

## **NATIONAL TEACHERS' AWARD 2025: Professor Srivardhini K Jha from IIM Bangalore honoured for pioneering Entrepreneurship education in India**

***She received the accolade for creating a classroom environment that nurtures entrepreneurial mindsets and develops future-ready leaders***

Combining her rare blend of experience in the corporate world with academic rigour, Prof Srivardhini K Jha from Karnataka transformed classroom teaching with immersive, indigenous methods and scaled up NS Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (NSRCEL). From mentoring women entrepreneurs to shaping national policies, her journey reflects a vision of entrepreneurship as a mindset that can empower individuals, communities, and the nation's future. Prof Jha tells *Education Times* how developing an entrepreneurial mindset was difficult when she introduced it in academia.

With long-standing experience at Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, and Infosys, a coupled with knowledge gathered at Stanford University and IIM Bangalore (IIM-B), Prof Jha introduced an innovative perspective to the entrepreneurship curriculum across MBA, PhD, and online BBA programmes. Reflecting on her shift, she says, "I felt I could make a bigger impact through teaching and research by reaching out to young talented minds and shaping them for an inspiring future."

When Prof Jha first introduced entrepreneurship as a course at IIM-B, she was met with scepticism. Many questioned whether entrepreneurship could really be taught, insisting it was something one had to be born with. Rather than dismissing these doubts, she chose to reframe the conversation. "Entrepreneurship is a mindset. Whether you start a venture or work in a corporation, it equips you to respond to a rapidly changing world," she says. That shift in perspective proved powerful, although battling scepticism was not easy, but today it has emerged as the prominent job-creating sector.

"Students live through the decisions and journey of being an entrepreneur while studying to become one," she says, highlighting her focus on case studies rooted in Indian companies, live projects, simulations, and role-play exercises played a crucial role. Taking charge as chairperson of NSRCEL in 2022, Prof Jha has scaled up the incubator's impact. Today, NSRCEL supports more than 1,000 startups annually across 25 states.

Under her leadership, the incubator has expanded its focus into critical sectors including climate action, fintech, and social innovation. She has also championed women's entrepreneurship, with over 3,000 aspiring women founders completing the Foundations of Entrepreneurship programme. Most recently, she launched iCube (Incubating Incubators Initiative), which shares NSRCEL's 25 years of expertise with incubators in tier-II and tier-III cities. "We are trying to be a multiplier, building capacity in local incubators so they can support entrepreneurs in their regions more effectively," she says.

Prof Jha's contributions go well beyond the IIM-B campus. As part of the Startup20 core team during India's G20 Presidency, she played a key role in shaping a global voice for startups. She also contributed to the drafting of the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) 2020 and Karnataka's Research, Development, and Innovation policy. Her academic scholarship continues

through research published in journals such as *MIS Quarterly* and *MIT Sloan Management Review*. She also co-edited *Shifting Orbits: Decoding the Trajectory of the Indian Start-up Ecosystem*.

Further explaining the changing dimension of entrepreneurship, she says, “After introduction of NEP, the emphasis on entrepreneurship has changed, it is not just about business creation but also about solving social problems, sustainability, and building a strong ethical foundation. At the same time, inclusivity has been a major focus. Through NSRCEL, we launched a short online course designed to help anyone with even a spark of interest explore this path. In 2024, we also rolled out a fully online BBA in Digital Business and Entrepreneurship, which attracted 900 students in its very first run. Together, these initiatives are helping democratise entrepreneurship education, equipping aspiring founders with the right tools and mindset to begin their journey.”

As Prof Jha accepts the National Teachers’ Award 2025, she views it not as a culmination but as a milestone—a reminder that entrepreneurship education can shape lives, communities, and the nation’s future. “It motivates me to push boundaries. It is as much a call to action as it is an acknowledgment of my contribution,” she concludes.