Business Buzz
A Rendezvous with Women Entrepreneurs

Start-up Cases of Alumni of the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs
Indian Institute of Management Bangalore

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“You may say I am a dreamer, but I am not the only one.” - Lenon

To all the women who dream.
And venture to accomplish that dream.
Cases

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Foreword

This book was written by Sonali Jain during a one month winter internship at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore 2012-13. The fifth book in this series, her project was to develop easy-to-read cases that documented the start-up experiences of the alumni of the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) held annually at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore since 2004.

The MPWE has been a catalyst for many start-ups by its alumni over the years. As seen in these cases, many alumni have exploited opportunities or converted their skills into viable social and business enterprises that provide immense personal satisfaction to the entrepreneurs. While many joined the program as aspiring entrepreneurs, others reset and expanded their existing enterprises. We have included some innovative cases in their initial phase that may not have achieved their full potential.

We believe that these cases would inspire more women to join the program and create innovative social as well as business enterprises.

Program Directors MPWE
Author’s Note

“I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”

- Robert Frost

In this bounty world of choices, there are just a few women who make their mark and present the world with something to reminisce for generations to come. Their motivation, concentration, dedication and exhilaration are worth admiring. When the decision is between to walk a road less explored or to run towards the already trodden path, only the truly courageous and confident can choose the former.

Documented are the cases of ten muses of the present times, who with their extra-ordinary determination and work have magnificently dazzled the world. During the course of writing this book, I got acquainted with these wonderful women, learnt their stories of struggle and discovered a little part of me that was yet unknown. This book was more than inspirational, it was self-discovery. And for this, I thank all the ten women entrepreneurs for their time, understanding and copious patience.

This book would not have seen the light of day if not for Prof. Ganesh N Prabhu. I cannot thank him enough for giving me this wonderful opportunity to learn. His perfection and passion towards everything he does, inspires me. Thank you so much, Sir!

This note would be incomplete without having thanked my sister, Deepali Jain and my best friend, Ankur Garg - my favourite two people in the world. The book wouldn’t be here had it not been for their constant support and constructive criticism during editing and re-editing of the book. They believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself. You both are my guide, my light. Also, a special thanks to Jhashank Gupta for the immense help with the book cover design. Last but not the least, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to my parents, Mr. Anil Jain and Mrs. Sunita Jain for always being there for me.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Happy Reading!

Sonali Jain
Shopping – the one word that women all around the globe love. Now imagine a shopping spree that also helps to save the world! Angela Rooijmans, a Dutch business woman started ‘Emax Domina’ in June 2010 with the single objective of providing a sustainable and beautiful means to fulfill our social and environmental responsibility. ‘Emax Domina’ imports lifestyle products from India and sells them in the Netherlands through an internet-shop, supported by sales fairs and promotional parties.

My first interaction with Angela and her apollonian elegance, demeanor tantamount to modesty, her alacrity combined delicately with the insatiable urge to do good for society mesmerized me before I knew it. Angela comes forth as a master of all trades, managing house and kids, business and collaborations and still finding sometime to indulge in ‘rowing’ every week.

Born and brought up in Rotterdam, Netherlands, Angela has always been a self-made woman. Soon after completing her schooling, she moved to Amsterdam where she pursued a Master’s degree in Management Information Science from the coveted VU University. She also worked to fund her studies. “While I was studying I was also working as a secretary for three days a week, in order to pay for my studies”, states Angela with a smile that radiates confidence. After her graduation in 1990, Angela worked for a software company for nine years and then moved on to work fervently for two different universities and a consultancy firm as business consultant for six years.
It was in 2006 when her husband was transferred to Bangalore that she quit her steady job and packed her bags along with her two little bundles of joy (aged five and seven then) and moved to India. Having spent the last few years of her life juggling between the responsibilities of motherhood and housework and a full-time job, she thought India would be a good break from the busy schedule. Little did she know India was where she would discover her passion for entrepreneurship and rewrite the definition of “self-made” woman.

With her vibrant and doing-justice-to-her-name angel like smile, Angela talks about her stay in India, “As an expat wife I was not allowed to work in India, but I did a lot of voluntary work”. This benevolent dame began teaching English to the natives in India. She also worked at a slum project where women were making beautiful and unique products. And this was where she “got the idea of exporting those kinds of products to the Netherlands”. She adds, “I realized that people in the West can contribute to a better life for the poor by buying fair trade products.” It was this idea that led her to the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) in 2009. “I had no idea how to go about it. I entered the MPWE program and that really helped me pursue the idea”, she says about the six weeks program at IIM Bangalore.

However, when she returned to Netherlands after three and a half years, everybody expected she would begin her search for a job like before. They refuted the idea of importing and exporting business as a “mere hobby”. But for Angela, this was so much more than a hobby. Brewing her passion and combining it with her sole belief to do some greater good for the world in general and poor people in developing countries specifically, Angela decided to start her project ‘Emax Domina’. The company was formally founded in the Netherlands in August 2010.

Now it has been over two years since the genesis of her brand. With all apprehensions put to rest, ‘Emax Domina’ is spreading its high and mighty wings, ready to conquer the world.

**COMPANY BACKGROUND**

‘Emax Domina’- which is Latin phrase for ‘a woman who is eager to buy’-
stands true to its name. This propriety firm based in Netherlands is the one step solution for the thousands of women who love to shop unique one-of-a-kind items, but at the same time want to contribute to a better world.

Describing ‘Emax Domina’ Angela says, “I believe that we in the West with our consumerism destroy the world, both by exploitation of the poorest and by pollution of the earth. The poor people in developing countries are the victims. The best way of supporting developing countries is by contributing to local initiatives. I have experienced that engaged young people in India are taking action. I want to find a market in the Netherlands for their projects, and make Dutch consumers aware that they have an influence on the welfare of people on the other side of the world.”

Added to her zeal is the fact that she has the best of both worlds advantage situated for this kind of idea. Angela knows the western taste and the market in the Netherlands very well and on the other hand has a lot of contacts in India. This, combined with her connoisseurship for trends and design, makes her the perfect person to set up this trade.

The work for the start-up began while Angela was still in India. This included searching and contacting suitable suppliers, investment in terms of design of logo, stationary printing etc. Once Angela moved back to the Netherlands and the activities gained momentum, details like company website, photography and marketing were finalized.

PRODUCT DETAILS

Products of ‘Emax Domina’ are exclusive and handmade in India and obtained from various NGOs who work with low income men and women. These products are made using recycled products like old fabric, leather, plastic, paper etc., thus combining trendiness with eco-friendliness and durability. They are uniquely characterized by their design, color and patterns according to the Dutch taste along with a promise of Fair Trade.

The company offers a plethora of items to choose from:

- Flexie shopping bag and folders: made of old billboard material, saris
and leather-scrap.

- Shopping baskets: made of recycled PVC plastic sheets.
- Festoons, lamp shades and patchwork quilts: made of old colorful saris.
- Home accessories: made from old cans and bicycle chains.
- Placemats and jewelry: made of newspaper.
- Bags, wallets and purses: made of old tyres and waste fabric.

TEAM

From contacting the suppliers, managing finances, marketing, supervising deliveries of products, Angela solely ensures the amalgam works effectively. She occasionally indulges in indigenous help from other people – her husband, her brother and a friend who together provide technical know-how, aid in formulation of taxes etc.

INDUSTRY

“Market research has shown that there is a demand in the Netherlands for high end products from developing countries, despite the economic downturn.” This economic crisis mainly impacts products in low-end, the middle and high range products are still huge in demand and will continue to rise regularly.

Also, more people than ever prefer buying through the internet. “Internet shopping for lifestyle products is very big in the Netherlands. The level of broadband penetration in the Netherlands is the highest in the world (95%). However, there is already a lot of competition on the web and the market is easy to enter.”

MARKETING

‘Emax Domina’ focuses on working women aged between 25 and 55, who are trendy in their choices and are aware of their social and environmental responsibility at the same time. These women spend a lot of time on the internet and hence marketing mainly covers social media like Twitter and Facebook along with dedicated websites. This proves to be a cost-efficient and target-oriented marketing strategy. Angela plans
to do press releases in online magazines and papers in the coming year.

FINANCIALS

“External funding was not needed, at least not for the first two years. Emax Domina has grown slowly but incessantly and no big investments are needed. Working capital is needed mostly for keeping stock. There are hardly any debtors since Emax Domina sells only by up front-payments. Private funds are sufficient to finance the working capital.”

THE FUTURE

This mighty bird has miles to go before she rests. Talking of where she sees her business in the next five years, “I want Emax Domina to be a well-known brand which stands for: good quality, trendy, sustainable products. I want the products to be available in different shops (stand-alone shops, or middle-size chains of shops). Emax Domina has a presence in the Netherlands and in various other European countries (Germany, UK and Belgium). There should be at least six different suppliers in India working for Emax Domina each supplying four to ten different products.”

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Angela Rooijmans absolutely believes that believing in you is the key to success. “Believe in your own vision and follow your own path. There are a lot of people around you who constantly tell you what you should do. Just listen to their advice and use whatever is useful for you. Don’t let it distract you, follow your own path!” Angela is more than an inspiration. To me and to the all the women worldwide, she’s an epitome of self-sufficiency and determination.

She can be contacted at: angela@emaxdomina.nl

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A simple ‘Google’ search is all it took. I entered the words “Tanishk Shyamya, Streets India” and am flooded with links about her and her enterprise. Even after spending hours and hours reading articles about her in national daily newspapers and magazines, written by the who’s-who journalists of India, I am awestruck and curious to learn more about this recipient of The Weekend Leader’s Person of the Year (2010).

So after my research I call up Tanishk only to be greeted by a nightingale-like voice. I compliment her that this is the kind of voice you hear on radio. And she says, “Been there, done that.” And the rest of the conversation is a class apart. Meet Tanishk Shyamya, a 25 year old who has managed to achieve what most people her age can merely dream of.

Hailing from Dobhi, a small town of Bihar, Tanishk is an exemplary case of successful people with modest beginnings. She was schooled at DAV Public School, Gaya (a school which was 27km away from her home!) and like many other middle class families in her town, her family expected her to join civil service or a multi-national and be happy and content. But this dreamer has always been leagues apart from the ordinary. Daughter of a banker father, Tanishk says, “My father was the eldest brother in his family and also took additional responsibility of his four siblings, after the death of my grandfather. He was my idol from whom I learnt all the moral values of life, dedication, sense of responsibility, pride, and dignity. From humble beginnings as a typist, he had got a job in a bank. My mother is a homemaker.”
Tanishk’s entrepreneurial journey began as a teenager when she was just sixteen years old. In 2005, when her class 12 board exams were round the corner and when most students spent hours studying, Tanishk was found busy with youngsters of her colony – school going children of her age group, a few juniors and even rag-pickers – who used to come to her house to learn painting after school hours. “They used to be very keen in playing cricket and badminton with us. We also managed to teach them the basics of these sports. I felt so satisfied seeing them play like any normal kid. I was touched when they used to thank me every day and this was when I decided that I had do something for these underprivileged children in my career ahead”, the words of the young entrepreneur who took her first step into business with her indigenous learning center ‘PPP’– “Play, Paint and Padhai (studying)” – that functioned just outside her rented house in a small verandah in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

Tanishk’s media career started when she got an offer from a FM station Radio–Dhoom 104.8 FM of Prabhat Khabar group (Ranchi) – and she became a radio jockey at the age of eighteen. She started doing prime time evening shows and became the most popular radio jockey in the region with the highest listenership in a very short span of time. She then graduated in Mass Communication and Video Production from St. Xavier’s College, Ranchi in 2009 and completed her masters in Mass Communication and Journalism from Ranchi University in 2012. She has always strived to be self-made. During her first year at college, she started working as a freelance journalist for the most-read-Hindi daily newspaper ‘Dainik Jagran’. Then she moved on to join news channel IBN-7 as an intern. Tanishk had always secured good marks in exams and did extremely well during her internship. A master of all trades!

All was going well, but her heart always wished to do something for the disadvantaged. During her reporting days, there were times when she had to eat at street-side food joints. And this is when the idea struck her, “Hygienic, Cheap Street Food with a Brand” which finally culminated in the form of “Streets India” on 29 June 2010 from Ranchi, Jharkhand.

How often do we aspire to draw inspiration from idols who are perfect? Everyday. And how often does life give us a chance to meet that idol in
flesh and bone? Rarely. Knowing Tanishk is the grant of one those uncommon dreams for me. And for many more young women whose lives are, directly or indirectly, touched by the excellence and brilliance that Tanishk Shyamya is synonymous with.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

‘Streets India’ is an Initiative to organize street vendors across India and empower them with entrepreneurship opportunities. It is a unique social business model where the street vendors are provided designer carts, trained to prepare quality food in hygienic conditions and where the profit is shared amongst the beneficiary and the enterprise.

“Street vending is an important source of livelihood for nearly 2.5% of the Indian population. A substantial number of vendors are found in the urban areas and towns. A potentially huge consumer base, with over ten million street vendors just in India, and there are hardly any branded cart manufacturers.” Adding, “Potential market as far as other items are concerned would be the entire globe because our product portfolio would include eatables and processed food.”

“‘I will give you a talisman... Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him’ – Mahatma Gandhi.

Taking this as her guiding light, Tanishk set out to start her venture ‘Streets India’ aiming to help the grass-root level people in slums and streets. Taking us through the journey Tanishk ruminates, “During my reporting days I had to work day and night with no time for a proper meal. In such conditions, street food was the only available and affordable option. I always used to be surprised seeing a large number of people in queue, waiting to have street food, despite the fact that it was not so hygienic. And then the idea struck me!”

Thereafter, Tanishk began her research work and “stepped into a difficult journey with passion and great enthusiasm”. She says, “I took a lot of time to understand this unorganized sector. I was amazed when I got to know the size and volume of this sector.” However, this out-of-the-box idea was not received enthusiastically by her family and friends. “The
negative responses hardly made any difference to my thought process. I kept continuously working in this focused direction. Whenever I visited any street side vendor, I always used to observe them closely and ask them many questions. It took me some time to gain a complete understanding of this sector, collect relevant data and statistics before I formally gave a structure to the venture.”

Before embarking upon her flight Tanishk joined the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) at IIM Bangalore in 2010. “It greatly helped me hone my entrepreneurial skills. I went there with just an idea and I came back with a strategy to how to go about that idea.”

After all was conceptualized, the task at hand was to convince the vendors, arrange the finances and find an office space. “The payments from the bank got delayed and we had to evacuate our first rented office after two weeks.” It was a huge challenge but Tanishk’s unabashed enthusiasm kept the project going. In June 2010, the first batch of thirty under the aegis of ‘Streets India’ was inaugurated by former Food and Beverage cabinet minister Honorable Shri Subodh Kant Sahaye. Since then, there has been no looking back.

‘Streets India’ provides street vendors with specially designed vending carts equipped with better lighting facilities, inbuilt dustbins, and potted plants. It encourages use of biodegradable materials. Field supervisors monitor the vending carts on a daily basis. The vending carts are aesthetically designed by a highly qualified team. Streets India has also trained local carpenters to manufacture these carts so that they too find employment. Vendors are trained to cook quality food in hygienic conditions using gloves and aprons. They are taught ways of preparation, presentation and consumer behavior. ‘Streets India’ helps the vendors obtain the required registration number and authentic permission letters from the municipal corporation. The side and back boards are used for advertising. Vendors registered with ‘Streets India’ are provided a share in profits and their carts are insured in case of accidental damage.

**MARKETING**

‘Streets India’ derives marketing strategies from the well-known SOSTAC
model that focuses on the six most important elements of any business: Situation, Objective, Strategy, Tactics, Actions, Control. “We keep using online and offline print and electronic media, social networks and one-to-one approach wherever possible.” Besides, the deserved coverage by newspapers like The Telegraph, The Pioneer, Dainik Jagran, Hindustan Times, The Times of India etc. has spurred its popularity.

FINANCIALS

Streets India did not fit the conventional business model and hence the finances came after laborious efforts. “Nobody agreed to rent their place for training the down-trodden people. Renting in a commercial complex was out of budget. With the help of some seniors from college I managed to get a workplace away from the city.” Arranging money was difficult. “I approached several public, formal and private financial institutions. Nobody wanted to take risk of a college girl. After hardship of almost 8-9 months a senior officer in Canara Bank agreed to finance our first batch of thirty members whose capacity-building program was almost complete. I invested from my savings of three years in training the batch and in office rent, travelling, people mobilization, staff payment and other expenses.”

CURRENT AND FUTURE PLANS

Tanishk’s current plans include “forming a co-operative for funding the street side vending projects, working towards continuous training of street side vendors, adding them to our model and forming SHG (Self Help Group) to start up a chain of cafe and restaurants employing more and more skilled workforce trained by us are our current endeavors.”

Her future plans include technological advancements - installing solar cells, FM radios etc. top the list. Other plans include expansion in various fields of employment. “Streets India is trying to provide a platform for artisans. We have managed to put together an e-commerce website and hoping to establish a chain of outlets showcasing their talent. We are also planning increasing the household incomes of BPL families by training them for various skills, providing them raw materials and selling handicraft items online. We are also working on financial inclusion of
such families with the help of banks.”

Tanishk, for herself, has a few plans lined up. To quench her thirst for knowledge and education, she plans to pursue higher education. In words of William Shakespeare, “Knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven.”

AWARDS
Tanishk Shyamya received the coveted Weekend Leader’s Person of the Year 2010 Award for the her indelible impact on the lives of hundreds of people living below the poverty line, helping them achieve social and financial stability. She has won several accolades including Prerna Award for Social Entrepreneurship at Indian Institute of Management Lucknow, Social Entrepreneurship Award at Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur GES-2011, Young Achiever by Dainik Jagran, First Generation Entrepreneur by Danik Jagran. She was also nominated for the Ashoka Fellowship and the Ford Motors International fellowship!

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS
Tanishk believes in working without anticipating about the fruits the work might reap for you. “If you work hard and sincerely, there is no other reward greater than satisfaction that is derived from doing your bit for the society. Have faith in the Almighty and in yourself. Try with all your strength to do justification with all the responsibilities. God wants each of us to perform, and you will receive the best present of happiness.”

Magnamity in her heart, ambition in her eyes and dedication in her actions, Tanishk exudes excellence and confidence all around her. She is an inspiration for young girls who dare to dream. And dare to fulfill that dream.

Tanishk Shyamya can be contacted at: tanishk.shyamya@gmail.com

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There was a time, not long ago, when the budding entrepreneurs were forty or older. People in the bygone years grew up listening to their stories of how they faced all odds valiantly in the early years and bounced back with immense success later in life. When I first spoke to Anindita, I realized entrepreneurs need not be 45 years old; they could also be a 24 year freshly-out-of-college girl with just a remarkably huge passion and conviction. Meet Anindita, the creative mind behind ‘Gween Toys’.

Anindita, true to her name- which translates to ‘a’ plus ‘ninda’ in Hindi (someone who nobody speaks ill of) - is an immaculate mixture of intelligence, dedication and persuasion. Born in Kolkata and raised in Bhilai (Chhattisgarh), Anindita’s life began as a typical middle-class dream. After completing her schooling from Delhi Public School (Bhilai) in 2001, she moved to Bangalore to pursue her engineering degree in Information Technology from the prestigious RVCE College. Four years of engineering studies and one year of job experience in the same field made one thing certain to Anindita, that her interest lay somewhere beyond the sciences. And this is where the wonder began.

Keen to pursue her interest in designing for children, Anindita switched her career path entirely. In the year 2006, she took up a two and half year post-graduate program in ‘Toy and Game Design’ from National Institute of Design at Ahmedabad. “There are no designers in my family and they (family) do not understand the industry too well. My father was not very convinced about my shift. He always believed that I had the potential to crack the CAT (Common Admission Test) for management studies. I
prepared for CAT during my final year at RVCE and secured 99 percentile. But my interest lay somewhere else”, says the daughter of a mechanical engineer father.

“My husband (then my boy-friend) was the one who had pushed me to rethink my career based on my interests. He has always been supportive of trying out something (that) I’m passionate about. And he has constantly encouraged me to take things to a finish. He is my inspiration”, she says with humility.

She adds enthusiastically, “The idea for ‘Gween Toys’ and studying toy design came when I saw the lack of original and good designs in the Indian toy market and also by realizing the opportunity to use traditional Indian handicrafts to create original and global designs.”

‘Gween Toys’ and the work of designing began in full flow in 2009 immediately after NID course. After working assiduously for almost a year and a half, ‘Gween Toys’ was formally registered as a ‘Pvt. Ltd.’ (private limited) company in early 2011 in Bangalore. “I didn’t leave a job to start Gween. Rather, I took up the job of starting Gween.” She soon launched her first consignment of toys for the US Market via Amazon.com. She was 27 then. Just 27!

Anindita is full of zest and brimming with creativity. Her toys reflect the inner child in her. Ever smiling and ever curious to learn and experiment, she is a promising under-thirty woman to look out for!

COMPANY BACKGROUND

“Gween Toys creates innovative toys that inspire children to have fun while learning. It was started with an aim that children learn more than just their ABCs and 123s. Gween wants children to develop a love of their environment and learn how to preserve its natural resources at a young age. Therefore, each of our toys is created with three key components in mind: education, entertainment and eco-friendliness. Our products are designed for children aged between two to five years”, describes the co-founder of ‘Gween Toys’.

It all began in 2008 December, after Anindita completed two years of course work at NID, when a group mail was sent on their institute-server
by Mr. M P Hariharan, owner of ‘Rezonant Design Services Pvt. Ltd.’, inviting students to pursue their compulsory six months internship with them which would be aimed at designing and manufacturing toys for the American market. Anindita gladly applied, but what she did not realize at that time was that Gween was just an idea then; not even the name ‘Gween’ had been thought of yet. It was during her interview with Mr. Hariharan that she was made aware of the fact that joining Gween would mean setting up a business from scratch. During the same time, Anindita was accepted for a self-sponsored project at RMIT, Melbourne, Australia!

Spoilt for choice, Anindita joined ‘Gween Toys’ for one month (June 2008) before leaving for her project in Australia for three and half months. When she came back from Melbourne, she spent another two months in NID, Ahmedabad winding up her final year project (that was started in RMIT). Right after this she returned to Bangalore in January 2009 and took up the reins of ‘Gween Toys’ as a co-founder. And from then onwards, she completely devoted her time and energy on setting up the venture, taking ‘Gween Toys’ from “paper to plan”. “I was always excited about starting something from scratch and turning ‘Gween Toys’ from mere idea to a small business was the perfect platform as a learning ground for me. Handling that kind of responsibility was daunting but interesting.”

Anindita joined the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) at IIM Bangalore in the summer of 2011. “I took up MPWE just after launching ‘Gween Toys’ in the US market. By that time I had already worked hands on for bringing up a business from scratch. But I felt a formal course on management geared towards entrepreneurship would be just the right value addition – to help me take Gween to further heights. MPWE helped me gain valuable networking and sales skills. It helped me fill the gap between starting a business and making it grow”, says this 29 year old entrepreneur with a shimmer in her eyes that is too perspicuous to be not understood.

“My biggest achievement is making my parents and family proud of me. When Gween was launched, there were a lot of articles both on online and offline media mentioning both Gween and sometimes me as well. It
was then my parents appreciated the true scope of the field. They were extremely happy when they saw that I loved what I did and that my efforts were being acknowledged. This laid all doubts to rest”, says Anindita in a manner corroborating how much her parents’ nod means to her.

‘Gween Toys’ is now two years old and is doing remarkably well, in terms of both customer feedback and the number of products sold. These toys are unique in their high quality manufacture conferring with international standards, eco-friendly material utilization, biodegradability, innovation and possessing designs that are loved by many children and parents. It successfully integrates education and learning with fun and frolic. A portion of the profits from the toys is used to ensure that the children of the artisans have access to proper educational opportunities.

**INDUSTRY**

“Toy design and designing for children, specifically organic design is our USP. Our consumer base exists both in India and abroad - abroad claims a larger percentage. It mainly comprises children aged one to six years old and their parents. Also, adults with a pro-environment mindset are
targeted.” There are currently five designs of toys:

1. Picazee: The artistic zebra with hidden secret
2. Gusto: The windmill that fuels imagination
3. Gwomies: The little family forest with big responsibility (It received the CII Design Excellence Award in Dec 2011)
4. Zarafu: The wise giraffe with a knack for numbers
5. Alfinx: The thoughtful tiger with a love of letters

TEAM

‘Gween Toys’ is a professionally organized venture where experts look after the various requirements of the business. Anindita, the creative director and co-founder is responsible for conceptualization and design of products. Mr. Hariharan and Mr. Abott, the other co-founders, provide the mentorship, marketing expertise and funding for the venture. Anindita also works alongside Mr. Hariharan’s Rezonant Design studio team for Gween’s branding efforts. “We plan to hire a few design and marketing interns as and when Gween Toys expands.”

MARKETING

“Online strategy is via Facebook activities and posting advertisements on design and parenting blogs during festival seasons. Offline, it is done by reaching out to potential retailers in India and abroad. We try pitching to retailers who value organic products design.” When ‘Gween Toys’ was launched in 2011, the online and offline forums, national and international magazines aptly highlighted its value for money and creativity. This promotion of the brand gave an immense boost to sales.

FINANCIALS

“The funding was by Mr. Hariharan and his partner, Mr. Harish Abott.” Mr. Hariharan is credited with running a successful branding and design business for ten years and hence funds were easier to arrange and organize.

CURRENT AND FUTURE PLANS

“We are planning to expand the Gween toy-range by including different eco-friendly materials.” The aim is to increase the varieties and diversify.
Development and the associated work for the same are in progress at full speed.

The future has in store a lot many targets to be achieved and dreams to be fulfilled. “To set up a Gween store – offering all things natural and fun for children” is the prime goal. Also, Anindita plans to exploit the potential Asian and, specifically, the Indian Market for her toys.

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

“I would tell them not to be scared of taking the first step and I would advise to start as early as possible. Planning ahead well in business and life always helps. But I would also remind them not to drop reins midway. It is natural to lose steam. Still, it is better to start and finish – even if the finish is lower than set expectations, than to regret what it might have been if they had persevered some more.” Anindita believes in finishing what you have once started, because you never know how an opportunity may turn out to be.

Anindita Sengupta is an inspiration for many young women out there who are waiting to just push the barrier and come out liberated, following their own choices and dreams. Her parents have indeed named her thoughtfully. There is not one facet of hers which does not inspire me.

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Rudyard Kipling, the British Nobel Laureate says in his poem, “If you can dream... If you can think..., If you can meet with triumph and disaster..., If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you... (then) yours is the earth and everything that’s in it...” Meet Deepthy Menon – Brevity in her words and determination in her actions, a computer virtuoso and a successful entrepreneur!

When you have had a stable high-paying job with the one of the world’s best companies for a staggering 17 years- it is not easy to give it all up. It takes courage to follow your dreams. And Deepthy inspires awe. After all, not many can claim to be creators of 3D computer apps for Apple iOS!

Hailing from a small town of Kerala, most of Deepthy’s childhood was spent shuttling between India and the UK. After her parents settled in India for good, Deepthy started at NIT Calicut for a Master’s degree in Computer Applications after a degree in Physics. To commensurate her abilities, she was offered a position at Wipro, Bangalore via campus placements where she spent two years before moving on to Motorola. She worked at this leading telecom company for 15 fruitful years during which Deepthy held an assortment of responsibilities. “(I) held a wide variety of roles both in engineering as well as GoToMarket organizations, and this experience has helped me to visualize the big picture, rather than being cocooned into a particular slot“, says Deepthy exuberantly.

“My last three years in the company (Motorola) required me to interact with channel partners from large system integrators to small start-ups in
the enterprise mobility space. Here I learnt a lot about external collaboration and solution selling”, she says with a half-moon smile. It was during these years that the insight came knocking. “I then realized that if I was going to branch out, now was the time.” And hence, ‘One3One4’ slowly started to take shape.

To start a business, there are three pre-requisites: idea, talent and networking. Deepthy is a potent mix of all these. Adjusting to new surroundings comes naturally to Deepthy. “Adapting every three years to vastly different environments in India and the UK before I was ten instilled a sense of fearlessness in terms of expanding one's own boundaries. I learnt to appreciate Amar Chitra Katha as well as Disney with equal fascination!” Deepthy’s brainchild is ‘One3One4’, a technology company which is brilliantly branded for bringing Flip Design Pvt. Ltd.’s web-based desktop game ‘Chichi Reef Warrior’ into the Apple iOS platform.

Deepthy’s precociousness, her passion for her work and her magnetic intellectual skills are something that registers on to minds of people within a few seconds of talking to her. And she, undeniably, amazes me.

**COMPANY BACKGROUND**

‘One3One4’ creates 3D applications (games, simulations, interactive learning) for mobile devices by collaborating with creative design companies. *Magic in Mobility* Indeed!

Describing her journey Deepthy reminisces, “After quitting a corporate job in 2011 to pursue my own interests, I began exploring the feasibility of starting a new business venture combining my area of expertise, namely mobility and my passion for computer graphics”. Internet, advancement in technology and the incessant rise in customers for mobiles have opened gates for more innovative 3D applications in the recent years. Her initial research re-iterated creative design companies’ importance in coming up with great user-experiences. And this deep-dive exercise resulted in ‘Chichi Reef Warrior’s’ conceptualization and the collaborative development that followed.

Living in Bangalore, the IT hub of the country, proved to be of immense
value to her. Many creative and interactive media-based companies were willing to enter this domain to complement their portfolio by adding mobility software skills. Here Deepthy saw the opportunity of “a well-thought out” collaboration. “One of the biggest challenges was to find the right partner and I was clear that I did not want to compromise on quality for my first project and that too in an entirely new area; it took me six months to meet the right people.” But the efforts paid off. ‘Chichi Reef Warrior’ was successfully released in the Apple Store in October 2012. “We did not expect Chichi to break any barriers, but it is doing remarkably well considering it was the first attempt for both parties on iOS. Chichi crossed a 1000 downloads within 3 days of its release”, Deepthy says with a passion that is almost contagious.

Deepthy joined the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) in early 2012 which further helped in formalizing her idea. “When I joined for MPWE, it had already been a year since I quit my job and was exploring the white space between creative art and mobility. I was half-way through developing a product, and had many questions regarding the financial and legal implications. The course helped me to piece everything together.”

When asked how did her family and friends react to her starting a venture? “The major concern my family had whether I would be able to adjust with just a Hotmail id, after the glitz and glamour of corporate life. Within three months, I quietly showed my husband some stuff I had developed which laid all apprehensions to rest. People at work thought I was going through a mid-life crisis, whereas for me, it was a mid-life awakening”, she answers. Deepthy has always been amongst the most determined lot. “My maternal grandfather to whom I was very close, was a successful entrepreneur who started quite late in his life, and I guess this is also a tribute to him.”

TEAM

As of now, Deepthy alone handles everything from software development to marketing, and collaborating with external entities as and when the need arises, forming virtual teams with utmost perfection. “I am a one-woman army”, was her laconic reply!
INDUSTRY

With an increase in consumer base for mobile phones in India and abroad coupled with rising awareness and appetite for 3-Dimensional learning and entertainment platforms, interactive applications for various operating systems like Apple, Android and Symbian etc. are on the rise. ”By 2016, Gartner estimates that there will be more than 300 billion apps downloaded annually, or more than ten times the amount that were downloaded in 2011.” This makes space for a great potential in terms of business and creativity.

MARKETING

Since ‘Chichi Reef Warrior’ was the first product from a relatively new organization, one of its objectives was market feedback. “‘Chichi Reef Warrior’ went online mainly with the intent of observing the consumer reaction and learning from it. It had bare minimum of marketing that is, just a Facebook fan page and a Facebook ad campaign after release with free Facebook ad coupon worth fifteen hundred rupees.” I have to say – from computers, for computers, with computers! Considering the modest marketing that was employed, ‘Chichi Reef Warrior’ has come out with the flying colors, receiving a very positive response.
THE FUTURE

Since the market demand is on the upsurge, the future holds great dreams and expectations. “Going by Chichi Reef Warrior experience, I feel that App Discovery is the major challenge. Hence a well thought marketing approach is required, in addition to creating a quality product.” Developing new products in a wide arena like games, applications for entertainment and learning-aids is in the pipeline. More aggressive marketing in offline and online media also forms a vital part of the future plan.

Building her own title is one of her short term goals, work for which has already begun in full swing. For the long term, Deepthy wishes to “create a brand with great products”. Also “expanding to other mobile platforms” of the likes of Android, Windows 8 etc. features high on the list.

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Deepthy is inspired by the poem “If” by Rudyard Kipling. Her mantra is “to believe and absolutely believe in ourselves.” When the whole world blames us or doubts us, trusting ourselves is the only way out. Never lose hope no matter how bad the situation is. “Watch the things you gave your life to, broken, and stoop and build ‘em up with worn-out tools. If you can make one heap of all your winnings, and risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss, and lose, and start again at your beginnings.”

Accepting the pros and cons of life and placating ground reality for your benefit is also essential to start your own business. “I feel it’s a waste of effort to portray a perfect life, when we all know that it is the imperfections which make life worth living! This outlook itself frees up a lot of time to pursue one’s own interests.”

In fact, Deepthy’s unique hobbies include collecting caricatures and curios. Truly admirable!

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Kanika Gupta, the damsel from Delhi, is everything one associates with a girl – conversations colored in pink and purple and all texts terminated with a smiley. She is also everything that one associates with a lady – the eternal serenity and the dedication towards work. This was my first impression when I spoke to Kanika, the brain behind the start-up ‘Izel Homes’.

Her brilliance is evident from her eminent academic career. Hailing from Delhi, with slight splashes of Kolkata culture, Kanika was schooled at Montfort School (Delhi). She later attained a Bachelor’s degree in Design, Fashion and Textiles from National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Hyderabad in the year 2008 where her artistic flair won her the ‘Creative Display’ award. Further, she moved on to become the meritorious alumnus of Central Saint Martin’s College of Art and Design, London which was where she completed her MA (Design Studies) in 2010. She explored the domains of sensory, jewelry, fabrics-color and design-marketing and public relations, as Project Manager for various national and international enterprises for three years before she realized interior design was her cup of tea.

“I have always loved beautiful homes. Being a textile designer, I love fabrics and then again interiors and fabrics can be related closely. This has led to the dream in the form of Izel Homes”, she says describing her passion. So why not take up a job at a leading firm, I ask. “I have always been ambitious but not so much about money-driven ambition but more about being passionate about what I want to do. I landed up being a
designer and I figured why work for someone when the creative freedom comes from working for oneself”, she answers. “It took a lot of pushing to start something of my own as I kept looking for my true calling. And the day I started my business I guess I found one.”

The wish to be an entrepreneur stuck her while she was still studying. She joined the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) at IIM Bangalore in 2009. “MPWE gave me the confidence to handle and think big – bigger than I usually thought. Moreover, it was my way of knowing if I was truly meant to be a business woman.” Once she decided her fate, there was no stopping her. “I think I have been a lucky daughter to the coolest parents in the world. They have supported all my decisions without trying to put undue influence or pressure as to what I want to do. They have given that extra push when times have been tough. My mother specially is my biggest strength when it comes to my business”, says the daughter of a successful businessman father and an avid social worker mother.

And thus, the foundation for ‘Izel Homes’ was laid; both literally and metaphorically in 2010. Quoting her role model, Kanika asserts, “(Because) the ones crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do’ – Steve Jobs. A simple enough quote to live by and something that has inspired me. I wanted to do something which makes a difference maybe to an individual or a collective but it should make a difference.” And what better way to make a difference than by making homes from brick-structure houses.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

‘Izel Homes’ is a brand of luxury home interiors. In Aztec, “izel” alludes to uniqueness. The brand was jointly started by Kanika Gupta and Aanchal Paliwal, Kanika’s colleague from London. Now Kanika alone leads the crew.

‘Izel Homes’ is a one-stop solution to adorn your beautiful abode with custom-made, aesthetic and unique interior designs consummated with equally matching one-of-a-kind range of bed-sheets, cushion covers, curtains, table cloth etc. which are no less than a wonder to the eye.
Elaborating, Kanika says, “Our designs are chic and irresistible for anyone considering to liven up their house, anyone with a unique and an exquisite sense of aesthetics and everyone who like their house to feel like HOME by giving it that special personal touch. Textile design and architecture cross paths more than often to give that perfect look to a dream house.”

Taking us through her journey, Kanika articulates, “It started at a whim, an offer, a gap in the market. It turned serious the day we launched ourselves in the market and realized the true potential of what we could offer. For a creative person, I think it starts from being appreciated and it was the same for me.”

Flipping through her designs, I wonder where she gets so many varied ideas from. To this she answers, “I am inspired from the mundane things in life. The combination of my inspirations and my expertise in textiles and interiors brings a fresh approach to the table for interior projects. My romance with history in this contemporary lifestyle is what makes the Izel designs tick like none other! This has fed my creative imagination and the understanding of the possibilities and limitations yet creating new things regularly.”

One of the best and interesting features of ‘Izel Homes’ is the myriad of services it includes within the package. Some being:

- Complete Interiors
- Custom made designer furniture: beds, tables, sofas, chairs etc.
- Customized rugs: woolen, silk
- Wallpaper
- Custom made blinds and curtains
- Bed Linen (bed-sheet, bedcover and cushions)

It also provides consultancy services for accessories which includes advising on the color combinations, maximum space utilization pieces, theme-specific design and much more. ‘Izel Homes’ provides all these professional services at reasonable prices. The cost includes material, management and skilled labor. Once Kanika is given the carte-blanche to
furnish a house, the end product is your dream home standing furnished in front of you. “At Izel, we strive to create not only aesthetically pleasing products but products with quality at par with international standards. Our designs are chic and fresh, and the approach is fairly boutique like. We are here to serve our clients in the best possible way.”

INDUSTRY

‘Izel Homes’ is directed mainly towards the upcoming upper-middle class, the educated and modest income segment, who love art and are willing to experiment and invest in it. In today’s world where your surrounding is a strong resonation of your thoughts, more and more people are aggregating towards professionally managed interior-design solutions. In Kanika’s words, “I cater to a niche segment of the society forming a very small percentage. But this (is the) very group of people that are the aspiring upper class. We call them the upper middle class and the best part about them is that they are slowly but gradually appreciating art and culture.”

Every day the newspaper reports about the youth power that India boasts of. They are the ones who are moving out and living on their own. For them, a place that expresses and manifests their thoughts is high on their list. This is where services like that offered by ‘Izel Homes’ come to
the rescue. Also, with the world becoming a more social place with its fair share of parties hosted at home, decorating your home in the best style is a priority that has added to the market demand.

TEAM

As of today, Kanika alone steers ‘Izel Homes’ and she loves the challenge. “Every day is different and every day I am challenged by new projects, new problems and new solutions. None of my days are similar to the last other than one week in the last one and half years when I was slightly bored”, she writes to me with her trade-mark smiley termination.

MARKETING

Owing to her prior experience in marketing and public relations, Kanika lays enough stress on marketing. She utilizes both online and offline methods. “I have tried to reach out to this segment through word of mouth (the most powerful resource) as well as a bit of internet. Both have been working like magic for me on and off.” An updated website, an active Facebook page and regular Tweets works the trick.

On a more commercial scale, “Exhibitions help to spread the word and find a consumer base outside my home city.” Being a people’s person, networking comes to her aid too. “Links with people I have worked previously before or got introduced online has helped spread my products to tier two and tier three cities of India. I have also managed to display my products in selective stores across India.”

FINANCIALS

Kanika invested in this firm and her dream the entire savings from her previous jobs. The other resources were provided by her parents. “Finances weren’t so difficult, thanks to my parents and my savings from previous jobs. Once the initial amount was invested in the first six months, I did not want to burn holes in the pocket. So I earned and spent, and the resultant is in front of your eyes.”

CURRENT AND FUTURE PLANS

Kanika’s mantra is to love the present of the “present” bestowed upon us. “Live for today and don’t worry about tomorrow. Then again who has
seen tomorrow? I think I have done a good job living by this motto and not fretting about the future. The expansion has been good.”

She also believes in working every day, bit by bit. Her dream for her business, as she puts it, “Increase the turnover and make my company a professionally managed company with some sort of systems in place – these are my major goals.”

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

This happy-go-lucky girl asks each and everyone to believe in the power of dreams. “Don't ever let your surroundings or people bog you down. There is never enough power invested in you by God and your own will, which will stop you from achieving all your dreams. Don't stop and I am sure some day you will find your calling just like me.”

She further shares, ‘Hope is the hat rack on which I hang my dreams’ – Prodigal Daughter by Jeffery Archer. Never give up hope when you have a business on your own. Every rainy day will be followed by the sun and every cloud will have its own silver lining as it’s said.”

For a company that pleases, inspires and motivates to dream, Kanika is a seamless example. She has taught me to smile no matter what and where we are. That’s the overt key to happiness.

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With a smile as vivacious as it can be and a voice that exudes both cheer and candidness, Shruti Gangwar is the kind of women who leaves a deep impression on one’s mind within seconds of first interaction. She is humble as much as she is brilliant.

Shruti has always been an achiever. Her life is a tale that inspires admiration. Born in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh and schooled at a convent in her home town, Shruti cleared one of the toughest entrance exams in the world to secure an admission in Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee in 1996. Throughout her life she has been a multi-faceted woman excelling in both academics and extra-curricular activities. In her college days she actively participated in organizing cultural events, trekking, dance etc. and yet managed to bag one of the first jobs during the campus placements at the IT firm Infosys. This job took Shruti to Bangalore in 2000 where she worked with Infosys for eleven long years.

After such a smooth life, one wonders how the idea of entering into the entrepreneurship domain was sown in Shruti’s mind. “I was doing pretty well in my current job, (but) I was continuously asking myself these questions that there is something more that I should be doing and that's when the seeds of starting something of my own were sown”. She thought of quitting her corporate job many times when her restlessness grew, but it took a long time before she finally took the plunge and bade goodbye to her job in 2011. It so happened that after her daughter started school in early 2011, Shruti felt that she was missing upon her daughter’s activities and achievements and “magic moments” at school
as being a working parent she was left with little time for this indulgence. This was when she realized the yawning communication gap between school and parents. And hence the idea of ‘CoolGurukul’ was conceived in 2011. “The idea was to infuse technological advancements to pave a way for parents and teachers to collaborate using a web platform”, Shruti explains. In 2012, the idea was promulgated formally and February 2012 saw the official set-up and inauguration of ‘CoolGurukul’.

The pioneering venture has completed its maiden year and Shruti’s innovation, passion and vision are fittingly reflected in her venture.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

‘CoolGurukul’ or ‘CoolG’ – as it is popularly known- “offers a set of cloud products consisting of web portal for parents and teachers and set of plug-n-play cloud based communication and collaboration platform for managing institutes.”

‘CoolG’ is aimed mainly for playschools and institutes enrolling children aged between two and six. “This is the time when the need and desire to monitor your kid’s activity is the maximum. The child’s chores for the day, how well he/she performs the small tasks asked of him/her, evaluation by the teacher are important aspects parents want to know all details about. Necessity is the mother of invention, as they say”, says this mother of two children, aged three and seven now. And it holds so true in Shruti’s case!

Talking about support from her family and friends, Shruti humbly puts, “They had always encouraged and supported me in whatever I had done until now. They are and always will be my pillar of strength.” Another support pillar is in the form of the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) that also played a key role. Shruti’s MPWE admission is a story in itself. When Shruti heard about the MPWE program, she wished to do it in the summer of 2011- before leaving her corporate job- to gain an insight. As luck would have it, she could not enroll for MPWE 2011. But she knew she would come back the next year. And she did in 2012. Elaborating upon the rewards of resilience and patience that she gained here Shruti says, “MPWE helped in giving
structure and perspective to lot of things that make a ‘business’. Passion is just one aspect but there are several other factors that can make or break your business, MPWE helped a lot in identifying and handling these areas.”

‘CoolG’ was initiated in the city of Bangalore where there was both market and opportunity for such a venture. “Bangalore being a first-tier city provided a decorous launch-pad.” The people welcomed such a venture along with all its unique features with alacrity.

**SERVICES ON THE PLATTER**

‘CoolG’ enlists some major services that a school can opt for better interaction between the institute and parents. Some being:

- **Social Brand Management**: A social platform to showcase your school’s events by managing online presence.
- **Plug-n-Play Structure**: No worrying about additional software or hardware installations and upgrades.
- **Real Time Engagement**: Between institute and the parent community to share daily activities and updates, plan and co-ordinate calendar events, learning plans
- **Real Time Notifications**: Unified interface to communicate through notice, email and sms and private conversation.
- **Analytics**: Complete bird’s eye on the performance parameters of schools and multiple branches.
- **Assessments**: Complete customized "assessment" and "performance analytics" to identify strengths and weaknesses of each student.

**TEAM**

Before leaving her job in 2011, one of Shruti’s colleagues was “aligned to the idea and hence the team was formed even before the business formalization.” About him Shruti says, “We had worked together in many projects at Infosys and there was a comfort level in working.”

The team consists of Shruti Gangwar, “the innovator”; Rama Kumar R, “the technical guru”; Rahul Bile, “coder on the move”; Sushant Paste,
“the smiling techie”; Ujwal Paladugu, “bank on him web-designer”; John Paul K, “coder, wannabe director” and Ashwath R Bhardwaj, “will do it”. They all together lead the bandwagon!

INDUSTRY

“With more and more parents working today, the market for products like CoolG is ever expanding.” Services like these offer an easily accessible and direct communication platform for teachers and parents alike to discuss and work upon the strengths and weakness of their children. It sometimes also acts as a provision through which parents can keep a tab on the activities of school and administration. It makes communication regular and updated. Opinions, views, problems and revelations can be shared and taken care of at the cost of a click. All these appeal to the parents nowadays.

Also, in today’s time where finding a good playschool or nursery school is a more gruesome task than finding a suitable college, schools enrolled with platforms like ‘CoolG’ have an added advantage with a comprehensive list comparing schools on various parameters available. The demand for business products serving this dual purpose of social brand management for schools and aiding in a well-informed decision for parents is high especially amongst the emerging upper-middle class.

MARKETING

Marketing mainly utilizes networks and offline modes. Visiting potential schools and institutions, organizing demo-workshops and interacting with the staff, all form the back-bone of the marketing strategy for ‘CoolG’. “Marketing through contacts and networks from previous jobs also helps greatly.” On the online front, a dedicated website, Facebook page and involvement through other forms of social media are employed. Shruti’s future plan includes more diversification in this arena.

FINANCIALS

“The venture was self-funded initially. The first customer sign-up was within the first two months and that helped a lot.” Shruti started ‘CoolG’ with small but regular steps. The cost for the web platform was prudently kept low initially so as to assure no bottle-necks in the venture.
FUTURE PLANS

Shruti has an extensive, well-laid out and definite future plan for ‘CoolG’. First on the list is to expand the business to other first-tier cities like Chennai and then add second-tier cities like Pune. Secondly, she is enthusiastic about visiting and contacting more schools to tie-up with ‘CoolG’. Last but not the least, she wishes to launch a “service community site” for parents. A former colleague from MPWE 2012 batch has approached Shruti with the idea to integrate the services offered by ‘CoolG’ to reach out to the parents where the members can discuss and interact on issues concerning their wards. Work on this collaboration is already in running.

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Shruti believes "dream bigger to achieve greater”. Her mantra for success in any venture of life – be it business or the daily chores – are the three Ps: Persistence, Perseverance and Pursuance. “Nothing in life comes easy; to really achieve something, we really need to work hard. Believe in yourself and in your convictions and be resilient. Work hard and follow your dreams. There is no validation for not working hard. Go, take the leap and live your dream. It’s more beautiful than we think!” Shruti says with a never-say-die attitude that has become synonymous to her name.

Shruti’s is an exemplary story that re-instills my belief in the power of diligence and of patience; Tranquility at its best!

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Come Christmas and then New Year or a birthday, the two things that are liked by each one of us is, without any doubt, cakes and chocolates! And if I were to tell you about a place that delivers fresh cakes and special chocolates at your door step, with the guaranteed exotic taste and flowered with a personal touch, you’ll be more than overwhelmed. One such fabulous bakery service is that offered by Shivani – the founder, operator, baker and manager of ‘Exotic Delight’.

Shivani, a Delhi girl by heart, completed her schooling from Convent of Jesus and Mary School, Delhi. She moved on to complete her bachelor’s degree in philosophy (honours) from the coveted Miranda House, University of Delhi. This daughter of a Delhi-based jeweler (Nathu Mal & Sons Jewellers, Chandni Chowk) says, “I have always wanted to be a business-woman. I was in love with the idea of having no boss.” In fact, Shivani has been helping her father with his jewelry business since her college days. Even today, as the proud owner of ‘Exotic Delight’, she manages to take out time from her schedule to help her father.

So why not continue with the jewelry business full-time, I ask her. “Cooking, and more specifically baking, has been my passion since childhood. I used to help my mother in the kitchen when I was young. As I reached college, I began baking cakes and making chocolates for relatives and friends.” Adding she says, “Baking is fun – you can innovate and improvise.” Shivani attended the Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Hotel Management (Delhi) and the Pusa Institute of Hotel Management, Catering and Nutrition (Delhi) to turn her passion into her profession.
Shivani is also the recipient of the prestigious ‘10k Scholarship Program 2010’ by Goldman Sachs where each woman winner with exceptional entrepreneurial skills receives a full scholarship to attend a sixteen week management program at Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

Shivani started her enterprise ‘Exotic Delight’ in 2010 from her home in Delhi using home-kitchen equipment and appliances. Shivani feels that working from home has added advantages, “It makes managing between work and home easier. I am able to give more time to my friends and family.” Coming from a conservative family, home-based business appealed to one and all in her family. “I always preferred it. It gives me the option of flexible times and then there are no rent hassles!”

‘Exotic Delight’, now two years old, has been registering an incessant increase in its consumer base and the varieties of confectionery offered. It is a front-runner in providing quality product at affordable prices. After seeing the pictures of mouth-watering items prepared by Shivani, I can confirm that it has added one more permanent customer to the list!

COMPANY BACKGROUND

‘Exotic Delight’ is a perishable-consumer-goods company dedicated to providing high quality desserts, puddings, cakes, cookies, tarts, chocolates, cupcakes, macaroons to their clients. Their motto is ‘FRESHLY MADE AND FRESHLY SOLD’.

“’Exotic Delight’ started supplying cakes for birthday parties and chocolates and cookies as return gifts. With continual customer appreciation, Exotic Delight started getting bulk orders for weddings, Diwali and corporate gifting etc.”, says Shivani with a twinkle in her eye resembling that of a mother on seeing her child grow.

Further telling me about her journey she says, “I joined Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) in 2010. I came to know about it through a friend.” MPWE was a steering force. “I knew what I had to do, though I lacked awareness of the finer points of setting up a business. MPWE helped me get the transition from hobby to a commercial pursuit.” Once back from Bangalore after the program, Shivani finalized the details and ‘Exotic Delight’ came into being. “My
mother is my biggest inspiration and support. I owe my success to her.”

Shivani’s passion, her zeal to experiment and her imbibed creative-streak is evident in her voice when she tells me, “I am constantly innovating and experimenting with new ideas and keep adding new varieties and flavors in the range of my products like chilly chocolates, amla (Indian gooseberry) chocolates, paan chocolates, ginger chocolates etc.” She also lays sufficient stress on packaging, depending on the customer and occasion. “Packaging, that has to be the unique selling proposition definitely”, asserts Shivani with infectious calmness.

Great taste, variety, flavors and beautiful presentation of each product makes ‘Exotic Delight’ a unique creation and a cut above the rest.

RANGE OF PRODUCTS

In the constantly updated list, the high on demand delicacies are:

1. Cakes (black forest, chocolate truffle, mixed fruit, pineapple, strawberry etc.)
2. Cupcakes (red velvet, chocolate-chip, peanut butter)
3. Teatime cakes (muffins and brownies)
4. Chocolates (assorted chocolates and liquid core chocolates)
5. Cookies (chocolate-chip cookies, almond cookies)
6. Tarts (chocolate, lemon)
7. Pies (banoffie, apple etc.)
8. Soufflé (chocolate, mango, strawberry, lemon)
9. Cheese Cakes (strawberry, mango etc.)
10. Desserts (tiramisu, triffle pudding etc.)
11. Mousse (strawberry, chocolate etc.)
12. Macaroons (strawberry, chocolate, coffee)

INDUSTRY

“Exotic Delight’s customers are corporate clients of the likes of Goldman Sachs, housewives and children.” With the onset of a culture which highly derives its taste from the West, the market has seen more demand for baked items. Also, India has one of the highest population of vegetarians
who are always on the look-out for eggless cakes. “Exotic Delight makes special products for vegetarian people and we do not use any harmful chemicals or preservatives. We also have provision for sugar-free cakes” which makes it one of the very few bakeries offering this service in Delhi.

“We have specialized products made only on order, the packaging and products are customized” which appeals to the upcoming middle-class who prefer hand-picked unique gifting items on festivals but are often short on both skill and time.

TEAM

“We have two employees helping with the preparations, washing and delivery.” Besides this, the de-facto baking, planning the layout of the design, strategizing the marketing policies and managing the revenues and expenditure are all carried out by Shivani. Although she confesses to accepting help from her mother sometimes!

MARKETING

Most of the publicity and advertisement is through word-of-mouth. Shivani adds, “Exotic Delight promotes the products through exhibitions, tie ups, distribution of free samples at kitty parties, circulation of
pamphlets outside schools, colleges and temple (eggless), including fliers in the newspapers, direct mailing and supplying (products) to retailers.” The start-up also operates a Facebook page.

FINANCIALS

‘Exotic Delight’ was started at home with modest investment using the home kitchen appliances like oven, microwave, refrigerator, electric beater etc. The raw materials for baking and packaging are procured fresh when orders are received and hence no large funding is required.

THE FUTURE

“In the future I plan to promote the business on a larger scale and serve the cream clientele with dedication and establish my brand of chocolates and confectionary in India and abroad. It is a dream to have a small cafeteria one day with warm ambience, serving fresh cookies, chocolates, cakes and more along with hot and cold beverages.”

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

“In life there will come times when you’d like to give up. But the true measure of valor is when the going gets tough”, Shivani says asking her fellow would-be-entrepreneurs to “never ever give up”. She persuades all women to dream and work each day to build that dream piece by piece until you see your dream fulfilled. To “trust in yourself and appreciate the support of well-wishers” is her message.

Shivani makes one realize that you don’t have to be great to start; you have to start to be great. Talent, dedication and perseverance are all that is needed to achieve your dream. She inspires to achieve.

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Adrenaline. Yes, that’s the first word that came to my mind when I first spoke to Priya. It is not every day that you come across people, and more specifically women, who have first-hand experience working in the thrilling adrenaline-pumping field of journalism. Being involved in work that makes blood gush through the veins, requires high energy quotient at all times and satisfies the creative instinct in you, is a profession that few pursue. Meet Priya Mulgund Revankar, a journalist by qualification, a jewelry aficionado by heart and a business-woman by mind.

Priya was born in the small town of Gadag, North Karnataka. After completing her schooling and graduation in arts, Priya moved to Bangalore and then to Delhi for a master’s in political science from one of the best universities in the field, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 2002. “My parents were very opinionated, socially conscious and took part in community affairs/events as well as local level politics. This paved my interest towards political science and entering the system.”

Being a book-worm since her childhood and envisaging an interest in politics, Priya attempted the civil services exam several times, but destiny had decided otherwise. She didn’t clear the exam and eventually came back to her early interest – journalism. She worked as a reporter with The New Indian Express in Bangalore covering politics and local affairs for two years (2005-07). Describing her college and journalism days Priya says, “The two years in JNU gave me a great academic exposure and grounding in research/writing. Working as a journalist was the best work-experience I have had till now. I simply loved traveling, interviewing and meeting
new people.”

Priya was working as a journalist when she got married into a ‘business-family’ in the year 2005. Priya’s persistence towards learning was such that when she joined the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) at IIM Bangalore in 2007, she was on maternity leave expecting her first child. The ever eager and curious Priya speaks, “I joined it (MPWE) because I wanted to learn something new and understand what management was all about. It was also an attempt to understand the work my husband was doing. MPWE was my first exposure to management education. MPWE made me understand what business was.” And this was when the entrepreneur in Priya began to emerge. “Gradually I began discussing whatever I learnt at the classes with my husband and started taking an active interest in his firm.”

Priya’s husband was in the family business of manufacture and wholesale of silver jewelry called ‘Karwar Ornaments’ (KO). After her first child was born she realized that the time-consuming field of journalism would be tough to manage, at least for a few years. During this time, her interest in her family business began to grow. Priya joined ‘KO’ and her brainchild was to move the business from wholesale to retail in silver jewelry. Priya worked actively and whole heartedly to set up the first retail shop for KO. ‘The KO Shop’ was officially inaugurated in Bangalore in June 2008.

Priya is perseverance personified. She is an embodiment of doing what one loves and loving what one does. Priya has the enviable balance of being quizzical and quixotic at the same time.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

‘The KO Shop’ was a small outlet situated near her home so that she could take care both of her small baby and this new venture. Priya was keenly involved in the setting up of this store. Priya says, “I personally supervised the setting up of the store and spent time managing it. I was responsible for everything else other than procurement of jewelry. Within a year we received good response from the residential community surrounding us. At this time I also planned and created a marketing/advertising strategy for our store using my experience in journalism.”
There was a lot to be done and achieved to shift from the behind the scene work of ‘KO’ as a wholesale business to the limelight patch as a retail business in the form of ‘The KO Shop’. Previously the manufacturing activity was very loosely organized and run as a traditional family business. “The jewelry pieces were not photographed and were supplied to various retailers across Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai who sold it under their own name. There was no credit given to KO.”

Although Priya sincerely handled the reigns of ‘The KO Shop’, she always felt that this was a transient career for her and that she would get back to her writing and journalism work when her son grew up. In fact, during this time Priya was actively involved as work-from-home freelancer for an online community magazine started by her batch mate in MPWE.

But the rewards of hard work are always sweeter. With consistent efforts, the store started doing well and she got involved full–time. “We renovated and enlarged the store in 2010 . The success of our Bangalore store led to setting up more branches while the factory in Karwar also set up a retailing unit. The entire focus of the company shifted to retailing. In 2011 we set up our second store in Bangalore at a high street location in Indiranagar.” And thus, Priya’s impressive idea brought about an evolution from wholesale to retail in ‘Karwar Ornaments’.

Achieving balance between family and work is easier said than done. “There were times when I would carry my ten month-old son and run the store. When my children were extremely young I worked behind the scenes at my own convenience. Even now I try to work when the children are in school and try to spend the evenings with them.” Does she miss journalism, I ask her. “I had to decide between journalism and retail. It was a personal struggle for me. But my husband and family have always supported me.”

More recently, Priya has expanded ‘The KO Shop’ into an online shop- www.thekojewelleryshop.com. “The many new online businesses like Myntra and Jabong aroused my curiosity and interest in the e-commerce sector.” KO is touching new milestones and Priya has the quintessential role of catalyzing the change.
INDUSTRY
Silver is the new gold! Silver is cheaper than gold whose sky-rocketing prices are making it unaffordable as jewelry. Estimates show that silver jewelry market will grow enormously in the next few years. The range of products offered in silver jewelry is tremendous, including ‘jhumkas’, ‘bali’, ‘earrings’, ‘necklaces’, ‘pajeb’ etc. These pieces are available at nominal prices starting from a few hundred rupees at ‘KO’.

Priya explains meticulously, “We focus on a very specialized product – silver jewelry. The Revankars are traditional goldsmiths, they belong to the community of goldsmiths settled along the Goa and Karnataka coast and are famed for their mastery and styling in jewelry making.”

TEAM
Priya Revankar conceptualized the online venture and is actively involved in shaping the aesthetics of the shop. Mallika Viswas is the technology head and talent behind the online-store website. Vinod Sebastian is a freelance photographer who ensures that the beauty of pieces reflects on paper. Bharat Revankar, Priya’s husband, manages the finances.

MARKETING
Priya being a thorough professional knew the avenues that correct marketing can provide. “Using all that I had learnt at MPWE about branding and marketing, I decided that we had to brand our store and products. I convinced the family to hire a consulting company from Delhi to create a brand identity for us. The company created a logo, brochures, photographed jewelry, set up a website and created advertisements. The branding was done simultaneously for both Karwar Ornaments and the retail wing. The branding effort helped give us an identity and set up our unique selling proposition – which is handcrafted silver jewelry.”

Besides hiring external consulting agency, Priya utilized her experience in
journalism and personally wrote articles for magazines and online websites.

FINANCIALS

The financing was arranged by her husband and the ‘Karwar Ornaments’ firm that her in-laws owned and managed. The finance and accounts are handled by her husband.

CURRENT AND FUTURE PLANS

Taking business to greater heights is what an entrepreneur dreams of. Priya has the glass full to the brim for the future. Elaborating upon her current plan “We are in the process of setting up more retail outlets in Calcutta (West Bengal) and Chennai.” The list of goals for the future comprises of “Expansion as a national and international retail chain for jewelry with an organized structure which is professionally managed. To make our online store thekojewelleryshop.com the most trusted and recognized destination for buying jewelry online.”

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTRPRENEURS

“Have faith in your abilities; women have many unique qualities which can be of great help when you are setting up a business. And if you do not know something, don’t be afraid to learn from those who do. Structured courses like the MPWE are really great for women entrepreneurs so I would recommend that any woman who is serious about becoming an entrepreneur definitely attend one.”

There is an exemplary aura and a conspicuous charm about the way Priya Mulgund Revankar works her way through the known and unknown. Impeccably organized and delicately solemn, Priya is truly an inspiration.

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John F. Kennedy, a former President of the United States rightly said, “Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity.” Priya Hendi’s life and business reflects this tenet verbatim. Today her start-up ‘Aditi Fitness’ has successfully carved its niche in the fitness world.

The one quality that was ubiquitously and unanimously praised by each former client of hers, when I contacted them for my research, was Priya’s imbibed conspicuous humility. After interacting with Priya, I couldn’t agree more. Born in Belgaum and brought up in Hubli, Karnataka, Priya completed her school and college with a degree in commerce in the year 1991. Priya was keen to pursue a post-graduation degree in computer science but destiny had something else in store for her. Priya was married just after her final exams and shifted base to Vijayanagar, Bangalore. “We may not go where we intend to go, but end up where we need to be.” Although business runs in Priya’s blood - her father being a successful businessman and her mother too handling the business in spells - this mom of an eighteen year old daughter says, “I hadn’t imagined ever that someday in future I would be running my own business!”

Tracing back her journey she adds, “I tried working for someone a couple of times but it was not inspiring enough. In fact, I quit within two days. But there was always an urge in me to do something.” This urge paved the way for something great. “By 2004, my daughter had grown up and I mentioned to my husband that I would like to do something. He suggested that I begin a fitness center for ladies.”
Priya has always been very passionate and zealous about healthcare. “My dad is a strict disciplinarian as far as health is concerned and that has inculcated healthy eating and exercising habits in me. It so happened that we were staying in a rented house on the ground floor and in the same building, the house on the floor above was vacant and was let out by our owner. My husband suggested that I could use the place for the fitness center”, says Priya with eyes glittering with ebullience! Dearth of a decent fitness center for women in the area was a major trigger. Thus, after one year of incessant efforts 'Aditi Fitness', a center exclusively for women, was inaugurated in Vijayanagar, Bangalore in 2004.

Priya is an alumnus of the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) 2005 batch at IIM Bangalore. When she joined this program, ‘Aditi Fitness’ was nine months old, with some hundred plus members registered. As the ever-humble lady puts it, “The program enabled me to look from a broader perspective and clearly into where and how my business was situated in the market, from both competitors' as well as customers' angle. I then began to strategize and visualize my plan, playing the bigger game confidently and with ease – being reassured by the guidance and encouragement from the faculty.”

‘Aditi Fitness’ has completed eight years now with over 1500 members having already experienced the bliss of working out here. Priya, now 43 years old, is an example to the world that very woman is unique and can be powerful in everything that they choose to take on, be it raising children, managing home or profession. And that it is never too late to start what you love. A sincerest believer in the Almighty, this magnanimous lady gives away 10% of her earnings to charity each year. To walk and grow and take others along with you along the path, such is the perspicacity that resonates with Priya.

**COMPANY BACKGROUND**

‘Aditi Fitness’ is a working-out center for women that provides dedicated training to improve the health, fitness and well-being of its members with the help of its state-of-art equipment, certified trainers and healthy conducive environment.
'Aditi Fitness’ has become extremely popular with the women of Vijayanagar area in Bangalore for various reasons, with the most important being that it is an ‘only for women’ facility. This allows more women to shed their inhibitions and work-out. Written communication with some of the members highlighted that this is one of the prime reasons for them choosing ‘Aditi Fitness’. Flexible timing is another major attraction as members can drop in at any time from 6 am to 11 pm. And being one of the first fitness centers for women in Vijayanagar, it is also a place for sharing and talking with other women of the neighborhood.

‘Aditi Fitness’ and Priya have both come a long way since its inception. The proud owner says, “The success I enjoy from this business and the time, energy and commitment that I am able to bring forth over these years comes from my family. My parents are my biggest inspiration. My husband and daughter have been my support-pillar throughout.”

When asked what she loves the most about her business, pat came the reply, “A major advantage here is that I get to spend time at home with family in the afternoon and also attend to the work there. I also get to celebrate festivals at home without having to apply for leave, since the women will be home during such times.”

SERVICES ON THE PLATTER

‘Aditi Fitness’ has a lot to offer from heavy exercises to light natural ones. A diet consultation is also provided to all their members. The training is provided in various forms such as:

- Aerobic/cardio: It aims to improve blood circulation and pressure and breathing.
- Strength training: It helps in increasing bone density which facilitates absorption of calcium into bones for a toned body.
- Power yoga: For greater flexibility and relaxation.
- Pilates: Focuses on core muscles’ exercise, stimulates harmony within various parts of the body via dancing.
- Diet consultation: It is recommended to beginners on their request. A well-balanced diet chart is prepared on factors such as age, health, lifestyle etc.
INDUSTRY

Being healthy and maintaining a fit and lean body is on everybody’s high quotient, especially in a fast paced and stressful world of today. ‘Aditi Fitness’ caters to a wide variety of customers like:

“Generally it is women who are overweight, or in few cases underweight, who enroll themselves to reach optimum weight. They make some new friends and like to spend time with them.”

“Another category is students and professionals – they are the busy bees. They work out quickly and are on their appointed time, trying with much determination to work-out every day.”

“There are others including mothers and housewives who, having to constantly juggle between their various tasks and prefer flexible hours.”

“There are few young girls who visit for short duration to lose weight to look their best on their engagement or wedding day!”

Most of the clientele is the women population residing in the local area, though “there are visitors from another city or area also, who work-out and grasp a few things, and try to make the best of their holiday stay.”

TEAM

‘Aditi Fitness’ boasts of qualified and certified teachers and trainers, each with their special field of expertise and interest. The team comprises of Anjallee Shankardas and Deepti – certified power yoga instructors; Shruti - Reebok trainer; Chetana, Vandana, Siri - visiting dieticians; Isha - dance choreographer.

Priya works for over ten hours a day to attend to enquiries and work related calls. She browses through fitness journals and undergoes several new trainings to keep herself up-to-date about fitness and technology and to ensure smooth function and rapport with the members.
MARKETING

“‘Aditi Fitness’ is registered with ‘Just Dial’ telecom service. Apart from circulating pamphlets at the time of inauguration and about a year later during summers, there have been no other commercial advertisements.” Aditi Fitness has garnered a lot of trust among its members since the time of its commencement and these members suggest and recommend it to their friends and family. “There is a lot of word-of-mouth advertisement - When the family, friends, neighbors, colleagues notice a healthy and confident change in their (members’) appearance or when the clients themselves have their family members or friends enroll with us.”

FINANCIALS

‘Aditi Fitness’ was started in a rented house a floor above Priya’s house. Priya applied for a personal loan of Rupees 0.7 million from Citibank, to invest in equipment, maintenance and instructors. She had initially rented it on a lease for fifteen years. She has now purchased the building where her house and gym are located.

THE FUTURE

Priya aspires to include more accessories and add new programs for providing varied work-outs and to cater to a wider client base. “Boot camp and kickboxing will be introduced this season. I also plan to add a lady physiotherapist’s services to cater to injured or pregnant women. Zumba classes will begin from next month.”

There is a lot more in store for the future, mainly in terms of expansion of
the enterprise. “We plan to raise a structure on the second floor of the building for extending the gym premises. The work is likely to begin after six months.” For Priya, life is a boat that sails to explore new horizons.

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

“Women today are saddled with a dual role – managing household family responsibilities and competing in the employment area on parameters of evaluation that are more-often-than-not favorable to men. This takes its toll on women in the form of increased stress. Stepping into entrepreneurship offers women an opportunity to set up an environment where they can design the parameters of internal performance evaluation, decide the target customer focus and devote time to their business while juggling the pressures of their dual role.” With a persuasive fire and twinkle in her eyes, she says “go, try it out and express yourself. Being an entrepreneur is a privilege that few women enjoy.”

Priya is an inspiration for the thousands of women who want to make the very ordinary into something superbly extra-ordinary. Her sunshine smile radiates joy and fervor. Humility in verve, passion in words, determination in work, that’s Priya for you!

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In this world it is rare that a few influential words can completely transform the journey of a person – her experiences, her struggles, her disappointments and her eventual successes. Uma belongs to the prerogative. Listening to her, there is just one quote that truly resonates through my mind each time: Paulo Coelho’s words from his book ‘The Alchemist’, “When you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it”. Here I present to you my rendezvous with Uma Janapareddy - an entrepreneur, an inspiration and an aspiration.

Uma’s life is a tale that can be described as resilience at its best. Her story is the perfect example of the adage ‘when the going gets tough, the tough gets going’. Uma was born in Machilipatnam, Andhra Pradesh and did her schooling all over the state owing to her father’s transferrable job. Being passionate about health and nutrition, Uma enrolled for a bachelor’s degree in home science at Government College for Women in Guntur. But destiny took over when her father got transferred to Hyderabad. Taking it as an opportunity to travel and explore, Uma switched her curriculum to join the bachelor’s degree in applied nutrition in Hyderabad in 1986. Uma has always been a dreamer, an experimenter and an achiever. Looking back Uma says, “As a teenager I grew up dreaming of becoming an airhostess because I loved flying. My father being in government service I had lots of interaction with Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service officers especially those who were on training. During my graduation I was inspired by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister and Mrs. Kiran Bedi, the first woman
Indian Police Service officer. I appeared for the Indian civil services exam twice to get into the Indian Police Service.” Twists and turns in her life could never break Uma’s belief in herself and her actions.

During the last year of her graduation, Uma got married and the dreams of this independent young woman were kept on hold. “My husband had a job that demanded extensive travelling. My parents were very supportive of anything that I did post marriage. For me, my top priority has always been my children. I began to think of starting a venture only after my children reached an age that they could take care of themselves to a certain extent.” Keen on a work-from-home venture, Uma chose to do different courses in fashion designing in Bangalore. While she gave all her attention to the growing years of her two boys, she also took out time to volunteer for a not-for-profit organization to do her bit for society. Her sincerity and commitment towards her work won the hearts of many and she was elected as the national president of the organization. Uma has also worked with Mr. Chiranjeevi’s regional party in Andhra Pradesh for a year. Her experience of over ten years in various regional and national level organizations nurtured many facets of her personality.

In 2010, Uma joined the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs (MPWE) at IIM Bangalore where she presented a startup business plan in the handloom sector. Describing her MPWE experience she speaks, “The course gave me the confidence to run a business end to end. The most important aspect was the planning process that helped me understand what it takes to start a business and sustain it.” The same year, Uma started a successful social enterprise from her home in Bangalore – designing saris. “The idea was to help the weavers in the unorganized sector. My dream was to reach out to these people and make them co-entrepreneurs and share in the profits.” During this time, Uma thoroughly enjoyed the travelling and innovation that her business brought with it, but her insatiable passion still searched for new horizons.

Chasing your dreams even when everything is well in life takes an amount of courage and conviction that is the quality of the truly successful. She decided to quit the handloom business in 2011. Around this time, Uma was presented with an opportunity to start working to develop software
solutions for the clinical research industry and she seized it immediately. Her new venture ‘SyMetric Systems’ came into existence in 2012 to develop state of the art software solutions to monitor patient handling and drug handling during clinical trials.

Over a year has passed since she started to her new venture. Life is less than a roller coaster ride for her, with the unimaginably hard troughs and equally astounding achievements. But it is Uma’s sinuosity, serenity and simplicity, accompanied by a smile that could light a thousand aspirational hearts, that has kept her acumen scintillating with unflinching fortitude.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

“SyMetric Systems is the brainchild of a group of highly-talented professionals with in-depth exposure to the Clinical Research and Software industries”, says Uma, the founder of SyMetric Systems.

Journeying us through the pre-inception days Uma articulates, “Towards the end of 2011 and early 2012, while discussing with a group of people in the clinical research industry, I realized that there is a unique opportunity to create easy and simple to use software solutions at a lower total cost of ownership. There are multiple players and solutions in this field, but none of them are flexible. I immediately started working on the modalities.” She interviewed many experts from pharmaceutical industry and clinical research industry to understand the real opportunity and create her own unique selling proposition. Software development is not Uma’s forte. But the determination gene that is ever conspicuous in Uma helped her tame this unexplored area. She continues, “As I am not from a software development background, I took help from my husband and a few friends for high-level guidance to design the product. I also engaged the services of a few technical experts. The design was ready in a record time of two months. I rented an office space in my apartment complex. I started recruitment in March-April. I was lucky to find the right people immediately. I started with an architect, a web designer and four developers on 28th April 2012.” It was then she realized that this life had presented her with this venture to sincerely commensurate her passion. Amazingly, as if destiny was orchestrating and the universe was
conspiring, everything from conception, to design, to recruitment, to office space just fell in place.

Destiny began planting some testing times for Uma also. As the ever-graceful lady puts it, “Around Aug 2012, when we were just a few weeks away from completion of the development phase, we realized that our architect drifted away from intended design features and vision for the product. We had no option but to replace him, while keeping intact the deadlines. This was very stressful.” But soon an acquaintance of Uma, who happened to be working in the same field, contacted her and the rest is history. They revamped the design in a record time of ten days to bring the project back on track. The fruits of her hard work were reaped when the validation of the project was successful during the first trial. In March 2013, SyMetric Systems launched its first project in Bangalore.

While things are moving swiftly in her venture, Uma has to face a new challenge now. Her husband has to move to Hyderabad for work and she would now have to juggle between home and business in two different cities. Knowing Uma, I am sure that she’s going to come with the flying colors as always.

Uma is one of those immaculately balanced persons whose consistent exuberance in times of success and failures alike is worth admiring. Striving and surviving all with sunshine colors, Uma is an archetype of suppleness, igniting many to never give up.

INDUSTRY

SyMetric Systems provides comprehensive solutions for clinical trials management. The scope and the true potential of this field is still untapped and is expected to grow as more research and development work requiring clinical trials is required in industries like pharmaceuticals, healthcare and cosmetics. SyMetric Systems aims to provide the unified interface for IWRS (Interactive Web Response System), EDC (Electronic Data Capture), CDMS (Clinical Data Management System) and CTMS (Clinical Trial Management System). With the noteworthy allocation of time and resources by national and international governments and organizations, it is a good time to enter this niche market.
TEAM

Uma heads the marketing, sales, finances and business development activities of the enterprise. She hired an architect and four developers in the initial phase. She monitors the technical aspects of the projects and product development, with the help of some industry experts.

MARKETING

As SyMetric Systems develops industry solutions, the focus is on corporate marketing. Uma and her team hold regular meetings and showcase their products to prospective clients. Word-of-mouth publicity through established networks and contacts is also employed. An easy-to-navigate website enhances the market visibility of the organization.

FINANCIALS

The startup capital required for the business was entirely managed via savings. The initial requirement was primarily for setting up office infrastructure, sales and marketing collaterals and hiring the appropriate team. “Currently we are constructing our house at Hyderabad. Managing the finances for the house construction, while keeping a constant flow of investment for my business is like walking on tight rope.” Investing hard-earned savings in a business venture at this juncture, now that’s what they call passion. And confidence!

CURRENT AND FUTURE PLANS

SyMetric Systems is already scaling new heights and there is a lot more it has to offer in the coming years. In the near future, the company is expected to develop and launch two more projects. Long term plans include collaboration with a Canada-based company. There are talks and discussions are in progress for a potential merger or exclusive agreement to support some of the international customers. As it is said, sky is the limit for those who seek beyond the boundaries.

MESSAGE TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Uma is very inspired by the following two quotes from her two favorite role models.

‘Have a bias towards action – let’s see something happening now. You
can break that big plan into small steps and take the first step right away.’ – Indira Gandhi.

‘There are self-chosen exercises to move forward. There is nothing unfinished on my agenda. I do whatever I can for the day. Simple! If I were to die today; I will depart with nothing impending.’ – Kiran Bedi.

In Uma’s words, “Every woman is a power house. Each one is special in her own way. We don’t need any one else but ourselves to acknowledge this. There is nothing a woman cannot achieve that she puts her heart to. Most of the times our energies are misplaced with trivial aspects of life. Channelize that powerful energy to those aspects that nurtures your inner self, those things that make a difference to your life and to that of others and to the community at large. Transformation of a nation begins from home, and the responsibility rests on our able shoulders. Break those self-imposed barriers and see life with a renewed perspective....its just beautiful.”

Uma’s anecdote is an inspiration to many women. Her life is a story of how a woman faces all odds valiantly, strives harder each time to uphold her dreams and stands rock-solid even when the times are unfavorable. Her qualities are the words we generally read in books. Her demeanor, her exquisite way of handling situations at hand, the never-say-die attitude and her imbibed resilience make her a trailblazer.

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Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs

In an effort to encourage, empower and educate potential women entrepreneurs to create their own business or social enterprise or to grow their existing enterprise, the Nadathur S. Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (NSRCEL) at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) conducts a six week long Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs annually every summer at IIMB campus.

This unique program held every year since 2004 requires participants to prepare and present a business plan for their proposed or existing business or social enterprise. Many participants of previous programs have taken their business plan forward to start new enterprises or have initiated growth in their on-going enterprise. This program is specifically designed for women entrepreneurs to build their network and is focused on guiding and enabling them to identify business opportunities and develop a viable and sustainable plan for their proposed enterprise. All participants are required to present their business plan to the group in class and submit a copy of their business plan for evaluation to receive a certificate of program completion. Prizes with certificates are awarded for the best business plans as judged by faculty and entrepreneurs. Options exist to present to venture firms and angel investors.


This book features ten interesting start-up cases of the alumni of the Management Program for Women Entrepreneurs. Four earlier books in the series are available – Inspiring Women to Start Innovative Enterprises (released 2009), A Tryst with Women Entrepreneurs (2010) & Zeitgeists: New Age Women Entrepreneurs (2011) and Biz-Inked (2013). Over the years, the MPWE has gained considerable goodwill among entrepreneur/funding circles. For details of the current MPWE program check the link: http://www.iimb.ernet.in/executive-education/open-programmes-long-duration-programmes
Also available in this series on startup cases of MPWE alumni of IIM Bangalore

**Zeitgeists: New Age Women Entrepreneurs**  
Irene Mary Varughese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hema Deepak</td>
<td><em>Pet day-care centre</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sona Shareef</td>
<td><em>Coffee shop exclusively for women</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subhatra Priyadarshini</td>
<td><em>Customized chocolates</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atraeyee Purkait</td>
<td><em>Steel and pickles</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girija Ramachandran</td>
<td><em>Online customized shirts</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parul Sharma</td>
<td><em>Online student recruitment services</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aarti Mohan</td>
<td><em>Social development</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Chaudhuri</td>
<td><em>Executive coach &amp; consulting</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Published September 2011, Printed Book (Rs.100), E-Book (Rs.50) on Pothi.com

**A Tryst with Women Entrepreneurs**  
Sharika S Nair

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shruti Singh</td>
<td><em>Handwriting analysis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Richa Bajpai</td>
<td><em>Environmental services</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maura Chari</td>
<td><em>Textile export services; online shopping</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parvathi Menon</td>
<td><em>Management consulting with a focus on social enterprises</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Chaitra Harsha</td>
<td><em>Bio-consultancy</em></td>
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<td>Sarita Mishra</td>
<td><em>Renewable and environmental industry</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalpana Krishnaswami</td>
<td><em>Biotechnology</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. S. Mamtha</td>
<td><em>Energy-efficient lighting solutions</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rashmi Gowda</td>
<td><em>Centre for GMAT training; Real estate and infrastructure</em></td>
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Published August 2010, Printed Book (Rs.100), E-Book (Rs.50) on Pothi.com

**Inspiring Women to Start Innovative Enterprises**  
Sria Majumdar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babita Jaishankar</td>
<td><em>Fashion and image consultancy</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jyothi Ramnath</td>
<td><em>Personalized gifting</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mukta Darera</td>
<td><em>Life orientation</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nidhi Jain Seth</td>
<td><em>Awards and recognition; K-12 Schools</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lalitha Bilgi</td>
<td><em>Social enterprise</em></td>
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<td>Raksha Sriram &amp; Divya Raghuram</td>
<td><em>Arts center</em></td>
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<td>Pragnya Wakhlu</td>
<td><em>Music and dance therapy</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Madhuri Vaidyeswar</td>
<td><em>Health center</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meera K</td>
<td><em>News publication</em></td>
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Also available in this series on startup cases of MPWE alumni of IIM Bangalore

Biz-Inked
Alisha Arora & Divya Nandwana

Mithan and Swati (Personalized greeting cards)
Neelima Vobugari (Customer relationship management; web design consulting)
Sheetal Goel (Edu-mentoring)
Sangeeta Devni (Helping startups grow)
Shruti Tibrewal Oberoi (Financial research firm and customized packaging)
Jaahnnavi Katti (Soft skills training and executive coaching)
Kusum R H (Tax and regulatory consulting)
Yeshasvini Ramaswamy (Strategy and business management consulting)
Geethadevi (Project management consultancy)
Anju Dave Vaish (Strategic communications consultancy)
Ramya Kannan (Food testing services)
Aparna Viswanathan (Wedding planners)
Usha Satish Mudukutore (Inspired interiors)
Hema Ratna Singh (Brush manufacturing industry)
Ramya Bopanna (Recruitment firm)
Soundariya Krishnaswamy (Wellness spa)
Vasudha R (South Indian food products)
Geetha Manoneeta (Cultural excellence and entrepreneurship)

Published January 2013, Printed Book (Rs.100), E-Book (Rs.50) on Pothi.com

Books in progress in this series on startup cases of MPWE alumni of IIM Bangalore

Cases by Shreya Gupta

Cases by Pooja Rai
Sonali Jain is currently an undergraduate student at Netaji Subhas Institute of Technology, University of Delhi, and is pursuing Bachelor of Engineering in Instrumentation and Control.

A mathematics aficionado, Sonali is the recipient of various National Level Math Olympiad awards. When not daydreaming or pursuing her amateur interest in finance and economics, she likes to indulge in reading, blogging and solving Sudoku.

Occasionally, she tries to juggle between sketching and debating. Talking incessantly is the forte of this fun loving, care-free soul. She wishes to pursue a degree in management in the future.

Her family is based in New Delhi. She can be contacted at 2103.sonali@gmail.com