

# No Ceiling Stories



**Smita Deorah**  
Co-founder and Co-CEO,  
Lead School

# Smita Deorah built a ₹1.1 Bn+ edtech unicorn.



- ✓ Addressed an important socio-economic challenge
- ✗ No edtech expertise
- ✗ No entrepreneurial background



## Moment of Realization!

Smita's daughter had ample resources, but she saw her maid's child struggle in a resource-poor preschool.

**This stark contrast shook Smita.**



Education should  
not be a privilege.

**2011: Smita started Sparsh - An NGO transforming Anganwadis in Mumbai.**

Implemented ‘**pre-school in a box**’ model in **16 Anganwadis**, reducing dropouts and improving attendance.

This experience paved the way for **LEAD School**.



Smita and Sumeet Mehta  
(Co-founder and husband)  
began to lay the groundwork.

Their research highlighted the education divide in the country.

- **260 million** school-going children in India
- Only **10 million** receive quality education



## Smita upskilled herself.

- ★ Understood global best practices
- ★ Mastered modern teaching methods
- ★ Acquired curriculum development expertise



**2012:** LEAD (Leadership in Education and Development) School was launched with one school and 14 students in a remote village near Ahmedabad.

**Mission:** To make excellent learning accessible to every child in India.



## 2016: A breakthrough year!

Launched ELGA (English Language & General Awareness), addressing the deep-rooted English literacy gap.

- ★ Teaching English as a skill
- ★ Grouping students by ability, not age
- ★ Improved learning outcomes in Affordable Private Schools (APS) across small towns



## The momentum builds...

- ★ Launched first owned LEAD School
- ★ Empowered teachers with an app & tablets
- ★ Digitized curriculum and student materials
- ★ Scaled to public, government, and partner schools

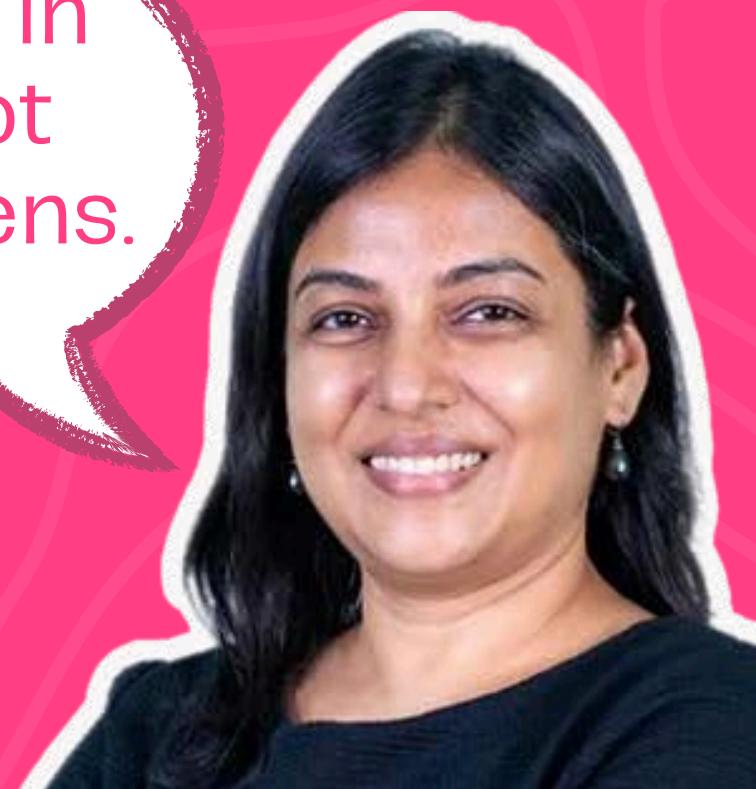


## COVID hit.

LEAD pivoted within 11 days, moving 800 schools online with structured digital learning.

After two years, Smita's belief fueled LEAD's swift return to offline learning.

Kids belong in schools, not behind screens.



## 2022: A Unicorn is born

LEAD raised \$100M in Series E funding, valuing the company at \$1.1 billion.

## 2023: Scale and impact

Acquired Pearson's local K-12 learning business in India.



**From 14 students to 35 lakh+  
students.**

**Partners with 8,000+ schools &  
50,000+ teachers.**



## Vision 2028

- ★ 25 million children
- ★ 60,000 schools
- ★ Self-sustaining edtech model

Smita Deorah is driving  
**India's education revolution.**





A Kalaari Capital Initiative

## No Ceiling Stories

Celebrating women  
who break barriers  
and redefine  
possibilities.

Because when she can do it,  
so can you.