



[Startup Bharat] How Deshpande Foundation's Navodyami initiative is encouraging micro-entrepreneurship in Bharat

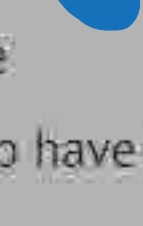
In an interview with YourStory, Namrata Telisara, Programme Associate, Deshpande Foundation, talks about how the team is building and encouraging micro-entrepreneurship through the Navodyami programme.

By Sindhu Kashyaap



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Startups may be synonymous with urban settings to many, but rural India houses a treasure trove of sorts. Be it handicrafts, art and craft, and even food processing, there are many micro-entrepreneurs waiting to be born across Bharat. All they need is the right backing and opportunities.



It is to make this possible that **Hubballi-based Deshpande Foundation** started the **Navodyami programme in 2011**. The Deshpande Foundation is primarily known to have in 2008 started Sandbox Startups, which provides incubation support to first-time entrepreneurs. It mentors aspiring entrepreneurs with a vision to create sustainable, scalable, and replicable business models relevant to Tier-II cities in India.

The Navodyami programme is focussed to create, support and scale micro-entrepreneurship at the bottom of the pyramid. Navodyami is one of the few programmes in Northwest Karnataka that combines training, handholding, and mentorship, enabling micro-entrepreneurs to scale better and faster.

In a conversation with **YourStory**, **Namrata Telisara, Programme Associate, Deshpande Foundation**, talks about the core objectives of Navodyami and the steps they are taking to help micro-entrepreneurship.

Namrata, who grew up in Hubballi and completed her MBA from MP Birla Institute of Management, presently works with micro-entrepreneurs and helps them navigate the digital age to launch their business.



A power loom at Navodyami



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Edited excerpts of the interview:

YourStory: What is the core purpose and mission of Navodyami?

Namrata Telisara: With Navodyami, our mission is to help strengthen local ecosystems. We want to build leaders and entrepreneurs by catalysing innovative thinking to accelerate the creation of sustainable, scalable enterprises that have significant social and economic impact.

The challenges of tomorrow will only be met with new innovative solutions that are grown into viable enterprises by entrepreneurs.

YS: What are the core challenges Navodyami faces in finding micro-entrepreneurs? What are the challenges in working with them?

NT: It takes time to identify micro-entrepreneurs. You need to go deep into the villages and meet the right people. After that, you need to mobilise these micro-entrepreneurs and convince them that they need to be a part of the programme. What really helps is working closely with them. We bring in marketing support, connect them for financial support, mentor them, and get them connected to a bigger network.

What helps is our entrepreneurship awareness programme. Here, we bring in awareness and insight into opportunities that micro-entrepreneurs can get.



Micro-entrepreneur getting facilitated at Navodyami



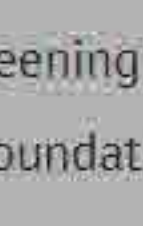
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We also have the Navodyami awards competition, which we started early on where we mobilise micro-entrepreneurs from rural and urban places. These are primarily for micro-entrepreneurs running enterprises in sectors like food, handicrafts, textiles, and others.

Applicants have to undergo a screening process. Shortlisted participants receive intensive training that includes sessions by successful entrepreneurs and business idea screening by bankers. Participants receive an official certificate from Navodyami, Deshpande Foundation India, after successful completion of the program.

YS: How else do you help micro-entrepreneurs?



NT: We work on creating marketing and credit linkages, and providing mentorship, networking, exposure, and legal compliances. We work towards identifying strengths and gaps of different types of micro-entrepreneurs (aspiring, struggling, established micro-entrepreneurs and traditional family-run businesses) and designing services specific to their needs.

We also organise *santhes*, or exhibitions, to provide a selling platform to micro-entrepreneurs. Besides generating sales, *santhes* help them reach a larger customer base and understand evolving demands of the customers. The buyers benefit as they get a wider number of options under a single roof.

We also have the Karyagara initiative, which is focused on finances. Money management is a big need for Navodyami micro-entrepreneurs. We help to make them financially literate by acquainting them with accounts, digital payments, and basic registration. The Karyagara sessions act as stepping stones to learn about how to effectively handle the money invested in and generated from the business. It also gives an overview of legal compliances and general registration protocol.

YS: How do you help micro-entrepreneurs with skill upgradation?

NT: Navodyami has started the Pragati training programme to upskill and provide value addition. It aims to empower aspiring and existing micro-entrepreneurs by providing skill development or vocational training.

We also conduct regular exposure visits so they gain first-hand experience of large-scale manufacturing and running a big business setup. They are taken to different industries where they receive mentorship and exposure to the latest technology, systematic processing, and high-quality products. The visits are helpful for micro-entrepreneurs to plan how to increase production and scale their business.



YS: What is the kind of impact and revenue generation created for micro-entrepreneurs?

NT: We provide timely guidance in market and credit linkages. We are currently helping 18 percent of our participants to achieve over 10 times growth. The business expansion services are helping 42 percent micro-entrepreneurs to grow over three times.

We have reached over 14,856 through our entrepreneur awareness programme, and have trained over 7000 micro-entrepreneurs. We have also mobilised credit worth over Rs 1.82 crore.