-centric approach which position GEL well to navigate challenges and capture growth opportunities arising from India's increasing transition towards cleaner energy solutions.



LNG terminal at Mundra

Brewing a Success Story



Photograph by MANDAR DEODHAR

VANIITHA JAIIN, 44
Founder, Revelry Distillery & Vanaha Gin
Mumbai

Vaniitha Jaiin was just six when she lost her father. Along with her mother, elder brother and younger sister, she was forced to leave their hometown of Ambasamudram in Tamil Nadu and relocate to Bengaluru. Coming from a small town to a metropolis in a different state meant early days in her new school were difficult, but Vaniitha soon excelled in sports, dance and studies at Aurobindo Memorial School. "My siblings and I were on a journey where we had to earn our tomorrow," she recalls.

Even before she entered college—first at Sri Bhagawan Mahaveer Jain College and, later, Jyoti Nivas College, where she studied for a management degree, Vaniitha began giving tuitions and selling clothes at summer camps when she was merely 13. By the time she turned 19, she had graduated to selling life insurance products. "This was not seen as 'OK' for a girl coming from a conservative North Indian Marwari family, who had lost her father. But I was a rebel for all the right reasons," says Vaniitha. It gave her enough pocket money to experience the taste of premium tea and coffee, helping develop her refined sense of how beverages are harvested, brewed and appreciated.

Later in her career, stints at companies such as O&M, Flipkart and Adecco exposed Vaniitha to some of the sharpest brand and marketing environments. But she was looking for something else. In 2010, at the height of a successful corporate career and with a one-and-a-half-year-old son, Vaniitha took an entrepreneurial leap. An advanced course in luxury brand management at ESSEC Business School in Paris sparked an unexpected fascination. "The word 'wine' literally whispered itself into my ears," she says, a curiosity that led her to the world of wines and spirits. She went to London and Paris to train, a learning journey that continued till 2022. Along the way, she launched her consultancy, The Perfect Pour, in 2015. She also rode solo across France's wine regions from north to south, shadowed master distillers, and judged international spirits competitions in China, Europe and the UK.

HER ADVICE

"Invest first in creating a great product. Invest in research, ingredients, craftsmanship and people who understand the liquid. Branding may encourage someone to pick up the bottle for the first time, but only a great product will bring them back"

The consultancy led to assignments with the Taj Group, Four Seasons and other leading hospitality brands. "I figured out that India is a hardcore spirits market," Vaniitha says. And, in 2023, she set up her own distillery in Goa's forested Sattari region, becoming India's first woman to own and build an alcobev distillery. In 2025, she launched Vanaha, her first product, a gin. Working on a "forest-to-bottle" concept, she created a five-step distillation process that included a vapour infusion chamber and cold vacuum distillation to treat over 200 delicate botanicals like flowers and herbs before distilling them down to a final 24 after over 7,000 hours of R&D. The zero-sugar Vahana, which has won 16 global awards since launch, is available in seven Indian states.

Headquartered in Mumbai, Revelry Distillery currently has a staff of 24 and the capacity to produce about a million bottles a year. Together with husband Navvin Jaiin, a former banking and insurance professional, the couple has infused a corporate flavour in their systems and processes to build a "house of premium spirits". Vaniitha's journey is proof that "India can make great spirits, a gin that is world-class and represent that the best can be made from India". Going forward, expect more products under the Vanaha brand. Work has left Vaniitha with no time for her passion for endurance sports—she has trained for Ironman and used to run marathons. "For now, entrepreneurship's the longest endurance event I've ever taken up," she says. ■

— M.G. Arun

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

A mother to a young child then, Vaniitha quit corporate life in 2010 to plunge into entrepreneurship, becoming India's first woman to own and build an alcoholic beverage distillery in the process

The Space Maker

MEGHNA AGARWAL, 48
Co-founder, IndiQube
Bengaluru



ANIRUDDH KAUSHAL

Meghna Agarwal became an entrepreneur 'by accident'. Growing up in Alwar, Rajasthan, she prepared herself for a career by securing an MBA and company secretaryship. "I think it was the fear of ending up in a kitchen or as part of the *saas-bahu* saga which kind of pushed me to work really hard," she says. But a bleak job market following the 9/11 attacks proved to be a fortuitous turning point. In late 2003, at age 25, Agarwal co-founded the recruitment platform, HirePro Consulting, a month after she got married to Rishi Das, founder of Careernet.

Equally serendipitous is the story of how she co-founded IndiQube in 2015 as a company providing flexible workspaces. Both Agarwal and Das ran their ventures out of the same building along Bengaluru's Outer Ring Road tech corridor, leasing out excess space to a few startups. Eventually, when Agarwal wanted more room for her firm, the lessees, reluctant to move, persuaded her to replicate the same co-working set-up for them elsewhere. She took over a 150,000 square feet building across the road which, to her surprise, filled up in a matter of months. That's when Agarwal, with no prior real estate experience, saw an opportunity in the market for plug-and-play, flexible work spaces.

Today, IndiQube manages 10.61 million square feet of office space in 17 cities as an integrated managed spaces platform, with Fortune 500 firms as its clients. "Our stand, that flexibility was the key, got vindicated," says Agarwal, who took IndiQube public in 2025. In FY26, the company's revenue grew 37 per cent to Rs 1,469 crore.

Her vision for the firm: "The idea is to venture out to other branches like retail and hospitality. Anything to do with space." The secret sauce for making the idea work, says the mother of two, is frugality. "Frugality means you are cost-conscious about everything," she adds. "There's a difference between being cheap and being frugal. I'm not talking about cheap but about being efficient." ■

— Ajay Sukumaran

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

With no prior experience in real estate, Meghna co-founded a flexible workspaces company that now manages 10 million square feet of office space across India and which she took public in 2025

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"I believe in 4 Cs. You need to have Clarity on what you want to do. Second is Control; women have to take control of their own lives. Third is Communication, and fourth is Consistency, because as a woman, especially, you will have phases in your life due to marriage, kids and ageing parents when you will be pushed to pause or slow down"

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HER TAKE

"There has never been a better time to be a woman entrepreneur—or an entrepreneur—in India. Have the courage to chase your dreams"

Setting a High Bar

SUHASINI SAMPATH, 43
Co-founder, Yoga Bar
Bengaluru

Growing up in a typical South Indian family with a strong emphasis on academics, sisters Suhasini Sampath and Anindita Sampath, co-founders of Bengaluru-based Sproutlife Foods, which owns the Yoga Bar brand, were taught to always strive for excellence. "Have you done enough?" was a question their father frequently asked. He believed that everyone, irrespective of gender, should be independent.



"You have only yourself to rely on," he would often tell them. This philosophy not only shaped their family values but also nurtured their intellectual curiosity and love for learning.

It was this curiosity that led them to spot a gap in India's packaged food market. While in New York, where Suhasini was studying and Anindita was working, they had easy access to wholesome snack bars and healthy breakfast options, but found few comparable products in India. Determined to change that, the sisters returned home and spent nearly three years developing nutritious, convenient foods made with clean ingredients. At the same time, Suhasini, in 2012, founded FinAdvantage, an accounting services firm for startups, which gave her first-hand experience in fundraising, scaling businesses and working closely with entrepreneurs. It became a crucial learning ground before starting her second venture.

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Suhasini transformed Yoga Bar from a single energy bar into one of India's leading health food brands

In August 2015, the sisters launched Yoga Bar with a multigrain energy bar, which went on to become the company's bestselling product. Today, Yoga Bar offers muesli, oats, protein bars, plant protein, protein shakes, peanut butter, dry fruits, seeds and quinoa, among other products, which are available in more than 7,500 stores across over 30 cities and are exported to Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and the UAE.

The company attracted marquee investors, including Fireside Ventures and Elevation Capital, enabling it to scale nationally. In 2023, FMCG major ITC acquired a 39.4 per cent stake in Sproutlife Foods as part of a phased acquisition that is expected to culminate in full ownership over the next few years for a value of Rs 500 crore.

Having led the business until May, Suhasini is now looking ahead to her next entrepreneurial venture. And she knows it will be a consumer brand, an area she is most passionate about building. ■

— Sonal Khetarpal

Technology-Driven Research at CCRH

Advancing the Science of Homoeopathy



Dr. Subhash Kaushik
Director General CCRH

The Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH), an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, is redefining homoeopathic research by integrating modern scientific technologies with the principles of homoeopathy. With an extensive network of research institutes and clinical units across the country, CCRH has emerged as a national platform for large-scale, multicentric, and interdisciplinary research addressing regional health priorities and national public health challenges. As India is home to the world's largest homoeopathic healthcare network, strengthening its scientific foundation is both a national responsibility and a global opportunity.

Recognizing that several questions surrounding the nature and mechanism of action of high dilutions require investigation using contemporary scientific tools, CCRH has adopted a technology-driven research strategy encompassing fundamental, translational, pharmaceutical, and clinical research. The objective extends beyond validating existing concepts to generating robust scientific evidence, overcoming long-standing scientific dogmas, and paving the way for a deeper understanding of the science of high dilutions.

One of the emerging areas of research focuses on characterization of high dilutions using through physicochemical, biological, and nanotechnology-based investigations. To achieve this, CCRH has established collaborations with premier institutions including IITs, ICMR, NIMHANS, Delhi University, the University of Calcutta, ICAR institutes, and other centres of scientific excellence. These partnerships have enabled the application of nanoscience, molecular biology, omics technologies, artificial intelligence, computational analytics, advanced materials characterization, and high-resolution analytical instrumentation to investigate homoeopathic medicines using contemporary scientific approaches.

Today, CCRH has established a robust fundamental research programme, with 210 research projects undertaken since its inception, including 121 initiated since 2022. These efforts are supported by over 200 collaborations and have resulted in 99 peer-reviewed scientific publications, nine patent applications, and three granted patents. Research spans oncology, infectious and emerging diseases, antimicrobial resistance, neuroscience, immunology, nanoscience, pharmacology, regenerative medicine, veterinary sciences, agro-homoeopathy, environmental health, and translational medicine. Experimental studies have demonstrated apoptosis, gene-regulatory effects, immune modulation, anti-inflammatory, anti-malarial, anti-arthritic, and anti-cancer activities of homoeopathic medicines, while mechanistic investigations continue to explore cellular signalling pathways and molecular interactions.

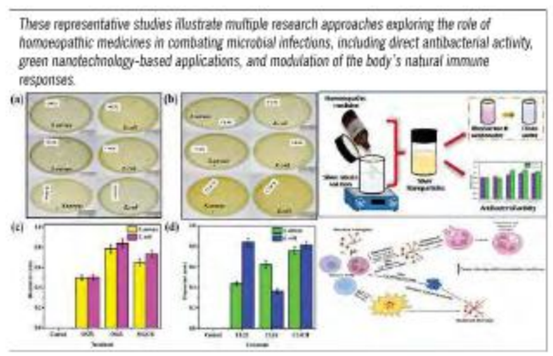
Innovation remains central to CCRH's research strategy. The Council has established dedicated virology, HIV and fundamental research laboratories and pioneered the development of a Micro-Electro-Mechanical Systems (MEMS)-based sensor for potency detection. Its growing intellectual property portfolio includes the landmark patent for the Process for Potentization of Homoeopathic Medicines, developed jointly with IIT Bombay, along with patents and patent applications on malaria, tissue regeneration, Japanese encephalitis and novel biological preparations, underscoring the translational potential of its scientific discoveries.

The new CCRH logo, released on 10th April 2026 embodies the harmony of science, nature, and holistic healing, reflecting the Council's commitment to evidence-based homoeopathic research, innovation, and global outreach.

The Council's nationwide research network provides a unique advantage in conducting multicentric population-based studies across diverse climatic, ethnic, and epidemiological settings. This extensive outreach enables generation of real-world evidence while simultaneously addressing regional healthcare priorities and diseases of national importance. Digital transformation has complemented these scientific initiatives through development of the Homoeopathic Clinical Case Repository, Drug proving Platform, expansion of digital knowledge resources, and establishment of an AYUSH e-library consortium, thereby strengthening data accessibility, collaborative research, and dissemination of scientific evidence.

Together, these initiatives position CCRH at the forefront of evidence-based homoeopathic research, integrating modern technology with traditional medical knowledge to contribute meaningfully to global scientific discourse and the future of integrative healthcare.





These representative studies illustrate multiple research approaches exploring the role of homoeopathic medicines in combating microbial infections, including direct antibacterial activity, green nanotechnology-based applications, and modulation of the body's natural immune responses.

सत्यमेव जयते
Government of Gujarat

Gujarat's Unwavering Commitment to Development

Heartiest Greetings on the 80TH Independence Day



Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister

Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Gujarat

"The 80th Independence Day marks an important milestone in our nation's journey, reaffirming the values of Unity, Integrity and Pride that continue to shape Bharat"

– Harsh Sanghavi, Deputy Chief Minister, Gujarat





Building a Viksit Gujarat



VIBRANT GUJARAT
Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference (VGRC) successfully held across four regions of Gujarat, paving the way for the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2027



Data Centre
Digital economy, AI and cloud infrastructure to gain new momentum; World's largest 'Data Centre City' to be built in Dholera



Welcoming the Commonwealth, Preparing for the Olympics
Gujarat will host the Commonwealth Games in 2030



Gujarat Industrial Policy-2026
A policy to realise the vision of Viksit Gujarat for a Viksit Bharat@2047



Sugam Digital
Citizen-centric digital initiative: A single digital platform integrating key Gujarat Government services and schemes of Government of Gujarat



A 'Sanjeevani Kavach' for the Tribal Community
Special financial assistance for organ transplants and robotic surgery for Scheduled Tribe patients, in addition to Maa-Ayushman Card benefits



Gujarat Ship Building and Repair Policy-2026
New policy to attract investments to the state's coastal regions and generate employment opportunities



Van Kavach
A Green Shield for Gujarat: A 1,100-hectare Green Shield is planned for the state. Of this, 600 hectares of 'Van Kavach' will be developed in the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha constituency



Sujalam Sufalam
Water storage capacity increased by a record 1,38,039 lakh cubic feet over the last eight years



Catch the Rain
A Campaign to increase water levels in borewells and wells



Relief Package
Launch of the Surat District Relief Package Portal for an efficient distribution of relief assistance following torrential rains



POOJA DHINGRA, 40
Founder & CEO, Le15 Patisserie
Mumbai

Photograph by MANDAR DEODHAR

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE ENTREPRENEURS

Macaron Maven

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Starting Le15 Patisserie at the age of 23, Dhingra, also a pastry chef and food influencer with over 6.6 million followers on Instagram, is credited with introducing French macarons to India, making them her retail chain's signature product

Pooja Dhingra's love for baking started early. She had little choice really, born as she was into a "food-obsessed family" in Mumbai where "almost everyone cooks and is an excellent cook". Just six when an aunt taught her how to make brownies, baking followed her through her teenage years, when she'd whip up confections for friends and family, and make goodies to take to school. "Food has been an integral part of my life, and I wouldn't know what else to do if it wasn't the food business," she says.

Food, though, wasn't what she set out to study first. It was law. But her stay in law school lasted precisely two weeks, before she realised she wasn't cut out for the profession. Food it would be, to pursue which she first moved to Switzerland to study hospitality and business management, and then to Le Cordon Bleu in Paris to study French patisserie. By year 2010, and age 23, she was back in Mumbai, ready to launch her venture: Le15.

Whipping dough was a passion, but making dough the harder part. At first, her age and gender worked against her: "Getting people to take me seriously was a problem. Everyone wanted to know where my father or husband was." The later challenges were ones any entrepreneur is familiar with: growth pangs, scaling the business, choosing the right team etc. But, as she says, "I've always been curious and keep learning. Whatever challenges come my way, I learn from them and move on."

HER ADVICE

"It is a tough business, but seeing someone enjoy what you make is also extremely rewarding. Don't give up when it gets tough, the tables always turn"

While in Paris, Pooja had tried the macaron, a sweet, meringue-based French sandwich cookie, which she later brought to India, the first pastry chef to do so. That was 16 years ago, and macarons remain Le15's biggest speciality. Recently, she opened a French-style cafe called Pardon Our French in Fort, Mumbai, creating a stir with its unique beverage programme and desserts. Going forward, she plans to focus on the distribution of products from Le15 Patisserie in Mumbai and scale other things digitally—her books, courses and her YouTube channel. The author of seven books, her first, *The Big Book of Treats*, came second at the Gourmand World Cookbook Award. Other titles include *The Wholesome Kitchen*, the bestselling *Can't Believe It's Eggless*, *Coming Home*, the Le15 Café Cookbook, *Bake At Home*. The latest, *Little Book of Cookies*, is written for children. Pooja, who has 6.6 million followers on Instagram, and 34,000 subscribers for her YouTube channel, also hosts a popular podcast, #NoSugarCoat, where she speaks to chefs, friends, mentors and other entrepreneurs about "the blood, sweat, tears and all the other ingredients that go into being an entrepreneur". ■

— M.G. Arun

सत्यमेव जयते
Government of Gujarat

Industrial Training Institute

Gujarat Skill Development Mission



Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister

Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Gujarat

GUJARAT: SKILLING THE WORKFORCE BEHIND INDIA'S NEXT INDUSTRIAL LEAP

Every industrial ambition eventually runs into the same question: who will build it, run it and keep it running. Gujarat has answered that question earlier than most states. As it works toward Viksit Gujarat @2047 and a $3.5 trillion economy, the state has treated its workforce not as a downstream concern but as core infrastructure, built with the same urgency as roads, power and ports. Two missions carry this forward: the Namo Gujarat Kaushalya & Rozgar Mission (NGKRM), which unifies the state's skilling and employment schemes under one architecture, and the Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded ITIs (PM-SETU), the Centre's industry-led overhaul of India's ITI system, now taking shape fastest in Gujarat. For industry leaders assessing where to invest in talent, both are worth understanding.

The scale of the ambition is worth stating plainly. Gujarat's current labour force participation rate stands at around 55 per cent; the state's target is 65 per cent, which translates into roughly one crore additional people entering productive work by 2030. No single scheme moves a number that large. It requires a system — one that can train at volume, certify to a consistent standard, and place people in real jobs, all while industry stays involved at every step rather than being consulted after the fact.

NGKRM: ONE MISSION INSTEAD OF MANY SCHEMES

For years, India's skilling landscape suffered from fragmentation — multiple schemes, inconsistent training quality, and a mismatch between what was taught and what industry actually needed. NGKRM was built to close that gap. Steered by the Directorate of Skill Development (DSD) and the Directorate of Employment and Training (DET) under the Labour, Skill Development and Employment Department, it brings the state's major training and placement programmes under one governance structure, with standardised cost norms, biometric attendance, and a single digital system tracking every trainee from enrolment to placement.

> "A provision of ₹226 crore has been made for the 'Namo Gujarat Kaushalya and Rojgar Mission' for building educated, skilled, and future-ready youth."
>
> – Shri Bhupendra Patel
> Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Gujarat

The mission's intent is to make skilling an industry-facing exercise rather than a government-run training programme that industry discovers afterward. That was visible at an Industry-Academia-Sector Skill Councils Outreach Programme held in Ahmedabad in July 2026, which drew over two hundred representatives from industry, academia and sector skill councils. The event saw memorandums of understanding signed between the National Skill Development Corporation and the DSD, Kaushalya Skill University, Gujarat Technological University and GIFT City, while sector councils for electronics, automotive and logistics briefed participants directly on hiring needs — skilling designed backward from actual jobs, rather than forward from available courses.

NGKRM also runs on a simple financial logic: money follows outcomes, not enrolment. Training partners are paid in tranches tied to verified attendance, certification and, finally, three months of confirmed employment — a structure meant to push training providers to care as much about placement as about seats filled.

PM-SETU: INDUSTRY AS CO-OWNER, NOT JUST RECRUITER

If NGKRM is the coordination layer, PM-SETU is the infrastructure investment sitting underneath it. Approved by the Union Cabinet with a five-year national outlay of ₹60,000 crore, PM-SETU is upgrading 1,000 government ITIs through a hub-and-spoke model of roughly 200 hub institutes and 800 spoke institutes, with five National Skill Training Institutes being developed into global centres of excellence, backed by co-financing from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Its real innovation is structural. Each upgraded ITI cluster is run through a Special Purpose Vehicle in which an Anchor Industry Partner takes the lead role, designing the curriculum, funding equipment and training infrastructure, and owning the placement outcome, while the state government identifies institutes and provides land and administrative support, and the Centre sets policy and releases funding. Industry stops being a recruiter waiting at the end of the pipeline and becomes a co-owner of the institute itself.



> "The ultimate success of future depends on winning the 'battle for world-class talent.'"
>
> – Shri Harsh Sanghvi
> Deputy Chief Minister, Government of Gujarat



Officials of the Labour, Skill Development and Employment Department at a state skilling recognition event, Gandhinagar



Medalists of Gujarat State in India Skill Competition-2025-26



Industry-Academia. NSDC and Sector Skill Council Outreach Program for Namo Gujarat Kaushalya and Rojgar Mission

GUJARAT'S HEAD START

Gujarat has moved faster than most states in putting this model to work. Requests for proposals for Anchor Industry Partners are already out across two phases of ITI clusters — Surat, Rajkot, Gandhidham and Vadodara in the first phase, and Dholera, Morbi-Surendranagar and Halol-Panchmahal in the second — mapped against the state's industrial corridors from North Gujarat down to Kutch and Saurashtra. A State Project Management Unit is in place, a Project Management Consultant has been engaged, and industry consultations through the first half of 2026 have drawn in companies including Reliance Industries, Tata Electronics, Polycab India, Yokohama, Borosil and Maruti Suzuki.

The clearest proof point came on 20th June 2026, when Gujarat's Second State Steering Committee for PM-SETU approved a Strategic Investment Plan submitted by ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) for the Surat cluster, with NAMTECH as academic partner. The proposal scored 88 out of 100 on technical evaluation and commits close to ₹240 crore over five years — roughly ₹145 crore for infrastructure and equipment, ₹29 crore for trainer development, and nearly ₹50 crore ring-fenced specifically for employment outcomes such as placements and apprenticeships. Polycab India has since expressed interest in the Panchmahal cluster, and Maruti Suzuki in the Surendranagar cluster, signalling that Gujarat's manufacturing majors increasingly treat ITI upgradation as core business rather than corporate social responsibility.



> "Our key objective is to provide global-level technical training to the youth and ensure every young person becomes self-reliant under the Skill India mission."
>
> – Shri Kunvarjibhai Bavaliya
> Cabinet Minister, Labour, Skill Development & Employment, Government of Gujarat

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR INDUSTRY

For a company scaling operations in Gujarat, these two missions offer a rare combination: a single-window skilling framework through NGKRM, and a direct route to co-designing your own talent pipeline through PM-SETU, with government sharing the capital cost and the compliance burden. On the NGKRM side, a tiered network of training partners — from large industry consortia running production-grade training on their own shop floors, down to general training partners covering all 34 districts — is being built out toward a combined capacity of five lakh trainees a year. Sectors from automotive and electronics to green energy and logistics are already inside this system, and the framework allows new priority sectors to be added as industry demand shifts, including emerging areas like semiconductors, drones, AI and electric vehicles.

The state has also been deliberate about widening the talent pool feeding into this system, including dedicated pathways for women entering technical trades, first-generation industrial workers, and youth in rural and tribal districts — a broader base of skilled manpower that ultimately benefits the industries drawing from it.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Viksit Gujarat @2047 rests on a target most industrial planners recognise well: moving a much larger share of the state's population into productive, formal employment over the next two decades. NGKRM and PM-SETU are the two instruments Gujarat is using to get there — one building the governance and financing architecture for skilling at scale, the other putting industry directly in charge of the institutes producing that talent.

For industry leaders, the message is straightforward: Gujarat is not just offering land, power and logistics for the next phase of India's industrial growth. It is offering to build the workforce alongside you.



> "Skilled youth are the true strength of our nation and can contribute significantly to India's economic growth, national progress and nation building."
>
> – Shri Kantilal Amrutiya
> Minister of State, Labour, Skill Development & Employment, Government of Gujarat



> "By bridging the gap between education and dynamic industry demands, Gujarat continues to set a benchmark in empowering workers and fostering a skilled, global workforce."
>
> Shri Lochan Sehra, IAS
> Secretary, Labour, Skill Development & Employment Department, Government of Gujarat

The Crisis Commander

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Fourteen years in uniform have seen Merin Joseph combine firm policing with compassion—from peacefully resolving labour unrest to pursuing justice in the most challenging criminal cases

Photographs by **CHANDRADEEP KUMAR**

MERIN JOSEPH, 36
Superintendent of Police, Kozhikode Rural
Kerala



HER TAKE

"Real leadership is not about power or position. It is about earning trust and standing by people, especially in their most vulnerable moments"

For Merin Joseph, excellence has been a constant. Brought up in New Delhi, with roots in Kerala, she was an outstanding student at St Stephen's College, winning multiple academic prizes before earning a Chevening Scholarship to pursue a Master's in Public Policy at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government.

It was her father, Dr Joseph Abraham, a former principal advisor to the Government of India, who persuaded her to take the civil services examination. She cleared it on her first attempt at just 22. Joining the Kerala cadre of the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 2012, Merin first came into the spotlight as Assistant Superintendent of Police in Munnar, where she helped steer the police response to the Pombilai Orumai agitation by thousands of women plantation workers, facilitating a peaceful resolution through dialogue with the management of the Tatas-owned enterprise.

Over the past 14 years, Merin has built a career marked by crisis leadership and a commitment to justice. She received the Chief Minister's Medal for her role in coordinating rescue operations during Kerala's devastating 2018 floods, and later earned the state police chief's Badge of Honour for her role in tracking missing women and children. Her crowning achievement came as Kollam City Police Commissioner, when she revived a pending rape case involving a 13-year-old girl, coordinated with the CBI, Interpol and Saudi authorities, and personally led a team to Riyadh in 2019 to bring the absconding accused back to India to face trial. He was later convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

"There wasn't one defining moment that changed my life," she says. "Every interaction with people, every difficult decision, and every challenge in uniform has reinforced why I chose public service." She credits former IPS officer Kiran Bedi as a lasting inspiration, admiring her courage, integrity and willingness to challenge the status quo. Her own message to young women is equally unequivocal: "Never underestimate the power of your own voice. You don't have to fit into someone else's definition of success. Dream!" ■

—Jeemon Jacob



SATHYABAMA
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)
CATEGORY - 1 UNIVERSITY BY UGC

NAAC A++

Centre for Advanced Studies

Sathyabama Centre for Advanced Studies, a state-of-the-art facility established with Advanced facilities that ensembles the conjunction of academic and research expertise.
The Centre houses Artificial Intelligence Laboratory with Supercomputing facilities, DARE (Drone and Robotics Experimentarium) Lab consisting of Robotics Workstations, Swarm drones, Quadruped and Humanoid Robots and autonomous rovers, Advanced Characterization facility with HRSTEM, FESEM and XRD Development tools, Advanced Media Centre and Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer.

AI Supercomputing Facility

The AI Supercomputing Lab is a groundbreaking AI research facility that aims to become a strong center for AI research. This lab aims to train and engage students and researchers in cutting-edge AI algorithms and its applications. The facility houses a 95-node supercomputer with 9.6 Peta FLOPS of AI performance. A tiered storage architecture is adopted to utilize flash storage and hence make data server provide industry-topping data speeds.





Metaverse Studio

The Metaverse Studio is a futuristic facility that transforms creativity and imagination into interactive and immersive experiences. Using cutting-edge high-performance development systems and Head Mounted Displays, this studio has a lot to offer for XR designers, XR engineers and Game developers.
The studio also houses an immersion zone to fully engage yourself in the metaverse. The Metaverse Studio encompasses Development Space, Metaverse Stations, Nvidia Ampere Architecture, Ray Tracing, AI DLSS, Nvidia Reflex, Blender to XR Development Tools, Unity Game Engine, Unreal Engine, Immersion Zone and Ideation Area.

Drone and Robotics Experimentarium

The Drone and Robotics Experimentarium (DARE) Lab is a state-of-the-art teaching and research facility that aims to be a premier center for Drone and Robotics research. The lab has Autonomous Drones, Industrial Robotic Arm, Autonomous Rovers, Humanoid Robot, Quadruped Robot and Robotics Workstations. All drones and robots present in the lab are fully programmable. There is no need for manual control or human intervention in their operation. All workstations come with Wi-Fi and Bluetooth communication in order to interface with the drones and robots.

METAVERSE STUDIO • AI SUPERCOMPUTING FACILITY

SATHYABAMA
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)
CATEGORY - 1 UNIVERSITY BY UGC

A++ NAAC



Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer

The Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer aims to be a leading private deep-tech startup hub. The centre is supporting students, scientists, faculty, alumni members and external entrepreneurs in creating successful deep tech startups, and translating benefits to the society. The centre supports technology ventures by offering both technological and business assistance to help entrepreneurs establish their startups. In addition to this, the centre supports the Instituiton's scientists and faculty in product development, industry connect and commercialization.

Advanced Characterization Facility

Advanced Characterization facility like X-ray Diffractometer (XRD), Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscope (FESEM) and High Resolution Scanning Transmission Electron Microscope (HRSTEM) are available at the centre which can be used for understanding the structure, composition, shape, size and morphology of different kinds of materials at Nano scale.

Advanced Media Centre

The Advanced Media Centre is a state-of-the-art facility equipped with high-end production suites, green screen facilities and audio recording booths, for the development of high-quality visual and audio content. The centre serves as a hub for faculty to create high quality video lectures, creative e-content to enhance the online teaching & learning experience.

Sathyabama Startup Cell

The Sathyabama Startup Cell is a dynamic hub for entrepreneurship, innovation, and business development. It empowers students, faculty, and early-stage entrepreneurs to transform their innovation into scalable and sustainable ventures. The Cell provides structured mentorship, incubation support, seed funding assistance, investor connections, industry networking, and access to essential entrepreneurial resources. It has incubated over 100 startups and facilitated revenue generation exceeding ₹2 crores. The Startup Cell has also secured grants from Entrepreneurship Development and Innovation Institute, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology under TIDE 2.0, and AICTE, demonstrating its strong commitment to fostering innovation, startup growth, and sustainable entrepreneurial success.



Centre for Ocean Research

Applied Phycology Lab

The Applied Phycology Lab utilizes advanced instruments including a Continuous Flow Analyzer, ATR-FTIR, and Multimode Reader to study algal biotechnology applications, marine biofouling, and environmental sustainability. The lab focuses on biofilms, algal adhesion, microalgal biomass optimization, and macroalgal spore-based seed production for ecological conservation and industrial applications.

Biomolecules Separation Lab

The Biomolecules Separation Lab utilizes advanced Thin-Layer Chromatography (TLC) and High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) systems for efficient separation and quantitative analysis of biomolecules from marine natural sources. These technologies support the isolation, identification, and development of novel bioactive compounds with promising environmental and biomedical applications.

Halophyte Conservation Lab

The Halophyte Conservation Lab conducts applied research on seagrasses, seaweeds, and mangroves through field surveys and laboratory experiments. Using in-vitro micropropagation and mesocosm systems, the lab studies climate stressors such as warming and acidification, while developing conservation, restoration, metabolic engineering, and natural product discovery strategies for productive coastal ecosystems.



CENTRE FOR OCEAN RESEARCH

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & HIGHER STUDIES



Office of the International Relations & Higher Studies

The office of the International relations facilitates collaboration with International Universities for activities including Student Exchange, Faculty Exchange, Joint Research and other Collaborative activities for the benefit of the students and faculty. The office also initiates Semester Abroad Programmes, Internship Abroad Programmes and Summer Schools with Partnering Universities for the students of the Institution. The office also facilitates Faculty and Student Mobility programmes Funded by International Funding Organisations.

The Office of the Higher Studies helps in identifying and selecting the Universities to pursue Master Degree Programmes, provides support in the process of application, Letters of Recommendation and organises awareness programmes on Higher Education opportunities for the Pre final and Final Year Students. The Office conducts foreign language classes and other courses like TOEFL, IELTS for the students.

Makerspace

Makerspace is a state of art additive manufacturing facility established to foster innovations in young engineers, facilitate research and support additive manufacturing in industries. This unique facility is distinguished as a "**Centre of Excellence for Additive Manufacturing**" by Sratasys,India. Makerspace includes labs for material synthesis & testing, prototype designing and tissue engineering.

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Toll-Free Number: 1800 425 1770 | To Learn More, Visit: www.sathyabama.ac.in

CHENNAI · SRIPERUMBUDUR | SathyabamaOfficial | sathyabama.official | @sathyabamaofficial

In the Driver's Seat

The Vande Bharat Express has a small cab with a very large windscreen. At 130 kmph, the trackside softens at the edges, signals appear and disappear within seconds, and a delayed reaction can make all the difference. Even today, many still see it as a "man's job". But in Southern Railway's Chennai Division, that responsibility is often Aiswarya S. Menon's. "It is not just about driving a train. It is about taking hundreds of people to their destinations safely and on time," says the senior assistant loco pilot.

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Entering a profession long dominated by men, Aiswarya has mastered the controls of the Vande Bharat and emerged as one of India's standout young loco pilots



AISWARYA S. MENON, 33
Senior Assistant Loco Pilot, Vande Bharat
Moozhikulam, Kerala

Aiswarya, from Moozhikulam near Aluva in Kerala, joined Indian Railways in 2019 almost by accident. An electrical engineer by training, she had initially appeared for an air force exam before qualifying for the railway job. "That was when it began to sink in that I was going to be driving trains, and how unconventional and exciting that would be," she recalls. At about 2,000, women account for less than 2 per cent of the more than 107,000 loco pilots in Indian Railways.

Having lost her father early, Aiswarya was raised by her mother, who initially worried about night duties and safety. "Over time, she got used to it," she says. Her husband's support has also been crucial. "Man or woman, no loco pilot can do this job without the support and understanding of family," she adds.

Loco pilots work to rotating schedules, have no fixed weekends, and alertness must be sustained for the entire journey. Her disciplined approach to signalling and consistent performance caught the attention of senior officials. When Vande Bharat services were introduced on Southern Railway in 2022, she was among the pilots assigned to the prestigious trains and has operated the Chennai-Coimbatore and Chennai-Vijayawada services.

HER TAKE

"Know that a woman can do any job"

Today, Aiswarya has logged more than 2,000 hours of footplating—the railway term for working in the locomotive cab. In June 2024, she was one of 10 loco pilots invited as special guests to the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "I was like, why me? What special thing have I done?" she recalls, with the faint disbelief of someone who still sees herself less as a symbol of change and more as a loco pilot just doing her job. ■

—Avishek G. Dastidar

SHIBANI GHOSH, 42
Environmental lawyer
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

The Green Litigator

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Supreme Court–appointed amicus curiae in the long-running M.C. Mehta air pollution case, Shibani Ghosh has shaped India's environmental jurisprudence through litigation, scholarship and policy research



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

When Shibani Ghosh learnt in 2024 that an elephant was to be relocated from Jorhat in Assam to Delhi's Greater Kailash, one question struck her immediately: where would the animal be housed? The answer was Sainik Farms, a densely built-up, water-stressed neighbourhood hardly suited to an elephant. Already pursuing a case in the Delhi High Court against the transfer of elephants for religious purposes, she and her colleagues sought an urgent intervention on behalf of an animal welfare organisation. The court ordered an inspection and halted the relocation for then. "One elephant at a time," she says of that outcome—something that still defines her approach to environmental law.

Born in 1983 to architect parents, Shibani decided while still in Class 8 that she wanted to protect forests and wildlife. Her family backed that early ambition, a support she continues to find in her lawyer husband and their seven-year-old daughter. After graduating from The West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata, she won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, where she studied law and environmental change.

A stint with then Central Information Commissioner Shailesh Gandhi in 2008 gave her an insider's view of how public institutions function—and where they often fall short. Her 13-year association with the Centre for Policy Research shaped her as both researcher and litigator. In 2019, she edited the widely used open-access volume *Indian Environmental Law: Key Concepts and Principles*, now taught in universities and cited by the Supreme Court.

A Supreme Court Advocate-on-Record, Shibani is one of three amici curiae assisting the apex court in the decades-old M.C. Mehta case, which continues to shape pollution-control measures across the National Capital Region. For Shibani, the central environmental battle today is not only enforcing existing legal safeguards but preventing their silent erosion through exemptions, diluted definitions and perfunctory public consultations. ■

—Kaushik Deka

HER ADVICE

"Aspiring environmental lawyers should acquire as many skills as possible, remain open to learning from people who may not speak their professional language—panchayat members, scientists, project-affected families, etc.—and, above all, come prepared"



HEALING COMMUNITIES, EMPOWERING BHARAT DR. SWAPNA VERMA'S

Vision for a Healthier and Self-Reliant Nation

When success is often measured by wealth, status and recognition, some choose a different measure—service, compassion and social impact. Dr. Swapna Verma, a medical professional, social entrepreneur, education reformer, and daughter of Satna, Madhya Pradesh, is redefining rural development through preventive healthcare, women's empowerment, digital innovation and value-based education.

For Dr. Verma, healthcare is more than a profession—it is a powerful instrument of nation-building. Inspired by her mother's 15-year journey with Parkinson's disease, she is committed to ensuring healthcare reaches those in need. Through her NGO, Madhurima Sewa Sanskar Foundation and its flagship initiative, Bimari Mukt Bharat, she champions awareness, early detection and preventive healthcare.

She envisions self-reliant Bharat built from the grassroots, where healthcare, education and opportunity enable citizens to live with dignity. Her mission draws inspiration from Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

Her work received recognition when Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji recognised her among the Top 10 Pathbreakers at the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025 for her unique digital healthcare model.

Through its digitally equipped Clinic on Wheels, doctors, diagnostic facilities, medicines and healthcare workers reach remote rural and tribal communities. The initiative has screened nearly six lakh people, treated over 1.5 lakh patients, conducted blood and urine investigations, and distributed medicines. Eye camps, cataract surgeries and spectacles extend reach.

The campaign focuses on early detection of diabetes, hypertension, anaemia, thyroid disorders, malnutrition and chronic conditions. Door-to-door surveys and digital health records enable assessment, long-term monitoring and timely intervention. For Dr. Verma, healthcare also means nutrition, hygiene, mental well-being and healthier lifestyles.

Taking preventive healthcare beyond camps, Dr. Verma introduced the Jeevan Arogya app. Based on the principle that prevention is better than cure, it provides health education through videos covering nutrition, sanitation, maternal and child health, elderly care, physiotherapy, medicinal plants, mental health and lifestyle diseases.

During rural visits, Dr. Verma identified menstrual hygiene gaps. She launched Pad Sakhi, an app and initiative promoting reproductive health, anaemia prevention and dignity. Her foundation installs sanitary pad dispensers in rural schools. Village-level sessions provide women and adolescent girls scientific information on menstruation, nutrition and hygiene in an empathetic, culturally sensitive environment. The initiative facilitates access to sanitary pads and complements the Foundation's Anaemia-Mukt Satna campaign through screening, nutritional counselling and awareness.

Dr. Verma believes that while healthcare strengthens the body, education must strengthen character. Madhurima Sanskar Pathshala combines modern education with India's civilisational values. Children in rural and tribal areas learn the Bhagavad Gita, teachings of Swami Vivekananda, yoga, meditation, moral education, patriotism, environmental responsibility and community service, alongside computer literacy and digital learning. The goal is to nurture confident, disciplined and socially responsible citizens who contribute to the nation.

Inspired by her own academic challenges, Dr. Swapna Verma founded AMCI EdTech to pioneer immersive stereoscopic 3D medical education in India. She has transformed complex medical concepts, anatomy and clinical subjects into engaging 3D audio-visual learning experiences, available 24/7. By making difficult topics more interactive and accessible, it helps medical students understand concepts faster, save valuable study time and learn with greater confidence.

Dr. Verma's journey demonstrates that transformation does not begin only in policy rooms or cities. It begins where a patient receives timely care, a woman gains dignity, a child discovers values and a village gains confidence.

By integrating healthcare, education, women's empowerment, technology and values, Dr. Swapna Verma is shaping a vision of nation-building rooted in human dignity, self-reliance and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—envisioning a healthier, empowered Bharat that contributes to the well-being and harmony of the world.





THE PROFESSIONALS

Photograph by **CHANDRADEEP KUMAR**

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

Chak De! Sarpanch

NEERU YADAV, 36
Sarpanch, Lambi Ahir village
Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO
Neeru has empowered village girls through hockey and ensured women are heard in the panchayat

Dressed in a traditional *daman* (skirt) and *kurti*, *odhni* draped over her head and a hockey stick in hand, Neeru Yadav cuts an unmistakable figure on the dusty village field. Born in Narnaul, Haryana, and married into Lambi Ahir village in Rajasthan, this former school-teacher found her calling when she saw how women facing domestic violence were rarely allowed to speak before male-dominated village elders. "That made me realise that a sarpanch has much more to do than merely focus on development," she says.

But contesting a panchayat election in a village riven by bitter caste politics was anything but easy. Some even opposed her for being "too educated"—an MSc in Mathematics along with BEd and MEd degrees—and argued that she would eventually move to Jaipur, where her husband, an executive engineer with the Public Works Department, was posted. But that did not deter her from entering the fray in 2020. The results were declared just two days after she delivered her second child.

HER ADVICE

"Stay focused on your work, and let your achievements prove your worth"

Since taking office, Neeru has ensured that women are heard during family disputes brought before the panchayat. But her most visible impact has come through hockey, encouraging village girls to take up the sport despite social resistance, including objections to their wearing sports shorts. She believes sport can open doors to government jobs through the sports quota. Neeru donates her honorarium as sarpanch towards the girls' training, while her NGO Aditri Foundation, named after her daughter, pays the coach's salary. Several girls now compete at inter-district and inter-state tournaments, and two have reached the senior national level. Equally innovative is her 'utensil bank' of nearly 8,000 steel utensils that villagers can borrow free for weddings and community feasts, reducing plastic waste while saving them money. ■

—Rohit Parihar



HARI CHANDANA DASARI, 42
Secretary, SHAKTI Department, Telangana
Hyderabad

Problem Solver

A 2010-batch IAS officer of the Telangana cadre, Hari Chandana recalls an incident from her 2020-2023 tenure as district collector of Narayanpet that, she says, captures the essence of public service. She was visiting the weekly market when a woman approached her to say that the newly introduced eco-friendly mobile She-toilet had allowed her to return to selling produce. Until then, the lack of a place to relieve herself through the long market day had forced her to stay away, costing her a vital source of income. "Her one sentence taught me more about what governance is for than any file ever has," Hari Chandana says.

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"Women are conditioned to believe we must be fully qualified, certain and prepared before we step forward, while the world doesn't ask the same of others. I have taken on every meaningful role in my career before I felt entirely ready for it, and the readiness came through the doing"

That focus on solving everyday problems and making governance more accessible and inclusive has come to define her 16-year career. Since taking charge of Telangana's Labour, Employment, Training and Factories Department in April 2026, she has overseen its transformation into SHAKTI—Skill, Human Capital and Knowledge Training Initiatives. Beyond the rebranding, she has driven the state's first comprehensive minimum wage revision, a reform recognised by the International Labour Organization and one that is expected to benefit over 9.2 million workers. She is also developing an integrated skilling framework and shaping welfare measures for more than 400,000 gig and platform workers.

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Over 16 years in the IAS, Hari Chandana has transformed everyday civic challenges into enduring public solutions, most recently spearheading Telangana's minimum wage reform benefiting 9.2 million workers

Public service is a family tradition. The daughter of a former IAS officer and married to an IRS officer, Hari Chandana combines that grounding with academic training in environmental economics and political science from the London School of Economics and the University of Hyderabad. Before her current posting, she was Hyderabad district collector for a year. In that time, she introduced WhatsApp Prajavani, enabling senior citizens and persons with disabilities to register grievances remotely; launched Project Shakti, providing reusable sanitary pad kits to 60,000 schoolgirls; and set up the Samatha Canteen, staffed by transgender persons and people with disabilities, at the collectorate office. Earlier, in Nalgonda, she had helped rural women convert invasive water hyacinth into sustainable products. With each successive posting, her canvas has only grown larger. ■

—Prasad Nichenametla

Nari Shakti - Yuva Shakti - Rashtra Shakti



Women Power

- 30% horizontal reservation for women implemented in government jobs.
- 33% reservation for women ensured in cooperative management committees.
- Decline recorded in the maternal mortality rate in the state during 2024–25.
- Launch of the Mukhyamantri Ekal Mahila Swarozgar Yojana (Chief Minister's Self-Employment Scheme for Single Women).
- Launch of the Mukhyamantri Sashakt Bahna Utsav Yojana (Chief Minister's Empowered Sisters Festival Scheme).
- Interest-free loans of up to ₹5 lakh provided to groups under the Mukhyamantri Swayam Sahayata Samuh Sashaktikaran Yojana (Chief Minister's Self-Help Group Empowerment Scheme).
- A 5% bonus is being given to Self-Help Groups engaged in entrepreneurship.
- ₹2.30 crore in financial assistance provided for workshops and women's felicitation programmes held across districts.
- More than 2,65,000 women in the state have become 'Lakhpati Didis' under the Lakhpati Didi Yojana.
- Essential postnatal care kits being provided to women after childbirth under the Mukhyamantri Mahalakshmi Kit Yojana.
- Increase in pension for the war widows (veer veeranganas) of World War II in Uttarakhand.
- Women members of Self-Help Groups are being trained in drone operation to be developed as 'Drone Sakhis'.
- Assistance of ₹51,000 being provided for the mass marriage of daughters of registered construction workers in the state.
- Under the Nanda Gaura Yojana, the State Government provides ₹11,000 on the birth of a girl child and ₹51,000 for higher education when a daughter passes Class 12. So far, a total of ₹1,168.49 crore has been disbursed to 3,77,784 girls across the state.

Soldiers' Welfare

- Provision to give a government job to one dependent among the dependents of the state's martyred soldiers.
- Ex-gratia amount for dependents of martyred soldiers increased from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh.
- Ex-gratia amount for Param Vir Chakra awardees increased from ₹50 lakh to ₹1.5 crore.
- Agniveers in the state will get 10% horizontal reservation in government jobs; this rule will apply to direct recruitment in Group C uniformed services.
- 10% reservation implemented in government jobs for dependents of Rajya Andolankaris (Uttarakhand Statehood Movement activists).
- Increase in the ex-gratia amount given to families of martyrs and the honour amount given to medal-winning soldiers.





Youth Power

- Historic decision under the new Sports Policy to accommodate national and international medal winners in government jobs.
- Daily food allowance for the state's players increased from ₹250 to ₹480 per player per day, on par with the Sports Authority of India (SAI) norm.
- Sports scholarship of ₹1,500 per month being given to nearly 3,900 emerging players aged 8 to 14 under the Mukhyamantri Udiyaman Khiladi Unnayan Yojana (Chief Minister's Scheme for Promotion of Emerging Players).
- Players who win medals or participate in national and international competitions (such as the Olympics, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, etc.) will benefit from a 4% sports quota in state government services.
- 60 Patent Information Centres established across the state's colleges, universities and other centres.
- Over 33,000 youth have secured government jobs in the last four and a half years.







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THE SHE LIST
UNDER 50

THE **PROFESSIONALS**

The New Top Gun

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

From being part of India's first batch of women fighter pilots to becoming the first woman to complete IAF's elite Fighter Combat Leader course, Bhawana Kanth has several historic firsts to her name

In the first week of August, Squadron Leader Bhawana Kanth added another first to a career already woven into the history of the Indian Air Force (IAF). By completing the elite Fighter Combat Leader (FCL) course at the Tactics and Air Combat Development Establishment, Gwalior, she became the force's first woman 'Top Gun' combat pilot. The demanding course prepares experienced fighter pilots for complex air combat missions, advanced tactical operations, mission planning, tactical decision-making and combat leadership.

SQN LDR BHAWANA KANTH, 33
Fighter pilot, Indian Air Force

Born in Bihar's Darbhanga district in 1992, Bhawana followed in the footsteps of her father, an engineer with Indian Oil Corporation, and earned a Bachelor of Engineering degree in Medical Electronics in 2014. She briefly worked at Tata Consultancy Services, but flying remained her ambition. Clearing the Air Force Common Admission Test, she chose military aviation over a conventional engineering career.

Commissioned into the IAF in June 2016 as part of India's historic first batch of women fighter pilots, alongside Squadron Leaders Avani Chaturvedi and Mohana Singh, she progressed through training on the Kiran and Hawk jet trainers before entering the MiG-21 Bison fighter stream.

In March 2018, she flew her first solo sortie on the Bison. A year later, she became the first Indian woman fighter pilot qualified to undertake combat missions on a fighter aircraft. Her milestones beyond the cockpit continued with the Nari Shakti Puraskar, received alongside Avani and Mohana from President Ram Nath Kovind in 2020, and with representing the IAF tableau in the Republic Day parade in 2021, becoming the first woman fighter pilot to do so.

As her colleagues say, she was not being trained simply to become a fighter pilot; she was being trained to become a combat leader. ■

—Pradip R. Sagar

HER TAKE

"Anything is unconventional only till it becomes the norm. Someone has to be willing first. Sometimes, all it takes is to never give up on your dreams"



AATISH PILLAI

Spaces with a Soul

SHIMONA BHANSALI, 42
Founder and Principal Designer, DesignHex
Mumbai

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"We are often taught to prove that we deserve a seat at the table. I think the more interesting question is, what if you changed the table itself?"



KUBER SHAH

Shimona Bhansali loves curved forms and dramatic designs, something that mirrors her non-linear career trajectory. At just 17, while most teenagers were navigating high school, she took on her first independent design project. After completing her management studies in 2005, she began doing interiors as a hobby for close family and friends. Her real education was forged on the ground—through drawing, carpentry and other artistic disciplines rather than a formal design school. At the same time, she launched a packaging company and ran it successfully, only to realise that it was merely a detour before the pull of three-dimensional spaces became impossible to ignore. In 2016, she formally founded DesignHex.

Treating every early commission as a testing ground for her multi-functional philosophy, Shimona has quietly built a reputation over the years. Even today, the creative ethos of her firm rests on a simple sentiment: "It feels good to be lost in the right spaces." That idea also underpins her rejection of the beige minimalism that has come to dominate many Indian homes.

Today, she stands out as an outspoken, unapologetic, maximalist-loving designer whose work is synonymous with over-the-top spaces. Think hand-painted ocean ceilings, Antoni Gaudí-inspired structures, and homes designed as vibrant ecosystems that could house a chorus of exotic birds. Yet what distinguishes her work is not merely its abundance, but the sharp, contrarian language of her design. A former WADE Asia (Women in Architecture and Design) and GeeVees award winner, this year she also features in 'AHJ 26of26', Architecture Home Journal's annual edition dedicated to the 26 most compelling architects and designers from all over the world.

For now, Bansal remains grounded and curious. "I admire people who remain beginners even after becoming experts. The moment you think you have figured everything out, you stop growing." ■

—Ridhi Kale

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Rejecting cookie-cutter aesthetics, Shimona has built a thriving interior design practice that has brought her top awards, including the WADE prize for women in 2024 and a GeeVees award in 2025



RANJAN RAH

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Dolly turned her village's *gram kachahari* into an effective grassroots justice system, helping resolve nearly 700 disputes over land claims, widows' inheritance rights and family feuds

Bringing Closure

DOLLY, 36
Sarpanch, Sadipur village
Gaya, Bihar

Lined up on steel racks inside Dolly's modest residential office are more than 700 brown case files, each carrying the same typed inscription: Case Closed. It has become a quiet signature of the 36-year-old village sarpanch's style of governance—resolving conflicts through dialogue, persuasion and compromise rather than years of litigation.

Politics was never part of her plan. Raised in Meerut, Dolly studied for an MBA in Pune and later worked in the ticketing department of an aviation firm. Marriage changed both her address and her future. In 2014, she married documentary filmmaker and entrepreneur Dharmveer Bharti and moved to Gaya. After the death of her mother-in-law Neelam Devi, who was the sarpanch of Sadipur, the family persuaded Dolly to contest the 2018 byelection. She scraped through by just 130 votes against seven male candidates.

The real battle began after the election. Many villagers approached her husband instead of her, assuming she was merely a nominal sarpanch. Weeks of patiently hearing complaints, conducting site inspections and delivering fair verdicts gradually established that she was the one in charge—not the men around her.

Today, Sadipur's 20,000 residents bring to her the disputes that define rural life: ancestral property quarrels, land claims, domestic conflicts and widows seeking their legal share of family assets. Dressed in a sari, Dolly is often seen riding her Scooty across Gaya, usually with another elected woman representative riding pillion, persuading reluctant relatives to sit together and negotiate. Under her stewardship, disputes that could drag through civil courts for years are often resolved within six months. Re-elected in 2021, she has helped settle over 700 disputes so far, even as she balances village governance with raising her two young children—an eight-year-old daughter and a one-year-old son. ■

—Amitabh Srivastava

HER TAKE

"Education gives you confidence; leadership is about using that confidence to solve people's problems. Women should never hesitate to step forward when they have the opportunity"

DELHI'S ELECTRIC REVOLUTION

THE POLICY THAT IS REIMAGINING INDIA'S CAPITAL



As India celebrates another year of independence, Delhi has quietly scripted one of the most transformative environmental and mobility reforms. In the history of Delhi's battle against pollution, few decisions will be remembered as transformative as the Delhi Electric Vehicles Policy 2026. The launch marks far more than the introduction of another government scheme. It represents a future-ready vision to reclaim clean air whilst reducing dependence on fossil fuels and placing its citizens at the center of a sustainable transportation revolution.

In a city where vehicular emissions have long remained one of the major contributors to air pollution, the Government of NCT of Delhi (GNCTD) has chosen decisive action over incremental change. The Delhi EV Policy 2026 is not merely incentivizing electric vehicles; it is fundamentally reshaping how mobility will evolve in India's capital over the coming decade. Notified with effect from July 1, 2026, the policy has been designed to accelerate electric mobility across all major vehicle categories, improve air quality and create a comprehensive electric mobility ecosystem for the capital. The policy recognises clean air as a public right and places environmental protection and energy conservation at the heart of transport planning.

This is not a policy for a niche segment. It is a policy for every resident of Delhi- from the student commuting to college, to the delivery entrepreneur, the auto-rickshaw driver, the small trader, the fleet operator and the middle-class family purchasing its first vehicle.

A Policy Born from Necessity

The policy was conceived against a stark reality. Studies and reports presented before various authorities have consistently highlighted vehicular emissions as a major contributor to Delhi's air pollution burden. Two-wheelers constitute nearly two-thirds of Delhi's vehicle population, while three-wheelers and commercial goods vehicles clock significantly higher daily mileage than private cars. Recognizing that transportation reform is indispensable to improving air quality, the Government undertook an ambitious exercise to create a policy framework capable of delivering large-scale environmental benefits while remaining economically viable and socially inclusive, thereby making vehicle electrification a public health intervention rather than merely a technological choice.

The result is a comprehensive four-year policy framework that seeks to accelerate EV adoption across major vehicle categories, establish an extensive charging ecosystem and reduce dependence on ICE vehicles. Yet what truly distinguishes the Delhi EV Policy 2026 is its willingness to move beyond incentives and embrace transformational change.

The Courage to Lead

Every major policy breakthrough requires political courage. Delhi's EV Policy 2026 exemplifies this political resolve by charting India's first clear, time-bound roadmap for the mandatory electrification of key vehicle segments. Under the policy, from 1 January 2027, only electric three-wheelers and N1 category (upto 3.5 tonne GVW) goods carriers will be eligible for new registrations in Delhi. Building on this momentum, from 1 April 2028, all new two-wheelers registered in the Capital will be electric, marking a decisive shift towards a cleaner and future-ready transport ecosystem.

These measures are revolutionary because they move the conversation beyond voluntary adoption. They create certainty for manufacturers, investors, charging operators, fleet owners and consumers alike. By providing a clear transition timeline, the policy sends a powerful signal that the future of mobility in Delhi is electric. Such bold mandates are expected to influence policy discussions across India, much like Delhi's earlier environmental initiatives became templates for national reforms.

Designed for Every Citizen

One of the most remarkable aspects of the policy is its inclusiveness. Unlike policies that primarily benefit affluent consumers, Delhi's EV Policy 2026 has been carefully structured to cover virtually every segment of society.

For middle-class families and daily commuters, electric two-wheelers are supported through purchase incentives linked to battery capacity during the first three years of implementation.

For auto-rickshaw drivers, the backbone of last-mile connectivity in Delhi, the policy provides substantial purchase incentives for electric autos (e-3W).

For small businesses, logistics operators, e-commerce delivery fleets, electric N1 goods carriers receive dedicated incentives, helping commercial operators transition away from polluting vehicles.

For families replacing old vehicles (i.e. BS-IV and below), the policy introduces attractive scrapping incentives that reward citizens for retiring older, more polluting vehicles and replacing them with EVs. Scrapping incentives are available across multiple vehicle categories, including two-wheelers, three-wheelers, passenger cars, goods carriers and Grameen Sewa vehicles.

The message is clear: the clean mobility transition should not be restricted to a privileged few. Every Delhi resident should have the opportunity to participate and benefit.



Unprecedented Financial Benefits

At the heart of the policy lies one of the most comprehensive fiscal support packages offered by any state government in India. Citizens purchasing eligible electric vehicles can avail purchase incentives, scrapping incentives, complete exemption from road tax and registration fee for eligible categories.

The policy recognizes that while electric vehicles offer lower operating and maintenance costs, initial purchase prices can sometimes discourage consumers. By directly reducing acquisition costs, GNCTD has ensured that clean mobility is not merely an environmental choice- it is increasingly becoming an economically sensible one.
For thousands of families, small entrepreneurs, delivery partners and transport operators, these incentives can substantially reduce the cost of vehicle ownership while simultaneously lowering fuel expenses for years to come.

A Digital-First Citizen Experience

Perhaps the most citizen-friendly innovation under the policy is the creation of a dedicated digital portal (https://evsubsidy.delhi.gov.in/) for processing purchase and scrapping incentives.

Under the new framework, eligible beneficiaries can submit applications online through a designated portal, track progress digitally and receive benefits through transparent and time-bound process. The operational guidelines mandate end-to-end digital processing of applications and direct benefit transfer mechanisms.

The portal represents far more than an administrative tool. It symbolizes the Government's commitment to transparency, accountability and citizen convenience. Since its launch, the portal has witnessed significant public interest and participation. The strong response from citizens reflects growing confidence in the policy framework and demonstrates that Delhi's residents are ready to embrace electric mobility when provided with a reliable, transparent and supportive ecosystem. In many ways, the portal has become a barometer of public trust in the clean mobility transition.

Building an Ecosystem, Not Just Selling Vehicles

A successful EV transition cannot rely solely on vehicle incentives. It requires an ecosystem. Recognizing this reality, the Delhi EV Policy 2026 adopts a holistic approach that brings together government agencies, OEMs, Charge Point Operators, Battery-Swapping Operators, Aggregator fleet operators and consumers.

Delhi Transco Limited (DTL) has been designated as the nodal agency for planning and co-ordinating public charging and battery-swapping infrastructure across the city. A single-window clearance mechanism is being established to accelerate deployment of charging infrastructure, while dedicated provisions encourage charging facilities at residential communities, commercial establishments and vehicle dealerships.
The policy also encourages participation by DISCOMs, private enterprises, Resident Welfare Associations and community housing societies in expanding charging access. The vision is ambitious: Create a city where charging an electric vehicle is as convenient and routine as charging a mobile phone.

Consultation at an Unprecedented Scale

Policies succeed when stakeholders see themselves reflected in the final outcome. The Delhi EV Policy 2026 emerged after extensive consultations involving Original Equipment Manufacturers, Charging Point Operators, Battery-Swapping Operators, Aggregators Fleet operators, DISCOMs, various departments of GNCTD, Government of India ministries, experts, regulators and environmental institutions.

A month-long public consultation ensured that citizen concerns were incorporated. Industry consultations provided practical insights on implementation challenges. DISCOMs & CPOs contributed expertise on grid readiness. Environmental stakeholders helped align policy objectives with air quality goals.

The final policy therefore represents a collective vision rather than a top-down directive. It is the culmination of months of dialogue, deliberation and consensus-building across the mobility ecosystem.

Beyond Vehicles: A Circular Green Economy

The policy's ambitions extend beyond electrification. Recognizing future environmental challenges associated with battery disposal, Delhi has incorporated provisions for battery recycling, collection systems and environmentally responsible waste management. Dedicated mechanisms have been proposed to support battery traceability, recycling infrastructure and compliance with battery waste management regulations. This ensures that the transition remains sustainable throughout the entire lifecycle of electric vehicles.

A National Model in the Making

History has repeatedly shown that Delhi often becomes the proving ground for ideas that later shape national policy. The Delhi EV Policy 2026 has the potential to follow the same trajectory.

Its combination of bold electrification mandates, generous citizen incentives, digital governance, charging infrastructure expansion, stakeholder participation and environmental stewardship creates a comprehensive framework unmatched in scope and ambition. More importantly, it demonstrates that environmental responsibility and economic growth are not competing objectives. They can reinforce one another.

The Road Ahead

Ultimately, the success of the Delhi EV Policy 2026 will not be measured only in the number of electric vehicles registered or charging stations installed. It will be measured in cleaner mornings, clearer winter skies, quieter streets, lower household transport costs and healthier children.

The greatest beneficiary is the ordinary citizen.

A school-going child breathing cleaner air, an auto driver saving on fuel every day, a delivery worker earning more because operating costs have fallen and a family spending less on transport—these are the real metrics of success.

On the eve of India's Independence Day, Delhi's electric mobility mission represents something larger than a transport reform. It represents confidence: the confidence to imagine a cleaner capital, the courage to legislate for the future and the conviction that environmental responsibility and economic progress can advance together. As the nation celebrates its journey of progress and innovation, Delhi's EV Policy 2026 stands as one of the capital's most significant achievements: A bold declaration that the future of mobility is clean, inclusive, digital and electric.

The revolution is no longer on the horizon. In Delhi, it has already begun!



THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **PROFESSIONALS**

The Change Economist

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

From building a leadership school for girls to leading macroeconomic research at Tata Group, Roopa Purushothaman has linked theoretical insight with actual social impact

ROOPA PURUSHOTHAMAN, 48
Chief Economist & Head of Policy Advocacy, Tata Group; Founder, Avasara Academy *Mumbai*

Born in the US to immigrant parents from Kerala, Roopa Purushothaman's career was shaped by a question she encountered as a teenager while studying public health issues in India for a school project: why do some countries become rich while others remain poor? The question stayed with her, leading her to study economics, ethics, politics and international affairs at Yale, followed by development studies at the London School of Economics.

At just 25, Roopa gained global recognition as co-author of Goldman Sachs' influential 2003 report 'Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050', which argued that Brazil, Russia, India and China could emerge as major economic powers. The experience, she says, taught her to "analyse deeply and write effectively".

After moving to India and working in investment research, Roopa realised that financial constraints deprived many talented Indian girls of leadership training. To bridge that gap, she founded Avasara Academy, a non-profit, in Pune in 2015. "Not only do we seek to develop the next generation of women leaders," says Roopa, "we also wish to create a model school that couples the best of global and Indian pedagogy." The residential secondary school now has 410 students. Its graduates have gone on to institutions such as Ashoka and Krea in India, and Mount Holyoke, Syracuse and Ithaca in the US.

Since joining the Tata Group in 2017 as chief economist and head of policy advocacy, Roopa has led macroeconomic research and policy advocacy initiatives across one of India's largest conglomerates. Now based in Mumbai, her journey, in many ways, echoes the Tata tradition of linking enterprise with social purpose. ■

—M.G. Arun

HER ADVICE

"To youngsters choosing economics as a career, focus on the question that keeps you up at night, pursue it across disciplines, and learn to write simply and well"



Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

Sailing into History

WHAT MAKES THEM SHEROES

Roopa and Dilna are the first women officers in Indian Navy history to receive the Shaurya Chakra after completing the first two-person circumnavigation of the globe by Indian women in 2025

With both their fathers serving in the armed forces—Lieutenant Commander Dilna K.'s in the Indian Army and Lieutenant Commander Roopa A.'s in the Indian Air Force—fearlessness was part of their upbringing. Dilna, from Kozhikode, Kerala, joined the Indian Navy in 2014 as a Logistics Officer after becoming a national-level rifle shooter through the National Cadet Corps. Sailing entered her life later, when she volunteered for the Navy's sailing programme while posted in Visakhapatnam. Roopa, born in Puducherry, studied aeronautical engineering at Anna University, Chennai, worked at the National Aerospace Laboratories in Bengaluru, and joined the Navy in 2017 as an Armament Officer, gradually progressing from dinghy-sailing to competitive and ocean sailing.

Their paths converged in 2021 at the Indian Navy's Ocean Sailing Node, INS *Mandovi*, Goa. In 2023, they were among 17 officers selected for the Sagar Parikrama programme, designed to prepare naval officers for demanding long-distance and circumnavigation expeditions. Intensive training followed, covering seamanship, navigation, meteorology, survival, emergency response, engineering and medical care at sea. Before their final selection for Navika Sagar Parikrama II—the Indian Navy's second all-women global sailing expedition—the duo completed demanding voyages to Rio de Janeiro via Cape Town, to Port Louis in Mauritius, and a double-handed (two-person) passage to Port Blair and back, accumulating more than 38,000 nautical miles of sailing experience.

Finally, they set sail from Goa aboard the 56-foot ocean-going sailing vessel INSV *Tarini* on October 2, 2024, and returned on May 29, 2025, after 238 days at sea and more than 25,600 nautical miles across the Indian, Pacific, Atlantic and Southern Oceans—the first Indian women to complete a double-handed circumnavigation of the globe. They are also the first Indians to reach Point Nemo—the most remote point in the world's oceans, located in the South Pacific—by sailboat. This year, they were awarded the Shaurya Chakra for their feat, becoming the first women officers in Indian Navy history to receive the nation's third-highest peacetime gallantry award—a milestone that is already inspiring young girls to dream bigger. ■

— Pradip R. Sagar

LT CDR ROOPA A., 33
Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala, Kerala

LT CDR DILNA K., 33
Western Naval Command

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"Unconventional dreams are a calling. They give your life meaning and take you towards a version of yourself you may not yet know exists"

—Lt Cdr Roopa A.

"You cannot think about the entire journey at once; you have to focus on what lies immediately ahead. That mindset has stayed with me beyond sailing"

—Lt Cdr Dilna K.



(L-R) Lt Cdr Roopa A. and Lt Cdr Dilna K. on board INSV *Tarini*

Building Institutions, Not Just Businesses

How Medline Academics is Redefining Healthcare Education

Q. What inspired you to start Medline Academics?
Every entrepreneurial journey begins with identifying a real problem. While interacting with doctors, I realized that although medical education provided strong theoretical knowledge, many professionals lacked structured opportunities for practical learning and mentorship, particularly in reproductive medicine. Medline Academics was created to bridge that gap by combining digital learning, expert mentorship, and clinical exposure, enabling healthcare professionals to build confidence throughout their careers.

Q. What makes Medline Academics different from traditional medical education?

We believe education should build competence, not just knowledge. Our learning model blends online education with simulation training, case discussions, mentorship, and hands-on clinical experience through our association with Dr. Kamini Rao Hospitals. Our objective is simple — equip doctors with practical skills that directly improve patient care.

Q. How do you see India's future in healthcare and MedTech?
India has the talent, clinical expertise, and growing technological ecosystem to become a global healthcare leader. However, innovation alone isn't enough. Continuous education must evolve alongside technology. Medical professionals need lifelong learning to adapt to AI, digital healthcare, and emerging clinical practices. Academia will play a critical role in preparing this future-ready workforce.

Q. What role will Artificial Intelligence play in healthcare education?
AI is a powerful enabler, not a replacement for doctors. It can personalize learning, identify knowledge gaps, enhance simulation-based training, and support clinical decision-making. However, qualities like empathy, ethical judgment, and human connection will always remain central to medicine. The future belongs to professionals who can effectively combine technology with compassionate care.





Dr. Pooja S Rao

Q. What has entrepreneurship taught you about leadership?
One of my biggest lessons came through failure. It taught me that lasting organizations are built on resilience, clarity, and strong foundations—not speed. Leadership is about creating systems and empowering people so that the organization continues to grow beyond any individual. Innovation is about solving meaningful problems consistently and responsibly.

Q. What personal lesson has your entrepreneurial journey taught you?
Entrepreneurship has shown me that resilience is often quiet. It is about staying composed during uncertainty, making difficult decisions without compromising values, and remaining patient. More importantly, I learned that leadership is measured not by personal success, but by the opportunities you create for others to grow.

Q. What advice would you give young entrepreneurs in healthcare and education?
Start with the problem, not the product. Healthcare and education are built on trust, so focus on solving genuine challenges rather than chasing trends. Listen carefully to doctors, learners, and patients, build credibility before scale, and never compromise on quality. Businesses may begin with ideas, but enduring institutions are built on purpose, integrity, and people.

A GEN-NEXT VISIONARY REIMAGINING THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

ARADHANA GALGOTIA

Stepping into her role as Chief Operating Officer, Galgotias University with academic zeal, Aradhana Galgotia is on a mission to provide students in India the educational environment needed to excel globally

For Aradhana Galgotia, education is not simply about acquiring a degree or mastering a body of knowledge. Its deeper purpose, she believes, is to teach young people to think: to question assumptions, engage with different perspectives, analyse problems, remain curious and ultimately use knowledge to create meaningful change.

As Chief Operating Officer at Galgotias University, she is attempting to translate that philosophy into practice. Her ambition is not merely to add new programmes or international collaborations, but to create an academic environment in which Indian students have access to the kind of intellectual, technological and global exposure that can prepare them not just for employment, but for an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

After graduating from Jesus and Mary College in New Delhi, Aradhana pursued an LLM in Intellectual Property Rights at Queen Mary University, London and subsequently an MBA at Cambridge Judge Business School, University of Cambridge.

Moving between Indian and European academic environments gave her an unusual vantage point: an understanding of the strengths and realities of Indian higher education, combined with first-hand experience of an international academic culture that places considerable emphasis on independent thinking, discussion, debate, case-based learning, experiential learning and interdisciplinary engagement.



At Cambridge, she encountered an ecosystem in which academic learning was closely connected with entrepreneurship, innovation and the application of ideas to real-world problems. The experience reinforced a conviction that has since become central to her work: the best educational practices should not remain the preserve of a few elite institutions or be accessible only to students who travel abroad.

For Aradhana, global exposure is not synonymous with international travel. It is about changing the way a student sees the world. One of the clearest expressions of this philosophy is Galgotias University's growing association with Girton College, University of Cambridge.

In 2026, 16 Galgotias students were selected for a fully sponsored two-week Graduate Programme at Girton College. The initiative gives students the opportunity to experience an international academic environment, engage with themes such as artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship and innovation, and interact with students and faculty in a setting very different from their regular university experience.

"Having experienced the transformative impact of world-class education myself at Queen Mary University, London and University of Cambridge, I feel strongly that our students should have the opportunity to learn from and engage with the same ecosystem"

– Aradhana Galgotia, COO, Galgotias University

For Aradhana, the significance of the programme goes well beyond a summer spent at Cambridge. She sees such opportunities as a way of taking students beyond the familiar boundaries of their classrooms-to encounter different intellectual traditions, learn alongside peers from different backgrounds, test their assumptions and develop the confidence to participate in global conversations.

"The Graduate Programme enables our students to experience world-class learning, interact with global faculty and peers, and gain perspectives beyond the classroom," she says. "We hope this exposure inspires them to think bigger, innovate boldly and create meaningful impact."

The student response reflects this vision. Fourth-year student Vayu Nandan Tripathi says Cambridge challenged him to think beyond technology - to consider value, impact, scalability and execution-and view startups not only as a builder, but also as an investor.

That, perhaps, is the transformation Aradhana is seeking: not the transfer of information, but a change in perspective. Her approach extends beyond international programmes.

At Galgotias, she has championed active, experiential and industry-linked learning. The university's G-SCALE initiative, mentored by Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, promotes peer-driven, hands-on learning. Its iOS Student Developer Programme, powered by Apple and Infosys, enables students to conceptualise, design, develop and deploy applications. In 2026, 18 Galgotias students won Apple's global Swift Student Challenge-the highest number from a single Indian private university. The ecosystem has also enabled 82 student-developed applications to reach Apple's App Store.

Other initiatives follow the same principle. Galgotias has created industry-linked learning environments in AI, advanced computing, electric vehicles and innovation, with partners including IBM, Tata Technologies, Cisco, Wipro, Tech Mahindra, HP and NVIDIA. The objective is to bridge the gap between classroom learning and its real-world application.

This philosophy drives her interest in bringing literature, arts and public dialogue into university life. The proposed "Galgotias Festival of Letters", inspired by the Jaipur Literature Festival, aims to bring writers, thinkers, academics and artists together with students, connecting ideas across technology, business, science and society.

For Aradhana, technological capability must go hand in hand with intellectual breadth, cultural awareness and empathy. This balance forms the foundation of her vision of holistic education.

Aradhana's perspective is deeply personal. As the daughter of Suneel Galgotia, Chancellor of Galgotias University, she grew up witnessing the institution's evolution, while her own academic journey took her through educational environments in Delhi, London and Cambridge. These experiences shaped her expectations of what a university should offer.

Passionate about learning, reading and literature, she believes education must continually evolve with society, technology and the aspirations of young people. Galgotias has earned five-star QS ratings across Teaching, Academic Development, Innovation, Employability and Facilities.

Yet, for Aradhana, progress extends beyond rankings and infrastructure. Her larger question is: What kind of person should a university produce? Her answer lies in an ecosystem where technology and humanities, industry and academia, and learning and experimentation coexist.



Aradhana Galgotia with her parents Suneel Galgotia and Padmini Galgotia at her graduation ceremony at Cambridge Judge Business School, University of Cambridge.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP



Aradhana Galgotia represents a new generation of education leaders who have themselves experienced the increasingly global nature of higher education and now seek to bring those experiences into the Indian university system.

From Jesus and Mary College in Delhi to Queen Mary University of London and Cambridge Judge Business School, and then back into Indian higher education, her journey has given her the opportunity to experience different academic cultures from the inside.

She is now attempting to combine what she has learnt from those environments with the possibilities available within a rapidly changing Indian higher education landscape.

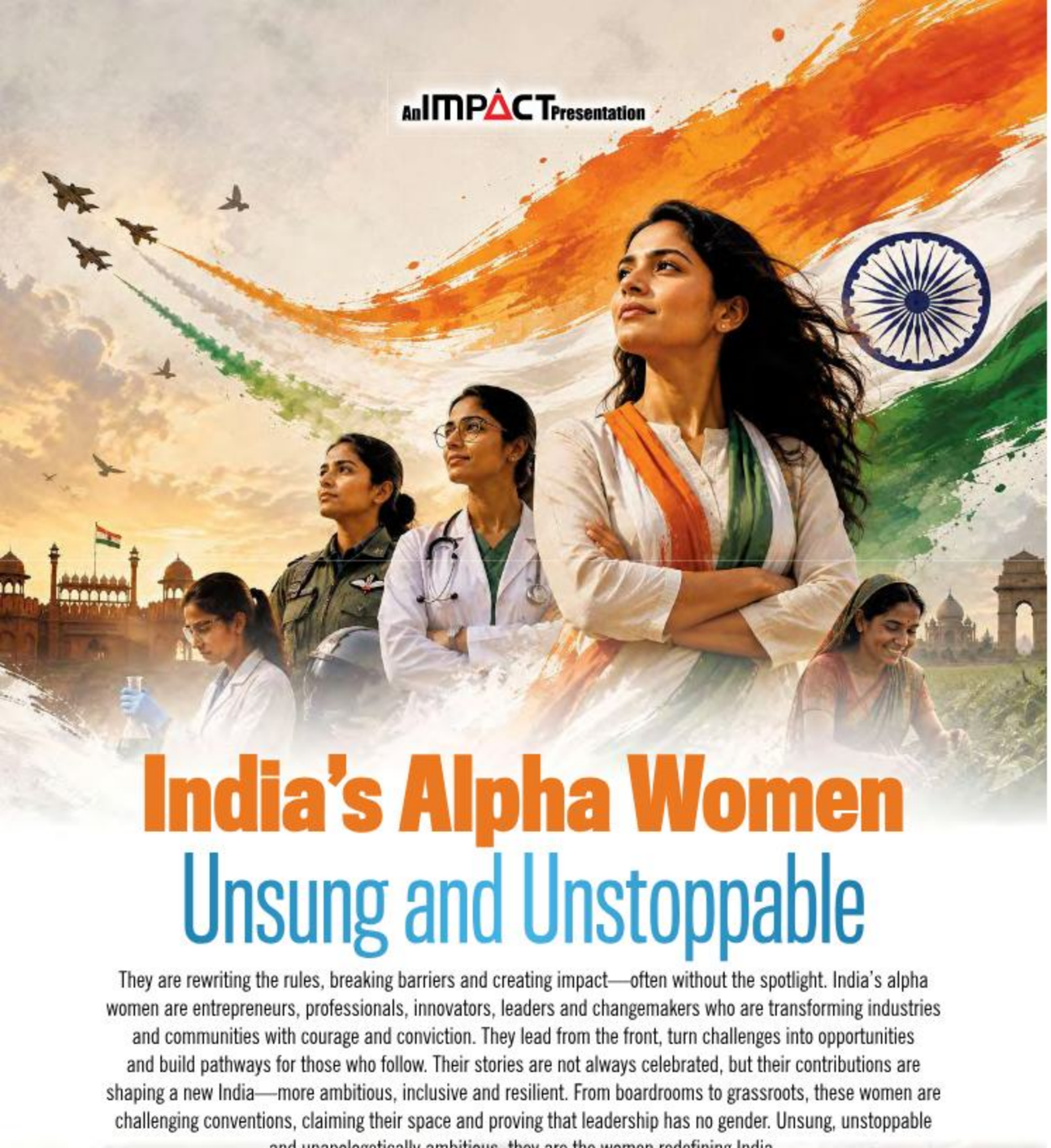
Her challenge is not simply to make Galgotias University more global. It is to make global learning more accessible to its students.

And perhaps that is the larger transformation she is seeking: not simply to prepare students for the future, but to give them intellectual confidence, technological capability and human understanding to become its shapers.

For Aradhana, achievement is less about a single milestone and more about continuous learning. "I am passionate about learning new things and broadening my intellectual horizon," she says. "Thirst and quest for knowledge-cannot be ruled out."

An avid reader and writer with an interest in literature, she also enjoys tennis and swimming. Her approach to success is grounded in balance and consistency: "It's always the small consistencies which contribute towards long-term success in life."

At a time when technology, globalisation and AI are reshaping education, her philosophy is simple: remain curious, keep learning and continue imagining what comes next.



India's Alpha Women

Unsung and Unstoppable

They are rewriting the rules, breaking barriers and creating impact—often without the spotlight. India's alpha women are entrepreneurs, professionals, innovators, leaders and changemakers who are transforming industries and communities with courage and conviction. They lead from the front, turn challenges into opportunities and build pathways for those who follow. Their stories are not always celebrated, but their contributions are shaping a new India—more ambitious, inclusive and resilient. From boardrooms to grassroots, these women are challenging conventions, claiming their space and proving that leadership has no gender. Unsung, unstoppable and unapologetically ambitious, they are the women redefining India.



FROM LEGACY TO LEADERSHIP: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ENGINEERING EDUCATION

How Tejshree Abhay Meganathan is leading Rajalakshmi Engineering College into a new era of education, innovation and possibility



"Leadership is about honouring what has been built, while having the courage to reimagine what comes next."

For Tejshree Abhay Meganathan, leadership is deeply personal. As the second generation of the Rajalakshmi Group of Institutions, she has inherited a strong foundation-but her ambition is not simply to carry forward what has been built. It is to expand it, multiply it and take it into its next era.

As Executive Director of the Rajalakshmi Group of Institutions, Tejshree brings together her experience in branding, marketing, strategic communication and education to look at the institution through a distinctly contemporary lens. Her focus is on building an organisation that is not only academically strong, but digitally relevant, innovation-led, future-facing and deeply connected to the aspirations of its students.

At the heart of that journey is Rajalakshmi Engineering College (REC), established in 1997, institution with NAAC A++, NBA and DSIR-SIRO recognition. With more than 18,000 students and over 560 faculty members, REC has grown into a large and dynamic ecosystem of engineering education, research, innovation, entrepreneurship and student life.

But for Tejshree, institutional growth is about far more than numbers.

"An engineering college cannot afford to stand still. Technology changes, industries change, and the aspirations of young people change even faster. Our responsibility is to stay ahead of that curve."

That philosophy has translated into a continuous focus on emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, research, industry collaboration and innovation. REC has built a significant research and innovation ecosystem, with 323 patents filed, 36 patents granted, more than ₹55 crore in research funding and over 250 industrial consultancy projects. Its growing startup culture has also nurtured DPIIT-recognised ventures and hundreds of student innovations.

For Tejshree, however, the transformation of an engineering college is not only about laboratories, patents and research papers. It is also about creating a campus community that students want to be part of. Over the years, she has placed increasing emphasis on the student experience-from strengthening Rajalakshmi's digital presence and creating new ways for students to engage with the institution, to supporting large-scale technical, cultural and sporting events and platforms that allow students to discover and express themselves beyond academics.

The objective is simple: to create a college where students do not merely attend classes, but build friendships, find their communities, experiment with ideas, celebrate their talents and create memories that become an important part of who they are.

Her background in branding and communication has played a significant role in this evolution. Tejshree believes that institutions today need to be experienced as much as they are understood. A great institution must have a strong identity, a vibrant community and a voice that resonates with the generation it serves.

That vision extends beyond the Rajalakshmi campus. Through her work with the Confederation of Indian Industry's Indian Women Network, Tejshree has championed entrepreneurship, mentorship and leadership opportunities for women, reflecting her belief that meaningful leadership is ultimately about creating opportunities for others to grow.

Yet perhaps the most defining part of Tejshree's leadership journey exists outside the boardroom. She is building this next chapter while raising three young children, navigating the demands of motherhood alongside the responsibilities of leading and growing a large institution. It is a balancing act that requires constant prioritisation, resilience and, above all, a strong support system.

Tejshree is the first to acknowledge that the pace and scale at which she is able to pursue her ambitions would not be possible without the people around her.

"I am fortunate to have a husband and a family who understand what I am trying to build and support me through it. You can dream big, but having people who believe in that dream with you makes all the difference."

For her, that support has made it possible to embrace both sides of her life wholeheartedly—to be present for her children while continuing to build, lead and dream ambitiously for the institution she represents.

Her journey is ultimately about evolution of an institution, of a family legacy and of herself. She is taking an organisation built by the first generation and pushing it towards a future that is more digital, more innovative, more research-driven, more connected to industry and more responsive to the aspirations of a new generation.

The ambition is not simply to preserve a legacy. It is to build on it with courage, create something bigger from it, and ensure that the next generation inherits not just an institution—but a platform filled with possibility.

For Tejshree Abhay Meganathan, that is what leadership looks like: honouring what has been built, while having the courage to reimagine what comes next.



India's Growth Story
Women at the Heart of a Changing Nation

Women are shaping India's growth story across boardrooms, classrooms, hospitals, government offices, laboratories and marketplaces. From the doctor serving patients and the teacher shaping young minds to the entrepreneur creating jobs and the civil servant driving governance, women are increasingly moving from being participants in India's development to becoming its architects.

The transformation is visible in workforce numbers. India's female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for those aged 15 years and above rose from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 41.7% in 2023-24, while the female Worker Population Ratio increased from 22% to 40.3%. Female unemployment fell from 5.6% to 3.2% during the same period. More recently, government data shows female LFPR reaching 40% in 2025. Overall, India's LFPR for people aged 15 years and above stood at 55.9% in February 2026, indicating the expanding size of the country's active workforce.

Healthcare is one of the most significant arenas of women's contribution. Women are increasingly visible as doctors, nurses, researchers, hospital administrators, public-health professionals and healthcare entrepreneurs. India had 42.94 lakh registered nursing personnel as of March 2025

Education is another powerful engine of women's economic mobility. Female enrolment in higher education increased from 1.57 crore in 2014-15 to 2.24 crore in 2023-24, a rise of 42.2%. Female Gross Enrolment Ratio reached 31.2%, compared with 22.9% in 2014-15. Women now account for 54.9% of India's total school teaching workforce, making them a powerful force in shaping the next generation. Female postgraduate enrolment has also risen by more than 61% since 2014-15.

Entrepreneurship is perhaps the clearest expression of women-led growth. More than 10 crore women have been mobilised into Self-Help Groups, creating an enormous grassroots economic network. Female self-employment increased from 51.9% in 2017-18 to 67.4% in 2023-24. Nearly every second DPIIT-recognised startup has at least one woman director, while women have received 68% of loans under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana. The government has also reported 2 crore Lakhpati Didis, highlighting the scale of women's income-generating activity in rural India.

Government services are witnessing a gradual but important shift as well. Women are increasingly entering the IAS, IPS and other civil services, bringing greater gender diversity into policymaking and administration. In the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2024, 284 of the 1,009 candidates recommended for appointment were women, or about 28%. The 2025 IAS Civil List records 5,577 officers in active service, reflecting the scale of the administrative machinery in which women's representation continues to grow.

The story of Indian women is therefore no longer confined to one sector or one social class. It spans the rural entrepreneur, the corporate executive, the doctor, nurse, professor, teacher, scientist, IAS officer and startup founder.

India's next phase of growth will depend on converting this momentum into greater leadership, equal opportunities, higher incomes and stronger workforce participation. When women advance, they do not advance alone—they create jobs, educate families, strengthen communities and expand India's productive capacity.

The rise of women is not a parallel narrative to India's growth story. It is increasingly at the very centre of it.



LATA GULLAPALLI
REDEFINING LEADERSHIP THROUGH IMPACT

For Lata Gullapalli, leadership has never been defined by designation or status. It is measured by the impact one creates. Over a distinguished career spanning global investment banking, corporate governance, entrepreneurship, academia and philanthropy, she has remained driven by a singular purpose—to create solutions that are financially sound, socially relevant and sustainable.

Looking back, Gullapalli sees a clear thread running through every stage of her journey. Whether structuring complex financial solutions, serving on corporate boards or mentoring entrepreneurs, her focus has always been on creating long-term value. Underpinning this philosophy is an unwavering commitment to integrity, which she believes is the foundation of both credibility and enduring leadership.

Her career across multiple countries has also shaped a distinctly global outlook. Adapting to new cultures, learning different ways of working and embracing change taught her that leadership today is less about authority and more about adaptability. In an increasingly connected world, she believes the best leaders are those who think beyond borders and are willing to learn continuously.

That perspective extends to her understanding of business. While organisations were once expected to serve only shareholders, Gullapalli believes today's businesses must create value for employees, customers, communities and society at large. For her, profit and purpose are no longer competing objectives but complementary goals.

"The definition of profit has changed," she believes. Organisations that consider the interests of all stakeholders are not only more responsible but also more resilient. Businesses that improve lives while delivering financial success ultimately build stronger and more sustainable enterprises.

Having served on the boards of both corporate and non-profit organisations, Gullapalli sees little difference in the principles of good leadership. Every organisation, she says, should be run with professionalism, efficiency and accountability. What changes is not the discipline but the destination. A leader's real responsibility is to communicate a vision so effectively that people begin to own it themselves. Once that happens, extraordinary outcomes become possible.

Despite being recognised as an influential woman leader, Gullapalli has never viewed her career through the lens of gender. She describes herself instead as someone who naturally challenges conventional thinking and constantly seeks better ways of doing things. It is this instinct to disrupt, innovate and improve that has defined her leadership style.

Her advice to aspiring women professionals is refreshingly practical: let ability speak louder than identity. Competence, confidence and self-respect, she believes, earn lasting respect far more effectively than labels ever can. Her hope is for a future where women succeeding in leadership is no longer considered exceptional but simply expected.



Beyond the boardroom, Gullapalli's interests are remarkably diverse. Writing, travel, music, sport and mentoring have enriched her perspective as much as her professional achievements. She believes every experience contributes to personal growth and makes one a more empathetic and effective leader.

As India enters a new phase of economic growth and innovation, she sees immense opportunities for individuals willing to create meaningful change. Rather than viewing these as opportunities specifically for women, she believes they belong to those with the capability, courage and commitment to make a difference.

Her own journey reflects the power of bringing together diverse experiences. Finance, governance, education, entrepreneurship and social impact have never existed in silos for her; each has strengthened the other. She sees herself less as a conventional leader and more as a collaborator who enjoys solving problems, building institutions and enabling others to succeed.

For Gullapalli, there is rarely a single turning point that defines a career. Success comes from being prepared for unexpected opportunities, thinking clearly in moments of uncertainty and having the courage to make difficult decisions. It is this philosophy that inspired her to teach decision-making through her programme, How to Think, reinforcing her belief that human judgment and critical thinking remain indispensable, even in an AI-driven world.

Her message to young women is simple yet profound: know yourself, respect yourself and stay true to who you are. Confidence rooted in authenticity, she believes, is the strongest foundation for building a meaningful life and career.

Lata Gullapalli's journey is a reminder that leadership is not about personal success alone. It is about creating lasting impact, inspiring others and leaving every institution, every community and every life a little better than you found it.

LEADING WITH PURPOSE

Women Redefining Success and Social Impact



"I follow my heart and intuition. It is you who will get you where you want to go and nobody else."

Dr. Pooja S. Rao is a healthcare education entrepreneur and Co-Founder of Medline Academics, an e-learning platform focused on reproductive medicine. With a strong background in branding, digital innovation and healthcare education, she has played a pivotal role in creating learning ecosystems that bring medical knowledge to a wider audience. Her work reflects a commitment to combining technology with meaningful education and patient-centric healthcare. Beyond academics, she has been associated with healthcare initiatives, conferences and women-focused healthcare platforms. Her leadership philosophy is rooted in following one's instincts and creating meaningful impact. As she says, "I follow my heart and intuition. It is you who will get you where you want to go and nobody else."



"To go where we haven't gone before. To create firsts, raise the bar and give our students experiences that inspire them to dream bigger."

Mrs. Tejshree Abhay Meganathan Executive Director of Rajalakshmi Group, represents a new generation of education leaders blending innovation, technology and contemporary thinking. With nearly two decades of experience in media and marketing, she brings communication, creativity and strategic thinking to education. She has played a key role in strengthening academic-industry collaborations, global partnerships and student experiences, preparing young minds for an evolving world. Her vision is to create new possibilities, set new benchmarks and inspire students to dream bigger.



"I am extremely passionate about bringing qualitative and pedagogical changes within the Galgotia Group of Institutions since it will bring them on par with some of the world class academic institutions, capable of producing high-quality manpower for the industry and academia alike."

Aradhana Galgotia, Chief Operating Officer, Galgotias University, is a dynamic new-generation education leader committed to transforming pedagogy and creating globally benchmarked learning opportunities for students. An LLM in Intellectual Property Rights from Queen Mary University of London, she has gained valuable international academic exposure, including MBA at Cambridge Judge Business School, University of Cambridge. Passionate about holistic learning, innovation and academic excellence, Aradhana is driving the adoption of global best practices at Galgotias University while contributing to its vision of becoming a globally recognised institution.



"Leadership isn't about authority–it's about creating sustainable impact."

Lata Gullapalli brings over 25 years of international experience in investment banking, mergers and acquisitions, financial restructuring and capital raising across South Asia, Russia and the UK. Today, she combines financial expertise with a strong commitment to social impact, mentoring women entrepreneurs, particularly in rural communities, to build sustainable businesses. As Chairperson of The Savoir Faire Company and a board member of several organisations, she champions leadership, entrepreneurship and empowerment, creating lasting social impact.



"My vision is to create a healthy nation on the robust foundation of affordable and attainable care for everyone and help patients and citizens of India lead healthier and happier lifestyles."

Dr. Asmita Jagtap, Executive Director of Bharati Vidyapeeth Health Sciences, is advancing a vision rooted in accessible healthcare, quality education and social responsibility. Continuing the legacy of her father, the late Dr. Patangrao Kadam, she champions affordable healthcare, community outreach, digital learning and public health awareness. Her leadership extends across healthcare delivery and medical education, with a strong focus on underserved communities. For Dr. Jagtap, leadership is about service and creating a healthier nation where everyone can access affordable, attainable care.

Leading a Legacy of Lifecare

DR. ASMITA JAGTAP

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
BHARATI VIDYAPEETH
OFFICE OF HEALTH SCIENCES**



t a time when healthcare is being transformed by technology, changing patient expectations and new models of education, Dr. Asmita Jagtap is helping shape what comes next.

As Executive Director of the Office of Health Sciences at Bharati Vidyapeeth and a Patron Member of Bharati Vidyapeeth, she brings together medicine, psychiatry, hospital administration, education and community service with one guiding belief: healthcare is a fundamental right and must remain accessible to every section of society.

A doctor, psychiatrist and hospital administrator, Dr. Jagtap holds an M.B.B.S., M.D. in Psychiatry and a Ph.D. in Hospital Administration, along with qualifications in labour laws DLL and medico-legal science (PGDMLS). Her commitment to continuous learning has also taken her to executive programmes at Cornell University and Stanford University.

But her journey is defined not simply by qualifications, but by what she has chosen to build with them.

Under her leadership, Bharati Vidyapeeth Health Sciences has expanded its focus across hospital operations, quality improvement, healthcare technology, medical education and community health. Among its initiatives are a Human Milk Bank, a dedicated Sleep Lab and a state-of-the-art Simulation Lab designed to strengthen hands-on medical education and training.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, her leadership also supported the establishment of an oxygen-generating plant, large-scale vaccination and healthcare training initiatives, and COVID-19 centres in Turchi, Kadegaon and Sangli.

Her vision for healthcare extends beyond conventional hospital boundaries. Bharati Vidyapeeth has embraced emerging technologies and innovation, including the trial of the world's first robotic dental arm, reflecting a commitment to preparing clinicians and institutions for the healthcare landscape of tomorrow.

For Dr. Jagtap, leadership is also deeply personal. She is carrying forward the vision and values of her father, Dr. Patangrao Kadam, whose legacy was built around education, service and social transformation.

Her approach combines that legacy with a contemporary understanding of healthcare—one that places equal emphasis on clinical excellence, accessibility, technology, institutional leadership and human compassion.

Her work has earned recognition beyond the institution. She was named among the Most Influential Young Leaders 2023–24 in London, while Bharati Vidyapeeth Health Sciences was recognised among India's Greatest Brands 2023–24.

Dr. Jagtap also sees leadership as an opportunity to create space for others. Speaking about women in leadership, she says:

"Women are breaking barriers and redefining leadership across fields. Their vision, resilience and empathy are shaping stronger institutions. From healthcare to business, they are creating change and opening doors. Their rise is paving the way for the leaders of tomorrow."

Her story is therefore not simply about leading an institution. It is about evolving a legacy while creating a new one—where healthcare, education, technology and social responsibility come together.

From healing patients to educating healthcare professionals, from strengthening institutions to embracing innovation, Dr. Asmita Jagtap is leading with a clear purpose: to make healthcare more accessible, education more meaningful and institutions more responsive to society.

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **INNOVATORS**

For the Love of Storks

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Purnima created the Hargila Army, a women-led grassroots conservation movement that has transformed the Greater Adjutant Stork to a symbol of ecological pride



Photograph by **NILOTPAL BARUAH**

At an age when most children lose themselves in imaginary wonderlands, young Purnima Devi Barman found her muse in a bird that everyone feared. The Hargila, or the Greater Adjutant Stork, was regarded as an ill omen and despised for its ungainly appearance and scavenging habits. Years later, a phone call would turn that childhood fascination into a life's mission. A nesting tree had been cut down by villagers who believed the birds brought misfortune. When Barman rushed to rescue the fallen birds, she was met with hostility. Then a new mother to twin daughters, she picked up one of the injured chicks and felt an immediate connection, her thoughts going to her own children.

That moment transformed empathy into action. Barman went on to create the Hargila Army, a women-led grassroots conservation movement that today has over 2,000 female volunteers. And they do much more than protect nests. They have transformed the Greater Adjutant from a feared and mocked bird into a symbol of ecological pride and rural identity. From barely 115 birds in the 1990s, the Greater Adjutant population in Assam has grown to more than 1,800 now.

Saving the Hargila (literally 'bone swallower' in Assamese) has brought Barman some prestigious global conservation honours, such as the Whitley Gold Award (2022), a feature in *Time* magazine's Women of the Year (2025) and, this year, the National Geographic Wayfinder Award. Barman, though, feels her greatest prize has been changing the fate of the man-sized bird while also bringing a transformation in people's outlooks. ■

—Riddhi Rishika

HER TAKE

"The Hargila carry on as nature's scavengers, even as many consider them a bad omen. Perhaps we humans can learn from them...take courage to keep doing what we believe in"

PURNIMA DEVI BARMAN, 46
Conservation biologist and community mobiliser
Guwahati

Nari Shakti Ideologue



FARZANA AFRIDI, 49
Professor and Head of Economics and Planning Unit, ISI *Delhi*

Farzana Afridi was the first girl in her extended Bihari family to study abroad and earn a PhD, a remarkable achievement, considering both her grandmothers were non-literate. She gives full credit for this to her father, a government officer posted in Delhi who had big dreams for his children. Her upbringing also shaped Afridi's academic interests, the reason she chose women's economic empowerment as the central theme of her research. The 2020 recipient of the National Mahalanobis Memorial Medal for her contributions to quantitative economics, Afridi says a defining moment came in 2018 when she received a research grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "They recognised the value of my research...it was a game-changer for my career," she says.

As her work expanded, Afridi began examining labour markets from a broader systems perspective, studying both employer and worker behaviour and the incentives that shape their decisions. Today, she is a faculty member in the Economics department at the Delhi centre of the Indian Statistical Institute (the ISI's only woman faculty in the past 15 years) while also teaching and heading a number of initiatives at other institutions. Her ongoing research focuses on the intersection of workers, enterprises and emerging technologies, and how the latter will influence existing gender gaps. Reflecting on her own journey, Afridi says that leadership has never made life less demanding. "A woman's life never stops being challenging, mine certainly hasn't," she says. ■

—Sonal Khetarpal

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Farzana's research has shaped the discourse on women's economic empowerment, labour markets and public policy in India in the past decade

HER TAKE

"Young women have to remain single-minded in their focus, seize opportunities that provide a sense of purpose beyond traditional expectations...and trust that the rest will follow"

HER INSPIRATION

"For me, people are role models. Everyone has something to share with their wisdom and lived experiences. I just soak that in"



INFOSYS SCIENCE FOUNDATION

DR ANJANA BADRINARAYANAN, 40
Molecular biologist, National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) *Bengaluru*

The Cell Mender

An average human cell can sustain up to 10,000 damages to its DNA every day. And these can get fixed pretty fast too. These repair mechanisms are crucial because several diseases, including cancer, are linked to incorrectly fixed cell damage.

Repairing a double strand DNA break, one such lethal damage, requires a matching piece of DNA from elsewhere in the cell. Easier said than done, given how efficiently DNA is packed into a tiny cell. Stretched out end to end, human DNA from a single cell can extend up to 6 feet while that of an invisible bacterium is little more than 1 mm. How then, do pieces of DNA find each other in the crowd? Over the past decade, Anjana Badrinarayanan's lab at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) found a missing piece of that puzzle by observing bacterial cells in real time through high-resolution microscopy, much like "ecologists observing animals in their natural habitat". The repair mechanism, they discovered, is a highly regulated process of sweep-search involving specific enzymes that act like a motor. "It grabs on to the piece of DNA and the protein that's doing the DNA search and sends it off on these sweeps. We found the motor that powers this process, giving us insights into the rules governing what is the right match and what is not," explains Badrinarayanan.

Winner of the 2025 Infosys prize in Life Sciences, Badrinarayanan's fascination with DNA maintenance in microbes grew during her graduate studies in Oxford. "Microbes are the most diverse living systems on our planet...and we still know remarkably little about how they survive," she says. "Everything from recycling and scavenging resources to driving essential biogeochemical cycles that sustain us depends on microbial life." ■

—Ajay Sukumaran

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Anjana's groundbreaking research into the molecular mechanisms that help cells repair DNA damage

Government of Haryana

"The double engine government of Haryana is committed to building world-class infrastructure. Haryana is emerging as a top state for investment, and increasing investment means an increase in new job opportunities. It is very important for Haryana to become developed to make Viksit Bharat."

- Narendra Modi



HARYANA'S BIG LEAP INTO THE FUTURE

"With a new industrial policy, nine sectoral policies, an AI-enabled investor ecosystem and a sharper push into future industries, Haryana is indicating a shift from a manufacturing stronghold to a more diversified, innovation-led economy"

Haryana enjoys the reputation of being one of north India's most industrialised states. Though occupying only 1.3 per cent of India's geographical area, the state accounts for about 3.6 per cent of the national GDP. The fact that about 57 per cent of its land mass lies within the National Capital Region gives it a locational advantage few states enjoy. This base is now being harnessed to take a big leap into the future, a metaphor for making a bold, proactive jump towards tomorrow.

Haryana took the jump on June 1, 2026 by presenting a new economic direction through three closely linked developments. The Hon'ble Chief Minister, Sh. Nayab Singh Saini, unveiled the Make in Haryana Industrial Policy 2026 along with nine sectoral policies, an AI-enabled Unified Single Window System, and a new Happening Haryana identity.

The Make in Haryana policy sets a target of ₹5 lakh crore in investment and 10 lakh jobs over the next five years. But interestingly, investment commitments on the day of the launch of the direction, crossed ₹1.10 lakh crore, underscoring the ambience the state offers to entrepreneurs and investors. The larger point, however, does not lie in the numbers but in the fact that Haryana is trying to change the terms on which it competes for capital, industry and talent. Industries Minister Rao Narbir Singh hailed the launch as an important day in Haryana's industrial history.

"My government's priorities lie in ensuring that development reaches every corner of the state, with a particular emphasis on empowering rural areas, advancing social welfare, promoting environmental sustainability, and uplifting backward communities. In sync with the vision of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, Haryana has implemented several initiatives that reflect a commitment to both economic growth and social equity"

- Nayab Singh Saini





The Happening Haryana initiative provides a common platform for investor outreach. The Indo-Japan discussions reinforce the importance of trusted partnerships, while the GCC agenda points towards innovation-led growth.

Put together, this shows that the state is trying to widen the ambit of its growth model beyond manufacturing and logistics into technology, services, innovation and future industries.

The Hon'ble Chief Minister states that at the heart of Haryana's recent reform agenda lies a larger national aspiration. The Prime Minister, Sh. Narendra Modi, has articulated his vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, transforming India into a developed nation by the centenary of Independence. Sh. Saini is aligning Haryana's growth strategy with this national vision through the framework of Viksit Bharat, Viksit Haryana.

The state's focus on industrial competitiveness, future-ready sectors, technology-driven governance, investment promotion and job creation reflects an effort to position Haryana as a key engine of India's growth journey

The state's focus on industrial competitiveness, future-ready sectors, technology-driven governance, investment promotion and job creation reflects an effort to position Haryana as a key engine of India's growth journey.

AT THE CENTRE OF HARYANA'S STRATEGY LIE THREE PILLARS.

ONE: MAKE IN HARYANA

The Make in Haryana Industrial Policy 2026 serves as the foundation of the state's new economic framework.

For Sh Saini, the rationale is straightforward. States today are no longer competing solely through incentives. They are competing through speed, resilience, governance quality and long-term partnerships. Investors, he says, want and seek certainty rather than approvals.

This vital shift in thinking runs through the policy. To drive investment into high-growth industries, the Make in Haryana Industrial Policy 2026 identifies a set of thrust sectors that align with emerging global opportunities and national priorities. These include Toys & Sports Equipment, Textiles & Apparel, Auto, Auto Components & Light Engineering, Leather & Footwear, Renewable Energy Projects, Green Hydrogen, Electronic Waste Recycling, Chemicals & Petrochemicals, Electric Vehicles, Electronics System Design & Manufacturing (ESDM), Semiconductors, Rare Earth & Critical Materials, Defence & Aerospace, Pharmaceuticals & Medical Devices, and Agro, Food Processing & Allied Services. These sectors are expected to serve as key engines of industrial growth, exports, innovation and employment generation in the state.

The key pillars include promoting the brand "Happening Haryana", encouraging innovation and research, supporting sustainable industrial development, strengthening export competitiveness, developing robust industrial infrastructure, providing flexible fiscal incentives and building industry-ready talent.

The Industries Minister, Rao Narbir Singh, framed the objective in similar expansive terms. Haryana, he says, should not only remain a manufacturing destination but also evolve into a centre for innovation, exports, technology and future industries.







Dr. Amit Kumar Agrawal, IAS, Commissioner & Secretary, Industries & Commerce Department, has described the launch as a milestone in Haryana's economic journey, and the culmination of nearly 30-40 consultations with industry stakeholders held under the leadership of the Hon. Chief Minister.

Dr. Yash Garg (IAS), Director General, Industries & Commerce, made a detailed presentation surrounding the launch. He highlighted the need for Haryana to respond to the changing global realities. As supply chains diversify and competition intensifies, states must not only attract investment but also create conditions that make industries more competitive in the long term.

The Make in Haryana Industrial Policy 2026, a flagship policy, aims at enhancing Haryana's competitiveness as a global manufacturing and investment destination. It seeks to attract investments across identified thrust sectors by reducing the cost of doing business, promoting employment generation, encouraging innovation and exports, and supporting sustainable industrial development through a comprehensive package of fiscal incentives.



TWO: NINE SECTORAL POLICIES- BUILDING FUTURISTIC GROWTH ENGINES

Alongside the Make in Haryana Industrial Policy 2026, the state unveiled nine sector-specific policies tailor-made to create specialised investment ecosystems across technology, advanced manufacturing, sustainability, healthcare and value-added agriculture. The sectoral policies combine capital and operational support with infrastructure development assistance, sector-specific incentives, and a range of common benefits, thereby creating a comprehensive framework to support industrial growth, innovation, exports, and employment generation.

INCENTIVE	DETAILS
Net SGST Reimbursement Subsidy	Reimbursement of 20% to 70% of Net SGST for up to 12 years.
Capital Investment Subsidy	Subsidy ranging from 2.5% to 30% of eligible capital expenditure, including additional support for thrust sectors.
Local Employment Generation Subsidy	Incentive of up to 1.0 to 1.2 lakh per local employee for a period of 10 years, with additional support for recruitment through Haryana Kaushal Rozgar Nigam (HKRN).
R&D Investment Subsidy	Support of up to 50% of capital expenditure, subject to a maximum of 50 crore, along with incentives for commercialization of patents.
Export Incentive Subsidy	Export-linked support of up to 4.5% of eligible capital expenditure.
Green Incentives	Incentives for renewable energy projects, Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) systems, green buildings, and carbon credit generation initiatives.
Electricity Duty Reimbursement	Reimbursement of 100% electricity duty for up to 20 years.
Stamp Duty Reimbursement	Reimbursement of up to 100% of stamp duty.
Infrastructure Development Support	Assistance of up to 100% for trunk infrastructure development up to the plot boundary in underdeveloped areas.
Additional Top-Up Support	An eligible unit can EITHER avail fiscal benefits under the Make in Haryana Industrial Policy 2026, OR avail 50% top up support on incentives as disbursed under Government of India schemes, as per its choice

THE NINE SECTORAL POLICIES ARE:

Haryana IT/ITeS, AI & Emerging Technologies Policy 2026

The main objective of this policy is to increase the IT industry turnover from Rs. 1.5 lakh crore to over Rs 3 lakh crore, create 1 lakh jobs, promote R&D through CoEs, drive innovation & sector-wide growth and increase IT exports to Rs.1.25 lakh crore in 5 years.

Haryana Global Capability Centre (GCC) Policy 2026

The GCC Policy aims to attract 100 new GCCs in the state, supporting the creation of over 30,000 new employment opportunities

Haryana Electronics System Design & Manufacturing (ESDM) Policy 2026

The ESDM Policy aims to position Haryana as a globally competitive ESDM manufacturing hub, with an avowed objective to attract Rs 10,000 crores investment in this sector, and create 75,000 jobs.

Haryana Pharmaceutical and Medical Devices Manufacturing Policy 2026

This policy aims to establish Haryana as a global pharma and med-tech powerhouse, and attract Rs 10,000 crore investment in this sector, generate 20,000 jobs, boost exports, reduce import dependency and promote innovation and R&D in advanced medical devices.

Haryana AVGC-XR Policy 2026

The AVCG-XR Policy aims to boost creation and global distribution of regional digital content, generate up to 10,000 direct and indirect jobs, attract investments and anchor units in the AVCG-XR Sector & promote its use in governance, education, etc.

Haryana Toys and Sports Equipment Manufacturing Policy 2026

Designed with an objective to develop Haryana into a competitive hub for toys and sports equipment manufacturing, attract Rs. 5,000-crore investment in the sector, generate 25,000 jobs with focus on MSME & Skilling, and develop one integrated Toys & Sports Equipment manufacturing cluster.

Haryana Electronics Waste Recycling Policy 2026

This policy aims to achieve near 100% e-waste recycling by 2030, strengthen collection, dismantling and recycling ecosystem, promote scientific and responsible e-waste disposal and to develop advanced recycling infrastructure.

Haryana Agri-Business and Food Processing Policy 2026

This policy aims to attract Rs 5,000 crores of investment in the sector, strengthen farmer-FPO-processor-market linkages, increase food processing exports by 50%, create 30,000 jobs, reduce post-harvest losses, develop value chains.

Haryana Data Centre Policy 2026

The Data Center Policy aims to attract Rs 10,000 crores of investment in this sector, create high quality employment opportunities, promote sustainable and energy efficient infrastructure and facilitate transparent single-window ecosystem

The Make in Haryana Industrial Policy 2026 is the State's flagship industrial policy aimed at enhancing Haryana's competitiveness as a global manufacturing and investment destination.

THE KEY BENEFITS THESE SECTORAL POLICIES WILL ENSURE ARE

CATEGORY	INCENTIVES AND SUPPORT
CAPEX Subsidy Support	Support for building and infrastructure development, plant and machinery, IT hardware and software, captive renewable energy projects, ETP/WTP/ZLD facilities, stamp duty, EDC payments, and green building certifications.
OPEX Subsidy Support	Reimbursement/support for Net SGST, electricity duty, annual lease rentals, quality and export certification costs, patent-related expenses, guarantee fees under credit guarantee schemes, credit rating expenses, freight charges for exports, and internet bandwidth/cloud rental charges.
Infrastructure Development Support	Assistance for establishment of Centers of Excellence (CoEs), R&D centers, and sector-specific industrial parks and clusters.
Common Incentives with Make in Haryana Policy	Employment generation subsidy, export incentives, patent commercialization support, green incentives, one-time support for top-up support on Government of India schemes where applicable.



THREE: UNIFIED SINGLE WINDOW SYSTEM- REIMAGINING INVESTOR EXPERIENCE

A key component of Haryana's new economic framework is the AI-enabled Unified Single Window System, designed to simplify and accelerate the investor journey from project conception to implementation.

The platform brings together approvals, policy guidance, incentives, land identification and



investor support within a single digital ecosystem. Its flagship features include an AI Agent that provides real-time guidance on approvals, incentives and departmental services. This AI Agent differs from the usual systems, as it engages with the user and provides investment related information at a single place; an AI Blueprint Report that helps investors assess project requirements, compliance obligations and infrastructure needs; and a GIS-enabled Land Intelligence System that enables businesses to identify suitable land parcels, evaluate connectivity, and compare industrial ecosystems across the state.

Additional tools such as Know Your Incentives and Know Your Policy help investors quickly identify applicable incentives, sector-specific benefits and regulatory requirements. By integrating information, approvals and facilitation services on one platform, Haryana aims to reduce procedural complexity, improve and hasten decision-making, and provide greater certainty to investors. The Portal also





enables interested investors to schedule a meeting with department officials at the click of a button.

The Unified Single Window System not only reflects the state's broader shift towards technology-enabled governance, but also facilitates realisation of the Hon. Chief Minister's vision of moving from ease to speed, and, from speed to predictability, in investor services.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The significance of Haryana's recent reforms lies not in any single policy announcement but in integrating multiple strands of economic strategy.

While the Make in Haryana Industrial Policy seeks to strengthen industrial competitiveness, the sectoral policies identify and help rev up future growth engines, the Unified Single Window System aims to transform investor facilitation. The Happening Haryana initiative provides a common platform for investor outreach. The Indo-Japanese discussions reinforce the importance of trusted partnerships, while the GCC agenda points towards innovation-led growth.

The direction is increasingly clear. Haryana is attempting to leverage its manufacturing strengths while expanding into technology, innovation, digital governance and knowledge-intensive industries. It is a strategy that combines industrial growth, sector-specific ecosystem development and governance reform into a single economic framework.

The Hon. Chief Minister states that Haryana's recent economic initiatives are in broader alignment with the vision of the Hon. Prime Minister of Viksit Bharat 2047, the goal of transforming India into a developed nation by the centenary of Independence. He has increasingly emphasised this objective through the framework of "Viksit Bharat. Viksit Haryana", recognizing that India's growth ambitions will ultimately be realised through the success of its states, and Haryana aims to play a key role in India's growth journey.

Under the able leadership of the Sh Saini, Haryana is seeking to be in the forefront of states playing a big role in realising the national vision by strengthening manufacturing competitiveness, building future-ready sectoral ecosystems, promoting innovation and technology, enhancing ease-of-doing business and creating job opportunities on a big scale. The launch of the Make in Haryana Industrial Policy, sectoral policies and the AI-enabled Unified Single Window System reflect this approach, positioning Haryana's economic transformation as an integral part of the vision of a developed India by 2047.

TAKEAWAY

"I like to quote the late US poet-activist Maya Angelou: 'Every time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it and without realising it, she stands up for all women'"

The Taboo Breaker

In Class 9, Aditi's science teacher, who made every other lesson easy and fun, skipped the chapter on menstruation entirely. "With a taboo subject, there is a hidden code that somehow everybody knows," she says of her small school in Garhwa, Jharkhand. It was the 1990s, and at home, too, the rules were unequivocal. "I grew up looking at myself as something dirty and impure. No going to the puja room. No touching things in the kitchen," recalls Aditi.

Her worldview changed at the National Institute of Design, when she met Tuhin Paul who was her project partner, and is now her husband. What began as a classroom exercise became their diploma project, then a funded research project. The duo chose the comic book format deliberately. "The medium is the message. So, it cannot be a serious form of communication," says Aditi. Friendly characters communicate the message, even depictions of the female anatomy are done plainly.

Aditi and Tuhin crowd-funded Menstrupedia in 2013, mostly through their NID network. They built it as a business rather than an NGO, because going village to village was not sustainable, and because a business can price for the urban market and then translate, cut costs and distribute free in rural areas. Today, Menstrupedia Comics are used in 37,500 schools, translated in every Indian language. Aditi has something for boys too: Gulu shines a light on male puberty, covering nightfall, masturbation, consent and addiction. As Aditi says, it is our duty to raise our boys right. ■

—Jumana Shah

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Aditi founded Menstrupedia Comics, a friendly, animated guide and digital platform that helps shatter taboos and educates school children about puberty, menstruation and hygiene



ADITI GUPTA, 42
Co-founder, Menstrupedia
Ahmedabad

MAYUR BHATT

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Child bride to Nari Shakti Puraskar awardee, Bina epitomises female enterprise with her mushroom business

Mushroom Mahila

In his feminist poem, *The Mushroom Hunters*, Neil Gaiman talks of how women were the first scientists, because while the men were out hunting, women would venture out, carrying babies in slings so that their hands could be free…to pick mushrooms. *"Some mushrooms will kill you/ while some will show you gods/and some will feed the hunger in our bellies…."*

Bina Devi, from the small hamlet of Tilkari in Bihar, will relate. She started growing mushrooms at home in 2014. By 2019, a 450 sq. ft shed had come up. In 2020, the enterprise earned her the title of Bihar's 'Mushroom Mahila' as well as that year's Nari Shakti Puraskar.

Bina was only 14 when she was married off to a farmer, Krishnakant. Money was tight, perhaps why, unlike other young brides, Bina joined her husband in the fields. Her hard work soon drew the admiration of her father-in-law, who affectionately began calling her 'Grihalaxmi', the one who brought prosperity to the house. Little did he know how prophetic the blessing would prove to be.

Bina was elected sarpanch in 2011. The next year, scientists from the Bihar Agricultural University visited Tilkari to train rural women in mushroom cultivation so that they could earn a livelihood. Bina soon mastered it, realising that "mushroom cultivation required little space, modest investment and could generate rich returns". The experiment transformed the family's fortunes, the additional income helping the family dream of a better future. Today, her four children are all well educated, with the youngest, a daughter, pursuing a Bachelor of Computer Applications. The family's old mud house is now much bigger. Nearby rises a concrete home in which Bina has invested nearly Rs 12 lakh.

But the achievement is also about teaching other women to dream. Today, women from a hundred villages earn a livelihood through mushroom farming under her guidance. Bina also travels across Bihar and even to other states to conduct training programmes. ■

—Amitabh Srivastava

HER TAKE

"Every woman—especially in rural India—should strive for financial independence. Become someone your children can look up to"



RANJAN RAH

BINA DEVI, 49
Mushroom farmer
Tilkari, Bihar

Bina Devi, standing, with a bag of her mushrooms

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AAVASSOITYA RAYA

DR BARKHA SUBBA, 41
Conservation scientist; Executive member, Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection
Darjeeling

Saving the Salamander

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO
Winner of the 2026 Whitley Award, Barkha leads a grassroots conservation effort to save the endangered Himalayan amphibian

For most people, the Himalayan salamander is an obscure amphibian native to the eastern Himalayas. For Dr Barkha Subba, it is a reminder that when nature disappears, entire ecosystems—and the communities that depend on them—begin to disappear too.

Subba spent a childhood filled with stories of mountains and wildlife narrated by her grandmother, and trips to forage in the woods. "I didn't dream of becoming a conservation scientist," she recalls with a smile. "I simply kept following my curiosity." A first-generation postgraduate in her family, Subba studied zoology before joining the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park for research. It was there that she became fascinated with the Himalayan salamander—a shy amphibian that emerges only during the monsoon and spends the rest of the year hidden underground.

Subba started working with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Darjeeling during the pandemic, before launching an ambitious community-led conservation programme centred on the Himalayan salamander. She believes conservation can succeed not just with science but also trust, shared ownership and people's participation. Today, tea garden workers, villagers, schools and forest officials have all become partners in protecting the wetlands where the species breeds. That philosophy has won her the Green Oscar, or the Whitley Award, this year, bringing international attention—and crucial funding—to safeguard one of India's least-known species. ■

—Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

HER TAKE

"Stay curious and don't be afraid to pursue what genuinely interests you, even if the path is not always clear. Science and conservation need more women—not only as participants, but as researchers, leaders and decision-makers"



MANDAR DEODHAR

PARVEEN SHAIKH, 37
Conservation scientist, avian ecologist, BNHS
Mumbai



Protecting the Skimmer

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO
Parveen's decade-long effort to save the Indian Skimmer, an endangered river bird, won her the 2026 Whitley Award

The Indian Skimmer is an unusual bird with an extraordinary vulnerability. With its bright orange bill, it flies inches above the surface of rivers, skimming the water to catch fish. But it breeds on sandbars and mid-river islands, where shifts in water flow, predators or even a wandering cow can destroy an entire nest.

For conservation scientist Parveen Shaikh, saving the bird meant understanding not only its ecology but also the people who live alongside it. A Mumbai suburban girl, who "was not born into nature", she discovered her passion for zoology in college. "I was always passionate about science. I developed my knack for zoology in college," she says.

Shaikh, who joined the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in 2012, began work on Indian Skimmer populations along the Chambal river in 2016. Her 'Guardians of the Skimmer' initiative trained and incentivised local residents to monitor nests and protect vulnerable colonies. Shaikh says they now also help identify new nesting sandbars and prevent disturbance during the breeding season. Some even proudly refer to the skimmers as 'our birds'. Indeed, nest survival rate in the Chambal Sanctuary has risen from 14 per cent to over 25 per cent, while the local population has risen from about 400 birds in 2017 to nearly 1,000. In 2024 alone, the nest protection programme saved 500 chicks.

HER TAKE

"Do not give up. It might take time...but if you are persistent, passionate and hard-working, you will succeed"

Now, Shaikh is taking that model to a much more challenging landscape. Her 2026 Whitley Award (the 'Green Oscar') will support the expansion of the project to Prayagraj, where the birds face boat traffic, fishing, pollution and intense human activity, including the enormous crowds that gather for the Kumbh. ■

—ADM

The Farmer's Friend



RE-AN KHAN

NIDHI PANT, 33
Co-founder, S4S Technologies
Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar

Nidhi Pant of S4S Technologies has a code that she lives by. "We only rise by lifting others... it's something me and my sister were taught by our parents at a young age,' she says. Her father was a scientist at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Mumbai, who used his research on isotope applications to help identify potential water resources back in his home state Uttaranchal. "That was his way of giving back to the society that nurtured him," says Pant.

In 2011, Nidhi, a graduate of Mumbai's Institute of Chemical Technology, teamed up with four batchmates and two others to found S4S Technologies, the acronym reflecting their vision: science for society.

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Nidhi and her co-founders leveraged technology to help preserve the produce of small farmers and find them markets for their products

In the beginning, they focused on areas like healthcare, but later zoomed in on agriculture. The idea was to work with farmers to minimise losses arising from lack of storage facilities for their produce. "Many a time, the costs of transportation and losses due to lack of proper storage add up to more than the value of the produce," says Pant. "Sometimes farmers can't even afford to take back their unsold produce." Studies say Indian farmers lose produce worth some $40 billion (Rs 3.8 lakh crore) in this manner annually.

Cold storages needed continuous power supply, which is unviable for farmers. Dehydration (including moisture removal and airtight containment) was a way of preserving farm products. So, the S4S team in 2014 developed dehydrators, and sold 5,000 of these in 15 countries. But soon they realised that farmers with small holdings would not know where to sell such dehydrated products. "Then we decided to empower farmers to become processors themselves," says Pant.

S4S Technologies is now a food ingredients company for large companies like Sodexo, Marico and the Tata Group, aggregating products from as many as 500,000 farmers in Nashik and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar in Maharashtra. They also offer farmers a combination of technologies for Rs 3 lakh: a cutting machine, a fixed bed drier, a low energy consumption drier and a solar drier. Farmers can earn Rs 40,000-1 lakh, depending on how much they are able to process. The company employs some 250 people, had revenues of Rs 420 crore in FY26, and is now expanding to Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. ■

—M.G. Arun

HER TAKE

"In your journey, you will have a number of pivots; listen to your customers closely and solve their problems. It will be a long journey, so be resilient. You will need the grit to play the long game"

TRANSFORMING FROM TRADITION TO DIGITALIZATION



Prof. Vd. Rabinarayan Acharya
Director General, CCRAS

Digital Ayurveda: A Unified Vision of CCRAS & Ministry of Ayush

The convergence of digital innovation and traditional knowledge systems has created a transformative pathway for Ayurveda in the 21st century. The Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS), under the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, through its extensive digital research ecosystem and with the support of the Ayush Grid initiative, are jointly shaping a technology-driven future where Ayurveda is preserved, scientifically validated, globally accessible, and integrated with modern healthcare systems.

Digital transformation in Ayurveda is not merely the adoption of technology; it represents a strategic effort to preserve India's ancient medical heritage while creating a future-ready ecosystem for research, healthcare delivery, education, and innovation. By combining digital governance, evidence-based research platforms, knowledge repositories, and citizen-centric services, the Ministry of Ayush and CCRAS are opening new possibilities for Ayurveda to connect with researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and communities worldwide.

Ayush Grid: The Digital Backbone of India's Traditional Medicine Sector

The Ministry of Ayush has developed the Ayush Grid as the technological foundation for the digital transformation of the Ayush sector. Designed as a comprehensive IT ecosystem, Ayush Grid focuses on healthcare services, research and development, education, Ayush drug administration, medicinal plants, capacity building, and global outreach. The initiative aims to create an interoperable digital environment that improves accessibility, transparency, efficiency, and evidence-based decision-making across the Ayush ecosystem.

A major milestone under this initiative is the My Ayush Integrated Services Portal (MAISP), the master digital gateway of the Ministry of Ayush. It integrates Ayush-related applications and services into a unified digital ecosystem, supported by an AI-enabled chatbot to enhance user experience and facilitate citizen-centric access to services.

Several e-governance platforms—including AHMIS, Ayush Research Portal, Ayusoft, e-Aushadhi, Ayush Suraksha, NAMASTE Portal, Namaste Yoga, mYoga, y-Break Pro, Ayush Nivesh Saarthi, e-Charak, Ayush Next, National Ayush Mission Portal, and Ayush Anudan Portal—have been integrated through secure APIs, enabling seamless interoperability, real-time data exchange, and unified service delivery. Together, these platforms strengthen governance, improve healthcare delivery, promote research, facilitate investment, and enhance the digital ecosystem of the Ayush sector.

CCRAS: Building a Digital Research Ecosystem

The CCRAS Digital Initiatives Dashboard is a comprehensive digital ecosystem integrating various standalone digital platforms dedicated to Ayurveda research, education, governance, publications, and public services developed by CCRAS.

Category	Major Applications/Portals
Web Portals – Informatics & Point of Care Applications	Ayur Prakriti Web Portal, Swasthya Assessment Scale, Namaste Portal
Web Portals – Knowledge & Literature	Ayush Research Portal, Ayurveda Grantha Samuccaya e-Book Portal, CCRAS Book Sale Portal, e-Granthalaya
Web Portals – Schemes	Studenship Program for Ayurveda Research Ken (SPARK), Scheme for training in Ayurveda Research for PG Scholars (PG-STAR), Post-Doctoral Fellowship (PDF) Portal, Ayush PhD Scheme
Internal Applications	eOffice, SPARROW, e-HRMS, Project Monitoring System (PMS), IT Grievance Management System, and configurable secure data collection software for Remote areas with low connectivity
Mobile Applications	Swasthya Assessment Scale application, Ayurveda dictionary (Ayur dict) application
CCRAS Journals, Newsletters/Bulletin	Journal of Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (JRAS), Journal of Drug Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (JDRAS), CCRAS Bulletin, Newsletter, Hindi Magazines
Other platforms	CCRAS Official Website, Official websites of all CCRAS institutes

The Council has developed several digital tools that make Ayurveda more accessible to citizens, researchers, and practitioners. Personalized health platforms such as the Ayur Prakriti Web Portal, Swasthya Assessment Scale, and Agni Assessment Scale promote preventive healthcare based on Ayurvedic principles. Digital knowledge repositories, including the Ayurvedagranthasamuccaya (Apta Digital Library), e-Granthalaya, Showcase of Ayurveda Historical Imprints (SAHI) and Ayush Manuscripts Advanced Repository (AMAR) portals, preserve India's rich medical heritage, while searchable editions of the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Madhava Nidana, and the Ayurveda Shabdarthabodhika dictionary provide authentic reference resources.

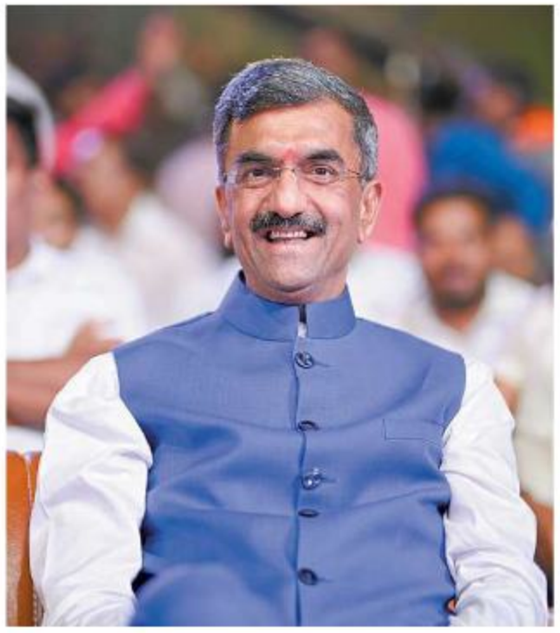
Dedicated portals such as SPARK, PG Star, Ayush PhD/Post-Doctoral Fellowships, and the Ayush Research Portal support research, scholarships, fellowships, and access to peer-reviewed scientific evidence. Public engagement is further strengthened through the Ayush Information Hub, Book Sale Portal, and digital outreach across social media platforms.

The successful implementation of eOffice has ushered in paperless and transparent governance, while digital libraries and online repositories preserve thousands of scientific publications and research resources. Upcoming initiatives such as the Project Monitoring System (PMS) will enable real-time monitoring of research activities across the Council's nationwide network.

CCRAS's digital transformation is far more than a technological upgrade—it is a strategic vision for the future of evidence-based Ayurveda. By integrating digital governance, advanced research infrastructure, knowledge management, and citizen-centric services supported by the Ayush Grid, the Council has created a future-ready ecosystem that strengthens scientific excellence while making authentic Ayurveda knowledge accessible globally.

CCRAS has transformed the way traditional medicine is preserved, researched, and shared, positioning India as a global leader in the digital advancement of Ayurveda.

"WE WANT MAHARASHTRA TO BE INDIA'S MOST DIVERSE AND FUTURE-READY TOURISM DESTINATION."



Shri Shambhuraj Desai
Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra

Tourism is a key pillar of the Viksit Maharashtra Vision 2047. What are the key milestones you hope to achieve by the end of this decade?

Maharashtra has always had a natural edge in tourism, thanks to the sheer diversity that few states can match. Building on that strength, our focus now is a more integrated, future-ready approach, one where tourism experiences over the next few years are seamless, sustainable, and truly world-class. We're working on stronger connectivity, better destination infrastructure, broader digital services, greater private-sector participation, and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to professionally manage destinations, improve visitor experiences, and build stronger destination branding. We are also developing multi-thematic tourism circuits that encourage visitors to explore more of the state and stay longer. Just as important, we want this growth to reach every corner of Maharashtra, not just the well-known circuits, by giving emerging destinations the same push as established ones, while creating greater opportunities for local communities through skilling, entrepreneurship, and tourism-led livelihoods. Tourism success is no longer measured by footfall alone, but by the quality of experiences, increased length of stay, higher visitor spending, and the tangible economic value created for local communities. That's the direction Maharashtra is steadily headed in.

The Viksit Maharashtra Vision 2047 proposes five priority tourism circuits and thematic sub-circuits. How will these improve the visitor experience and encourage longer stays in Maharashtra?

Today's traveller seeks a complete experience rather than simply ticking destinations off a list, and that is the thinking behind our tourism circuits. We are developing 100 thematic sub-circuits across eight tourism themes to showcase Maharashtra's diverse tourism offerings in an integrated manner. Instead of promoting individual attractions in isolation, we are connecting heritage, spiritual, coastal, wildlife, experiential, and MICE destinations into curated travel routes supported by quality infrastructure and better last-mile connectivity. The circuits will also diversify tourism experiences by bringing lesser-known destinations and new tourism projects into the mainstream, helping spread visitor footfall beyond established hotspots and unlocking the tourism potential of emerging regions. By enabling tourists to experience multiple facets of Maharashtra in a single journey, these integrated circuits will increase the average length of stay, distribute tourism benefits more evenly across the State, and create new opportunities for local entrepreneurs, artisans, and hospitality businesses.

With the upcoming Simhastha Kumbh Mela in Nashik, how is Maharashtra preparing to deliver a world-class pilgrimage experience while ensuring efficient crowd management and infrastructure?

Simhastha is a matter of pride for Maharashtra. Our priority is to ensure that every devotee and tourist has a safe, smooth, and memorable experience. Preparations are already underway in coordination with all departments on roads, transport, sanitation, accommodation, healthcare, and security, while technology will help manage crowds and keep pilgrims updated in real time. Alongside these efforts, we are developing the Ramkal Path corridor in Nashik to



further strengthen the city's spiritual tourism ecosystem and create a more seamless pilgrimage experience. We also want visitors to experience what the region offers beyond the Kumbh, including its spiritual heritage, history, vineyards, and local culture, so that their visit extends beyond the religious occasion and contributes to the local economy.

How do you plan to leverage Maharashtra's UNESCO forts, heritage sites, and cruise tourism to create globally competitive tourism experiences?

Maharashtra's UNESCO forts and heritage sites are living chapters of our legacy, and we're focused on presenting them the right way by combining conservation with accessibility. That means better last-mile connectivity, upgraded visitor infrastructure, and trained local guides who bring these stories to life for travellers from India and abroad. Through the NAMO Tourism Centres and the NAMO Tour Guide Skilling Programme, we are strengthening visitor services while building a skilled local tourism workforce. At the same time, we're strengthening the global branding of Maharashtra's heritage and diversifying tourism experiences through cultural, spiritual, river, and cruise tourism. We're also expanding boating and cruise tourism along the Konkan coast, linking it with our heritage circuits. Initiatives like India's first underwater museum around INS Guldar in Sindhudurg add a new dimension to marine tourism.

The Vision aims to attract large-scale private investment in tourism. What policy incentives do you believe will be most effective in bringing global investors to Maharashtra?

Investors want a policy environment that's transparent, predictable, and responsive—and that's exactly what we're building through Maharashtra's Tourism Policy. We're simplifying approvals, making it easier to do business, and opening up opportunities across hospitality, wellness, MICE, cruise tourism, and eco-tourism, with a strong focus on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). To facilitate investments, we are developing a dedicated land bank for tourism projects, creating a curated portfolio of PPP opportunities across the State, and establishing dedicated investment outreach mechanisms to engage investors both within India and in key international markets. The Maharashtra Convention Bureau (MCB) is positioning the State as a premier destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE), while targeted roadshows and investor engagement programmes will showcase Maharashtra's investment-ready tourism projects to domestic and global investors. Maharashtra already offers strong connectivity, a diverse tourism portfolio, and a robust market. What we want to provide now is the confidence, institutional support, and policy certainty that convert this potential into world-class tourism infrastructure, greater private investment, more employment opportunities, and sustained long-term growth.





PURUSHOTTAM DWAKAR

ARIANA AGARWAL, 16; AVYANA MEHTA, 16
Class 12 students at Jayshree Periwal International School
Jaipur

A Smart Filter

It was during a field trip to the villages near Jaipur that the trio of Ariana Agarwal, Avyana Mehta and their schoolmate, Vivaan Chhawchharia, noticed the villagers drinking contaminated water. They realised that while affordable methods to remove certain impurities were available, there were hardly any low-cost solutions for eliminating microplastics, an environmental and public health threat. Over time, microplastics can build up in organs like the liver and blood, and trigger cell swelling or hormone disruption. Researching for remedies, the trio learnt about the adhesive properties of tamarind seed powder and began exploring its potential in isolating microplastics. An opportunity to work under mentors at IIT Guwahati helped sharpen their focus.

WHAT MAKES THEM SHEROES
Along with classmate Vivaan Chhawchharia, Ariana and Avyana developed Plas-Stick, a biomagnetic coagulant derived from tamarind seeds that helps remove microplastics from water. Won them the Global Winner title at The Earth Prize

After numerous trials, they developed a formulation by combining tamarind seed powder with iron particles. Natural polysaccharides extracted from the seeds bind to suspended microplastics, while embedded magnetite nanoparticles allow the resulting flocs (fluffy clumps of bacteria/fungal filaments found in water) to be removed using a handheld magnet. "For Plas-Stick, a major turning point was getting our dosage right. We had to go through several iterations to find the right balance. The breakthrough was the moment we realised that our idea could genuinely work beyond the lab," says school head girl Ariana, who had also worked on GRAINOS, a moisture sensor device that analyses wheat grains to predict their likely future market value for farmers.

For Avyana, a pivotal moment was starting Plastic2Build, her youth-led non-profit. "What began as an attempt to address the plastic waste crisis gradually grew into something much larger," she says. ■

—Rohit Parihar

TAKEAWAYS

"What makes our innovation special is that it uses something simple and indigenous to address a global problem"
—Ariana

"We started with a simple premise: can something we see as waste be part of the solution to a much bigger environmental problem?"
—Avyana

DR KRITHI K. KARANTH, 47
Conservation scientist
Bengaluru

Guardian of the Wild

For someone who first accompanied her father, the acclaimed tiger biologist Dr Ullas Karanth, into the jungles at age two, it was not until she was studying for a master's at Yale University that Krithi Karanth actually made up her mind about a career in conservation. Twenty-two at the time, it was a research project at Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary in the Karnataka section of the Western Ghats that sealed her decision. The big break came in 2011 when she received a grant from the National Geographic Society for research into human-animal conflict. "When an organisation like that finds you, it boosts your profile, gives you the confidence to dream more, ask bolder questions," she says. "It changes your career trajectory."

Today, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries cover only 5 per cent of India's land area, far lower than the 15 per cent in countries such as the US and China. This needs to go up to at least 10 per cent, says Krithi, CEO of the Bengaluru-based non-profit Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS) that her father set up in 1984. "We can do this by 2050," she adds. "There are imaginative ways to bring those numbers up." Since Krithi took over in 2018, CWS has expanded its scale of operations. It now works extensively in 100 parks in eight states, while its education programmes have reached 75,000 middle school children in villages around wildlife parks. The CWS training programmes focus on building foundational knowledge amongst key stakeholders such as forest departments, frontline staff, veterinary services, the police and fire services. ■

— Ajay Sukumaran

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO
The 2026 Indian Rolex National Geographic Explorer of the Year, Krithi's work spans human-wildlife coexistence, education and conservation



ANIRUDDHA KAUSHAL

HER TAKE

"It's okay to fail, but pick yourself back up, be supremely resilient. That is the only way you are going to have a long, impactful career. A lot of people get disheartened by failure. I think I have learnt the most from failing"



AZHAR

AKANKSHA SINGH, 39
Senior Scientist, CSIR-CIMAP
Lucknow

Learning from Plants

HER TAKE

"Science is not an easy path, especially for women. It needs a lot of patience and perseverance. But if you have a passion for it, it's a wonderful domain. You are constantly asking new questions and discovering new things"

Dr Akanksha Singh had once imagined herself as a doctor. But then fate brought her to botany. A PhD later, she eventually found her calling in plant-microbe interactions. Today, as a senior scientist at CSIR-CIMAP (Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants), she is studying a microscopic world of endophytes, microorganisms that live within plant tissues and can have a mutually beneficial relationship with their hosts.

The idea has big implications for agriculture. Unlike micro-organisms that live in the soil and are exposed, endophytes are protected within plants, making them more resilient. Some can also pass from one generation of plants to the next through seeds, raising the possibility of longer-lasting benefits. Singh's team is mapping the microbiomes of medicinal plants and some of the promising endophytes have already shown encouraging results in field trials and are being tested in crops such as wheat, rice and tomatoes.

As for her own career, after a few stutters, the turning point came in 2014 when she received the Department of Science and Technology's Women Scientist Scheme fellowship. For Singh, it became the bridge back to research. She rebuilt her career, eventually joining CIMAP.

Now, her work has received recognition on three national scientific platforms in the same year. For Singh, it's just rewards. Her aim now is to find practical ways in which the invisible microbial world inside plants can help farmers grow healthier crops, and make agriculture better equipped for a changing climate scenario. ■

—Avaneesh Mishra

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

A 2026 National Academy of Sciences, India, Young Scientist Award winner, Akanksha's work on plant-microbe interactions opens up new avenues in sustainable agriculture

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ANDHRA PRADESH'S

NEW PUSH TO BUILD WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

With credit, skills, technology and market access coming together, Andhra Pradesh is taking its women's self-help group movement from livelihood support to enterprise creation and sustainable growth.

For decades, women's self-help groups (SHGs) have been a powerful instrument of social and economic transformation in Andhra Pradesh. Today, the state is seeking to take that movement a step further—by turning women who have traditionally operated small livelihood activities into entrepreneurs capable of building, scaling and sustaining businesses.

The foundation is formidable. Andhra Pradesh's rural community network comprises 26 Zilla Samakhyas, 660 Mandal Samakhyas and 27,875 Village Organisations, connecting 8.32 lakh SHGs and 84.68 lakh members. In urban areas, the network covers another 2.75 lakh SHGs and 24.75 lakh members through urban federations.

The state's emerging enterprise strategy seeks to use this vast network not simply for welfare delivery, but as an institutional platform for enterprise identification, financing, training, formalisation and market access.



WOMEN AT THE CENTRE OF ENTERPRISE CREATION

At the heart of the strategy is a detailed livelihood profiling exercise. During January-February 2026, 1.5 lakh e-Nari Community Resource Persons participated in a state-wide livelihoods survey to understand household income, existing livelihoods, skills and consumption needs. The exercise is being used to prepare individual Micro Credit Plans and match women with suitable enterprise opportunities and financing sources.

The scale of the opportunity is clear. Of the 83.87 lakh rural SHG members profiled, 42.89 lakh women were in the below-₹1 lakh annual income category. At the same time, the survey identified strong potential in agriculture, livestock, services, trading and manufacturing.

Overall, 33.58 lakh women opted for income-generation activities, requiring an estimated ₹47,369.61 crore in finance. Agriculture accounts for the largest requirement, followed by services, trading and livestock. The broader finance requirement, including consumption needs, has been estimated at ₹67,904 crore.

For 2026-27, the state has envisaged a ₹60,000 crore directed-credit framework, combining bank finance with Stree Nidhi, Community Investment Funds, UNNATHI, SHG internal lending, NRLM and central schemes. Of this, ₹32,000 crore is projected as bank linkage for livelihoods and enterprise creation, while Stree Nidhi has a ₹12,000 crore allocation, including a ₹3,000 crore dedicated line for women entrepreneurs.

RESPONSIBLE CREDIT: KEEPING NPAS UNDER CHECK

An important feature of the new approach is the emphasis on credit discipline and NPA minimisation.

The government's framework proposes that financing be matched to the individual livelihood profile, the nature of the enterprise, its risk and margins. Instead of relying on a single source of funding, an enterprise can use a calibrated combination of SHG savings, Community Investment Fund, Stree Nidhi, bank credit and subsidies, depending on its stage of development.

Technology is being used to strengthen monitoring. The process includes digital Micro Credit Plans, online bank linkage, online sanctions, ground-tagging of assets, beneficiary authentication and real-time tracking. The stated objective is a fully digital, paperless system that enables closer monitoring from credit sanction to the grounding of the enterprise.

The UNNATHI programme provides another example of the focus on responsible lending. For SC and ST women entrepreneurs, eligibility requires beneficiaries to have no outstanding/NPA loans. The programme provides loans of ₹1-3 lakh per unit, with subsidy support of up to ₹50,000, helping women start micro-enterprises without encouraging the accumulation of stressed debt.

The emphasis is therefore shifting from simply measuring credit disbursed to building enterprises that can generate income and repay sustainably.

FROM FINANCE TO PERFORMANCE

The impact is beginning to show across multiple livelihood sectors.

The Mahila Kisan programme benefited 29,733 women in 2025-26. Among the key livelihood initiatives, 3,038 women benefited from bamboo cultivation, 1,839 from millet-based enterprises, 1,845 from moringa, 19,079 from aqua and seaweed livelihoods, 850 from tomato and onion cultivation, 1,200 from spices, 100 from honeybee activities and 1,680 through backyard poultry.

The FPO ecosystem is another pillar of the strategy. The state reports 540 FPOs, 65,375 Farmer Producer Groups and 7.11 lakh farmers mobilised across 26 districts. FPOs are increasingly being used for procurement, food processing, storage, licensing and market access.

For 2026-27, Andhra Pradesh has set a target of 66,932 farm-sector entrepreneurs, including 29,167 Community Resource Persons as entrepreneurs, 31,703 livestock-sector entrepreneurs and 6,062 agriculture-based entrepreneurs.

BUILDING BUSINESSES AROUND LOCAL STRENGTHS:

The enterprise programme is deliberately diversified.

The Bamboo Mission, for instance, facilitated 1.8 lakh bamboo saplings to 3,038 women farmers across 14 mandals in six districts during 2025-26. A primary processing plant involving machinery worth ₹46 lakh has been established, with additional plants being considered.

The Millet Mission targets 3,875 enterprises, including 3,000 SHG women entrepreneurs and 875 millet cafés. Four hundred women have already been profiled with individual enterprise plans, with 400 units being implemented across production, processing, marketing and food services.

The Moringa Mission has identified 2,046 farmers across 432 villages and 2,384 acres in its pilot phase, while a ₹60 lakh processing plant has been purchased in Chittoor.

Such initiatives point to a larger objective: creating complete value chains rather than isolated livelihood activities.

CONNECTING WOMEN TO MARKETS

The next challenge after production is market access. Here too, the state is seeking partnerships.

The proposed Swayam AP brand aims to take SHG products into modern trade, e-commerce and retail markets. The initiative currently identifies 500-plus SHG women, 62 product categories and 132 SKUs across 28 districts, with an emphasis on quality, compliance, branding and traceability.

Other partnerships are creating opportunities in retail, food services, digital services and agriculture. The Ezimart initiative has 1,025 stores operational, while the Namo Drone Didi programme targets 250 women entrepreneurs in 2026-27.

Some emerging business models are already showing promising commercial potential. Six Chai Rasta outlets report a monthly turnover of ₹7.4 lakh and monthly profit of ₹3.4 lakh. Six Tripti Canteens report monthly turnover of ₹7.82 lakh and monthly profit of ₹4.3 lakh.

THE LARGER ECONOMIC STORY

The transformation underway in Andhra Pradesh is ultimately about changing the role of women in the local economy—from participants in livelihood programmes to owners and managers of enterprises.

The government is also planning a Mentor-Mentee programme, in convergence with MSME, aimed at covering five lakh entrepreneurs. A pool of 6,200 Community Resource Persons is being created to support women with business plans, registrations and statutory compliances, while institutions such as ISB, XLRI and IIM Visakhapatnam are part of the capacity-building ecosystem.

The approach combines scale with a growing emphasis on accountability. Credit is being linked to enterprise viability; digital systems are strengthening monitoring; NPA-free eligibility is built into select programmes; and market linkages are being pursued alongside finance.

For Andhra Pradesh, the opportunity is considerable. If these initiatives translate into viable enterprises, stronger repayment performance and sustained market demand, the state's vast SHG network could evolve into one of its most important engines of women led economic growth.

The message is increasingly clear: empowering women is no longer only about giving them access to livelihoods. It is about giving them the capital, capability, confidence and connections to build businesses of their own.

THE ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY





A NEW ROADMAP FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

From free mobility and safer public spaces to education, health, skills and financial awareness, Andhra Pradesh is building a continuum of support for women and girls across age groups.

Women's empowerment is often measured in terms of schemes launched or benefits delivered. But the more meaningful measure is whether those interventions expand a woman's choices—her ability to travel, study, work, access services, make informed decisions and participate more fully in the economy.

In Andhra Pradesh, the government is pursuing that broader vision through a combination of welfare, mobility, adolescent empowerment and community-based interventions. Two initiatives illustrate the approach: Stree Shakti, which has transformed access to public transport for women, girls and transgender citizens, and Kishori Vikasam, an adolescent empowerment programme designed to equip the next generation with knowledge, skills, confidence and protection.

Together, they represent an important continuum—from creating mobility and opportunity today to preparing young girls for a more empowered tomorrow.

MOBILITY AS EMPOWERMENT

Launched on August 15, 2025, the Stree Shakti Scheme provides free bus travel for women, girls and transgender citizens domiciled in Andhra Pradesh, with valid identification. The facility is available across Pallevelugu, Ultra Pallevelugu, City Ordinary, Metro Express and Express services within the state. Passengers receive Zero Fare Tickets after verification, while the government reimburses APSRTC for the expenditure.

As of August 10, 2026, 86.61 crore women, girls and transgender passengers had availed of the free travel facility, with Zero Fare Tickets amounting to ₹3,079.03 crore. Women's share of total bus travel has risen from 40 per cent to 62 per cent, while daily women ridership has increased from 9.47 lakh to 23.99 lakh.

The impact is visible not only in ridership but also in the overall public transport system. APSRTC's occupancy ratio improved from 69 per cent to 85 per cent, while occupancy in Stree Shakti and Divyang Shakti services reached 93 per cent.

The numbers suggest that affordable mobility is opening up access to education, employment, healthcare, markets and other everyday opportunities for women across the state.

The scale of the response has required APSRTC to adapt its operations. High-demand routes are being monitored and additional services operated. The corporation has augmented 1,413 additional trips per day, adding 64,647 kilometres of operations using the existing fleet. Crew sensitisation and preventive maintenance have also been strengthened to manage the increased demand.

The government has simultaneously focused on basic amenities at bus stations. 113 RO water plants have been provided, while toilet renovation has been sanctioned at 152 bus stations at a cost of ₹24 crore. The addition of 563 fans and 1,802 chairs is also under procurement.

The financial commitment is equally significant. The government reimbursed ₹1,200 crore during 2025-26 and another ₹480 crore up to June 2026 towards the subsidy.



THE GIRL CHILD TAKES CENTRE STAGE

While Stree Shakti addresses access and mobility in the present, Kishori Vikasam focuses on building the capabilities of adolescents aged 11-18.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh's Department of Women Development & Child Welfare (WD&CW) is the nodal department for the programme, working with Health & Family Welfare, School Education, SERP, MA&UD, PR&RD, APSSDC, GSWS and Police. The model is built on inter-departmental convergence, peer learning and service linkages.

Its vision is straightforward: to create a generation of healthy, educated, confident, skilled, informed and responsible adolescents who can make informed decisions, protect themselves from risks and pursue education and livelihood opportunities.

The programme goes well beyond traditional health or education interventions. Its thematic framework covers education continuity, adolescent health, menstrual hygiene, nutrition and anaemia prevention, child protection and POCSO awareness, financial literacy, career guidance, cyber safety, sexual and reproductive health, life skills and substance-abuse prevention.

The objective is to give adolescent girls not merely information, but the ability to use it—to communicate, make decisions, solve problems, develop leadership skills and plan for their futures.

AN INTEGRATED SAFETY NET

Kishori Vikasam's strength lies in its convergence architecture.

Schools provide the principal platform for reaching adolescents, with sessions covering education, attendance, life skills, health, hygiene, child rights and digital safety. Career guidance links students to higher education, ITIs, polytechnics, vocational education, scholarships and skill programmes.

At the community level, SERP brings the SHG ecosystem into the programme, mobilising families and communities around girls' education, health, nutrition, child marriage prevention, cyber safety and career opportunities. SHGs and Village Organisations are also positioned as community-level partners in preventing child marriage and supporting vulnerable adolescents.

APSSDC adds another important dimension—career preparedness. Adolescents are introduced to vocational courses, technical training, digital and employability skills, entrepreneurship and industry-oriented opportunities, with encouragement for girls to enter technical and non-traditional sectors.

At the last mile, Gram/Ward Sachivalayam functions as a bridge between adolescents, families and government services, helping identify vulnerable and out-of-school adolescents and connecting them with education, health, welfare, counselling, skills and protection services.

TAKING EMPOWERMENT TO SCALE

The programme has already created a substantial field-level network. 275 master trainers and 2,700 district master trainers have been developed. More than 75,000 village-level members have been trained, while 43,500 adolescent groups involving over 4.15 lakh adolescent girls have been formed in vulnerable communities. Institutional coverage extends to 14,305 government and private schools.



The Kishori Vikasam Summer Campaigns of 2025 and 2026 further expanded outreach. The campaigns covered 9.57 lakh adolescent girls, while 3.77 lakh adolescent boys were covered in 2026. During the 2025-26 academic year, adolescent empowerment activities in high schools and junior colleges reached 29.16 lakh children.

The sessions themselves are designed to be practical, covering menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, child rights, anaemia, gender equality, education and careers, cybersecurity, financial management, leadership, physical activity and child-marriage prevention.

Partnerships are strengthening the programme further. UNICEF has supported learning resources, IEC materials and structured modules covering health, education, protection, life skills, career guidance and cyber safety. Padala Charitable Trust has supported regional workshops and dedicated learning material for adolescent boys through YUVA groups.

BEYOND WELFARE, TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

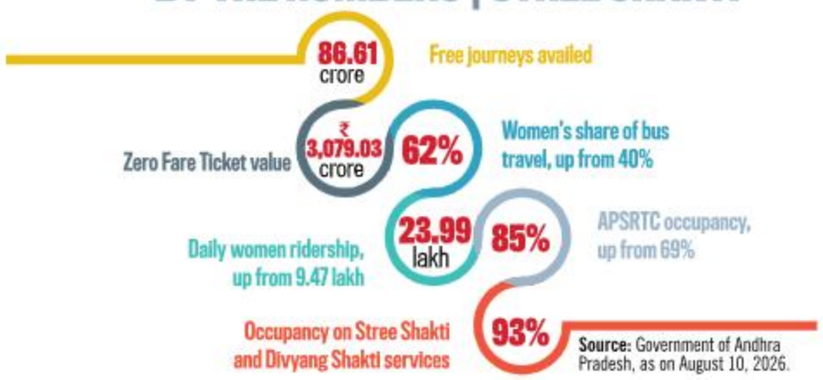
The significance of these initiatives lies in their cumulative impact. A woman who can travel without the burden of a daily transport fare has greater freedom to access work, education, healthcare and public services. A girl who understands her rights, manages her finances, knows where to seek help, develops digital awareness and receives career guidance enters adulthood with a stronger foundation for independence.

That is the larger story emerging from Andhra Pradesh's women-centric interventions: empowerment is being approached not as a single scheme, but as a continuum of opportunity, capability, safety and choice.

Stree Shakti expands mobility today. Kishori Vikasam builds confidence and capability for tomorrow. Together, they point towards a model in which the state's investment in women is measured not only by benefits delivered, but by the opportunities women and girls are enabled to pursue.

The ambition is ultimately simple—and transformative: to make mobility, knowledge, safety, skills and opportunity essential building blocks of every woman's journey towards greater independence.

BY THE NUMBERS | STREE SHAKTI



Source: Government of Andhra Pradesh, as on August 10, 2026.

THE SHE LIST
UNDER 50

THE SPORTSWOMEN

Fast & Fearless

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Still in her teens, Anahat Singh broke into the Top 20 of the world squash rankings last year. In July, she won the World Junior Championships, the first Indian to do so, ending an 11-year Egyptian stranglehold over the title

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

ANAHAT SINGH, 18
Squash player and Junior world squash champion
New Delhi



The prodigiously talented Anahat Singh was blooded early into sports by her lawyer father and interior designer mother, who both played hockey. While she started out with badminton, she followed in her elder sister's footsteps and was a regular feature on the domestic squash circuit by eight. At age 14, Anahat was the youngest member of the Indian team at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. By then, she had won the U-11 British Junior Open and the U-15 US Junior Open. She represented the national side again at the 2022 Asian Games, picking up two bronze medals in the mixed doubles and team events. Last year was a breakthrough season—on the senior circuit, Anahat picked up her first PSA World Tour Bronze title by winning the Squash on Fire Open in the US. A few months later, she qualified for her maiden Senior World Championships. The World Junior Championships win came as a perfect finale to her junior career.

HER ADVICE

"Winning the World Juniors is a turning point in my career. As it is my last junior tournament, it is also a perfect transition from the junior circuit to the senior one. I would ask young sportswomen to just give their 100 per cent and enjoy every moment of whatever they are doing"

Behind Anahat's gentle demeanour are a mature temperament and a burning desire to excel at the topmost stage. Under the mentorship of Gregory Gaultier and Saurav Ghosal, she has developed the skills required to take on more experienced opponents. Her ultimate target for now: the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028, where squash makes its debut.

At the moment though, Anahat is focusing on the Asian Games in September. There's a lot at stake, with the gold medallist assured direct qualification for the Olympics. "If I win gold, I can spend the next two years training for the Olympics, rather than trying to qualify," she says. With the confidence she's riding on these days, the goal seems well within her grasp. ■

— Shail Desai

GOLDEN KING:

A Gift of Love, A Legacy of Nature & a Message to the Next Generation

In a world where luxury is increasingly measured by technology, gadgets and material possessions, **Dr. K. Parekh and his wife** have chosen to celebrate something far more timeless - the beauty of nature, the companionship of animals and the values they can teach us.

At the heart of this philosophy stands **Golden King**, an exceptionally rare and magnificent horse regarded as **the only one of his kind in India**. But for the Parekh family, Golden King is much more than a prized possession. He is a symbol of love, a special gift to their daughter and a living expression of a philosophy that the family hopes the younger generation will embrace.

Blessed with **three sons and a daughter**, Dr. K. Parekh and his wife believe that children should experience life beyond screens, smartphones and modern gadgets. Their children have grown up appreciating the joy of spending time with animals and in nature - experiences that help keep them grounded, connected to their roots and aware of the world beyond technology.

For the Parekhs, the message is simple: **when we give our time, care and affection to animals and nature, we receive something equally valuable in return - a bond, a sense of responsibility, peace and an understanding of life that technology alone cannot provide.**

Golden King became a particularly meaningful part of this journey when the horse was brought into the family as a **special gift for their daughter**. What could have been simply an extraordinary gift became something much deeper - a living companion and a memory that can remain with her throughout her life.

The significance of Golden King also lies in his extraordinary presence and rarity. In a country with a rich equestrian heritage, a horse of such distinction naturally commands admiration. Yet, beyond his appearance and uniqueness, it is the relationship that develops between the family and the animal that gives this story its true character.



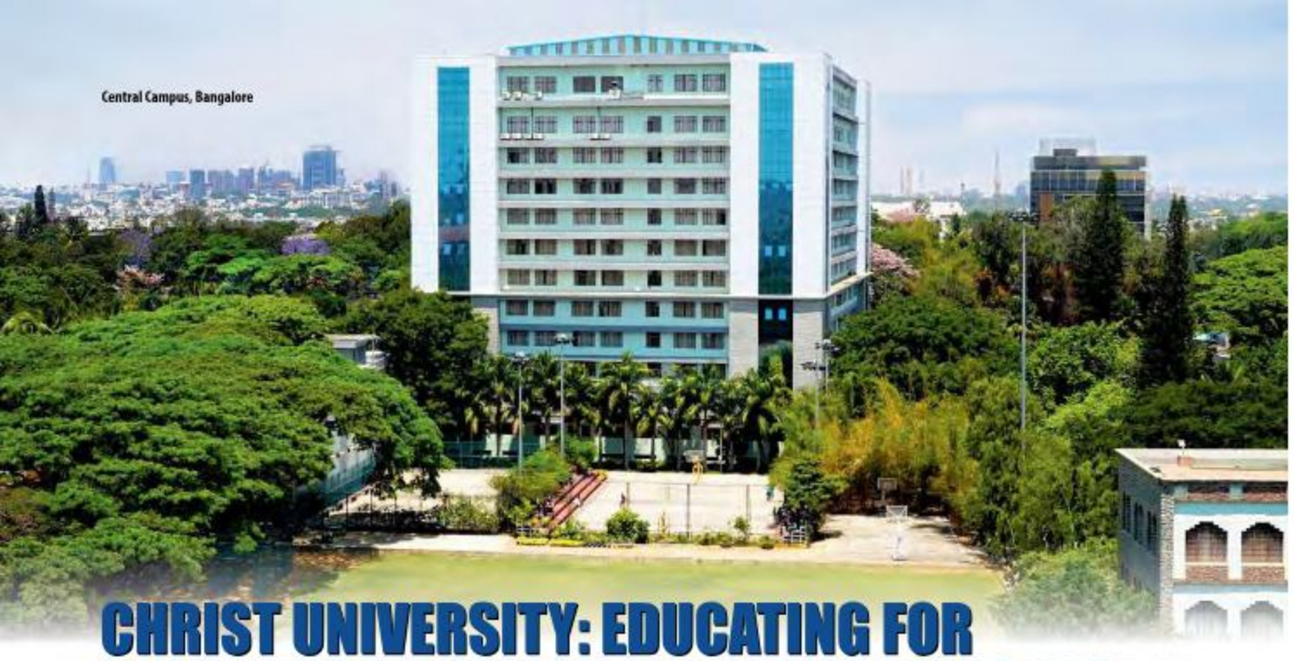
Dr. K. Parekh and his wife wish to take this philosophy further. Their vision is not limited to their own family or their existing horses. They hope to **add more horses to their collection in the years ahead and introduce more people close to them to the joy of living alongside these magnificent animals**. For them, gifting a horse to a near and dear one is not merely an expression of affection - it is an invitation to discover a different way of connecting with nature and wildlife.

This approach carries an important message for today's young generation. At a time when children are spending increasing amounts of time with smartphones, gaming devices and digital entertainment, experiences with animals can teach patience, empathy, discipline and responsibility. Caring for an animal requires time, commitment and consistency, while the bond that develops in return can be deeply rewarding.

Through their passion for horses and nature, **Dr. K. Parekh and his wife** hope to encourage more families to rediscover this connection - to step away from screens, spend time outdoors and understand that nature has its own language of love and companionship.

Golden King, therefore, is not simply a horse. He represents **a father's love for his daughter, a family's connection with nature and a vision for a generation that remains rooted despite living in an increasingly digital world**.

And perhaps that is the most valuable legacy the Parekhs hope to create - not simply a collection of exceptional horses, but a culture of compassion, responsibility and love for animals that can be passed on to the next generation.


Central Campus, Bangalore

CHRIST UNIVERSITY: EDUCATING FOR EXCELLENCE, SERVICE AND A CHANGING WORLD

At a time when higher education is being transformed by artificial intelligence, interdisciplinary knowledge, globalisation and a growing emphasis on social responsibility, CHRIST (Deemed to be University) continues to uphold a deceptively simple proposition: education must develop the whole person.

From its beginnings as Christ College in Bengaluru in 1969, CHRIST has evolved into a multidisciplinary, multi-campus university with four campuses in Bengaluru and additional campuses in Pune-Lavasa and Delhi NCR. Behind this institutional growth lies a philosophy that has remained remarkably consistent—Excellence and Service, a nurturing ground for holistic development that enables individuals to contribute effectively to society.

The roots of this philosophy trace to St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, whose educational vision regarded knowledge as an instrument of human and social transformation, developing responsible, socially conscious and service-oriented individuals.

The institution's growth has been marked by key milestones: autonomous status from the UGC in 2004, recognition as an Institution with Potential for Excellence in 2006, and, on 22 July 2008, elevation to a Deemed to be University under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956—a shift enabling expansion in academic programmes, research, infrastructure and international engagement. In 2018, the institution was renamed CHRIST (Deemed to be University), the name it carries today.

This journey—from Christ College in 1969, through autonomy and university status, to a multi-campus institution—reflects more than administrative evolution. It represents continuing academic expansion, visible today in the breadth of its academic, research, professional and developmental ecosystem.

Six Campuses, One Educational Vision

The University's expansion across six campuses has created distinct academic environments while retaining a common institutional ethos. The Bengaluru Central Campus remains the centre of its long academic and cultural tradition; the Bannerghatta Road Campus represents a contemporary, multidisciplinary environment; the Kengeri Campus, with its expansive setting, is particularly important for engineering and technology education; and the Yeshwanthpur Campus adds another dimension to CHRIST's Bengaluru presence. Beyond Bengaluru, the Pune-Lavasa Campus offers a distinctive natural setting, while the Delhi NCR Campus extends CHRIST's vision into the National Capital Region. Across these locations, the central proposition remains the same: an education combining intellectual rigour with creativity, responsibility and service.

Education Beyond the Classroom

At CHRIST, holistic education is not an occasional extracurricular intervention; it is embedded in the University's understanding of what it means to be educated. Academic learning is complemented by opportunities to develop leadership, creativity, communication, teamwork, cultural understanding, social sensitivity and civic responsibility.

The Student Welfare Office (SWO) is a key expression of this philosophy, providing platforms for students to explore their abilities in music, dance, theatre, literature, art, quizzing and cultural activities. Organising a festival, performing on stage or leading a team builds competencies essential for life and leadership—student participation itself becomes a form of education.

Learning by Doing: The Centre for Service Learning

One of the most distinctive dimensions of CHRIST's holistic philosophy is its emphasis on experiential learning through service. The Centre for Service Learning (CSL) systematically integrates community engagement with academic learning, enabling students to apply disciplinary knowledge to real-world situations while developing critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership and civic responsibility.

CSL creates a shift from learning about a problem to learning through engagement with it. Students work with communities, NGOs and institutions, encountering social issues in real contexts and reflecting on how these connect to academic concepts. Service-learning is now embedded in the undergraduate curriculum across disciplines including social sciences, psychology, media, economics, commerce, management, computer science, education, law and engineering.

The result is a powerful educational cycle: learn, engage, reflect, apply and transform—building empathy, confidence, collaboration and leadership alongside disciplinary knowledge, while communities gain partners working toward meaningful solutions.






From Campus to Community

CHRIST's commitment to experiential education finds another expression through the Centre for Social Action (CSA), which has facilitated grassroots engagement for decades, addressing education, child rights, women's and youth empowerment, livelihoods, community development, environmental sustainability and climate action. Students encounter realities of poverty, inequality and sustainability firsthand rather than only discussing them in classrooms—service-learning provides the pedagogical framework, while social action provides the lived context.

Preparing Students for the Age of Artificial Intelligence

If social responsibility represents one dimension of the University's vision, Artificial Intelligence represents another defining frontier. CHRIST has established a dedicated Centre for Artificial Intelligence (CAI) to advance education, research, innovation and responsible AI adoption, bringing together faculty, researchers and students for interdisciplinary exploration, workshops and training.

AI is not treated as a specialised technology relevant only to computer science; the broader objective is to prepare learners to function intelligently, critically and responsibly in an AI-enabled world. CHRIST offers programmes such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, with AI-related learning increasingly integrated across disciplines. A future-ready graduate is not simply someone who knows how to use an AI tool, but someone who can question its outputs, recognise bias and protect human agency. Technology provides new capabilities; human values provide direction.

Employability as an Extension of Education

Holistic education must ultimately prepare students for professional life. The Office of Placements and Career Guidance works with schools, industry partners and students to facilitate recruitment while building employability through resume building, interviews, group discussions and professional etiquette. Initiatives such as Career Corridor: The Last Mile Toolkit give final-year students mock interviews and industry-oriented preparation.

Placement preparation is not confined to recruitment season—leadership development, internships, industry interaction, student projects and communication training all contribute to employability. The University reports a 95% placement rate institution-wide, with outcomes varying by programme and campus; the Delhi NCR Campus, for instance, reported more than 300 offers from over 120 recruiters in 2025–26, with a highest CTC of ₹15 lakh. The larger objective remains placement readiness—graduates equipped with competence, confidence, adaptability and professional ethics.

Alumni: Extending the CHRIST Community Beyond Graduation

At CHRIST, the relationship between University and student does not end with graduation. The Office of Alumni Engagement (OAE), established in 2021, strengthens this relationship, facilitating chapters, reunions, professional networks and mentoring across an increasingly international alumni presence spanning the Middle East, North America, Canada, Kerala and Delhi NCR. Graduates become mentors, industry connectors, recruiters and ambassadors, while the University continues to support their lifelong learning.

Sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals

The University's commitment to social responsibility also finds expression through the UN Sustainable Development Goals, encompassing education, social inclusion, environmental responsibility, health, gender equality and economic development. In the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2025, CHRIST was placed in the 801–1000 band globally, with subject-specific SDG positions across areas including No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, and Affordable and Clean Energy—external measures of an institutional effort to connect education with measurable social outcomes.

A University on a Global Trajectory

CHRIST's evolution is reflected in its growing national and international presence. In the QS World University Rankings 2026, it is placed in the 1401+ global band, and in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026, in the 1501+ band. At the national level, CHRIST's NIRF 2025 performance places it at #63 in the University category and #96 Overall, with notable discipline-specific positions including #24 in Law, #57 in Management, #76 in Engineering and #34 in Architecture. It has also made a mark in the World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI). Rankings cannot capture a university's entire contribution, but they offer external indicators of its academic, research and innovation trajectory.

The Future of Education

The real test of a university is not merely how it responds to the present, but how thoughtfully it prepares students for the future. For CHRIST, that future is shaped at the intersection of academic excellence, artificial intelligence, experiential learning, employability, social responsibility, sustainability, leadership and global engagement.

AI prepares students for technological change. Service-learning connects knowledge to lived realities. CSA exposes students to grassroots social challenges. SWO creates spaces for creativity and leadership. Placement initiatives connect education with professional opportunity. Alumni networks extend the University's community across the world. The SDG agenda frames its wider social impact. Together, these represent an educational philosophy in which knowledge leads to competence, competence to responsibility, and responsibility to service.

From its beginnings in 1969, through autonomy in 2004 and transformation into a Deemed to be University in 2008, to its emergence as a multi-campus institution with a growing global presence, CHRIST continues to reinterpret what education can mean in a changing world. Its aspiration is not simply to produce successful graduates, but individuals who think critically, innovate responsibly, lead compassionately and serve meaningfully.

Excellence and Service, in this sense, are not simply CHRIST's institutional vision. They are its continuing educational promise.


BGR Campus, Bangalore


Kengeri Campus, Bangalore


Yeshwanthpur Campus, Bangalore


Lavasa Campus, Pune


NCR Campus, Delhi



SHEETAL DEVI, 19
World's first and only female armless World Para-Archery Champion
Loidhar, Jammu and Kashmir

AFP

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **SPORTSWOMEN**

Against All Odds

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Born with phocomelia—a congenital condition that left her without arms—Sheetal has broken barrier after barrier to become one of India's most powerful sporting icons

Sheetal always knew she was different because she did not have arms, but then her feet and toes let her eat, write and climb trees. It was enough in idyllic Loidhar, a remote village in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir, where her parents, Mann Singh and Shakti Devi, work as farmers.

Sheetal hadn't even heard of archery. She had gone to Bengaluru in 2020 for medical treatment when she was taken for an assessment. "They told me I had a strong core and suggested three sports, one of which was archery," she recalls. That day became the beginning of a new journey. She started training at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board Sports Complex in Katra, Jammu.

A 2023 Arjuna awardee, Sheetal uses a custom release device attached to her shoulder. She loads and nocks the arrow with her toes, draws the bow with her body and feet, aims and releases with precision.

Sheetal rose to World No. 1 when she won two gold medals and a silver at the 2022–23 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou. At the Paris 2024 Paralympics, she claimed bronze in the mixed team event, becoming India's youngest Paralympic Olympic medallist at 17. In 2025, she won an individual gold at the World Archery Para Championships in Gwangju by defeating World No. 1 Öznur Cüre Girdi of Türkiye—becoming the first armless woman to win a world title. In a takedown of a significant barrier, she also became the first Indian para-archer selected for the able-bodied junior national team. Coming up next are the 2026 Asian Para Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, where she will defend her titles. ■

— Ishfaq Tantry

HER ADVICE

"Believe in yourself, work hard and keep pushing yourself. When I started, many said I would fail. Had I listened to them, I wouldn't be where I am today. So never let other people's opinions decide your future"

Ms Tenacity



VAISHALI RAMESHBABU, 24
Grandmaster, Chess
Chennai

When Vaishali Rameshbabu, 24, reached the shores of Pegela, Cyprus, in March to compete in what was her second straight Candidates, not many expected her to win a tournament whose victor gets to challenge the world champion. And rightly so. She had the lowest ELO rating among the eight-woman field, and came with a mixed bag in 2025-26, which saw her struggle for consistency. In fact, it was Vaishali's younger brother, R. Praggnanandhaa, who was seen as the more solid bet to handle the rigours of one of the toughest classical chess tournaments.

But here's the thing about Vaishali. She isn't a lioness on the 64 squares; she's more a sly fox, crafting and calculating her way to stifle the opponent till they are left with little to manoeuvre. Playing with white pieces against Divya Deshmukh, she avoided her compatriot's opening preparation to wrap up the game in just 31 moves; and, against Aleksandra Goryachkina, she piled up the pressure and provoked a mistake.

"She has this great tenacity to her," says five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand. "Even when she is struggling in a tournament, she is able to keep it together and keep playing; and even when she is losing, she is never fully lost, turning a lot of games in difficult moments." It's exactly what she did at Candidates, a feat that made the social media-shy youngster only the second Indian woman since Koneru Humpy (2011) to fight for the title that's eluded India so far. Her match-up against world champ Ju Wenjun awaits FIDE scheduling.

When it comes to discipline, most agree that it's hard to rival Vaishali. "She was already a very hardworking player when she came to me," says R.B. Ramesh, coach to Indian sport's most famous siblings. "She is reserved around strangers and jovial with her close ones." It's perhaps why you won't see this Gen-Zer posting a reel on Instagram. She knows the real stories are written on the board by outwitting the world's best. It's why a nation believes that it will have its first female world champion by 2027. ■

— Suhani Singh

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Won the gruelling Candidates 2026 which gets Vaishali a straight shot at the world champion crown

HER TAKE

After winning the FIDE Candidates tournament in Pegeia in Cyprus, Vaishali Rameshbabu had this message for all young Indian girls pursuing chess: "Just enjoy the game. There is more to it than the game itself. Play a lot of tournaments and enjoy the process"



Dr. Prabhakar B Kore
Chancellor, KAHER, Belagavi

KLE EMPOWERING PROFESSIONALS

KLE ACADEMY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
(KAHER), Belagavi, Karnataka
(DEEMED-TO-BE-UNIVERSITY)
www.kaher.edu.in

The KLE Academy of Higher Education and Research (KAHER), Deemed-to-be-University established on 13th April 2006 is one of the premier Health Science Universities in the country, imparting high quality health profession education at Under-Graduate, Post-Graduate and Post-doctoral levels. Based on the excellent infrastructure, faculty base, research, contemporary teaching & training practices and overall academic environment, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, on the recommendations of the University Grants Commission (UGC), granted Deemed-to-be-University status to 11 colleges of KLE Society (sponsoring society) and thus the KLE Deemed-to-be-University came into existence.

The University has been accredited with **'A+' Grade by NAAC (3rd Cycle)** & has received 12B status from the University Grants Commission (UGC). It is placed in **Category 'A' University by MoE, GOI**. & recognised as Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (SIRO) by the department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India.

Sponsoring Society (KLE Society):

The sponsoring of KAHER viz. KLE Society, was **established in 1916** has over the years established itself as a rising star in the field of education and healthcare. The KLE Society **celebrated its centenary year in 2015-16**. The KLE Society is unique in its character as it was formed by seven visionary and dedicated teachers **"Saptarishis"** with philanthropic support from three generous Patrons. It is also unique in its association and governance, as it runs purely on democratic values and principles with a charitable objective.

The Society has undergone rapid metamorphosis under the able leadership of Chairman **Dr. Prabhakar Kore** and in the last 40 years has bloomed and blossomed and today it encompasses **318 institutions** all over the country which in itself is an inspirational achievement.

Research Excellence @KAHER

KAHER has established itself as a nationally and internationally respected hub for high-impact, interdisciplinary health research, integrating medical, health, and life sciences. Its robust ecosystem spans medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, ayurveda, homeopathy, physiotherapy, and allied sciences, delivering quality-driven outputs through a growing portfolio of publications in high-impact indexed journals, competitive extramural funding, and sustained collaborations with leading national and global agencies.

The JNMC Research Unit at KAHER has earned unprecedented recognition as India's only center honored by ICMR-DHR (Government of India), WHO, NICHD-USA, and NHMRC-Australia. Designated as a WHO Collaborating Center for Maternal and Perinatal Health (2019), ICMR Centre for Clinical Trials (2021), and ICMR Collaborating Centre of Excellence (2023), it positions KAHER among India's premier biomedical research institutions. KAHER has been the recipient of several national/international grants from ICMR, Dept. of AYUSH, NBM-BIRAC, DBT, AICTE, NIV, CCIM, VGST, Dept. of Atomic Energy, NIH (USA), WHO, Thomas Jefferson University, Thrasher Research Fund, CIFF, Gates Foundation, etc. With 250 MoUs with institutions of national and international repute to drive translational innovation and global impact.

KAHER's state-of-the-art infrastructure includes DCGI/ICH-GCP compliant Phase II-IV clinical trials facilities, Dr. Prabhakar Kore Basic Science Research Labs, and the Abdul Kalam Ayurtech Incubation Centre with NABH and SIDCER-FERCAP accreditation.

KAHER's KIIF incubator hub fosters interdisciplinary excellence, translating discoveries into Commercialization, Scopus/ Web of Science publications, and policy outcomes to advance a knowledge-based health economy.

RECOGNITION, ACCREDITATION & MEMBERSHIP



CGTMSE: EMPOWERING WOMEN, ENABLING ENTERPRISES, CONNECTING THE WORLD

Building the Foundation for Inclusive Credit

Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) are a vital pillar of India's economic growth, yet access to institutional credit has traditionally remained a challenge, particularly for first-generation entrepreneurs who may not have adequate collateral or an established credit history. Recognising this gap, the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) was setup in July 2000 by the Ministry of MSME, Government of India and SIDBI.

Over the past 26 years, CGTMSE has emerged as a key enabler of collateral-free and third-party-guarantee-free credit to MSEs. By sharing credit risk with lending institutions, the Trust has helped create greater confidence within the lending ecosystem and enabled entrepreneurs to access finance based on the viability and potential of their enterprises.

Scale with Purpose

CGTMSE has grown significantly in both scale and reach. During FY 2025–26, the Trust approved guarantees amounting to ₹4.32 lakh crore, registering a 42% growth over ₹3.05 lakh crore in FY 2024–25. With a wide network of Member Lending Institutions across banks, RRBs, co-operative banks, financial institutions and NBFCs, the guarantee mechanism is reaching enterprises across the length and breadth of the country.

Yet, the larger purpose extends beyond numbers. At its core, CGTMSE seeks to make formal finance more accessible to entrepreneurs who have the potential to create businesses, employment and sustainable livelihoods.

A Special Focus on Women

Women entrepreneurs are an important and growing force in India's entrepreneurial landscape. However, lack of collateral, limited formal financial history and difficulties in establishing creditworthiness can continue to constrain their access to institutional finance.

CGTMSE has introduced specific incentives to encourage greater credit flow to Women-led enterprises. Women entrepreneurs are eligible for a 10% concession in guarantee fee and enhanced guarantee coverage of up to 90%, providing additional comfort to lending institutions and reducing the cost and risk associated with financing.

The impact is visible in CGTMSE's portfolio. Women entrepreneurs accounted for approximately 22% of guarantees approved by number of accounts and around 17% by guarantee amount during the financial year 2025-26.

These numbers are encouraging, but they also represent an opportunity to go further—enabling more Women to establish, scale and formalise their enterprises and move from being entrepreneurs at the micro level to becoming larger employers, innovators and contributors to national and global markets.

Taking India's Credit Guarantee Story to the World

CGTMSE's journey is increasingly extending beyond national boundaries. A significant milestone was the Global Symposium on Credit Guarantee and 38th Annual Conference of the Asian Credit Supplementation Institution Confederation (ACSIC), hosted by CGTMSE in Mumbai on April 23–24, 2026, as part of its Silver Jubilee celebrations.

The Symposium brought together participants from more than 19 countries and 26 leading organisations, including policymakers, credit guarantee institutions, financial sector leaders and international experts. It provided a unique platform for global institutions to exchange experiences and deliberate on the future of credit guarantees.

The strong international participation reaffirmed that credit guarantee institutions are increasingly recognised as important instruments of inclusive economic development. For CGTMSE, hosting this global gathering in India marked an important step in positioning the institution as an active participant in the global credit guarantee dialogue.

Supporting MSMEs to Go Global

Under the Export Promotion Mission – Niryat Protsahan, CGTMSE has launched the **Special Credit Guarantee Scheme – Collateral Support for Export Credit** to facilitate collateral-free export finance for eligible MSME exporters. The Scheme aims to reduce credit risk for lending institutions and facilitate timely export credit for eligible MSMEs.

Under the Scheme, eligible MSME exporters can avail collateral support for export-related working capital facilities up to an overall guarantee ceiling of ₹10 crore. Micro and Small Enterprises can receive a total guarantee coverage of up to 85% (as against normal coverage of 75%), while Medium Enterprises are eligible for 65% guarantee coverage.

The Scheme is expected to improve credit access, encourage lenders to support export-oriented MSMEs, and enable businesses to expand into global markets without the constraint of collateral. Eligible MSME exporters holding a valid IEC and Udyam Registration are encouraged to approach their Member Lending Institution or visit the DGFT portal to obtain Unique Identification Number (UIN). CGTMSE encourages MSME exporters to leverage this opportunity to strengthen their export competitiveness and accelerate India's journey towards becoming a global export powerhouse.

The Journey Ahead

From empowering Women and enabling collateral-free credit to supporting MSMEs in reaching global markets, CGTMSE is helping transform entrepreneurial aspirations into sustainable enterprises—strengthening India's journey towards a more inclusive, resilient and globally competitive economy.

Interview with **Mr. Manish Sinha,** CEO, CGTMSE

Q CGTMSE has enabled over 1.41 crore collateral-free loan accounts worth more than ₹13 lakh crore in cumulative guarantees since its inception. As India celebrates 80 years of independence, how do you measure CGTMSE's contribution to a different kind of freedom — the economic freedom of India's Women entrepreneurs who have historically been shut out of formal credit?

CGTMSE has significantly contributed to the economic empowerment of Women entrepreneurs by enabling collateral-free access to formal credit. Since inception till June 2026, the Trust has supported over 32.5 lakh guarantee accounts for Women-led enterprises, with guarantee approvals exceeding ₹2.34 lakh crore. In FY 2025–26, Women-led enterprises accounted for 22% of the total guarantee accounts approved by CGTMSE. By addressing the challenge of collateral, CGTMSE has enabled more Women to start, sustain and grow their businesses, promoting financial independence, entrepreneurship and inclusive economic growth.

Q In April 2024, CGTMSE enhanced guarantee coverage for Women-led enterprises to 90% — significantly higher than the standard 75% — along with a 10% reduction in the Annual Guarantee Fee. How has this enhanced coverage specifically changed the lending landscape for Women entrepreneurs, and what are you hearing from the ground about its real impact?

The enhanced 90% guarantee coverage and 10% reduction in the Annual Guarantee Fee have made lending to Women entrepreneurs more attractive for Member Lending Institutions while reducing the credit gap for Women-led enterprises. The impact is reflected in the strong growth in guarantee approvals. The guarantee amount for Women-led enterprises increased from ₹32,223 crore in FY 2023–24 to ₹47,969 crore in FY 2024–25. In FY 2025–26, the guarantee amount increased substantially to ₹73,565 crore, indicating higher-value credit support to Women-led enterprises. This demonstrates growing lender confidence and increased formal credit access for Women entrepreneurs, enabling them to establish and expand their businesses with greater financial support.

Q The woman who has no property to pledge, no family collateral, and no banking history — but has a viable business idea and the will to build it — is precisely who CGTMSE was created for. How does CGTMSE ensure that its guarantee framework genuinely reaches first-generation Women entrepreneurs, particularly in Tier 2, Tier 3 cities and rural India, where awareness remains a challenge and lending institutions may still be conservative?

CGTMSE's guarantee framework is designed to facilitate access to institutional credit based on the viability and potential of a business, rather than relying solely on the availability of collateral. This makes the Scheme especially relevant for first-generation Women entrepreneurs. Our wide network of Member Lending Institutions—including Regional Rural Banks (RRBs), Co-operative Banks, Small Finance Banks (SFBs), NBFCs, and Commercial Banks—ensures that the Scheme reaches entrepreneurs across Tier 2, Tier 3 cities and rural India. These institutions have deep local presence and play a crucial role in extending collateral-free credit to underserved segments. With enhanced guarantee coverage for Women-led enterprises and continuous outreach with lending institutions, CGTMSE is witnessing increasing participation of Women entrepreneurs, helping make formal credit more accessible and inclusive across the country.



Q With the Union Budget 2025-26 announcing term loans of up to ₹2 crore for first-time Women founders, the guarantee ceiling raised to ₹10 crore from April 2025, and over 3.07 crore Women-led MSMEs now registered on the Udyam portal, India's Women entrepreneurship ecosystem has never been more formally supported. In your view, what is the single most important shift still needed — in policy, in financial institution behaviour, or in societal attitude — for India's Women entrepreneurs to fully realise their economic potential by 2047?

While policy support and credit guarantee mechanisms have significantly improved access to finance, the most important shift required is a change in the lending mindset—to evaluate Women entrepreneurs based on the viability of their business rather than the availability of collateral. Financial institutions should continue to adopt a more inclusive and cash flow-based approach to credit appraisal. Combined with greater financial awareness, digital adoption, and market linkages, this will enable more Women entrepreneurs to scale their enterprises and contribute meaningfully to India's vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Q Behind every guarantee approval is a woman who said yes to herself — who chose to build rather than wait. Is there a story, a sector, or a moment from CGTMSE's work with Women entrepreneurs that has particularly stayed with you — one that captures why this work matters beyond policy documents and guarantee percentages?

Rather than a single story, what has stayed with me is the growing confidence of Women entrepreneurs across diverse sectors—from manufacturing and services to retail—who are successfully accessing formal credit without collateral. Many of these are first-generation entrepreneurs who have transformed small business ideas into sustainable enterprises, creating employment and supporting their families. These stories reinforce that a credit guarantee is more than a financial instrument; it is an enabler of aspirations, confidence, and economic independence. That is what makes CGTMSE's work meaningful beyond policy and numbers.



SAIKHOM MIRABAI CHANU, 32
Olympic medallist and weightlifter
Nongpok Kakching, Manipur

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **SPORTSWOMEN**

A Heavyweight Legacy

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

An Olympic silver medallist and world champion, Mirabai Chanu has carried Indian weightlifting for nearly a decade. Her 2026 CWG gold, as well as three national records, show that she continues to raise the benchmark

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

Five months of complete bed rest nearly ended Mirabai Chanu's weightlifting career. A serious back injury after the 2018 Commonwealth Games left her unable to even get out of bed. "Lying in bed, I often wondered how I'd ever lift weights again," she says. "At that point, I thought I would have to quit weightlifting."

The comeback that followed has become a part of Chanu's legacy. She claimed India's first Olympic silver in weightlifting at the 2020 Tokyo Games, adding to a career that included a World Championship gold and Commonwealth Games success. This year, she reaffirmed her place among the country's finest athletes, winning another CWG gold and setting three national records at the National Weightlifting Championships.

For Chanu, success has always been rooted in conviction, with her mother remaining her greatest source of strength. "She has supported me from the very beginning," she says. "She knows everything I have been through, from injuries to all the struggles."

As one of India's most recognisable sporting icons, representing the Northeast has been deeply personal. "I wanted to show people what my identity represents. I belong to Manipur and to the Northeast," she says. Her message to young women is shaped by experience. "There is nothing we cannot achieve," she says. "But if we want to compete at the world level, three things are essential: hard work, sacrifice and discipline." ■

— Hrijoy Das Kanungo

HER MOTIVATION

"I always wanted to be in sports. The moment I joined the national camp, I knew I had to do something big. From then on, I realised this was the field I wanted to dedicate my life to. I believed that if I worked harder and stayed committed, I could achieve something for India. That was the real turning point for me"

The Shooting Sensation

SURUCHI SINGH, 20
World No. 1 in women's 10m air pistol (ISSF 2025)
Jhajjar, Haryana

The only difference between her early days in the game and now, several world championships and staring contests with the bullseye later, is how much thought she puts in before starting. "Earlier, I would have a lot on my mind," says Suruchi Singh, the 20-year-old star shooter from Haryana who recently climbed an ISSF (International Shooting Sport Federation) World Cup podium for the seventh time. "Now I just pick up the gun and shoot. I can do it any place, anytime."

It's that cool-headedness—a calm detachment from the pursuit that has meant so much to her ever since a collarbone injury disqualified her from wrestling—that coaches have argued cannot be taught. Suruchi thinks a lot about technique, but intuition guides her pistol far more than it used to. Even in a sport so about being more accurate than your competition under pressures of time, "I never think about other players when I'm facing a target," she says. "I focus only on myself." That advice from her mother—her parents are her role models—has held her steady through years of highs and lows.

Her incubation period started when she was 13; she gained international fame six years later in 2025 with three back-to-back gold medals at the ISSF World Cup in the 10 m air pistol events, nudging Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker to second place. This came after topping the national trials in 2024, which itself was a result of feverish training after a crushing failure at the Olympics trials months before. "That was my lowest moment," she says, "but I trained hard to recover."

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO
After years of rigorous training, Suruchi won three back-to-back gold at the ISSF World Cup 2025, shooting to international fame

Next stop is the Asian Games, for which she's not nervous, just excited. Suruchi follows a credo of unrelenting hard work, keeping one eye set on summits still unconquered. Usually she doesn't think that far ahead—"every match is my next goal"—but if she has one overarching ambition, it's "to wave the tricolour at the Olympics". ■

— Udbhav Seth

HER ADVICE

"To other women athletes, I say, work hard, dream big and let your performance speak for you"



Photograph by **CHANDRADEEP KUMAR**



THE SPORTSWOMEN

Captain on the Charge

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Salima's journey from a remote village to hockey captaincy shows Indian sports at its best—talent emerging from regions far from elite systems

Growing up in Simdega, Salima was the toast of her village, Barki Chhapar, for the number of goats and chickens she'd regularly win for her exploits with the stick at local tournaments. These days, she has settled for medals and accolades. The recent bounty includes the Arjuna Award and a silver medal at the Asia Cup in 2025.

Salima picked up the sport inspired by her farmer father, Sulakshan, a local player. "I would go with him to tournaments and learned by looking at him," she says. It's why 'papa' is still her biggest inspiration. Her family and villagers' support, she says, was crucial too. "Girls were never stopped from playing. My dream was always to play for India." That ambition got fast wheels under the tutelage of late Pratima Barwa at Simdega training centre. She made her debut for the national senior team in 2017. Salima has proven how sport can empower women. With her father the sole breadwinner, Salima's prowess in hockey since the youth level has helped the family considerably. In doing so, the speedy, attacking midfielder nicknamed 'the Ferrari' soon became an icon for other young women, especially those from tribal backgrounds.

Only 22 when she took over the reins as captain in 2024, Salima has quickly adapted to the role. She credits her teammates as well as erstwhile captains Rani Rampal and Savita for their leadership. Already a veteran of the squad at 24, Salima has experienced several setbacks—narrowly missing out on a medal at Tokyo 2020 and failing to qualify for the 2024 Paris Games. However, her maiden Olympics remains a personal turning point. "My life and the situation at home became better with it," she says. Her next goal is to win gold at the upcoming Asian Games to qualify for the 2028 LA Games. A podium finish there would be an enduring achievement. ■

HER ADVICE

"Women can do it all. So, never give up. I also think that having parental support is necessary. Share what you feel with them"

— Suhani Singh

राष्ट्रीय सहकारी विकास निगम
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सहकारिताओं की सहायता में सदैव तत्पर

Powering 'Sahakar Se Samriddhi' Through Cooperative Finance

India's cooperative movement is witnessing unprecedented growth, and the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) has emerged as a key driver of this transformation. Since the creation of the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021, NCDC has expanded its role from a financing institution to a strategic development partner supporting cooperatives across agriculture, dairy, fisheries, sugar, storage, processing and rural enterprises.

The Corporation recorded its highest-ever financial performance in FY 2025-26, with sanctions of ₹1.55 lakh crore and disbursements of ₹1.27 lakh crore. NCDC continues to demonstrate that cooperative finance can combine scale with sustainability and social impact.

Financial Transformation

NCDC's loan disbursement has increased more than five-fold—from ₹24,733 crore in FY 2020-21 to ₹1,27,598 crore in FY 2025-26. To make credit more affordable and responsive, the Corporation introduced floating interest rates and differential pricing mechanisms, enabling easier access to finance for cooperatives across sectors and regions.

Strengthening Dairy & Sugar Cooperatives

The Corporation has played a major role in strengthening value chains in dairy and sugar. Under the Government's scheme, NCDC has disbursed Rs. 10,005 crore to 56 cooperative sugar mills for ethanol projects, cogeneration plants and working capital support. Enabling Dairy Cooperatives to lead another White Revolution, NCDC is strengthening dairy cooperatives through integrated financial and technical assistance. 17,964 dairy cooperatives were assisted in 2025-26. An MoU was also signed with NDDB to further strengthen the dairy cooperative ecosystem.

Empowering FPOs and Fisheries Cooperatives

NCDC has emerged as a leading institution in promoting collective farming and fisheries enterprises. Under the Central Sector Scheme for FPOs, NCDC has facilitated the formation of 1,863 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) across the country. Grant assistance of around ₹320 crore has been extended, benefiting over 15 lakh farmers. In the fisheries sector, under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), NCDC has registered 70 new Fish Farmer Producer Organisations (FFPOs) and is strengthening 1,000 Primary Fisheries Cooperative Societies. So far, ₹134.94 crore has been utilized for promoting and strengthening FFPOs, improving market access, collective entrepreneurship and livelihoods of fishermen across the country.



Innovation and New Cooperative Enterprises

NCDC is also fostering a new generation of cooperative enterprises. The launch of Bharat Taxi, India's first cooperative-based ride-hailing platform, has created a people-centric mobility ecosystem where drivers are members and stakeholders.

The Corporation has further introduced the Sahakar Innovation Scheme, offering grant support of up to ₹25 lakh for innovative cooperative projects, while initiatives such as Yuva Sahakar, Digital Sahakar, Nandini Sahakar and Swayam Shakti Sahakar are encouraging entrepreneurship and women-led enterprises.

Geographical Expansion and Institutional Strengthening

To bring cooperative finance closer to the grassroots, NCDC has expanded its physical presence with a new Regional Office at Vijayawada and nine Satellite Offices across the North-East, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. Today, the Corporation has a nationwide network of 19 Regional Offices and 9 Satellite Offices, ensuring coverage across all States and Union Territories.

As India moves towards the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047, NCDC is transforming cooperatives into engines of inclusive growth. By combining finance, innovation, institution-building and professional governance, the Corporation is translating the vision of "Sahakar Se Samriddhi" into reality and strengthening the foundations of an Atmanirbhar Bharat.



A Journey of Dignity, Opportunity and Belonging

From Marginalisation to Mainstream Development



Over the past 78 years of Independence, India has worked towards strengthening its rural economy. Yet, tribal communities, despite being among the country's earliest custodians of forests and natural resources, remained on the margins of development for decades. Their dependence on common natural resources often resulted in limited socio economic gains for the communities themselves. Acknowledging the gap, Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has adopted a comprehensive and mission driven approach to ensure that tribal communities become equal partners in India's development journey.

Targeting Comprehensive Tribal Development

In the past 12 years, an integrated approach, underlining the ethos of 'government as one' has been adopted to bring noticeable change in lives of tribals through socio-economic development and promotion of tribal heritage. Various initiatives such as Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN), Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DA JGUA), Tribal Freedom Fighters Museums (TFFMs) and Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) have been instrumental in bringing this transition. These efforts are further supplemented through provisions of grants under Proviso to Article 275 (1) of the Constitution of India which provides for development of scheduled tribes and scheduled areas.

Celebrating Tribal History and Heritage

Addressing the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on 15th August, 2016, Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, announced tribal museums dedicated to tribal freedom fighters so that their sacrifices for the country are acknowledged and the nation pays tribute to their memories. Pursuant to the announcement, 11 Tribal Freedom Fighter Museums (TFFM) were sanctioned in 10 states. To further the cause of promoting tribal heritage, Government declared 15th November, the birth date of Bhagwan Birsa Munda as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas in 2021.

Building Paths for Tribal Children

Since its inception in 1999, Ministry has given utmost priority to provide good quality education to tribal students in a safe and conducive environment as education is the biggest social mobiliser. This vision was exemplified in the setting up of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) which were initially supported through Art 275 grants but in 2018-19, the entire approach was restructured. EMRS were configured as a Central Sector Scheme with an allocation of more than 24000 crores, as a result of which, school infrastructure, pedagogic equipment and good quality teachers have been ensured. National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS), an autonomous organization, has been established to manage and implement the scheme in an effective manner.



Strengthening Tribal Livelihood Opportunities

Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVK) were launched in 2018-19 to target livelihood generation for tribal gatherers and transforming them into entrepreneurs. Then during 2021-22, the scheme was revamped as Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM) and scope of VDVKs was broadened to include procurement, processing and production of all tribal products, including non-MFP items.

Transformative Missions for Tribal Development

The Ministry is implementing two flagship initiatives, Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DA JGUA), launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 2nd October 2024, and Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN), launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 15th November, 2023, aimed at delivering comprehensive infrastructure and essential services across tribal and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) villages through a whole of government approach.

While launching PM JANMAN from Khunti, Jharkhand on the occasion of Janjatiya Gaurav Divas on 15th November, 2023, Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi said, "Earlier governments did the work of connecting the figures, but I want to connect the lives, not the figures. With this goal, PM JANMAN has started today". PM JANMAN has been a milestone initiative in addressing development of PVTGs through convergence among 9 Union Ministries / Departments. In many cases scheme norms have been relaxed to reach remote PVTG habitations/ households. Based on the learnings from PM JANMAN, DA JGUA was conceptualized. The Abhiyan converges 17 Union Ministries / Departments through 25 interventions with an aim to saturate infrastructural gaps in around 63000 tribal majority villages.

Reinforcing Livelihoods Through Skills and Tribal Tourism

Alongside welfare initiatives, the Ministry is creating sustainable livelihood opportunities by promoting entrepreneurship, green skills and community based tourism among tribal communities.

In collaboration with the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and Tata Power Skill Development Institute (TPSDI), the Ministry has launched training programmes in Solar PV Helper and Assistant Technician skills for ST and PVTG youth. Training has already been conducted in Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Kerala, with additional States being added in the next phase.

The Ministry is also promoting tribal homestays through the Tribal Eco Tourism Pilot Programme (TEEP) in partnership with the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC). The initiative equips tribal families with hospitality, guest management and tourism skills, enabling them to generate sustainable income while showcasing their unique culture, traditions and natural heritage. Homestay owners from Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Gujarat have already been trained, with the programme set to expand to more tribal regions across the country.

Recognising excellence in tribal tourism, the Ministry partnered with the India Today Tourism Awards and Survey 2026, where Nawang Chotta Homestay of Arunachal Pradesh received the Best Homestay Award. The recognition reflects the growing potential of tribal tourism as a vehicle for livelihood generation, cultural preservation and responsible travel.

Strengthening health care

Ministry is strengthening tribal healthcare through the JANHIT (Janjatiya Health Intelligence and Technology) initiative; a comprehensive platform for improving disease surveillance, preventive healthcare, traditional medicine integration and evidence-based policy making in tribal areas. The initiative aims to integrate community-level health data with programme implementation, enabling timely interventions, targeted planning and improved health outcomes for tribal communities.

Ministry has entered into a strategic collaboration with ICMR–National Institute of Health Research (ICMR-NIHR) to scientifically strengthen community-based healthcare systems in tribal areas while



recognising the invaluable role of traditional tribal healers. The collaboration also includes establishment of Central and Regional Programme Management Units, orientation of State Tribal Welfare and Health Departments, and implementation of the Bharat Tribal Family Health Survey, Sentinel Surveillance and Disease Elimination programmes. This partnership represents a unique convergence of traditional tribal knowledge and modern public health systems to improve healthcare accessibility, strengthen disease prevention and preserve India's rich indigenous medical heritage.

Ministry is partnering with Council of Scientific and Industrial Research - National Botanical Research Institute (CSIR-NBRI) for conservation of medicinal plants and rare, endangered and threatened species. The programme includes bio-resource conservation programme, ethnobotanical surveys, capacity building of tribal youth and healers, establishment of scientific conservation and propagation systems for medicinal plant resources.

Ministry has launched a national challenge for preparation of high-quality district proposals covering agriculture; fisheries; animal husbandry; NTFP value chains; women's SHGs; skill-based enterprises. Selected proposals will receive financial assistance for implementation of projects which will culminate in development of Agri-based clusters. This initiative aims to generate sustainable livelihoods and strengthen value chains in tribal districts.

Tribal Freedom Fighter Model Village (TFFMV) Initiative envisions to develop the birthplace villages of revered tribal freedom fighters into model villages that reflect tribal heritage, dignity and holistic development. Eleven priority villages have been shortlisted across 10 States and 1 Union Territory, each linked to a tribal freedom fighter.

Ministry is focussing on setting up of community managed crèches to provide services like day care for PVTG / tribal children of age 06 months to 3 years, provision of meals, growth monitoring, routine immunization and health check-ups to tackle the challenges presented in form of malnutrition and high burden on tribal women owing to geographical remoteness of PVTG/tribal habitations.



Janjatiya Garima Utsav 2026: Celebrating the Journey of Tribal Transformation

Building upon these initiatives, the Ministry organised Janjatiya Garima Utsav 2026 from 10 May to 9 June 2026 as a month-long celebration of tribal dignity, opportunity, participation and achievement. The Utsav was structured around four thematic components: Technology as a Development Driver, highlighting the role of technology, AI and digital innovation in tribal education, healthcare, livelihoods and service delivery; Jan Bhagidari Abhiyan : Sabse Door, Sabse Pehle, focusing on saturation of services, health outreach, livelihood support and direct engagement with communities in the most remote tribal habitations; Birsa Lives in New Bharat, celebrating tribal heritage, the legacy of Bhagwan Birsa Munda and the achievements of contemporary tribal leaders and changemakers; and From Classroom to Confidence, showcasing the impact of EMRS, scholarships and institutional support in enabling tribal youth to emerge as skilled, confident and aspirational participants in India's development journey. The Utsav culminated bringing together these interventions under a unified narrative of tribal pride, empowerment and inclusive development.

THE SHE LIST
UNDER 50

THE **SPORTSWOMEN**

The Game Changer

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Currently ranked 7th in the ICC women's T20 batting rankings, Shafali Verma came in as an injury replacement in the 2025 ODI World Cup. Her exploits with the bat—and ball—were instrumental in India winning the tournament

Behind the well-timed, lofted drives, fierce cuts and mighty hoicks that shred hapless opposition bowlers and built the reputation of Shafali Verma as a fearsome attacking batsman lies a now-familiar tale of determination. Shafali's father Sanjeev, a small-time jeweller, didn't err in detecting the uncut diamond in his ward, and got her admitted to a local academy disguised as a boy after many others rejected her for her gender. She was nine. At age 15 in 2019, Shafali got her maiden India call-up—the youngest Indian cricketer to make an international debut, a record broken only recently by Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

At her Test debut against England two years later, she fell just four runs short of a hundred. In 2024, she notched up the second fastest Test century in women's cricket and then converted it into a double hundred. In 2023, she led India to victory in the inaugural ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa. "Becoming captain of the India U-19 team was a big turning point for me," says Shafali. "It gave me a chance to take responsibility and grow as a player."

Shafali Verma's fearless batting approach is propelled by her iron resolve to succeed—she fell back upon relentless training even when left out of the India team for the 2025 women's ODI World Cup. Then, a burst of fortune—called in as a late injury replacement, Shafali lit up the knockouts. She owned the final with a match-winning 87 and two crucial wickets to help India win. "It felt like life had given me another chance, and I had to make the most of it," she says.

Indeed, Shafali brings an X-factor to the table, served with cold, clinical force. Still just 22, she will serve Indian cricket for many more years. The inevitable ups and downs of a sporting career colour her advice for other women. "Always believe in yourself. There will be difficult times, and not everything will go your way, but don't let one setback decide your future." ■

— Rahul Rawat

SHAFALI VERMA, 22
Indian cricketer
Rohtak, Haryana

HER INSPIRATION

"As a role model, I've always looked up to Sachin Tendulkar sir. I used to watch his batting videos with my father when I was young, and he inspired me to dream of playing for India. My father has been my biggest inspiration, because he has always stood by me and encouraged me to keep going"



Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **SPORTSWOMEN**

A Grip on Glory

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Antim Panghal has become a worthy successor to the other most decorated Indian female wrestler of our time, Vinesh Phogat, by attaining rank World No. 1 in the women's 53 kg category (2025) as well as winning bronze at the World Championships and Asian Championships last year



ALAMY

ANTIM PANGHAL, 21
Wrestler
Hisar, Haryana

The youngest female wrestler from India to reach the Olympics had her high slashed brutally when, in a shock defeat, she was knocked out in the first round at the 2024 Paris edition. Yet Antim Panghal, not even 21 at the time, had already won the U20 World Championship two years in a row, won bronze at three world events—the Asian Games, Asian Championships and World Championship—and had been branded the United World Wrestling's (UWW) Rising Star of 2023. She'd not put one foot wrong. Till then.

"I had to heal first," she says. And it wasn't just physical recovery. The bout had borne a psychological effect—what would need to be cultivated is a healthy attitude to defeat. So now, two years later, after having booked herself a ticket to the Asian Games and earned the title of World No. 1 in the women's 53 kg category (2025), Antim is more nimble, observant and determined. Ambition is an old friend, but resilience has joined the team. "Every bout teaches you something new, how to attack, what to pay attention to. No two opponents are the same," she says. "When we train, we learn how to not get too confident if we win and not too disheartened if we lose."

Her routine is much the same as it was when she started training as a 10-year-old. Get up at six in the morning, train for three to four hours, repeat in the evening. She looks back on the journey that started with travelling 20 km daily to practise, and wears her setbacks like badges of honour. "Give it your all, with everything you have," she tells youngsters. "The best advice I got was to not lose sight of your goals, no matter what happens, to not back off for a single day." ■

— Udbhav Seth

ROLE MODEL

"The one name we have all heard growing up was that of Sushil (Kumar) *pehelwanji*. If I have a role model, it's him. I'd want to be like him"



THE 50 SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE **SPORTSWOMEN**

Packing a Punch

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Coming from a family of boxers, Jaismine Lamboria won gold at the 2026 Commonwealth Games in the 57 kg category, besides winning the world championship in 2025

Photograph by **CHANDRADEEP KUMAR**

An athlete is sustained as much by mental victories as physical ones. Boxer Jaismine Lamboria, who won gold at this year's Commonwealth Games, has learnt this again and again, like with her quarterfinal loss at the 2023 Asian Games. "It was my biggest turning point," she recalls. "I had never learnt as much with anything I had achieved before. I was very low, but then you get up, assess what went wrong and move on." Jaismine credits her psychologist at the Army Sports Institute, Pune, with instilling confidence in her decisions, whether they lead to victory or defeat. "I learnt through my sessions that, as athletes, we have short careers, so the only way to go about them is to do it unabashedly."

JAISMINE LAMBORIA, 24
Boxer
Bhiwani, Haryana

A decision that proved fruitful was during the 2024 Olympics qualifications, when she dropped from the 60 kg to the 57 kg category. Two years later, she has won gold in both the 2025 World Boxing Championship and 2025 World Boxing Cup, and has converted the 2022 CWG bronze to gold.

This was partly achieved by no longer clinging to a defensive stance. She now returns the favour when she's hit with a volley of punches, ensuring opponents stay on their toes. ■

—Udbhav Seth

HER INSPIRATION

"I learn a bit from sportspersons of every discipline: Mary Kom, Neeraj Chopra, Milkha Singh, M.S. Dhoni.... I admire one's discipline, one's nature, someone's willpower and another's determination"



AFP

ANKITA BHAKAT,28
International Recurve Archer, Olympian, Assistant Manager (Sports), Tata Steel
Kolkata

Hitting the Bull's-eye

Ankita Bhakat was just 10 when she accompanied her father to an archery ground in north Kolkata. Something clicked when she saw the bow and arrow. "I liked them and so I decided to learn archery," she says, recalling the moment that altered the course of her life. Her homemaker mother and her father, a milk trader, stood firmly behind her dream. But recurve archery is an expensive sport, and a professional bow costs over Rs 2 lakh. For six years, Ankita competed in the Indian Round discipline, a traditional format with wooden bows while looking for help to buy an Olympic recurve bow (one that curves away at the tips). Finally, in 2014, she was selected to the Tata Archery Academy in Jamshedpur, giving her world-class coaching and a recurve bow of her own.

Having made her international debut in 2015, Ankita's talent propelled her to the very top of India's recurve archery ranks. She hit the bullseye again and again: bronze at the Hangzhou Asian Games, representing India at the 2024 Paris Olympics, and, in 2025, a maiden individual Asian Championship title. In 2026, she was in the Indian team that defeated South Korea and China to win World Cup gold.

Employed in the sports department of Tata Steel, Ankita spends 6-8 hours daily on the range. Yet, despite the accolades won, she believes her biggest achievement still lies ahead. That little girl who fell in love with bows and arrows now dreams of standing on the highest step of an Olympic podium. ■

— Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

One of India's top recurve archers and a multiple World Cup medallist and Asian Games bronze winner, Ankita Bhakat overcame financial hardship and sporting odds to become an inspiration. Next target: The Olympics

HER TAKE

"Parents should encourage their children to play sports. And when children play, they should enjoy the sport instead of treating everything as a competition"

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WHY INDIA'S SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM IS AT THE CENTRE OF A GROWING CONTROVERSY



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Role of Honour

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Yami finally gets her flowers after a long career, with a groundbreaking role last year in *Haq*, as a woman who fights for her and her kids' rights. She has also won the National Award for *Article 370*

Photographs by **BANDEEP SINGH**

YAMI GAUTAM DHAR, 37
Actress
Mumbai



Before producers Aditya and Lokesh Dhar settled on Yami Gautam Dhar to play the part of a steely NIA officer in conflict-ridden Kashmir in 2018-19, there was brief talk of a male actor being better for the film's commercial prospects. "But they wanted a female actor to shoulder this," says Yami. "They didn't think a female officer would not be able to do what a man would in this scenario." That decision stood vindicated as *Article 370* earned Rs 78 crore at the domestic box office. Two years later, vacationing in Mauritius, Yami and Aditya found cause for celebration again, when they heard the movie had not just been named best film at this year's National Award, Yami had also won the best actress honour.

HER INSPIRATION

"My mum Anjali. She has to be the most selfless, loving, strong and emotional person I have met. I can't do anything without her. I run to her for the smallest thing"

In a career spanning nearly 15 years, she had finally earned her first significant accolade. When she started out, with *Vicky Donor* in 2012, her confidence was "at another level", she says. "There was no fear of saying 'no'." Though the film was a critical and commercial success, it didn't open the doors she had hoped it would. Yami worked on some duds and in supporting roles so that she could stay seen and relevant. "The bubble breaks, fear seeps in, you have questions and you realise you are just a tiny drop in this massive ocean." That self-doubt evaporated in 2019, when she delivered two blockbusters—*Uri* and *Bala*. One military thriller, one comedy. Her versatility was clear.

Next year, she will be in the awards conversation again for her work in *Haq*, a drama loosely inspired by Shah Bano's herculean legal battle for alimony. "I wasn't trying to mirror someone's personality," says Yami. "The film encapsulates the plight of so many women.... No matter how much you do, you will be running short. At the heart of it, it's the anguish of a mother." For now, even as she processes the news of her National Award, she realises expectations from her are only set to rise. "The artiste in me will always want to detach from that," she says. "I want to work in the same headspace I was in during *Haq* and *Article 370*. I would still like to feel that nervousness [on set]." ■

—Suhani Singh

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"Health is a very underrated aspect of life. Please give yourself an hour or so every day for you to unwind, connect and work on yourself. Be it yoga, cycling, dancing, whatever. While we are capable of multitasking, everybody needs good health to sustain themselves"

SMALL IS NO LONGER JUST BEAUTIFUL, ITS BOLD !!!

(Startup is not merely an entrepreneur finding her feet, it's a Declaration!!! MSME is not just a one person business struggling for survival, it's a Sovereignty!!!)

-Ankita Pandey
-Ateesh Singh

(The views are personal and in no way represent the Government vision or policy perspectives)

8.75+ crore MSMEs and 2.3 lakh+ startups and still counting. These numbers reflect the remarkable build-up of India's enterprise ecosystem over the last decade. They become even more significant when read alongside another fact: more than 3.35 crore MSMEs are women-led, while 48% of recognised startups have at least one woman director. This juggernaut found its motion not just by push or by pull. It also self-started. And built self-traction. This is the story of that growth.

When Startup India was launched in 2016, it promised a framework. What it delivered was beyond imagination at that point in time. India became the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world after the USA and China. Today, startups operate across 56 sectors, and there is at least one recognised startup in more than 770 districts across the country.

The stated mandate was deliberate enough: give budding entrepreneurs structure, connect them to capital, nurture innovation and open corridors to global markets. It did all of that. But it also went well beyond the policy line. It rewired aspirations geographically. Cities and towns across the hinterland that had no vocabulary for venture capital began producing founders. Ambition no longer remained the preserve of the dazzling lights of Gurugram, Bengaluru or Cyberabad.

A startup, in essence, is an innovation-driven enterprise built to create scalable products, services or business models with significant growth potential. Within this universe, deep-tech startups represent a specialised category, built on advanced science, engineering, intensive research and proprietary intellectual property.

The critique is familiar. Startup India rewards scalability over science. A hyperlocal logistics app and a precision robotics lab often occupy the same podium, measured through similar metrics of jobs created, wealth generated and growth charted. For those who believe breakthrough innovation must begin in a laboratory and end in a Nobel citation, this appears to be a category error dressed up as policy. They have a point. But not the entire picture.

India is not Norway or Switzerland. It is a nation of 140 crore people, simultaneously combusting with raw energy, restless hope and uncommon brilliance. It doesn't have a few hundred problems to solve. It has millions, layered through its diversity, economics and social realities.

At that scale of complexity, waiting for laboratory perfection before allowing innovation to enter the arena is not rigour. It is abdication. India needs every kind of solver, the scientist and the street-smart founder, the deep-tech engineer and the first generation jugaadbaaz entrepreneur. It needs Nobel ambition and neighbourhood quick fixes.

Not merely because they solve problems. They give productive form to a generation too talented to be idle and too impatient to wait.

And make no mistake. Big-ticket science has not been sidelined. The pursuit of genuine, world-altering discovery has not been traded away for the convenience of an app. That work goes on. Fully aided, fully funded and fully intended.

The two tracks are not in competition. They never were. The startup ecosystem did not steal resources from science; it created a culture that makes science more possible. It built the risk appetite, investor infrastructure, talent pipeline and national confidence to back bold ideas at scale. India is running both engines simultaneously.

Perhaps the most quietly radical thing Startup India did was this, it democratised the geography of aspiration.

Today, more than half of recognised startups are outside the metros, in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities that barely figured on a venture capitalist's map a decade ago. Alongside aspiration came something that rarely finds mention in policy papers, pitch decks or GDP calculations.

Dignity.

For generations, the Indian middle class operated on a single, unspoken covenant: security above all. The government job. The bank desk. The stable private placement. These were not merely career choices; they were moral ones.

Those who stepped outside that covenant paid a social price. Entrepreneurship was often viewed as wandering, uncertainty, even failure before it had begun. Startup India changed that. Not overnight. Not everywhere. But irrevocably.

It gave that choice a name the world respected. It gave that person a designation, founder, that carried weight in a society long governed by the currency of status. That, more than any unicorn, IPO or valuation milestone, may well be Startup India's most enduring contribution.

Then came the outcome few anticipated: a capital ecosystem genuinely oriented towards risk. Angel investors, HNIs, Alternative Investment Funds, venture capital, the Fund of Funds and private equity together created India's first truly layered risk-capital continuum. Around it emerged instruments that scarcely existed before. Convertible notes. **SAFEs**, revenue-based financing and meaningful **ESOPs**. A new financial vocabulary that an entire generation of founders learned from scratch. The story of MSMEs is equally fascinating.

The MSMED Act, 2006 replaced the old Small Scale Industries framework with a modern classification of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Subsequent revisions expanded investment and turnover limits, allowing businesses to grow without immediately losing MSME benefits.

The real breakthrough came in 2020 with Udyam Registration—a simple, transparent, free, online, self-certified and permanent registration system integrated with Aadhaar, PAN and GST. It transformed the formalisation of India's enterprise base. Since the launch of Udyam and Udyam Assist, registered MSMEs have risen from 1.65 crore to over 8.75 crore. Institutional credit expanded from ₹10 lakh crore in 2014 to ₹36.79 lakh crore by December 2025, while credit guarantees more than tripled, substantially improving access to finance.

What further accelerated these gains was the RAMP (Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance) programme. By encouraging every State and Union Territory to prepare Strategic Investment Plans based on detailed assessments of their industrial ecosystems, it identified gaps in infrastructure, credit, technology, market access and capacity building, creating a practical roadmap for long-term enterprise development.

The result was a fundamental shift in the State-entrepreneur relationship. Confidence replaced hesitation. Government became an enabling partner rather than a distant authority, while entrepreneurs increasingly saw themselves as equal stakeholders in India's growth story.

Importantly, there was no fear of upward migration. The expanded MSME definition, now embracing enterprises up to ₹500 crore, removed the psychological ceiling that had long constrained ambition.

India's enterprise story is not merely a policy success. It is a civilisational realignment in how aspiration, risk and opportunity are understood. What Startup India and the MSME revolution achieved together is something no single scheme or subsidy could have engineered alone, they changed what an Indian believes is possible.

The juggernaut is no longer being pushed. It is finding its own momentum, coming from within, growing stronger every time a new entrepreneur takes the leap. What began as policy has quietly become a national mindset. It is no longer a programme. It is a way of thinking. And it is not slowing down. If anything, it is deepening, widening and gathering pace with every new story it creates.

"The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me." - Ayn Rand



Reble With A Cause

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

With her recent work on major film soundtracks like *Dhurandhar*, Reble has crossed over from Meghalaya's independent hip-hop scene to national popular culture

There is a version of Daiaphi Lamare who, as a child in Nangbah, West Jaiñtia Hills, ate her lunch alone and barely spoke. There is another who now commands stages across the country as Reble, one of Northeast India's most distinctive voices in hip-hop. The 24-year-old rapper-singer, whose given name, Daiaphi, means 'I'll take care of you', grew up in Nangbah and did a BTech in Civil Engineering. Daiaphi insists her two names are not incompatible. "Reble is a part of Daia," she says, "expressing emotions of rebellion, anger, so-called negative emotions according to society."

Music, she says, is what changed her: "When I discovered music, I discovered confidence." The harmony of her introverted and extroverted nature, capable of working a room and withdrawing into the glittering sights of her mind after the noise settles, shapes everything she writes: dense, image-heavy lyrics that reward close listening without spelling things out. "I write like I'm writing a poem," she says. "You get it, or you don't."

HER TAKE

"People who make it don't work like people who don't make it. They're not normal anymore. They become so obsessed with what they do that it borders on illness. That obsession is what makes the art good"

The instinct to make art entirely on her own terms has shaped her career. She never expected music to become more than a passion project. Years of independent releases built a reputation that led to Bollywood through *Dhurandhar* and performances at major festivals, including Rolling Loud India. She refuses to rank milestones, calling them "tiny little steps" towards a much larger body of work she hopes to build over decades. Her latest single, 'Praying Mantis', turns on the pun between prey and pray, an indictment of people who "use a moral or religious high ground to have power". Next comes an EP and a string of collaborations, including with fellow Northeastern artistes.

"I just want to make good music. I don't want to alter my art to make [the outcome] favour me," she says. On the scarcity of women in hip-hop, she's candid, calling for a stronger ecosystem that encourages more women to enter the genre, even as she resists defining her own journey through gender alone. ■

–Aparmita Das

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**



KAPILA VENU, 44
Koodiyattam performer
Irinjalakuda, Kerala

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE ARTISTS

The Dance of Continuity

There is nothing simple about Koodiyattam, the colourful 2,000-year-old temple art form that is a mix of Sanskrit drama and Kerala folk traditions. The drama, which mostly plays out seated, involves intense use of the eyes (*netra abhinaya*) and hands (*hasta abhinaya*), and is many a time an elaborate production. Enacted by Nangiars (women performers) and Chakyars (male actors), the performances unfold over multiple nights at the temple *koothambalam* (internal stage), sometimes even extending for over a month.

This was the tradition Kapila Venu was born into. The daughter of Mohiniyattam guru, Nirmala Panicker, and renowned Koodiyattam artiste, G. Venu, she spent her childhood in two places: Lawrence School, Lovedale, where her mother was teaching, and at 'Natanakairali', the centre for traditional performing arts Venu founded in 1975 in Irinjalakuda, Thrissur. Kapila's initiation into Koodiyattam began at age 7, and she had a 10-year apprenticeship under the legendary Ammannur Madhava Chakyar in the gurukulam tradition. But she says it was father Venu's advice and supervision that turned her into the performer she is today. Along the way, she also trained in Mohiniyattam, Kerala's own martial arts form Kalaripayattu, and Nangiarkoothu, a female, solo version of Koodiyattam.

In a three-decade-long career, Kapila has trained and collaborated with many internationally acclaimed dancer-artistes, including Min Tanaka and Akram Khan. She has also performed across Europe and the US, starting with a full-length Koodiyattam performance in Sweden when she was just 17. Kapila's feminist politics is integrated into her art, even while performing classical heroines such as Gandhari, Vasantasena or Kannagi. Winner of several awards, including the Kumar Gandharva Samman and the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi Award, she was also the subject of a National Award-winning, eponymously titled documentary, directed by Sanju Surendran. ■

—Jeemon Jacob

HER TAKE

I do not believe in separating art from the artist. I believe artists have a responsibility to strive to be humane, ethical and accountable in the way they live and work

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

An exponent of Koodiyattam, one of Kerala's oldest living theatre traditions, Kapila won global acclaim for her work in Akram Khan's dance-theatre piece, *Gigenis*, in 2025

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Photograph by AAVASSDITYA RAYA

TRIBENY RAI, 35
Filmmaker
Sikkim

A Voice from the Margins

Growing up in Nandok, a quiet village 19 kilometres from Gangtok, Tribeny Rai knew early what it meant to be a girl. It did not matter that she came from a family of four sisters, and her schoolteacher and parents never discriminated between them, because the people around her constantly reminded her where women belonged. At gatherings, younger male cousins would be blessed before her during traditional ceremonies, even though it was customary to follow the descending order of age. Boys, she was told, would carry forward the family legacy, while girls would get married and leave. Coming back from work, it was she who was expected to prepare food while the boys rested. Those seemingly ordinary moments left extraordinary scars.

Instead of accepting these norms, Rai decided to challenge them. "It was essential, as a woman, to choose a profession that helps me earn a sense of power and authority," she says. She first dreamt of becoming a journalist and worked briefly as a reporter with a local newspaper. Then, she discovered filmmaking. Cinema, she realised, allowed her to create entire worlds.

That path was anything but easy. In Sikkim, secure government jobs remained the accepted aspiration, while filmmaking, especially in Nepali, offered neither financial certainty nor an established industry. Rai joined the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute and then worked with Doordarshan, making documentaries and TV shows. Every rupee earned—and even part of her mother's retirement savings—went into financing her debut feature, *Shape of Momo*. It was a gamble few investors were willing to take: a Nepali-language film about women from the hills by a first-time director. But the risk paid off. The film travelled globally and established Rai as one of the most promising voices from the Himalayas. ■

— Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Tribeny burst onto the global scene last year with her debut feature, *Shape of Momo*, about a woman's return to her patriarchal village, the script doubling as a thesis on gender, family and belonging in the Eastern Himalayas

HER TAKE

"I got introduced to world cinema at the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute and fell in love with the director's work. When I first saw the Apu Trilogy, I couldn't believe how personal Ray could make the Bengal countryside for me"



MADHUBANTI BAGCHI, 34
Singer
Mumbai

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

WOMAN TO WOMAN

"If I have any advice for other women, it's to develop a level of confidence, even delusion, up to a point. If you are really going to be somebody special, then you need to stop being practical"

THE ARTISTS

The Chart Topper

How does someone with a master's degree in engineering, a self-confessed introvert who does music for herself first and foremost, become one of the most sought-after voices in Hindi cinema? In Madhubanti Bagchi's own words: by "dreaming crazy". The credo is time-tested. "In 2016, after a phase of not taking up any singing projects, I suddenly got a call from M.M. Keeravani. I initially thought it was a prank call," she says. "I recorded the song in Hyderabad. The film never released but, coming back, I felt the moment had to mean something. I decided I was moving to Mumbai to pursue a career."

That journey began with umpteen jingles before her first chart-topper, 'Aaj Ki Raat' for *Stree 2*, and Bagchi has built an enviable catalogue of songs in the two years since. She has become the bonafide queen of foot-tapping tracks that can light up house parties as well as set a stage on fire, and there is no better testament to her skills than the fact that her songs seem tailor-made for her. She has reached a place where she can afford to call a spade a spade: it's still industry practice to not pay artists for recording film tracks.

"Seniors never raised their voice or felt the need to ask for money because they had enough," she says. "The situation becomes skewed and you are made to feel like 'I am doing you a favour by giving you this great opportunity that will change your life'." Bagchi admits she cannot bring about a sudden revolution in the system, but she'd rather bow out of an unfair situation and work with composers "who have respect for artists".

She is also selective about the songs she lends her voice to. "It sounds a little arrogant, but I really can't bear to think daily 'Oh my god, I need to get a hit ASAP and for that I will have to make, like, 15 calls to people'," she says. "Or that if I say no to this, then XYZ will not work with me or I won't have work." The belief in her abilities has helped her avoid the rat race. "I would put a lot of pressure on myself and not be able to do my best if I crowded my catalogue and sang way more," she adds. It makes her an anomaly in the music industry, but she'd rather be that than a recognisable clone. ■

— Suhani Singh

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Madhubanti has been unshakable at the top of Bollywood charts through hits in 2025 and 2026, with earworms in films like *Dhurandhar* and *Azaad*, and the recent *O'Romeo*

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SANYA MALHOTRA, 34
Actress
Mumbai

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

Lighting Up the Stage

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Sanya's gripping performance in the 2025 domestic drama, *Mrs*, and kicking off her entrepreneurial journey with a matcha brand

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

Rome wasn't built in a day. Twelve years back, that's what Sanya Malhotra's dad had told her as she struggled to find a toehold in the Mumbai film industry. Today, Sanya is everywhere; from making women open up about their marital woes after watching her character struggle in *Mrs* (2025), to putting up reels about her matcha brand, to winning hearts with her moves in Diljit Dosanjh's 'Charmer'.

Malhotra senses the seismic shift in her career after *Mrs*, one of the most-watched dramas on streaming last year. It sees her play a new bride who faces the humiliating brunt of patriarchy, most of it unfolding in the kitchen. "Before it, I was a confident actor, but I was still figuring it out. Now, I can do films that I am front-lining and make them work," she says. "The audience had more confidence in me than I had in myself." Its success has also emboldened Sanya. "I want to make bolder choices. I don't want to hold back," she says. "Now I want to do what I haven't done before." Proof of that is *Sunder Poonam*, a slated-for-2027 Amazon film in which she plays a woman "she couldn't empathise or sympathise with at all".

HER TAKE

"When *Mrs* released, people made reels, I got letters and DMs from women who related to Richa's story. I felt, 'This is it'."

Sanya has come a long way since she made her debut in the blockbuster *Dangal* (2016). It has been a journey where failure was necessary to find her groove. "I did a few films just for eyeballs. In hindsight, I could've avoided them. But it's good I didn't. How would I learn otherwise?" There is greater awareness of what she wants now. Sanya doesn't let balancing between theatrical and OTT titles consume her or the pressure of building an audience faze her. "When I love a script and a character," she says, "I am freer and more comfortable." ■

— Suhani Singh

YAMINI REDDY, 43
Kuchipudi exponent, choreographer and educator
Hyderabad

Interpreter of Kuchipudi



She may have been born into India's first family of dance, to Kuchipudi exponents Dr Raja and Radha Reddy, but Yamini Reddy had a normal childhood. She can't recall feeling any pressure of carrying forward her parents' dance legacy, but she was set upon being a Kuchipudi dancer since childhood. She debuted on stage with her parents at the age of three. When the sitar virtuoso Pandit Ravi Shankar saw her perform as a young girl, he was mesmerised.

Yamini is known as the torchbearer of change and believes that an art form can grow only through innovation and exploration, but without digressing from its traditional structures. Conveyed through modern choreography techniques, her performances express a new language for Kuchipudi. The lights, sound effects, stage set-up and musical compositions leave the audience spellbound, the unique storytelling transports them to another realm. As her performance last year in Hyderabad did, when Yamini and her troupe of 25 dancers presented *Surya - Tvam Suryam Pranamamyaham*, tracing the emergence of light through Kuchipudi.

As founder-director of Natya Tarangini, the dance and music school she established in Hyderabad in 2007, she says Kuchipudi demands intense concentration, mental resilience and perseverance. The discipline has, in turn, instilled in her patience and self-discipline. Yamini considers her parents and gurus to be her role models and calls the legendary classical dancer Yamini Krishnamurthy her biggest inspiration in life. ■

— Shelly Anand

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Infusing a modern edge to Kuchipudi, Yamini Reddy has expanded the scope of her dance school, Natya Tarangini, and won the World Dance Day Award 2026

HER TAKE

Being a mother to a 14-year-old son and a working professional, Yamini knows how tough it is for women to balance family and work. But she refuses to think that women can't have both. "Women have the tendency and instinct to put others first and not think about themselves, but I feel it's perfectly fine to be a little selfish and prioritise their own needs and dreams"

Photograph by **SHREYAS ASODHA**

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RIMA DAS, 45
Filmmaker
Kalardiya village, Assam

Stories of Her Land

Directing was not her original ambition, acting was. After years of rejection and being told her height, appearance and 'type' didn't work in front of a camera, it broke something inside Rima. "I started feeling small," she says. Her adopted home, Mumbai, nevertheless, opened another door. After increasing exposure to world cinema, she bought a Canon 5D DSLR and made her first feature, *Antardrishti* (*Man with the Binoculars*), about an old man looking back on life. She knew she had found her calling.

Her next film, *Village Rockstars*, about a girl whose dreams of buying a guitar get derailed by a devastating flood, was shot over nearly three years in her village with children from modest backgrounds, and restored something the years of rejection as an actor had taken away. "The process healed me," she says. The film premiered at Toronto, won National Awards for Best Feature Film and Best Editing and became India's official entry for the 2019 Academy Awards, the first Assamese film to achieve that distinction.

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Rima's small-scale films have won over film fests everywhere, from Toronto to Berlin to India. The feather in her cap came last year, with *Not A Hero*, about a city boy adjusting to village life

Rima has gone from strength to strength ever since, her subsequent films premiering at the Toronto and Berlin international film festivals, and she was also invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 2024. Her latest production, *Not A Hero*, got a Crystal Bear Special Mention at the Berlin International Film Festival recently, marking another international milestone for a filmmaker whose cinema began far from studios, elaborate crews and big budgets. ■

— Priyanka Saharia

HER TAKE

"Even with a small camera, you can make a film, and that story can travel the world"

THE SHE LIST UNDER 50

THE ARTISTS

Stepping into Stardom

'*Lokah* has made my dreams feel bigger," says actress Kalyani Priyadarshan while reflecting on the defining film of her career. The 2025 film, in which she played a vampire superheroine, was an ingenious, funny and thrilling piece of work that went on to become Malayalam cinema's highest grosser. It also opened doors for Kalyani beyond Kerala. "I find myself in rooms with people that I have admired for years. There are more doors opening, which didn't happen before," she says. "I need to work even harder to make the most of these opportunities."

Daughter of renowned filmmaker Priyadarshan, Kalyani's is a more long-winded route to success. An early turning point in that journey, she says, was a late-night conversation with her father where she told him she wanted to become an actor. "I was shaking, because he never wanted me or my brother to work in films. He knows how gruelling the life is. He, in turn, said, 'I will support you in whatever you want to do'."

With *Lokah*'s success comes a sense of responsibility about the choices she makes. "When you do something successful, people offer you more of the same. I have always been an actor who wants to keep surprising people," she says. "I believe that for you to be a great actor or grow as one, you should be able to do everything." And rather than judging the morality of the parts, she scrutinises the quality of the stories and the connection she is able to forge with them. "I have always found it easy to say 'No' to good opportunities to make room for the right ones," she says.

Meanwhile, the ripple effects of *Lokah* continue to be felt across Indian cinema. Action heroines have got top billing in Samantha-starring Telugu entertainer *Maa Inti Bangaaram* and Tamil film *Blast*. Kalyani, though, would love for gender to not be the criterion to measure a film's worth. "I hope we move away from thinking female-led films as a separate category. A great story is a great story," she says. And her advice to other women? "Never let success get to your head and failure to your heart. Highs and lows cannot dictate who you are." ■

— Suhani Singh

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Kalyani anchored *Lokah Chapter 1: Chandra*, Malayalam cinema's highest-grossing film (over Rs 300 crore), proving women-centred titles can be pan-India phenomena too

INSPIRATION

Veteran Malayalam actress Urvashi is Kalyani's biggest inspiration. "Urvashi ma'am can make you laugh, then break your heart in the next scene. I have aspired to not be limited to one kind of role because of her. She is proof that actresses don't have a shelf life"



KALYANI PRIYADARSHAN, 33, Actress
Chennai

The Crossover Sahiba

WHAT MAKES HER A SHERO

Last year saw Rashmika dominate both the box office with Sambhaji epic *Chhaava* and the indie scene, with a sensitive lead role in *The Girlfriend*



Photograph by **SAHIL BEHAL**, Styled by **ZUNAILI MALIK**

RASHMIKA MANDANNA, 30
Actress
Hyderabad

For long, Rashmika Mandanna was known for being the beguiling, bankable romantic interest in hero-centred blockbusters like the *Pushpa* films, *Animal* or *Chhaava*. Then came *The Girlfriend* (2025), a small, independent Telugu feature riding entirely on her shoulders. It's where audiences discovered the actress she truly is.

Playing a naïve collegian stuck in an emotionally abusive relationship and unable to express herself, Mandanna tapped into the anxiety and exhaustion of what it means to be with a domineering, toxic partner. "When you are in your early adulthood, you don't know that saying 'no' is okay. You always feel you have to be okay with what you get and this is how life is," says Mandanna. "A lot of us are not confident facing our fears and respecting what we feel."

It was a bold choice to pick as one's first solo vehicle but, for Mandanna, it was an "important story" that needed to be told and allowed her to explore her full range as a performer. "When you lead a film, there's a lot of room to dive into the layers and nuances of a character," she says.

One of the most prolific actresses in the industry, with five releases last year and across languages (Kannada, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil), Mandanna is currently recovering from a hip injury. "I feel this is the universe's way of saying you need rest. If you won't take a break, then we will break some tendon or something so that you have no option but to," she says with a laugh.

Recently married to actor Vijay Deverakonda, Mandanna actively strives to bring equilibrium between her personal and professional life. "I go on time for a shoot and don't bring work home after pack-up. I am very capable of disconnecting the two," she says. Looking back on her journey, which started with the Kannada hit *Kirik Party*, she is filled with a sense of contentment. "I have learned a lot about myself," she says. "I am the woman I wished to be a decade back. I have success, love and respect from peers and audience. I hope to continue doing so." ■

—Suhani Singh

HER TAKE

"Women should be financially independent before settling down with a partner of their choice. Take charge of your life. You have to work for respect, and happiness is a decision you have to make"

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