

# Textile Sphere India

The Pulse of Technology Innovation in Textiles

(Formerly Textile Outlook India)

## Rise of Women in Textiles

Bridging Gaps, Building Futures

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- Techtexsil – Texprocess 2026, Frankfurt
- Swiss Textile Machinery
- SIMA Texfair 2026, Coimbatore – Review
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Above (L-R): Dr. Seema Srivastava, India ITME Society; Pia Terasa, Saurer Group; Carmen Silla, Jeanologia SL; Ashna Sharma, Yash Textile Machines. Below (L-R): Summer Hsia, Stäubli AG; Smriti Choudhary, Cocoon Fine Rugs; Chandrima Chatterjee, Secretary General, CITI; Smita Joshi, Sutlej Textiles.

Also: Spinning-Weaving-Knitting-Dyeing & Finishing-Textile Printing-Technical Textile & Nonwoven

# The Power Shift: Women Driving the Future of Textiles

In this exclusive interaction, **Dr. Seema Srivastava, Executive Director, India ITME Society**, shares with Textile Sphere India her inspiring journey from international trade to leading one of the textile industry's premier institutions. She reflects on leadership, resilience, and the evolving role of women in driving innovation, inclusivity, and decision-making across the textile ecosystem.



**Q. Could you share your professional journey and what inspired you to build a career in the textile machinery and technology ecosystem?**

Economics, International trade and Business Management were the subjects I pursued for my education. It was pure coincidence that after working many years with Taiwan World Trade Centre and WTC-Mumbai, I joined India ITME Society in 2009, now completing 16 years with India ITME Society.

I enjoy my work at India ITME Society tremendously and got very good opportunity to work at multiple levels and forging long lasting professional and personal relationship with the industry.

**Q. The textile sector has traditionally been male dominated. What challenges did you face as a woman leader, and how did you overcome them?**

At India ITME Society, my experience was slightly different since I joined at the top of pyramid position as 'Executive Director' and was fortunate that I could bring transformation to the office atmosphere and make it more inclusive. My gender related tribulations were not at India ITME Society. However, I did face some scepticism from many as to whether a young female can execute and manage an industrial exhibition of such scale with 3500 live machineries, 73 vendors companies, large scale utility services onsite

co-ordinating with 100+ customers acquiring various permissions required for macro & micro event planning etc.

There were of course people who did not have confidence in leadership of a female and expected me to fail in my endeavour. Never spoken words, but discernible condescending and patronising behaviour which made me dig my heels stubbornly to pursue success in all my projects.

I appreciate all my office bearers since 2009 till date who gave rock solid support to me in my decisions and efforts to bring changes in India ITME Society which helped me prove naysayers wrong and also steer India ITME Society to a globally recognised organisation today.

**Q. How do you see the role of women evolving in India's textile and apparel industry – especially in technology, innovation, and decision-making positions?**

Female scientists have been instrumental in the success of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), leading major missions like Mangalyaan, Chandrayaan-2, and Chandrayaan-3. These women have shattered gender barriers, with, for instance, nearly 30% of the team working on Chandrayaan-2 being women.

Also, Women in AI in India are driving a significant transformation, with over 7,000 women-led startups emerging as of late 2025. However, while making strides in entrepreneurship and research, women still occupy only 22% of AI roles and face persistent gender gaps in leadership and core model



At the exhibition site at NESCO with the Operations Team

development.

My take is that, with such role models driving a whole nation ahead in many sectors, textile sector is no challenge for women. In textile sector many well established scientists, researchers and educators are women and contributing substantially towards innovation. Decision making roles is where deficit is, and which needs to improve. This push has to come from Women themselves. Nobody is going to hand it over.

**Q. In your experience, what leadership qualities uniquely strengthen women leaders in the textile sector?**

India has undergone exponential transformation economically and technologically as well. In the last decade, increasing inclusion of women in the workforce has been a major contributing factor to this prosperity. Not only has the nation progressed, but families and society as a whole is overcoming poverty, achieving better health and higher living standards from dual income due to this inclusiveness of women in economic activity.

In my experience, successful leadership is equally challenging for both genders. Whether you are a man or woman, it requires similar traits, skill sets, knowledge, determination

and gumption.

However, women possess better intuitive skills, empathy and patience which in my opinion are an added advantage in navigating the complexities of customer relations, negotiations and management of human resources etc. Plus, the ability to multitask is very natural as already a working women juggle multiple roles of mother, wife, officer seamlessly.

**Q. As Executive Director of India ITME Society, how are you encouraging greater participation of women in textile engineering, manufacturing, and entrepreneurship?**

A major change I could bring specifically to India ITME Society office was increase in the number of female staff since I joined. This was a major transition from an all-male office & exhibition team. It has also helped change the perception that women cannot successfully execute industrial exhibitions, especially in India where organizing exhibitions is particularly challenging. I would like to think that, it has encouraged many young women to join the exhibition industry. Besides, companies may have also become more comfortable trusting women and assigning them top leadership positions in Indian exhibition industry.

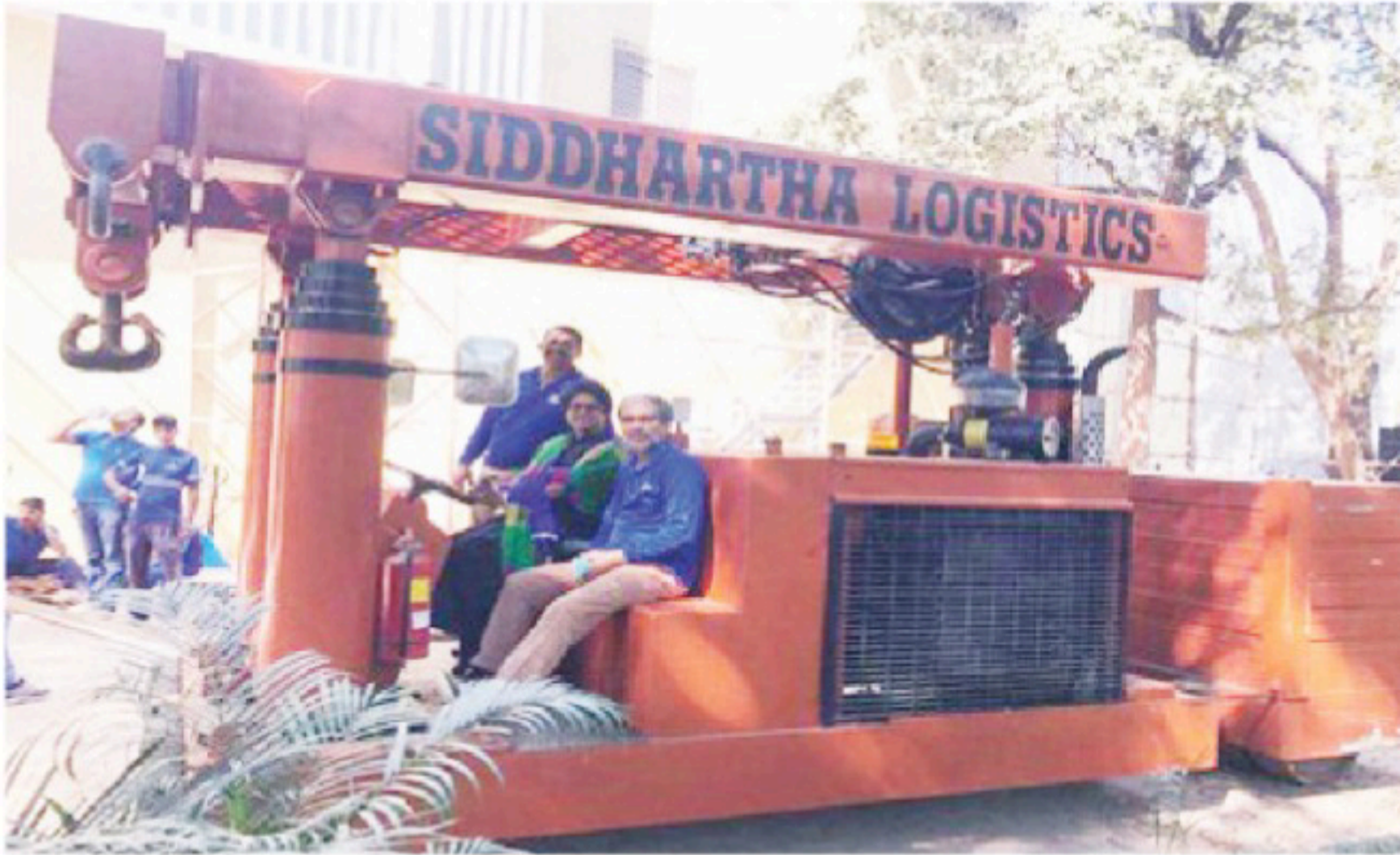
***In textile sector many well established scientists, researchers and educators are women and contributing substantially towards innovation. Decision making roles is where deficit is, and which needs to improve. This push has to come from Women themselves. Nobody is going to hand it over.***

That is about exhibition industry; now with respect to textile engineering industry, I do not have any data/information so cannot say if any major difference occurred. However, I do know that women participants and executives from textile engineering companies have felt more welcome, safe and comfortable to stay and work late at exhibition site in the night during setup days at the ITME exhibition than before due to my presence at the venue.

**Q. What structural or cultural changes are still required in the industry to ensure equal growth opportunities for women professionals?**

It is quite frustrating to me that in this era of AI, space travel and information explosion in our country, we are still debating on how to provide safe work environment for women to work?

Providing separate washroom, office transport, office timing, creche in workplace or maternity leave are about creating conducive work amenities; not creating safe work environment for women. What is required would be a change in the mindset of male colleagues. Safety comes from educating entire work force from top to factory floor to change prejudices, bias and



discriminatory behaviour towards women. It is not availability of separate washrooms which makes women feel safe, but whether she will be safe to use washrooms alone at late hours that will make work environment safe for women employees.

It is not the facilities, but behaviour of peers and senior staff which sets the tone for safe and thriving office atmosphere where dignity, and interpersonal respect of all staff are equally upheld. Then the society also will change and will be comfortable about a daughter, sister, wife and mother going to work/travel with male colleagues. Such a social and professional environment will encourage and give confidence to women to take up challenging assignments.

**Q. How important is mentorship and skill development in empowering the next generation of women textile professionals? Are there initiatives you advocate or support in this area?**

Guidance from a mentor with experience and knowledge helps immensely in avoiding pitfalls in decision making, reduce learning time, improve confidence and helps in aligning goals and work knowledge.

Bombay Chamber of Commerce run mentorship programs regularly

and I have been part of the program as a mentor for young women. I think periodic interactive sessions and personal development training and counselling support for young female staff will help gain confidence and reduce dropout of women employees from jobs.

**Q. With the industry moving toward automation, sustainability, and digitalization, how can women prepare themselves to stay competitive and relevant?**

In this scenario, the challenges for male work force are same. I do not believe that it is gender specific as both need to upscale and upskill similarly. In my opinion, new technological advancement usually opens up new avenues of work as well. Learning and adapting accordingly is important to retain jobs.

**Q. What advice would you give to young women engineers and managers aspiring to leadership roles in the textile & apparel sector?**

New generation is more confident and have greater opportunities and acceptance than before. However, rectifying own prejudgments would help a lot in dealing with societal push backs successfully with confidence. Believing in self-capabilities and willingness to work

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hard always will give results.

Also, in the name of equality, behaving aggressively in office or accepting assignments to prove a point without required skill sets is a recipe for short term success, not a road to top leadership roles.

Self-realization of one's strengths and capabilities, upgrading skills sets to match one's ambition is very much required for sure, steady and stable journey towards top rung.

**Q. Finally what message would you like to share with industry stakeholders to create a more inclusive and progressive textile ecosystem?**

Even though hailed as the second-largest employment sector after agriculture, the textile industry is gradually losing its sheen to other industrial sectors and failing to attract young and talented individuals.

Industry should modernise its employment practices, adopt comparable remunerations, upgrade work environment to compete and match other modern industry segments to attract and retain quality talent. Conducive work environment should be created to attract more women work force at every level from factory floor to Board room.