

Simone Tata Pioneer of India's Beauty & Retail Industry, Passes Away at 95

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Simone Tata (née Dunoyer), the Swiss-born entrepreneur who transformed India's beauty and fashion retail landscape, passed away on Friday in Mumbai. She was 95.

Simone's journey in India began after she married into the Tata Group and embraced Mumbai as her home. Her influence went far beyond family ties — she played a defining role in normalizing cosmetics in Indian society at a time when makeup was often stigmatized.

Building Lakme — Redefining Beauty for Generations

In 1961, Simone joined what would become the legendary brand Lakme. Under her guidance, Lakme evolved from a fledgling cosmetics venture into India's most iconic beauty label — a transformative change that empowered generations of Indian women to embrace self-expression and personal style.

One of her most memorable initiatives was the bold advertising campaign “Is it bad to look good?”, which challenged social taboos around makeup and beauty, and helped Lakme become a symbol of modernity and confidence.

From Cosmetics to Retail Revolution

When the Tata Group sold Lakme in 1996, Simone didn't step back. Instead, she used the proceeds to acquire retail chain Littlewoods — which later evolved into the now-famous store chain Westside. Through Westside, Simone helped popularize modern departmental retail culture across India, transforming how Indians shopped for beauty, fashion, and lifestyle products.

With this move, she extended her influence from beauty to retail at large, cementing her status as a trailblazer who shaped Indian consumer habits and retail infrastructure.

Legacy Beyond Business

Simone served on the boards of Tata Industries and other Tata-affiliated trusts, guiding business decisions and promoting ethical leadership. After her retirement in 2006, she stayed largely out of public view — but remained a dignified presence at significant family and business events.

As one former Tata director aptly recalled: she was “a gracious lady and an outstanding entrepreneur.”

Her death marks the end of an era — but hers is a legacy that lives on every time an Indian woman reaches for her first lipstick, or walks into a modern retail store where global-style shopping is taken for granted.

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