



(From left) Naina Lal Kidwai, Ashni Biyani, Namita Thapar and Nidhi Tanti

WOMEN INHERITORS

Inheritors too Have to Overcome Gender Barriers

Creating a support system and mentoring aspiring entrepreneurs is critical

Sreeradha.Basu@timesgroup.com

How long before we see Mehra & Daughters on every street corner?" was the provocative question with which Naina Lal Kidwai, chairman, Max Financial Services, kicked off a session at the ET Women's Forum on Friday. A pertinent point, given that the panel she was addressing comprised daughters of some of India's biggest industrialists, all of whom had assumed the mantle of taking forward their respective businesses. In a session on The Changemakers: How Daughters are Remaking India Inc, Ashni Biyani, director, Future Ideas, Nidhi Tanti, vice president of the Suzlon Group and Namita Thapar, executive director, Emcure Pharmaceuticals spoke out on what it took to induct themselves in the business and be taken seriously; what they're doing to bring more women into their organisations; the importance of a supportive family and the guilt that some still live with — and others have been able to overcome.

In a country where only 14% of

entrepreneurs are women, and a minuscule percentage of that are leading businesses in family-owned concerns, these women's journeys came with their own set of challenges. For Biyani, whose background was in design, the transition to business itself was no cakewalk. "I did it through hard work and persistence. A woman in a consumer-centric business has an edge and as a thought leader-I



LARGER PICTURE

Only 14% of entrepreneurs in India are women, and a minuscule percentage of those are family-owned businesses

made my mark," she said.

Thapar said she was a qualified CA, had an MBA and seven years of work experience in the US under her belt before she was considered competent enough to join the family business. Tanti had her sights set on investment banking initially, but had to start on the manufacturing floor and work her way up before assuming the reins at two of the group's biggest businesses.

Along the way, all have faced societal pressure and stereotypes: being asked if they would give up once they got married or had kids, whether they were only paving the way for a transition to the male sibling or even being judged when they left work early for a family commitment.

Each of them credits their families for the support they have provided. "We come from an extremely progressive family—that goes a long way," said Thapar.

As women leaders, they have sought to promote diversity and make their respective organisations safer, better and more attractive for women employees besides getting more of them on board.

Tanti, for instance, said that because of the nature of the industry, the percentage of women in her organisation was dramatically low—just 4%. "We've targeted quadrupling of the number by 2022," she said. "For that we are creating a whole ecosystem—putting in basic hygiene facilities, child-care facilities, travel facilities. For the more physically challenging roles, we are working out ways to make them more tech-equipped so that those opportunities too can be given to women in-

stead of discounting them."

Thapar said that at Emcure too, various ongoing initiatives had driven up the number of women but more needed to be done, something she hoped to achieve with new policies being introduced. "I run the franchise of a Younger Entrepreneurs Academy that teaches entrepreneurship to 11-18-year-olds," she said.

"As much as 41% are girls. That makes me optimistic of where we will be a few years down the road."

(The discussion was moderated by Naina Lal Kidwai, chairman, Max Fin Services)

HIGH-FLYING SELFIE

Captain Kiran Sangwan with some new fans

