

Foreword by Kapila Vatsyayan



# WOMENTREPRENEURS

Inspiring Stories of Success

Avinash Kirpal



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# WOMENTREPRENEURS

Inspiring Stories of Success

Avinash Kirpal



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# WOMENTREPRENEURS

*To the passionately committed young girls whose  
life mission is to improve the quality of life in  
marginalized communities by overcoming  
sociocultural challenges.*

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**Vivek Mehra**, Managing Director and CEO, SAGE India.

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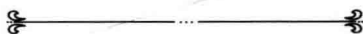
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## *Foreword*

Girls in India have been encouraged by traditional families to take up professions such as teaching or medicine. They have also been taught that they should focus on home and family. This is despite the fact that many Indian women have taken remarkable initiatives for the upliftment of society and made a deep impact both at personal and societal levels. The names of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Durgabai Deshmukh, among others, easily come to one's mind.

The perception about the roles of women in society has now dramatically changed. Women have reached great heights in diverse professions and vocations, as pilots, astronauts, engineers, academicians and bankers, and in public life.

The entrepreneurs featured in this book have used different criteria for measuring the success of their undertakings. Interestingly, most of them have not emphasized profitability. For them, the most important concern is the social upliftment of different sections of society and of course issues of environment.

This book presents the work of women entrepreneurs across a wide spectrum and in various fields. For instance, Binalakshmi Nepram from Manipur was stirred to action by seeing many innocent women and their families

devastated on account of the gun culture prevalent in Manipur. Urvashi Butalia is a doyenne of feminist publishing, bringing to light issues concerning marginalized women. Also, there are other women who have been tirelessly working, for example, in creating awareness in coping with children afflicted with autism (Merry Barua) or in ameliorating the problems faced by destitute unmarried mothers (Lakshmi Krishnan). There are also other women who have achieved remarkable success in providing consultancy in human relations, in the hospitality industry and in creating employment opportunities for rural women.

These experiences can guide young aspirants who are concerned about striking a balance between their careers and their family lives.

Avinash Kirpal and SAGE Publications deserve credit for taking the initiative to produce this inspirational work at a time when the economic scenario as well as the socio-cultural environment in India are set to support the efforts by young women who have the courage and determination to accomplish noble entrepreneurial work.

**Kapila Vatsyayan**

Chairperson, Asia Project  
India International Centre



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# *Acknowledgements*

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the support and encouragement received from many individuals who have helped me directly or indirectly in the completion of this book.

## **Saroja Khanna**

My friend Saroja's livelihood had been from publishing and journalism, as well as from telling stories to entertain little children. She not only provided feedback that helped me to clarify my thoughts at various stages of the book's preparation but also enhanced my capabilities to acquire fresh insights into entrepreneurial behaviour by taking me (often dragging me!) to performances, book launches and meetings with bureaucrats, diplomats, business people and academicians, which broadened my perspectives and enriched my writing.

Since a manuscript has to pass through various computer systems, a writer is expected to be conversant with the popular computer languages as well as requirements such as downloading, formatting, filing and so on, at all of which I am absolutely hopeless. Saroja helped me sail through this maze of electronic wizardry so that I could get together a reasonably professional-looking document.

## **Himadri Das**

I am indebted to my erstwhile colleague Professor Himadri Das, Director at the Great Lakes Institute of Management, Gurgaon, and formerly Professor of Finance at the International Management Institute, New Delhi, for his guidance regarding the selection of people who could participate in my project, some of whom he had taught at business schools. I also thank him for his advice about how to deal with problems associated with the emotional and psychological needs of female entrepreneurial aspirants which, as a teacher, he understood very well.

Himadri also explained to me ways of asking probing questions so that during interviews one could uncover hidden truths. This substantially enhanced the depth of the stories in the book.

## **Patricia Orrico**

I am grateful to Patricia Orrico, Director, International Federation of Industries, Salvador, Brazil, for inviting me to visit Salvador and for providing me with international perspectives and viewpoints on the subject of entrepreneurial projects. She introduced me to several successful Brazilian women entrepreneurs who told me about the sociocultural challenges that they faced and who responded actively, in a question and answer session, to information about what their counterparts in India had to overcome.

## **Sachin Sharma**

Sachin Sharma was the specialist deputed by SAGE Publications to help me write a manuscript of acceptable

quality. In spite of my very frustrating and annoying ignorance about publishing practices, Sachin meticulously and patiently persevered with tutoring me and made this project come alive. He never hesitated to provide a helping hand, enabling me cross the rough patches that inevitably appear in such journeys. I am very grateful to Sachin for being so considerate. Without his encouraging attitude, I would have not been able to develop capabilities to write inspirational stories and I would have remained a lesser writer.

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# *Introduction*

**B**usinesses and philanthropic ventures established by women have contributed significantly in many developing countries by enhancing welfare and employment as well as by increasing the variety of goods available for the local market and export. Apart from these measurable benefits, a greater involvement of women entrepreneurs in the economy has other advantages: because of their natural predispositions, women are sensitive to issues concerning the environment, avoidance of waste as well as promoting ethical and decent conduct; these serve to civilize society as well as encourage sustainable development.

This book tells the stories of 10 women from various backgrounds and from different parts of India who started entrepreneurial businesses or philanthropic enterprises after overcoming major sociocultural challenges. For example, it is often mentioned that our society, which is dominated by men, expects women to focus on family and home and that such an expectation makes it difficult for female entrepreneurs to perform tasks that are necessary for establishing projects, such as travelling and meeting people. Other challenges include the tendency among men in the business world to not accept women as fully committed to their start-ups, and in fact to regard them as

promoters who would soon quit in order to take care of home issues. When financiers, suppliers, customers and prospective employees think like this, it becomes very difficult for women entrepreneurs to create enterprises.

The stories illustrate how opportunities for women entrepreneurs are changing because of globalization and new technologies as well as the liberal social ideologies sweeping across the world and across India. The stories show that the motivations for women starting entrepreneurial ventures no longer arise predominantly from the need to supplement income but increasingly from fulfilling a need for creative expression and individual growth as well as a desire to benefit society. These developments, together with the spread of education amongst girls, have created a new breed of modern Indian women entrepreneurs and also shifted the focus of their enterprises from home-oriented products to products and services that are based on knowledge and technology, as well as to humanitarian and developmental activities.

Some of these women had the benefit of business education, others had some formal education, whereas some did not have any education at all. The stories of MBAs who started businesses include diverse areas such as trading, hospitality, executive search and HR consultancy. The stories of women who established humanitarian NGOs include areas such as care for adolescent unwed mothers and their children, care for people with autism and their guardians, the welfare of nomadic tribes, sustainable development and ecotourism.

The book also considers the lessons that emerge from the stories as well as ideas concerning issues that are frequently faced by female entrepreneurs. It looks at the personality traits of the entrepreneurs while investigating

the causes of their success. It also highlights some of the common mistakes made by women in the course of creating and running their ventures: for example, their tendency to try to manage too many activities single-handedly resulting in stress. Some entrepreneurs do understand that a solution is to delegate to knowledgeable professionals but, as shown in some stories, the hiring of professionals is itself a problem because they tend to avoid entrepreneurial start-ups headed by women. The stories show some novel ways used by the women entrepreneurs to overcome these and similar challenges.

The stories are based on material collected through personal interviews. The book uses the format of 'stories' rather than of 'case studies' to engage non-academic readers. The stories have been selected not because their projects were outstandingly successful in terms of growth or impact but because they demonstrated imaginative ways in which sociocultural challenges and prejudices were overcome.

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# 1

## Shailja Dutt

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*Talent Search*



**B**uilding strong relationships based on mutual support and good faith is a dominant feature of Shailja's style of doing business. She always had an almost childish belief that if you do a good deed to help another person then your action will, in some magical and mysterious