

Business Tigresses in Post Liberalised India

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Abstract: India was a nation born with a closed economy and closed society. Women were sidelined for centuries in this narrow society and even the erstwhile colonial masters did not take much efforts to emancipate them from the clutches of Masculinity. To imagine a woman running a business 100 years back would have been a daydream, but education and political initiatives taken by the successive governments have ensconced them in the topmost chair of post liberalised India. Here Post Liberalisation does not just mean economic liberalisation, but also involves social liberalisation. This paper will pop out the evolution of women entrepreneurs with specific focus on Indra Nooyi, CFO, Pepsi co., and Chanda Kochar, CEO, ICICI.

Liberalisation of economy is not a gradual process, but a sudden one born out of economic woes that afflict the masses for decades due to faulty economic policies. India witnessed economic liberalisation in the early 1990s as the nation grappled with balance of payment crisis that aggravated with the ballooning oil crisis. In such a tight situation the then Congress government led by Late Shri. P.V.Narashima Rao unrolled a series of economic reforms that announced the birth of post –liberalised India. The subsequent years saw a massive churn in fields of education, IT, production and in fact even in the field of culture. Indian culture till then was an exclusive one, and women were generally conservative with a firm hold on the traditional practices. The onslaught of liberalisation slowly unchained their shackles and gradually they learnt the art of flying in the colourful world with the same wings of creativity.

Indra Nooyi, the CFO of Pepsi co is one such person who belonged to the breed of modernism and liberalism. Like Infosys Narayanamurthy, she too belonged to the south Indian tradition. She was born in Madras to the Tamil speaking parents and her primary education was done in the Holy Angels Anglo Indian school. After completing her graduation in the Madras Christian College, she went on to pursue her MBA in the prestigious Indian Institute of Management. Since the opportunities in the socialistic economy was very less she did not stay for long in India as she got an opportunity to do her Masters degree in public and private management in Yale School of Management. This probably changed her outlook as she got very lucrative offers in the capitalistic western countries. Like Indra Nooyi there might have been hundreds of entrepreneurs in western countries but the fact that she belonged to the traditional south India need to be noted. This is where her achievement stands.

Her biography reveals that she was born in a conservative family but still she took strong decisions pertaining to her career. The age in which she passed her youth was a very narrow one when it came to issues relating to women. Only few women were bold enough to venture into the male dominated world and in political sphere Indira Gandhi was one. There is a high probability that Indra Nooyi should have drawn inspiration from the great leader. But apart from the adventurism it is important to highlight the fact that she entered a field that was meant only for men. Turning the pages of history, seldom do women dominate the pages of economy or merchandise. India of 1970s and 80s were no different from the previous years. Her stint with Johnson and Johnson was a unique and challenging one and she was responsible for managing the introduction of stayfree napkins in India. Since India of that period was against advertising feminine hygiene products, Nooyi had to approach the young women directly for marketing. Her vexation with the Indian business world made her join the Yale school of management and this phase of her life changed her career as a whole. The degree she earned in USA fetched her a place in Boston Consulting Group as a director of International corporate strategy projects. Her growth was not only gradual but also steady. As a result she ended up becoming the Vice President of Pepsi co India ltd. Her involvement and dedication took her to greater heights and she ended up becoming the Chief Financial Officer of the firm in the year 2000 and subsequently the President in the year 2001.

Her achievements are great as she is one of the few Indian women who have imprinted her footprints in the Indian business. The present era could be a conducive one for female business heads, but to venture into the same four decades back is something unimaginable. Late 1970s and 1980s were times when women were seen as domestic members who need not venture out into social sphere as employees and business heads. In such an age she had the temerity not only to opt for a job, but also to go out for higher studies in USA. This courage and decisiveness is the hallmark of this great lady. She never vacillated in her views and of course had a great vision. Her individualism propped up her to great heights in short duration she has done something great for Indian women as a whole. Her achievements make us term her as a true BUSINESS TIGRESS.