

Forbes INDIA

Home | Wednesday, December 9, 2015 | 10:11:34 AM



South India and the spirit of enterprise

South India has contributed in throwing up some of India's foremost business leaders

by Sourav Majumdar | 0 comments



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Certain geographies have often been identified closely with the spirit of enterprise in India. States like Gujarat and Rajasthan have fostered some of India's best-known entrepreneurs, while the new wave of enterprise and innovation is being driven by cities like Bengaluru, which is carving out its own place as one of the top destinations for technology entrepreneurs. South India, in general, has contributed in throwing up some of India's foremost business leaders, a trend which continues even now. Many of these entrepreneurs from the south have successfully created not just tech giants, but large manufacturing or retail businesses. This issue of Forbes India focuses on a few such groups and companies which represent the robustness of enterprise in the southern part of the country. These span sectors as diverse as tractors, media, foods and infrastructure, where business owners have made rapid strides and created large enterprises and well-known national brands.



So, if VG Siddhartha's Café Coffee Day is a household name in the cafés space, GM Rao's GMR Group is a powerful player in the infrastructure arena. Mallika Srinivasan, who helms India's second largest tractor maker Tractors and Farm Equipment (Tafe) and is carving out a clear vision to make a difference to India's farm sector through her farm equipment strategy, is another growth story from the south. On the other hand, there is Sadananda Maiya, who created MTR Foods and is now into his second innings in food retailing through his Maiyas brand. While Siddhartha's is a story of how a major national café brand was created from scratch, GMR's is one of a large business group taking adversity in the chin and soldiering on. Maiya's, on the other hand, is a perfect example of a successful second act.

This issue also seeks to answer a question which is currently agitating the entrepreneurial ecosystem around the world: Is the unicorn boom—the creation of startups with billion-dollar valuations—for real? Or are we sitting on a ticking bomb of overvalued companies? A Forbes package takes us through some of the top unicorns and their business models and comes up with the thesis that while some startups may be overvalued, taken together and compared with the first dotcom boom, these still represent great opportunities. We also delve a little deeper into one such unicorn from India—Vijay Shekhar Sharma's One97 Communications (valued at \$2 billion) which runs online payments brand Paytm. Sharma has his sights set far higher than where Paytm is at the moment. As he proclaims: "There may be two or five or ten \$100 billion ecommerce companies in India in a decade— I don't know how many, but I want to be one of them."

Best,
Sourav Majumdar
Editor, Forbes India
Email: sourav.majumdar@network18publishing.com
Twitter id: @TheSouravM

This article appeared in the Forbes India magazine issue of 27 November, 2015

<http://forbesindia.com/column/column/south-india-and-the-spirit-of-enterprise/41519/1>

