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How 15 women are taking the swanky 18th floor of the Bombay Stock Exchange by storm

BINJAL SHAH, 23 JUNE 2016



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The Bombay Stock Exchange building has a legacy of its own – at a staggering 28 floors in untainted white, the building has not only witnessed, but even been party to many waves in Mumbai's commercial fabric. As of last week, though, the guys at work at the swanky **Zone Startups India** office on the 18th floor of the building are scripting their own chapter in the history of women in business – with an **accelerator programme** exclusively for women entrepreneurs, 'empoWer.'



Backed by the Department of Science and Technology, GIZ, Vodafone India, Google, Nishith Desai Associates, and SheEO, **Zone Startups India** is hosting this six-week programme for 15 entrepreneurs chosen from among 181 applicants, based on innovation, their business model and the founding team's expertise. Meet the women who made the cut, and will soon be ready to make some noise:

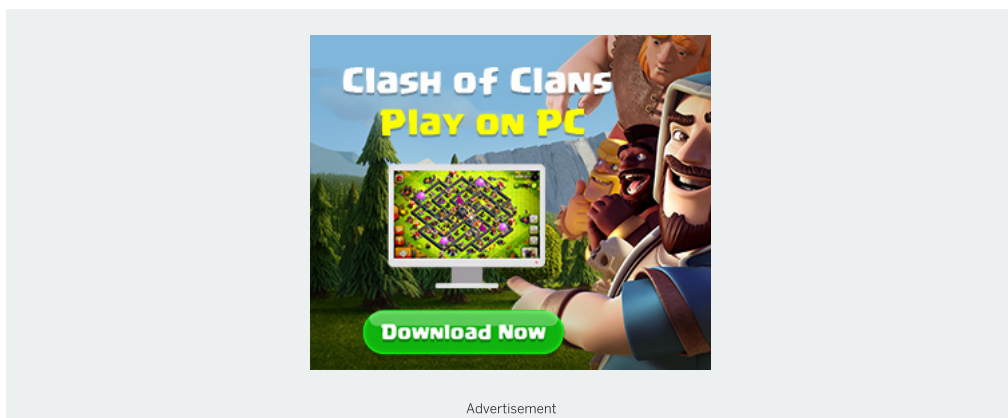
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1. **Sanskriti Dawle:** Founded in 2014, **Project Mudra** is a Braille edtech startup by graduates of BITS Pilani Goa. It is aimed at solving the low literacy rate among 39,000,000 blind people around the world, by building hardware products with software and content to impart Braille-based education. Braille literacy rates are at an all-time low; less than 10 percent in developed countries like the US, and less than 0.2 percent in India. The company's flagship Product, Annie, addresses this painpoint by helping the visually impaired person learn how to read, write, and type in Braille. The company has already received pre-orders from five blind schools across India and requests from international customers, and is set to launch its product by September 2016.

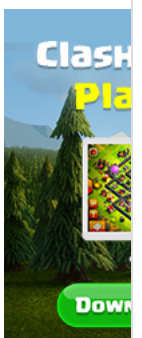


2. **Richa Singh:** Richa is an IIT Guwahati alumna with specialisation in user experience design, and has over five years of experience in product development. People in India are averse to the importance of mental wellness, without realising that a little support can go a long way. Discovering the right experts at the right time is a problem as people do not want to reveal that they are looking for a psychologist or counsellor. Her 'YourDost' provides voice, video, and chat-based consulting. Since December 2014, they have had 2.5 lakh plus users. Currently, they hold 700 sessions on a daily basis and are growing at a healthy rate per month.
3. **Smita Mishra:** The CS engineer with 15 years of work experience in the IT world started PoolWallet to leverage the social wallets wave but with her own spin on it. Hers is a mobile peer-to-peer and group payment social network, which helps people plan and pool money towards the cost of shared services, gift, events, travel, etc. It also enables groups to pool towards their 'wishlist'. They currently have about 600 users with 130 active users per month.



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L to R: Aditi, Vidya and Shweta

4. **Aditi Chadha:** Aditi has over seven years work-experience in **Silicon Valley**, including M&A Advisory in Technology, Semiconductors and She is a licensed Certified Public Accountant and the brand ambassador of the Telecom Centre of Excellence (TCOE). Her **DAZL** is a smart IoT device that works with stylish fashion accessories to deliver **location-based safety alerts** to your loved ones in one click and a range of personalised notifications with a buzz.
5. **Vidya Jayaraman:** Vidya is a Chemical Engineer from NIT-K and comes from a family of mathematicians. She founded **Math Adventures** after she realised that there was a huge gap in the manner in which Math was being taught in the formative years. Her product, MathMaster, makes learning fun and effectively translates the understanding of concepts into its application. Today, Math Master runs across Bengaluru and Mumbai and more than 7,000 students actively use it. Math Adventures has clocked revenues of Rs1.4 crores in the last financial year.
6. **Sweta Joshi:** Sweta has an extensive experience in digital marketing, and has been working with media as well as social startups for a long time before starting Algaari. Her co-founder, Jumur Pandya, is a science student, with degree in Hotel Management from IHM Mumbai, and has extensive experience of working with top hotels in India. Algaari was conceptualised in an attempt to craft products for the healthcare and hospitality industries that are **not only efficient but also affordable**, for commercial as well as household use.



L to R: Suhani, Nilima, and Mausumi

7. **Suhani Mohan:** She founded **Saral Designs**, a startup providing access to quality affordable **menstrual hygiene** products in India. An ex-investment banker, Acumen Fellow and an Engineer from IIT Bombay, Suhani has developed an automatic machine for distributed production of high quality ultra-thin sanitary napkins. This enables several local entrepreneurs collectively solve the problem of quality, access, and affordability of menstrual hygiene products. They have even created Aisha Ultra XL, ultra-thin sanitary napkins with wings that are available at stores as well as local schools in vending machines.

They have sold more than 65,000 pads in less than four months with presence in urban slums and 40 villages around Mumbai via 80 medical shops, 60 door-to-door sales women and 10 vending machines.

8. **Mausumi Acharyya:** Founder and CTO of **Advenio TecnoSys**, Mausumi is an expert imaging and AI professional and a passionate social-tech entrepreneur focused on equitable healthcare. She holds a PhD in Computer Science and Post-doctorate in medical image processing. **iCheck** is Advenio's machine intelligence-based automated high performance retinal abnormality detection application. It is designed to run on smartphone-interfaced handheld point of care fundus ophthalmoscopes. It enables early detection of certain retinal abnormalities that are also a risk predictor for diabetes and cardiovascular conditions – making Advenio's automated diagnosis of retinal abnormalities a vital cost-effective point of care screening tool for future health systems.
9. **Nilima Achwal:** Nilima writes and speaks frequently on social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment, and advises social ventures on business model innovation. India is facing a crisis **on gender and sexuality**: there is the sexual violence epidemic, pernicious stigmas that break down girls' confidence, and myths that harm young people's sexual health. **iEsha** is a private provider of sexuality and gender education. 1,000 students across 20 low-income schools have been enlightened so far.



L to R: Kanika, Saagarika and Bhargavi

10. **Kanika Jain:** Large BPOs are out of reach for mid-sized companies and have very low efficiency. Kanika Jain, a B.Com (hons.) and L.L.B graduate from the Delhi University, concocted **SquadRun** – a portal that connects technology with workforce for these companies. They have over 15 large consumer businesses using them with 45,000 users on the platform, record daily transactions of 300,000 data points on their platform and over 300 calls per day, growing aggressively week-on-week at 40-50 percent.
11. **Saagarika Jagadeesh:** Here's a fashionable woman in tech, having founded Primitus Technology in 2013 and UN-CUFFED Clothing this year. An IT engineer and MBA. With Primitus, she aims to bring structure and centralisation to customer outreach programmes by combining technology with qualified customer representatives, and works with over 15 dealerships pan India and across sectors such as four wheelers and two wheelers.
12. **Bhargavi Sridharan:** With a CFA and MBA from SP Jain and a decade of experience in finance, Bhargavi founded FinMitra. **FinMitra(.com)** enables the middle-class Indian to access predictive and customised financial advice at the click of a button. The platform has already undertaken paid trials with several reputed and well-known employers and a resounding 97 percent of employee participants recommended their services.



L to R: Tarusha, Renu and Saumya

13. **Tarusha Mittal:** [Cloudrino](#), a cloud IaaS/PaaS platform, is the flagship product of her first venture [Koonk](#). Cloudrino enables users to manage their cloud infrastructure with a console without any tech know-how. One can add and manage third-party servers, as well. The idea is to ease deployment and management. In a short span of 10 months since launching the product, they have over 100,000 user signups, without spending a penny on marketing. Tarusha is a generalist and has been working in the startup space for eight years. She co-founded Koonk in 2011, and was working in the data-center space for three years before moving to cloud.
14. **Renu Bisht:** An engineer with a gold medal in computer science and an MBA in marketing, Renu has worked with companies like ABG, [Wipro](#), and [KPMG](#) in different roles of IT project management, functional consulting and change management before she started [Vanitycube](#) – a mobile platform that allows users to book last minute beauty services at their time, place, and at their convenience. The company has created a base in Delhi NCR and Mumbai, on-boarded 125 beauticians, and served more than 20,000 happy customers in a year's time.
15. **Saumya Vardhan:** The MBA spent over 10 years with firms like [KPMG](#) London and EY London as a strategic consultant before she started [Shubhpuja.com](#). As vedic pujas constitute a host of rituals and specifications that the new generation at large is barely savvy with, [Shubhpuja.com](#) is a resource on the various rituals, and aggregates authentic services of qualified professionals for the traditional proceedings. In the one year since they were inceptioned, they have conducted more than 6,000 pujas.

The accelerator programme will constitute various bootcamps, workshops, demo days, as the problem faced by a lot of women entrepreneurs is inaccessibility to networks. "That is where we felt that there is a case for having a dedicated accelerator programme for women entrepreneurs – complete with mentoring, workshops, case studies of successful women led startups, industry connect, peer network and investor connect," says Ajay Ramasubramiam, Director, [Zone Startups India](#). The three winners of this programme will receive Rs 60 lakh collectively.



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