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TIMES ARE CHANGING



“I do not think of myself as a woman when I am working. In my experience, persistence and passion is the key to recognition and to making a difference. Times are changing, today there is an increased awareness about the contribution that women can make to the workforce and business, as well as to the country’s economy,” avers Nirupa Bhatt, Managing Director of GIA India and Middle East. in a candid conversation with Titto Eapen.

Today you are known as a true leader of the industry and you have become an inspiration for many women who want to foray into the gems and jewellery sector. However, 30 years in a male dominated industry and breaking the stereotype that women are equal to men is nothing less than a revolution in India. Can you take us back to the 90’s and recount some of the challenges that you faced as a woman in this industry?

The majority of diamond and jewellery businesses are owned by families. In general, acceptance of a non-family member is difficult in family-owned businesses. One has to learn to be a part of their social environment as well. As a professional, I could connect with entrepreneurs on a business level and being a woman helped me become part of their social

environment and family events. Women from jeweller families accepted me and that helped me develop a rapport with the head of the family as well as their children. Today, many of these children are leading the businesses and my connection with their families for the last 30 years has helped me grow that relationship.

You entered this Industry at a point when there were hardly any women in this sector. So what was the level of acceptance for women during those days?

I’ve always thought of myself as a professional willing to make a difference with whomever I work. Accountability and responsibility are gender neutral. I do not think of myself as a woman when I am working. In my experience,

persistence and passion is the key to recognition and to making a difference. Times are changing. There is an increased awareness about the contribution that women can make to the workforce and business, as well as to the country’s economy. As this recognition gains ground, more and more women will find themselves in responsible positions. I’m an optimist and I see women taking up more challenging and diverse roles in the industry.

How different was the market scenario then and what was the thrust that dragged you into the G & J sector?

I am a marketing and management professional. In the late 1980s, I was looking for a role to build my career. Argyle Diamonds had commenced production in the mid-80s and was visiting India to



understand the diamond industry. With Argyle, my responsibility was to identify the value chain for diamonds, understand the value added at each level to support exports of the jewellery and polished diamonds resulting from Argyle rough.

Diamond cutting was developing, and jewellery manufacturing for the exports had just started in the early 1990s. I admire Indian diamantaires for building world-class cutting facilities and investing in technology. The results are here for all of us to see – jewellery exports are increasing, and India is the largest cutting centre for diamonds and an important cutting/trading centre for emeralds and tanzanite. The domestic jewellery market too has evolved significantly in the past 20 years, with the emergence of regional and national chains, increasing the importance of designs, improving quality and more.

There is a popular notion in the people's mind that women look better as a consumer of jewellery. Since, you are also part of many industry bodies

including Women's Jewellery Association - What is your vision to bring more women to the entrepreneurial side of the industry?

There are many women entrepreneurs in the industry, mainly in design. Members of the Women's Jewelry Association's India chapter are talented and keen to grow their enterprises. I hope the industry will support them and encourage them to grow. This industry survives because of women and I believe that an increase of women in the workforce at all levels will bring fresh perspectives, hopefully leading to expansion and improved quality.

I would like women in the industry to be proactive, participate in industry events, join associations/trade bodies and expand their network. Mentorship is a great tool. I encourage jewellers to invest in creating formal mentoring programmes for promising women employees. This will create a support system to share and grow and to help them fulfil multiple responsibilities.

In a family business, how can a professional build a career for themselves? Is this sector lucrative for them?

The gem and jewellery industry offers great opportunities for professionals. Businesses would like to expand and they may not have all the skills required. Entrepreneurs who focus on building the business will create the need for hiring subject matter experts in the fields of designing, marketing, finance, supply chain management and more. In my opinion, entrepreneurs need to communicate and give confidence to professionals that there are career paths and future prospects for them to grow in this industry. At GIA India, we have witnessed an increasing number of students from outside the industry who wish to build their careers. Our jewellery design and merchandising courses are increasingly popular, in addition to the gemmology education we provide.

Where is the Indian Gems and Jewellery Industry heading towards 2025 and where do you see the women entrepreneurs in it?

India has had a rich tradition of jewellery for thousands of years. The gem and jewellery industry has capitalised on this and built a strong presence for itself. I believe the industry is destined to grow as businesses employ advanced technologies, strengthen processes, invest in professional education and embrace innovation. I see great potential for value addition and increased opportunities for men and women who seek to enter this industry.