



Women's era in startup space

The number of women entrepreneurs remains a small pool even today in the Indian startup world. However, with more women venturing into this space emboldened by previous success stories, the scene could indeed change

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP is buzzing in India with startups springing up by the day to capture the new business opportunities. And women are beginning to make their presence felt. Though small in number for now, their role is only expected to get bigger in the days to come. The country already has the presence of over 4,200 startups straddling the spaces of business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) with women as founders constituting around 9% of this group currently, according to information provided by Nasscom.

There has been a 50% rise in number of women entrepreneurs between the years 2014 and 2015 with this segment receiving a cumulative investment of \$168 million in the last one year, which was a 4x growth.

Women as entrepreneurs are equally excited about their journey in the startup world and are resonating well with their targetted markets. Anvita Mehra, founder & CEO of Confidential Couture, created the startup in the pre-owned luxury segment when she realised that there was market potential for such fashion items available at fair prices.

Anvita while studying in UK and ardent fan of luxury items realised

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ANVITA MEHRA,
Founder & CEO, Confidential Couture

that she could buy these goods which are pre-owned and came within her budget. This led her to the launch of her startup Confidential Couture in 2014, which according to her has received good reception. “We are living in a world where women are getting empowered by the day. My experience as an entrepreneur has not been that difficult. If we walk with utmost confidence, nothing will stop us,” she said.

It has been the lifestyle ex-



perience of women which has also led them to start ventures of their own as they realised that they are becoming important decision makers be it in the area of fashion, home decor, food & groceries or even weddings. In case of Mehak Shahani, co-founder of WedMeGood, an online wedding portal, the venture was started borne out of experience from her own marriage ceremony. The entire exercise of coordinating various vendors and bringing together to a single platform had certain challenges. She decided to start this online platform which act as a one-stop-shop for all requirements of wedding. On her experience as entrepreneur, she said, “Women traditionally tend to think a lot and are not known to be impulsive. Lots of women are thinking of startups but also worry about the security of their job. It is changing now with lot more entrepreneurs and they connect well with their target market.”

However, there is still a long road to be covered before women become an important contributor to this growing ecosystem of startups. There are certain organisations which look to foster entrepreneurship and encourage women in the world of technology. The Anita Borg Institute (ABI), is a non-profit organisation that believes technology innovation powers the global economy and that women are crucial to building technology the world needs.

Geetha Kannan, MD, ABI India, felt that startup lifecycle is very similar to one in corporates which is predominantly a man's world. “We still don't have lot many of women at the top in corporates and it is very similar in the case of women entrepreneurship also,” she said. According to her, lot many women go into functions in corporates which she referred as soft collar jobs such as nursing or HR and this also reflects in the entrepreneurial roles.

This has actually led to a situation where there are fewer women in the pure technology ventures where the operational model is quite different from the conventional B2C business. Though, there has been a change in the perception in the role that women are playing in startups, there is much to be desired. The biggest challenge has been do with the outlook of the society.

According to Mehak Shahani of WedMeGood, people in general should become more accepting of women putting their profes-

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sional life ahead of their personal one. “In a startup, it also becomes difficult interacting with people who are old schooled and not used to interacting with women,” she remarked.

Geetha Kannan likens the challenges faced by women in entrepreneurship is more like a glass bubble. “Considering risk is not the mainstay of what women want to do they generally bootstrap their venture and do not generally think big.”

Despite these challenges and environment surrounding the women entrepreneurs the future certainly looks bright and this tribe is only expected to grow bigger. Anvita Mehra of Confidential Couture said, “There are more equal opportunities today and the perception is changing. A woman should know what they are standing for.”

