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Star women entrepreneurs add a tricolour splash to US list

Rajiv Tikoo

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: All six Indian-origin women entrepreneurs in the Amex-WPO list typify the immigrant story of chasing the American dream of "better, richer, and happier life".

Sonu Ratra, president of Akrya Inc, a Sunnyvale, California-based company, which provides staffing and project management solutions to Fortune 500 companies, says: "We have succeeded because of our hard work. It does not go unrewarded in a place where there are a lot of opportunities." The fact that the Chandigarh-born girl has studied HR management from Symbiosis in Pune and social sciences from Tata Institute of Social Studies in Mumbai has also helped.

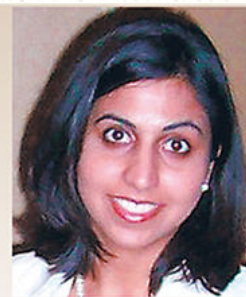
Priti Parikh, president of Tucson, Arizona-based Sweta Systems Inc., which is a technology services, consulting and systems integration firm, adds: "The support of family is also crucial when you are an immigrant Indian woman operating in business space dominated by men." It's essential to strike a work-family life balance, adds Parikh, who is originally from Mumbai.

6 INDIAN-ORIGIN STARS HEAD FASTEST-GROWING CO'S

Tricolour splash in US list of women-led pvt firms



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Since hard work by the owner alone cannot take a company beyond a point, most Indian entrepreneurs place a premium on their teams. Padma Allen, president and chief financial officer of New Jersey-based TechnoDyne, an information technology services company, says:

“Though getting the right people is always tough, it’s worth the effort and investment. It’s the team that makes a company.” TechnoDyne has 500 people on its rolls. Born, brought up and trained as a doctor in Bangalore, Padma stepped into the tech and finance world with ease and is currently pursuing an executive MBA from the Stern School of Business.

Agreeing with her, Kiran Gill, president of New Jersey-based Paras Environmental Inc says, “One of the major challenges in running a consulting firm is finding the right people. I have a great team and it has been one of the reasons for our rapid growth.” Her case is slightly different from others because she is not an immigrant, but was born in Washington, DC and got a degree in environmental studies from New York University and an MBA from the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Of course, all these factors may not have been sufficient for these entrepreneurs to achieve success, without an enabling business environment created by the US government. For example, the US government aims to award at least 5% of all contracts to women-owned businesses. Besides, training courses are also offered for owning or managing a business as a woman.

Pune-born Anjali Ramakumaran, CEO of Chantilly, Virginia-based Ampcus Inc, which is a business and technology consultancy, says: “The US government and large commercial clients are committed to creating space for women and minority-owned businesses. Large companies have themselves invested in diversity departments, which in turn help SWAM (small women and minority owned business) to conduct business.”

It’s only the beginning. The real challenge is in expanding and scaling up. But who is afraid? A confident Ranjini Poddar, co-founder and president of New Jersey-based Artech Information Systems, says: “Right now, we’re a \$225-million workforce solutions, IT consulting and outsourced project services company. Our goal is to become a half-a-billion dollar company by 2012. That may sound bold, but given our growth trajectory over the past 10 years, it’s viable.” She should know what she is saying. She has already translated into reality her dream, which she saw at the age of eight when she emigrated along with her parents from Uttar Pradesh to California.

Having tasted success, it seems only sky is the limit for Indian-origin women entrepreneurs as they set out to become half-a-billion or billion-dollar enterprises.