

Rising from the Roots: Stories of Female Entrepreneurs in Ahmednagar

Here's a sneak peek into my experience monitoring entrepreneurs in the vibrant Maharashtra district of Ahmednagar.

The entrepreneurs live quite far from the main city of Ahmednagar, Maharashtra. We drove for miles along winding green roads, up and down hills, stopping to ask directions, making sure we were on the right path to the right person. One time, in search of a young entrepreneur, we drove so far it felt like we had reached the end of the world.

Each time we arrived at their doorstep, their faces lit up when they saw their program officer (a Pratham staff that mentors them and supports them in growing their business). When our entrepreneurs looked at me with curiosity, the officers would introduce me, saying, "*Madam—head office se aayi hai*, she wants to talk to you about your business." And just like that, they'd welcome me, quickly arranging a place for us all to sit.

I met several inspiring women along the way. There was Urmila Magar from Deulgaon village, who, after receiving beauty training from Pratham, took out a loan and opened a full-fledged beauty parlor in her village. In just a few months, she opened another branch in a neighboring village. Now, she runs two parlors, providing high-quality beauty services and even training new students.

Then the next day I met Manisha Yerkal in the busier village of Madadgaon. She lived in a humble stone-built home without electricity when we visited. A trained beautician, she proudly showed us the simple but essential tools she had invested in. In her village, women mostly came to her for threading. She was eager to grow her business, and the program officer suggested she create service packages. If her clients liked the free



service, they'd come back and pay for it next time. As I was leaving, she expressed her gratitude for my visit and asked me to let her know if there was anything more she could learn through Pratham.

And then the day after that there was another Manisha, Manisha Kothule, living in the quiet village of Baburdi. Her home was an immaculately clean space, filled with her creative projects—like wall hangings and colorful pompom-laden decorations at the kitchen doorway. Pratham trained her in



making functional cloth bags and pouches. Her husband, though supportive, preferred that she work from home, saying, "*Jo bhi karna hai, ghar se karo.*" He even brought her raw materials from Mumbai in his employer's BMW. Her creativity and desire to keep creating left a lasting impression on me.

This experience made me truly appreciate how far our mentors and

program officers go, and how deeply Pratham has reached to make sure no one is left behind. Living in big cities, I often hear about start-ups—usually picturing a group of young, talented people coming together, securing venture capital funding to grow their tech-based businesses. But now, when I think of business and start-ups, it's these women from small villages who come to mind—their endearing smiles, their eyes gleaming with hope. These women, who have the courage and the desire to learn, with just a little guidance, can truly become Women with Wings and fly.

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