



# Empowering Times

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Dear Reader,

On 8<sup>th</sup> of March this year, it was the 100<sup>th</sup> International Women's Day. It was a celebration of economic, social and political achievement of women across countries. But, is this progress good enough? U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message at this year's International Women's Day celebrations, 'Women are still second-class citizens in too many countries and societies.' Clearly, the good work has to go on. **Empowering Times** brings a special edition covering real-life stories of women entrepreneurs and their achievements from Asia and Africa.

In **Thinking Aloud**, Dr. Maya Reddi, Professor of Management at Berkeley College in New York, also an entrepreneurial trainer, shares her experiences of training underprivileged women in East Africa.

**Empowering Times' August 2010** edition spoke of the Entrepreneurial Gene, are the traits any different for Women Entrepreneurs? Find your answers in **Podium** from **Sudha Sathaye**, Founder, Ultimate Kitchen and Furniture.

Two students writing a newspaper column on Entrepreneurs, decided to write a book on women entrepreneurs. **Voyage to Excellence - Ascent of 21 Women Leaders**, by **Nischinta Amarnath** and **Debashish Ghosh**, though a bit dated, it takes us through the indomitable spirit of Indian entrepreneurial women. This being a special edition on Women Entrepreneurs, **Dr. Chhabi Sinha Chavhan**, Dean - Amity Global Business School, Pune, reviews the book in **Between the Lines**

Ever visualized what multi-tasking can be for a working woman? Vikram captures the reality in **Figures of Speech**.

As always, do write to us and let us know how you liked this issue. To view our issues, please visit the Media & Archives section on the website or simply [click here](#).

Geetanjali Sharma  
Editor

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## FIGURES OF SPEECH

So do you have  
any experience in  
Multi-tasking?!



## THINKING ALOUD



**'Becoming entrepreneurs is the only way the women can look after their families.'**

## Overcoming Barriers to Entry - Dr. Maya Reddi

There is an old Chinese proverb - "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." My journey with women started with a modern variation of this ancient wisdom: "Teach a woman to fish, and she will feed a whole village." This has been my inspiration over the past thirty years.

Our image of a woman entrepreneur can conjure up many personalities, ranging from Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics who fulfilled the dreams of half a million women to become business owners; Oprah Winfrey the most successful media executive who changes 40 million attitudes of women per week; Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw of Biocon Group, India's first company to make industrial enzymes; and Sun Yafang, nicknamed the "market killer" of Huawei, China who are helping millions of subscribers to communicate. A common thread, which could link these entrepreneurs, is passion, commitment and the willingness to take risks to make their dreams come true.

While on a sabbatical, I decided to spend time in East Africa, working with women who, particularly in rural areas, have been victims of torture, mutilation, disease, loss, hunger and poverty and still manage to survive against all odds. Ethnic conflict and AIDS have ravaged the countryside, with women in rural areas having few coping mechanisms or opportunities for self-improvement. Becoming entrepreneurs is the only way the women can look after their families.

As I began thinking about ways to help these struggling communities, several questions came to mind. Could I teach women in these rural areas some basic skills so that they could be economically independent? Would new skills provide them with opportunities for social mobility? Would they even be willing to learn? Could I overcome linguistic and technological barriers and move out of my comfort zone? And, finally, would I be safe, publically pursuing gender equality in a traditionally male-dominated society?

During the many training programs I conducted across countries and villages, I met amazing women who were small entrepreneurs trying to eke out a living, yet adding value in their own space. Small startup efforts led to improvements in their lives and those of others, fostering a "feed the village", culture. These women dream about the future but continue to struggle in the present. Here is one such story, which truly epitomizes that entrepreneurship is more than simply starting a business.

Sissy, a Ugandan woman, widowed, had three teenage children, her mother in law and an old aunt to feed and look after. She decided that she wanted to open her own bakery. Unfortunately the venture didn't work out and because, without a large kitchen, she feared that she would burn her small house down. Another reason was that since food was always scarce in her household, there was a high probability that the cakes would disappear before they went to the market.

On the advice of a church member, she was introduced a new idea of making yarmulkes - these are the small caps worn by Jewish men, as a sign of religious piety. Although Sissy was Catholic and didn't know how to make yarmulkes, she thought, "Why not - I can always learn." The local temple priest had put out word that he was looking to buy about fifty yarmulkes per month and if he was satisfied with the product; he could recommend other potential customers. Taking a big risk, Sissy made about five yarmulkes and presented these to the priest. He was skeptical that she could do the job, given market demand, but decided to give her a chance.

Sissy knew she couldn't do it alone. She went around looking for women who could sew and soon had a team of five women. They were Somali women who were Moslem, with no opportunities and were desperate to look for some work, which would not be threatening to their men folk. She had inadvertently created a great religious triangle. Sissy convinced them to spend a few hours during the day in her yard sewing the yarmulkes. It was a difficult start for Sissy - quality and getting the yarmulke right was a challenge. But she kept going and finally met the quotas. She started marketing related products - her goal was to spread her reach and also employ more women, thereby starting the change process.

Sissy's experience may not have the dramatic true rags-to-riches story, but I keep remembering the one key insight from my discussions with her - when it comes to business, both producers, buyers and sellers can go beyond narrow geographical and religious borders and learn to respect each other's perspectives. All that matters is the common thread of commerce.

In the final analysis, what really matters is not who created wealth, who brought in the change or who made the difference - what matters is that Sissy's entrepreneurial venture led to new ways of thinking and doing!

*Dr. Maya Reddi, is a Professor of Management at Berkeley College in New York. She is passionate about women's empowerment and has had many years of experience in the field of entrepreneurial training. Her travels to various countries have given her the opportunity to work with women to improve their skills, to help them become economically self-sufficient.*



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## PODIUM

### INTERVIEW: Sudha Sathaye on Women Entrepreneurs



Sudha Sathaye was an early pioneer in the field of manufacturing & marketing of modular kitchens in India. She holds a patent for Modular Kitchen & Stainless Steel Kitchen Trolley designs. For her expertise in this field, Sudha is on the panel of the Reserve Bank of India and Nirman group of construction for low cost housing projects. She was recently in Sri Lanka attending the convention on low cost housing and low cost furniture.

Sudha is also the President of Women's wing of the Saturday Club Global-Entrepreneurs, Mumbai. A person with diverse interests; she has presented research papers on Indology in various national and international forums.

Further, in 2010 Sudha was selected for the Goldman Sach's 10000 Women Entrepreneurs Global Initiative Course organized by the Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad. As a successful businessperson, we asked her a few questions on Women Entrepreneurs. Read the full interview to know what she had to say...

**'I believe this is a limitation. If a woman is self-employed, she can manage her time and accomplish far more than what she does in a job'.**

**ET: Please share with us your journey of establishing Ultimate Kitchen & Furniture.**

**SS:** I started this venture 20 years back. It was my inner desire to work in the area of interior designing. The first kitchen I designed was for my own house. Back then, there weren't any designers who could design a modular kitchen. So I designed one for my own house. I got in touch with a fabricator and he made the first kitchen I designed. Since then there has been no looking back. I realized that this was the opportunity for me to deep dive in the profession I wanted to pursue. It was a new concept in India and designing a tropical kitchen in limited space offered a good challenge from the design perspective as well.

I started promoting my business through a small counter in Sahkar Bhandar, a supermarket chain in Mumbai, and displayed a kitchen there. I also got some space at the Churchgate station where I put up a live kitchen in a limited space of 10' x 2.6' x 7.5'. Soon enough enquiries started coming in. We opened our own retail shop, participated in mega exhibitions and very soon the media started featuring us. We had the first mover advantage for almost a decade. We even have the patent for designing Indian Kitchens. In the last 20 years, we have designed kitchens for a variety of customers. Our smallest kitchen is about 2.5 ft and the largest is about 3500 ft, which is an industrial kitchen.

From designing kitchens, we forayed into designing furniture. Today we have every variety of furniture. The tag line of our company is 'Kitchen on Wheels and Furniture of Steel'. The fabricator who did my kitchen is the general manager of our factory today. We are amongst the few who provide all services under one roof, right from taking measurements, designing, manufacturing, installing and providing after sales service.

**ET: Are the challenges of running a business any different for a woman?**

**SS:** The challenges of running a business are not different for a woman entrepreneur. However, because of our social set up, the domestic responsibilities cannot be taken away completely and this exerts pressure on any working woman.

**ET: What may be the possible reasons that we do not see as many women entrepreneurs around us?**

**SS:** The first and foremost reason is accessibility to resources. Secondly, they do not recognize their own potential. Our society looks at women as caretakers of the family. They are in a sheltered environment where they do not have to go out to struggle and earn a living; as a result, they are not exposed to the possibilities of their own potential. Women who opt for salaried jobs end up doing only what is expected from them during the fixed working hours. I believe this is a limitation. If a woman is self-employed, she can manage her time and accomplish far more than what she does in a job.

**ET: In what ways are women entrepreneurs better than their counterparts?**

**SS:** Women can multi-task very well, even if they are loaded with work they can cope up easily. This comes very naturally to them. Women are also good planners and can think of the minutest details. These are some absolutely necessary skills for any entrepreneur. Women also have a good presence of mind and are great coordinators.

**ET: From your experience, please share 5 insights for women entrepreneurs.**

**SS:** My message to women entrepreneurs would be:

1. Understand your own strengths and weaknesses and work on them.
2. Utilize your planning skills- it is a god's gift to all women.
3. When you are running your business, take the effort to know the market trends.
4. Women face failures very gracefully and this helps them in coping up with the bad times.
5. Come what may, never lose your confidence.

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## BETWEEN THE LINES

### The Voyage to Excellence : The Ascent of 21 Women Leaders of India Inc. - Nischinta Amarnath & Debashish Ghosh

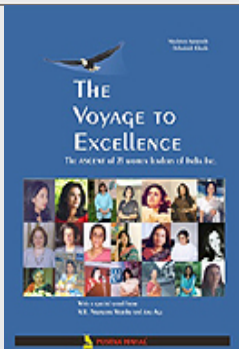
The two young authors, Nischinta & Debashish, have penned down the indomitable spirit of Indian women - "A never-ending desire to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield". They have narrated the story of the ascent of 21 women leaders of India Inc. with skill and empathy. Each story is an insight into fascinating journey which the book calls a 'voyage'.

From Joyti Naik, President Lijjat Papad, to Zia Mody, senior partner of the AZB & Partners, the dynamics of India's top 21 businesswomen portrays that neither education nor geography is a barrier if one truly aspires to be successful.

From pharmaceuticals to banking & from manufacturing to media - Indian women have left their mark in all the industries, be it Shahnaz Hussain- the herbal crusader or Sulajja Firodia Motwani, Joint Managing Director of Kinetic Engineering. Each of the women described in this book have boldly strayed away from the usual mould.

Being a business woman in India has never been easy and the book has showcased the problems women face in their careers and how they achieve stupendous success, battling all the odds. These women successfully strike the balance between family, friends and colleagues. Some of these women have weathered personal crisis in their lives. However, the crisis strengthened them from within, instilling in them the burning desire to achieve. The achievement of Priya Paul, Chairman of Appeejay Park Hotels, shows how women can succeed even in a sector where it was believed that women cannot take on established giants in the hotel industry.

Told in a lucid style each story in the book is thought provoking. The success of these remarkable women in the complex and competitive corporate world will inspire the readers. Towards the end, the book involves the readers through tests that determine their business acumen. The well researched stories of these 21 women who are today at the helm of Indian business will not only motivate more Indian women but all the youngsters to venture into business.



While the authors have brilliantly captured the stories of these incredible businesswomen, however, women today have made their mark in other fields as well, like Defense, Social Service, Sports, Administrative services, Medicine, Politics, etc. Probably including stories of women from diverse fields could have given a better insight about the versatility, endeavor and ingenuity of Indian women.

**About The Authors:** *Debashish and Nischinta authored this book when they were students. They were running a newspaper column called 'Entrepreneurial Encounter' and interviewing entrepreneurs in Chennai. The book became a natural extension of their work as they started focusing on women entrepreneurs.*

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