

PRICE ₹250. MARCH 15, 2019

INDIA Forbes

Priyanka Chopra Jonas

First
Bollywood.
Then
Hollywood.
Now Silicon
Valley



MARY KOM
GOES THE
DISTANCE

UBER'S LEAD
#LADYENG

DEEP-TECH
DIVAS

KASHMIR'S
STARTUP
SISTERS



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Welcome to the
Forbes INDIA
Tablet Edition



The women at Forbes India

Miss Representation

Underrepresentation, exclusion and trivialisation are realities women have to grapple with in virtually every sphere of life, and one arena in which such gender inequality is stark is sports. And the coverage of it. Sporting achievements of women are often devalued by making unfair and unfavourable comparisons with male counterparts, and a disproportionate focus on their sexuality tends to diminish their skill and performance.

In this issue of *Forbes India's* W-Power Trailblazers, our team of photojournalists comprising Madhu

Kapparath, Amit Verma and Mexy Xavier, with more than a little help from a pan-India network of freelancers, combed the country to tell the stories of India's sportswomen through pictures. Each

photograph tells a story, sometimes heart-warming, other times heartrending, on occasion both. For instance, girls deep in the interiors of Odisha who can't afford shoes reserve the weekend for hockey tournaments. The winning team takes home a goat. And a picture that will stay etched in your mind is of Sowmiya and Vedika, two of India's fencing hopefuls travelling in a crowded sleeper coach from Thiruvananthapuram on India's southern tip to Silchar in the northeast—that's about 3,700 km over three days, each way—to participate in the Senior National Fencing Championship in Guwahati, Assam.

Well, that's the reality of Indian sport: We recognise our heroes only when they win, not when they're getting ready to.

Mary Kom remembers how it was before her World Championship wins and the Olympic medal: Crammed in a room of four in the peak of Delhi summer. "We would just buy glucose and drink. That would be our so-called diet," Kom tells Kathakali Chanda in 'Punch and Mary'

on page 48. And open water swimmer Bhakti Sharma tells Kunal Purandare in 'Turning the Tide' how difficult it still is to get sponsorships—even after crossing the English Channel and the Strait of Gibraltar and winning the Lake Zurich Swim, one of the world's longest swimming marathon races.

The lead story of our W-Power issue is on a woman who played Kom on the big screen. She's a diva who's made it to covers of film and fashion magazines for her glamour, and acting and singing chops. But that's easily less than half of the reason for Priyanka Chopra Jonas

gracing the cover of *Forbes India*. As evolutions go, few Indian actors—male and female—can claim to have made the transition from the local silver screen to Hollywood. But it doesn't stop there with Chopra Jonas. After 17 years, almost

60 films and an entrepreneurial foray into production and talent promotion, she has stepped further where no Indian actor and few in Hollywood have tread: Into tech investing. "I'm a big fan of technology, of new ideas," PC told Monica Bathija and Salil Panchal in an exclusive interview. Go to page 24 for more on how PC turned VC.

This is also an apt platform to introduce you to the women who power *Forbes India* (see picture above). Look out for their bylines in the pages—and issues—to come. The issue itself is a collection of 19 stories on women from diverse fields, from sports and entertainment, to business and entrepreneurship, to politics and activism. These are women who are working towards, and creating change. As Pankti Mehta Kadakia, who anchored this package, puts it: "Very often, women in power are afraid to showcase their personalities, or, indeed, their femininity. It's okay to demand high-level policy changes, but also to discuss your beauty routine on Instagram." Touché.


We recognise our heroes only when they win, not when they're getting ready to



Best,

BRIAN CARVALHO
Editor, *Forbes India*

 brian.carvalho@nw18.com



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(Forbes 2018)

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INDIA Forbes [On The Cover]



THIRD ACT

Actor, singer and now businesswoman, Priyanka Chopra Jonas is using her celebritydom to improve lives at the intersection of technology and feminism

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Priyanka Chopra Jonas (right) is an investor in Whitney Wolfe Herd's dating app Bumble

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On the cover: Photograph by: Mexy Xavier, Digital Imaging by: Sushil Mhatre

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Bengaluru - Network18 Media & Investments Limited, 121, The Estate, Dickenson Road, Bengaluru 560042, Karnataka. Tel: 080-4064 9191
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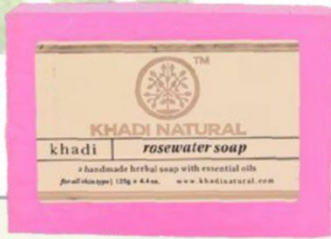
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Forbes India is printed & published by Brian Carvalho on behalf of Network18 Media & Investments Limited & Printed at Print House India Pvt. Ltd. 847/2, T.T.C. MIDC, Rabale, Navi Mumbai - 400701 & Published at Empire Complex, 1st Floor, 414, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400 013.

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Jet Cuts Costs Amid Mounting Losses

Airline has been on a cost-cutting spree since August **P/11**

Women Game for IPL

There has been an increase in female viewership during the cricket tournament **P/12**

Fashionably Near-Uncorn

Zilingo's valuation could reach close to 13 times this year's revenues **P/13**

GENERAL ELECTIONS

'Tall Leaders Have Lost When Opposition Came Together'

In conversation with Ruchir Sharma, author of *Democracy On The Road*, on 2019 polls and caste-based politics



COME APRIL, IT WILL BE THE 28TH time that Ruchir Sharma will hit the road to travel through major states to cover the 2019 elections in India, a country which he believes, even 70 years after Independence, has much less connection between politics and economics than one would expect.

Sharma who launched his book *Democracy On The Road*, a political travelogue of a 25-year journey through India, says, "If you look at a long sweep of history in India, the one statistic that tells you why development is not such a powerful

factor is that there have been about 27 instances when a state's economy has grown at a pace of over 8 percent over a chief minister's five-year term, and still half the time the chances are that the government will be tossed out, which is unlike any other country."

In fact, some incumbents like PV Narasimha Rao and Chandrababu Naidu among others were left to suffer humiliation on the campaign trail even after delivering growth. For instance, after a 9 percent growth during his term as chief minister, M Karunanidhi lost to J Jayalalithaa. Naidu and Rao

met the same fate.

As more and more Indians become eligible to vote, political parties are leaving no stone unturned to convince floating voters to vote for them. Floating voters are ones who are not loyalists to a party and firm up their decision in the run-up to the elections.

But it is always the bellwether constituencies where the swing vote often shifted to the winning party. For example, Seohara, Uttar Pradesh (UP), is one of the most volatile swing constituencies where six different parties have won Lok Sabha seats since 1974. In India, most elections have been lost by 3-7 percent votes.

Caste is still the opening gambit to win tickets and elections. Sharma says development can be one of six factors, but can't be the winning one to bag votes. The book offers a glimpse into how India goes into elections and how predominant caste and religion are as a voting parameter. But even caste votes are fragmented and community identity is key to politics.

An example of this is Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati. She first ran for office in Bijnor, UP, which is where Sharma kickstarted his journey in 1979 to understand politics and nuances of caste differences.

Bijnor is a reserved seat for Scheduled Caste candidates and in

Mayawati won her first parliamentary election from there in 1989. Mayawati is a Jatav, a caste known for leatherworkers, several rungs above sweepers and night soil workers. She brought all of them together and won by 8,879 votes. Though she became chief minister of UP later, Sharma notes that she lacks support from Dalits in other states and hence could not build a larger base across the country. So is the case with other leaders from UP, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, including the Yadavs.

Sharma says, “Mayawati’s Dalit base is confined just to UP because of the Jatavs and she does not have much acceptability in places such as Bihar or Maharashtra, which has a large Dalit concentration.” He adds politics is the downstream of culture and hence caste will always be there, and so will dynasty.

Sharma also makes note of the normality of joblessness in India. “We went to Madhya Pradesh last year and in the afternoon there were these bunch of men who did not have jobs; and they were sitting under a tree and

“India became a democracy when it was still very poor and perhaps more than the rich, the poor cherish the vote as a great leveller.”

playing rummy while placing small bets,” he points out. “This kind of acceptability of joblessness will not be there in many other countries, where the concern would be about violent crimes rising out of this.”

The book talks about political leaders, their campaigns over the last two decades, the rise of single leaders, the highest election spends in southern India and the catchy campaign catchphrases, among other things. Sharma says the electoral reality is that India rebels against domineering political bosses. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he reckons, may face a similar obstacle.

“In 2014 the opposition was badly fragmented, and that’s a big change in this election; that is Modi’s biggest obstacle because if you look at India’s history in terms of Rajiv Gandhi or Indira Gandhi or even AB Vajpayee,

they were tall leaders, but they all lost when the opposition came together.”

In 2014, the BJP came to power with resounding success. In 2019, though, even if BJP’s vote share remains the same, it may win fewer seats. “That is how Indian arithmetic works.. If the coalition is together... that’s what the real determining factor of this election will be,” adds Sharma.

He also thinks Priyanka Gandhi’s official foray into politics is a little late and it will take a while for her to bring in the votes.

If an election matters less to India’s privileged than to the poor, Sharma explains why: “India became a democracy when it was still very poor and perhaps more than the rich, the poor cherish the vote as a great leveller, their memo to the powerful, reminding them who calls the shots.”

—POOJA SARKAR

AUSTERITY MEASURES

Jet Cuts Costs Amid Mounting Losses

Though a revival plan is being put in place, such steps could hurt airline’s fortune

JET AIRWAYS’ PASSENGER

experience seems to be falling apart. The airline has been on a cost-cutting spree since August as it tries to contain losses which totalled ₹3,208 crore in the past three quarters. In spite of a high-traffic December-ended quarter, Jet reported a loss of ₹587.77 crore. IndiGo, India’s biggest airline, and SpiceJet, the fourth largest, reported profits of ₹191 crore and ₹55 crore, respectively. Also, Jet revised its fees for ticket re-bookings and cancellations, which is about ₹500 to ₹1,600 more than rival Vistara’s.

“Jet Airways has to go up the value chain and not down,” Devesh Agarwal, editor, bangaloreaviation.com, told *Forbes India* earlier. “Meals



have been eliminated in the economy class for many fare slabs, lounge access for elite members travelling in economy class withdrawn, one-piece baggage concept introduced, and route withdrawals among many other measures,” says Ajay Awtaney, editor, livefromalounge.com, a business travel website with a focus on aviation.

“Don’t cut anymore,” says Awtaney.

“Make some enhancements for loyal members as well as passengers and give them a reason to engage with the airline during this tough time.”

The Jet Airways board has approved a bank-led provisional resolution plan, which estimates a requirement of ₹8,500 crore that would save the airline from going bust.

“Of its cost cutting initiatives, the best has been network optimisation, which focuses on high-yield routes,” explains Gagan Dixit, vice president, Institutional Equity Research, Elara Capital. While the airline has exited from many routes in the Northeast and non-metros, it has added flights from its hubs of Mumbai and New Delhi.

—ANSHUL DHAMIJA

SHUTTERSTOCK



KIRANA STORES

'We Help Them Get More Sales'

MD and CEO of Metro Cash & Carry on the company turning profitable

THE INDIA OPERATIONS OF GERMAN wholesaler Metro Cash & Carry turned profitable last September, 15 years after it set shop in the country. Arvind Mediratta, 51, its MD and CEO, speaks to *Forbes India* on the journey.

Q Why did profitability elude the company for 15 years?

There were a lot of wastage and leakages. We also needed to improve on margins and focus on a profitable product mix.

Q What is your engagement with kirana stores?

Kirana store owners have to buy commodities from APMC yards. We provide them everything under one roof. Our prices are 2 percent lower compared to what they get from distributors. We also allow them credit facility and accept payments through all kind of options. We help them get more sales by digitising and modernising stores.

Q Can you elaborate?

About three months ago, we launched Kirana Success Centres. We have even tied-up with a company that can do kirana store makeovers in 48 hours.

Second is digitisation of their store. We provide them with a point-of-sale device, which shares a lot of data. So far we have digitised 500 stores. If they are successful, they will come back to us. It also helps with our in-house labels. Our business model will become outdated if kiranas are wiped out.

—ANSHUL DHAMIJA

3 mln	27	1,000	5,000
Number of customers it serves	Wholesale centres in India	In-house brands	Employees

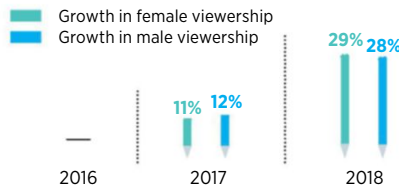
EYES TO THE SCREEN

Women Game for IPL

More and more women are taking to the cricketing extravaganza



Match Point

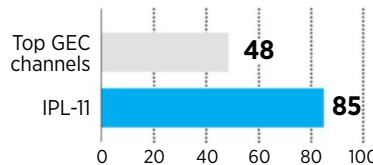


No. of Female Viewers (mln)



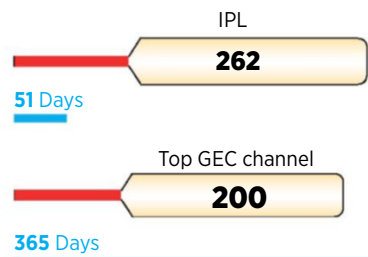
Runaway Hit (mln)

IPL reaches **77%** more women during prime time than any other Hindi GEC



Figures indicate prime time reach

Reach Among Women (mln)

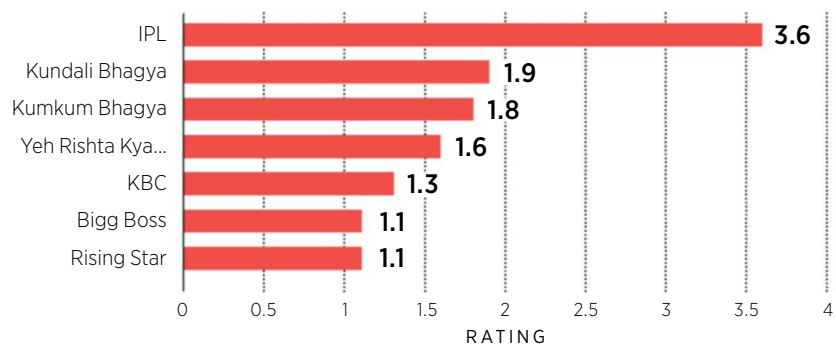


3.8 | IPL-11 had the highest TVR among women

47%

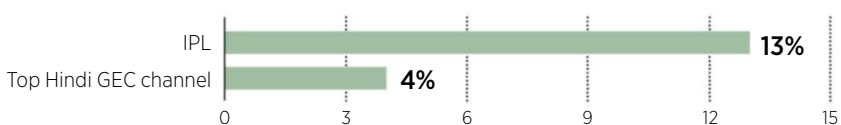
Women command a substantial share of IPL viewership

IPL Rates 2-3x Higher Than Any Top GEC Show



League Dominates Prime Time With 3.5x Leadership Margin

Share of Voice (% of GRP* garnered by a channel as percentage of total TV GRP) on IPL Days



Source: Barc

*Gross Rate Point

Disclaimer: The data is plotted only over the last three years of IPL since TAM, the measurement tool before 2016, is not comparable to Barc's current one



NEW BILLIONAIRE

Meals And Manicures

In the space of hot-pot restaurants, Zhang Yong's Haidilao succeeds through a tightly structured corporate culture—and unconventional customer service



“IT’S BETTER TO SCALE FAST AND BE everywhere instead of having a single towering presence,” says Zhang Yong, co-founder and chairman of Haidilao, one of China’s most popular restaurant chains. It serves hot pots, basins of boiling broth in which diners cook their own meat and vegetables tableside. The experience is communal, like roasting marshmallows around a campfire, and it is ubiquitous in China, where hot-pot restaurants crowd the streets. What has made Haidilao a hit—with annual revenue passing \$1 billion—has more to do with its ambiance than its selections of sole, abalone or crispy, Sichuan-style fried pork.

Zhang, 48, a high school dropout, is worth \$6.5 billion after Haidilao’s IPO. He has made it famous for its amenities, like tableside manicures and a service that will print diners’ selfies. There’s also Haidilao’s structure, which funnels employees through its empire—a complex web of shifus (managers) and apprentices who must pass rigid training. Haidilao promotes only from within, and shifus can earn a cut of their location’s profits.

—PAMELA AMBLER

STARTUPS

Zilingo: Fashionably Near-Uncorn

ZILINGO, A SINGAPORE-BASED online fashion marketplace, has raised \$226 million to fund an expansion, with a valuation of \$970 million, according to *Bloomberg*. Founded by Ankiti Bose and Dhruv Kapoor in 2015, it had revenues of \$1.3 million (Singapore \$1.8 million) for the year ended March 31, 2017, *Bloomberg* reported, citing data from the company’s filings in Singapore.

Revenues rose 12-fold in the year ended March 2018, and four-fold in the April-January period of the current fiscal. At that rate, the company could end the current year with revenues of about \$75 million, reflecting a valuation of close to 13 times this year’s revenues.

While Zilingo has a wholesale operation as well, the consumer-facing part is its main business. In business-to-consumer (B2C) ventures, there are, at best, two leaders who corner most of the market share. The biggest differentiation between a B2C leader and the next competitor boils down to acquiring the most number of consumers and raking in maximum amount of money to do that. The way to get there is to play the funding game at higher valuations with each round.

Zilingo certainly seems to have made it big. The latest funding was led by Sequoia Capital along with Temasek Holdings, Burda Principal Investments, Sofina and EDBI, according to Zilingo. The valuation reflects massive investor confidence in the founders—perhaps Bose having previously worked at Sequoia helped.

Bose and Kapoor declined to comment on revenues and valuation. Zilingo has 420 staff and works with 25,000 merchants, they say. “We have a long way to go as Asian fashion manufacturing is a trillion-dollar

Singapore-based venture is expected to evolve beyond its flagship marketplace business



Ankiti Bose (left) and Dhruv Kapoor

industry,” says Bose.

“Valuation is in the eye of the investor,” says Vijaya Kumar Ivaturi, a member of the Indian Angel Network, and co-founder and CTO at Crayon Data. “A B2C startup gets valued based on future revenues much more than a B2B startup. In a B2C segment, it is the winner-takes-all model and therefore, if the venture is convincing enough for the investor for garnering such an exponential growth, it is quite possible to get a very high valuation.”

“Growth rates, unique technology, large market size, and a passionate team are factors that would have driven valuation. Of course other terms like liquidation preferences would have been built in,” says Sanjay Anandaram, co-founder of JumpStartUp, which is one of India’s earliest US-India cross-border venture capital funds. “Access to large sums of capital is clearly the game changer for companies. High valuation is one thing. Building a sustainable business is another. Capital helps bridge the time, effort, learning and talent required.”

Zilingo has a tech team in Bengaluru and offices in eight countries. It expects to expand to Philippines, Indonesia and Australia.

—HARICHANDAN ARAKALI

NEW BILLIONAIRE: GRAHAM UDEN FOR FORBES; TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK

LEADERBOARD

\$140 mln

The amount for which the estate of Michael Jackson has sued HBO over a documentary which makes allegations against him



ENTERTAINMENT

Lazarus Inc

THE TIMES SQUARE HEADQUARTERS of Authentic Brands is a glamorous graveyard. A black-and-white photo of Marilyn Monroe hangs above the front desk. On a wall opposite, Elvis Presley sings and signs autographs in an endlessly looping video. Nearby, a pair of Muhammad Ali's gilded boxing gloves glimmer alongside red-and-black Michael Jackson 'Thriller' socks.

Marilyn, Elvis, Ali, Michael: They're four of the world's top-earning dead celebrities, pulling in a combined \$509 million last year. And their estates are all represented, in full

Nobody can extend the financial life of the dead and famous better than Jamie Salter

or in part, by Authentic Brands Group, the creation of Jamie Salter.

Most are owned by family members who can't all agree or who have little experience. "They live off the music or off certain parts of the assets. They're not building them into long-term brands," says 55-year-old Salter.

Before focusing on celebrities, Salter concentrated on reviving decayed brands such as Airwalk shoes and Aeropostale clothing, building Authentic Brands up to an estimated \$400 million in revenue.

He purchased 80 percent of the

Monroe estate in 2012 for a reported \$20 million to \$30 million before slashing its 300 licencing deals down to 80. Then he built the business back up, purchasing the other 20 percent and increasing the number of licenses to the sweet spot of 100, focusing on venerable brands that Monroe actually used in life—like Chanel No 5.

"You can sell x amount of Marilyn Monroe fragrance at a mass-market retailer, or you can do a deal with Chanel No 5," says Salter. "A No 5 deal doesn't pay as well, but I think that's important for the brand because it gives a halo effect. And the truth of the matter is, she wore Chanel No 5."

THE 13 TOP-EARNING DEAD CELEBRITIES

They're alive! Well, their businesses and brands are, anyway. These late celebs haul in millions each year through a variety of licensed goods and continuing sales from their music, films and books. Here are their takes for the past year:

1. Michael Jackson

\$400 million | Musician

Died: June 25, 2009 | **Age: 50**

Cause: Overdose/homicide

Jackon's posthumous roll continues, bringing in \$287 million recently from the sale of his estate's stake in EMI Music Publishing to Sony

2. Elvis Presley

\$40 million | Musician, Actor

Died: August 16, 1977 | **Age: 42**

Cause: Heart attack

He still moves more than 1 million albums every year, but the bulk of the King's coin comes from tickets to Graceland and a new \$45 million entertainment complex called Elvis Presley's Memphis

3. Arnold Palmer

\$35 million | Athlete

Died: September 25, 2016 | **Age: 87**

Cause: Heart disease

Mmm! There's a new addition to the Arnold Palmer beverage line: An alcoholic version made in conjunction with MolsonCoors

4. Charles Schulz

\$34 million | Cartoonist

Died: February 12, 2000 | **Age: 77**

Cause: Colon cancer

Snoopy sure is one pedigreed beagle: DHX Media paid \$345 million in 2017 to get 80 percent of the Peanuts business previously owned by Iconix

5. Bob Marley

\$23 million | Musician

Died: May 11, 1981 | **Age: 36**

Cause: Cancer

Products include headphones and Marley Natural cannabis and smoking accessories



6. Dr Seuss

\$16 million | Author

Died: September 24, 1991 | **Age: 87**

Cause: Cancer

The good doctor sold 4.8 million books last year

7. Hugh Hefner

\$15 million | Media Mogul

Died: September 27, 2017 | **Age: 91**

Cause: Cardiac arrest

The *Playboy* founder got lucky one last time when his heirs sold the remaining portion of his estate for an estimated \$35 million last year, getting more than a third up front

8. Marilyn Monroe

\$14 million | Actor

Died: August 5, 1962 | **Age: 36**

Cause: Overdose

Marilyn is back on the list this year thanks to new licensing deals, including Montblanc pens

9. Prince

\$13 million | Musician, Actor

Died: April 21, 2016 | **Age: 57**

Cause: Overdose

The Purple One is rolling in green, having sold a quarter-million physical albums over the past 12 months

10. John Lennon

\$12 million | Musician

Died: December 8, 1980 | **Age: 40**

Cause: Homicide

Between his solo work and his Beatles oeuvre, Lennon sells nearly 2 million albums annually

11. XXXTentacion

\$11 million | Musician

Died: June 18, 2018 | **Age: 20**

Cause: Homicide

No dead musician—and few living ones—clocked more streaming spins than XXXTentacion last year. The rapper, who had domestic-violence charges pending when he died, racked up 4 billion streams

12. Muhammad Ali

\$8 million | Athlete

Died: June 3, 2016 | **Age: 74**

Cause: Septic shock

A Tag Heuer deal and a settlement with Fox Broadcasting over a Super Bowl ad that used Ali's image lands the Greatest of All Time on our list for the first time

13. Bettie Page

\$7 million | Model

Died: December 11, 2008 | **Age: 85**

Cause: Natural causes

The classic pinup's allure has been turned into clothing, shoes, handbags, lingerie, wigs and even a fitness DVD

Methodology: Figures are for pretax earnings from October 1, 2017, through October 1, 2018, before deducting fees for agents, managers, lawyers and estate executors. Sources: Nielsen SoundScan; NPJ BookScan; insider interviews; *Forbes* estimates. Edited by Zack o'Malley Greenburg and Natalie Robehmed; additional reporting by Kurt Badenhausen and Elisabeth Brier.

MICHAEL JACKSON: KEVIN MAZUR / WIREIMAGE; TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK



INTERVIEW

'To Create A Luxury Market, We Need Consistent Policies'

Matteo Ortenzi, Lamborghini CEO for Asia-Pacific region, on the opportunities and constraints for the sports car manufacturer in India



ITALIAN LUXURY SPORTS CAR manufacturer Lamborghini launched the new Huracan Evo in India in February. Priced at ₹3.73 crore, it will sell alongside its flagship SUV Urus, and the Aventador sports line-up. The company, part of the Volkswagen Group, believes that the Indian market has a potential for growth as road conditions improve and wealth swells. Last year, the company sold a little less than 50 vehicles, and is hoping for a 50 percent growth in sales this year. In an interview with *Forbes India*, Matteo Ortenzi, CEO, Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, outlines constraints and opportunities for the company in India. Edited excerpts:

Q What are your plans for India?

India is not our big market at the moment and that's not a secret, but we believe this can change. It's just a matter of when. We want to be here in a consistent way to get close to our

customers, and be ready once the luxury sports car segment and the luxury market, in general, improves. We are a market leader and want to remain a market leader. We are quite keen to launch new products here as soon as possible. We believe that this market will grow a lot.

Q India is home to a large number of billionaires. That hasn't translated into the purchase of super luxury vehicles. What do you think is the reason?

I think things will change. Buying sports cars and driving them on road conditions in India is not always easy. This, in my opinion, was a big limit on the market. We partially fixed that with the right product propositioning. Urus is more flexible for Indian

roads. On top of that, India is a very high taxation market for luxury, and that hits us. What we need is a very consistent approach. I am not scared about the overall level of taxation, but of the continuous changes. We should have a clear policy and [only] then can the market grow properly. To create a luxury market, we need consistency and consistent policies.

Q Globally, companies like Mercedes and Tesla are leading the move toward electric vehicles. What are your plans?

Electrification is trending in the automotive [industry]. We are already preparing our steps. Once the technology is ready, you will see the first Lamborghini hybrid. Then, you will see the first electric Lamborghini. Legislation and innovation constraints will most likely bring us to electrify our cars because this is one of the ways in which we have to deal with emissions at the right levels.

Q Are you happy with your presence in India?

I'm happy about our presence because I think we have the right dimension of the network. Tier II and tier III cities are emerging markets in the world,

and India, especially because you have first generation rich men who want to own a Lamborghini. I don't want to push and then discover that it is not sustainable. India is growing more and the demographic trend is one of the signs that is giving us a positive

feeling. Things are changing in India, though this is still not reflected in the luxury market. I was in India at the end of 2018 and I saw a lot of work in progress. So things will change. It's just a matter of when.

—MANU BALACHANDRAN

“Legislation and innovation constraints will most likely bring us to electrify our cars.”



THE POWER OF SHE

Shakti, a non-partisan collective, is targeting the general elections for equal representation of women in Parliament, but the road to gender-just politics is tricky to traverse

By DIVYA J SHEKHAR

Vinod Rathod of the Delhi Police has been manning the Parliament gates for four years now. Like his namesake singer, he can also skilfully hum a tune or two, he tells this journalist, who is there to meet members of Shakti, a non-partisan citizen's

collective campaigning for equal representation of women in legislation. The pan-India collective is in Delhi for a national meet.

A volunteer from Shakti asks Rathod if he has ever noticed how men occupy more seats of power at his workplace than women. "That's always been the case," he says matter-

of-factly. Pointing at the Parliament, he adds, "But I hear that they [legislators] are talking about a bill to get more women in there. I would like that to happen. I'm all in for equality. It's a value I practise at home, too."

Viewpoints similar to Rathod's, of championing gender equality in politics, have been aired in the



MADHU KAPPARATH

IT professional Tara Krishnaswamy (fourth from left, standing), co-founded Shakti last year. The non-partisan citizen collective 600-odd volunteers across India

public sphere for many years now. Numbers, however, point to a contrasting reality. The percentage of women elected to Parliament has stagnated between 3 and 11 percent ever since the first Lok Sabha was constituted 67 years ago in 1952.

Even today, women constitute only 11.8 percent (64 of 543) seats in the Lok Sabha and 11 percent (27 out of 245) seats in the Rajya Sabha. A 2017 report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women indicates that between 2010 and 2017, the share of women representatives in the Lok Sabha rose only by one percent.

This is a paradox, considering the increasing share of women



WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL: 23 YEARS TOO LATE

◆ Was first introduced in Parliament in 1996 under Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda; no government has passed the bill yet

◆ The current version, called the 108th Constitution Amendment Bill, reserves one-third (33%) of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies

◆ Provides for one-third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

◆ In the Lok Sabha, one-third of all constituencies will be reserved for women on rotation basis

◆ Reservation will cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of the Amendment Act

◆ The Rajya Sabha passed this bill on March 9, 2010, but the Lok Sabha never voted on it

WHY WOMEN IN LEGISLATION MATTER

◆ Women legislators raise economic performance in their constituencies by about 1.8 percentage points per year

◆ Women are only one-third as likely as men to be carrying pending criminal charges while entering office

◆ Their assets grow by 10 percentage points less than those of male counterparts, indicating that women are less likely to be corrupt

◆ Share of incomplete road infrastructure projects is 22 percentage points lower for women than for male legislators

◆ Women are more efficacious and less vulnerable to political opportunism

Source: 'Women legislators and economic performance' paper by the United Nations (UN) University World Institute for Development Economics Research, 2018

voters in the electorate. From 48 percent in 1971, the turnout of women increased to 60 percent in 1984 and then to 65.3 percent during the 2014 general elections (as against 67.1 percent turnout for men). The gender gap among voters has shrunk to 1.8 percent.

The recently-concluded assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram echo the trend. The number of women voters surpassed the number of men in 24 of

the 90 constituencies in Chhattisgarh. In Madhya Pradesh, this was seen in 51 of the 230 constituencies. In Mizoram, there are 19,399 more registered women voters than men.

"Political parties do not see representation of women as priority. They are not accountable to citizens and function like they are outside of the system," says Tara Krishnaswamy of Shakti. An IT professional from Bengaluru who has worked in the citizen activism space for over a decade now, Krishnaswamy co-founded Shakti in December last year as a non-partisan group of like-minded people who will work towards better representation of women in the Parliament and state assemblies, starting with the general elections this year. "We are not a non-profit, but a citizen's movement that has committed itself to the cause, regardless of caste, ideologies, region or religion."

STRONGER TOGETHER

Shakti's core group of members and volunteers comes from various backgrounds. While co-founder Rajeshree Nagarsekar is a writer and political activist, other members include leaders like Nisha Agrawal, who became the first CEO of Oxfam India after a career at the World Bank spanning several decades; Jyoti Raj, co-founder, Campaign for Electoral Reforms in India (CERI); Swarna Rajagopalan, political analyst and social entrepreneur; Flavia Agnes, women's rights lawyer; Dhanya Rajendran, co-founder, The News Minute; Nisha Susan, co-founder of feminist online magazine *The Ladies Finger*; and academician Padmaja Shaw.

According to Krishnaswamy, their 600-odd volunteer base comprises people across India who are usually active in their respective cities. The core group is of nearly 115 members, and 40 of them are active in all events/campaigns conducted by Shakti across the country. Resources



and funds are crowdsourced. At the national meet in Delhi, women politicians, academicians, political analysts and journalists talked about ways to increase representation of women, empower existing women legislators and sensitise voters ahead of the elections in April-May.

“Politicians do not take women seriously because we do not take ourselves seriously. We do not vote as a women’s bloc or demand more female representation from political parties. We vote along caste or religious lines,” says Nisha Agrawal.

She points to the legislation mandating 50 percent representation of women at local government levels, which has led to about 13.72 lakh elected women representatives in India’s Panchayati Raj Institutions. There are numerous studies that show how these women legislators have raised the economic performance and social security of their people at the grass-roots level, she explains.

“Legislation sets the ball rolling. That, however, should not stop political parties from giving tickets to women of their own volition,” Agrawal says. “Every party has included the Women’s Reservation Bill [which reserves 33 percent Lok Sabha seats for women] in their manifesto but nobody wants to table or pass it. So for now, the least parties can do is ensure they give more tickets to women than they did last year.”

Political analyst Preethi Nagaraj agrees parties should do more. “When 50 percent seats at the panchayat level are reserved for women, what happens to them after that? Where do they disappear? Aren’t they competent enough to fight the next level of elections?” she asks, likening this situation to that of engineering students or women in technology, which is characterised by high enrollments and representation in colleges, but low workforce participation.

The current political structure is built to include women in small,



“Politics, power and party structures are not made to accommodate women.”

KANIMOZHI, RAJYA SABHA MP FROM TAMIL NADU

non-offending roles that do not affect the larger party structure and functioning, says Nagaraj, who is not associated with Shakti. The chain of representation is not allowed to continue and women have no natural career progression to bigger political roles. “Parties keep fielding fresh candidates who are considered more ‘winnable’,

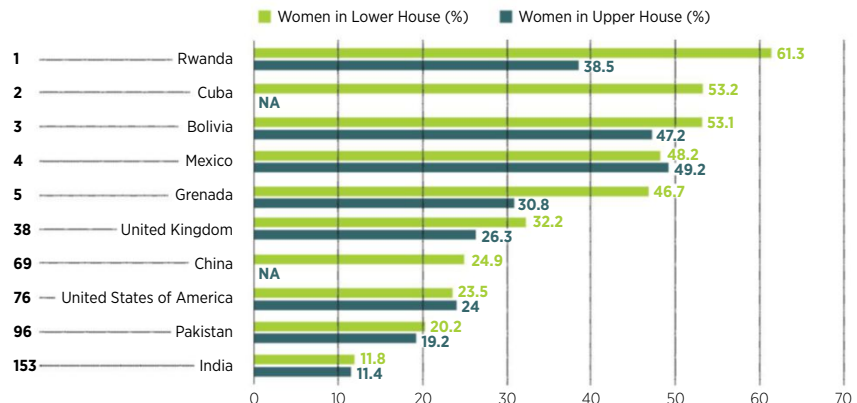
thus continuously changing the structure of competition for women. We continue to lose experienced women leaders who are already aware of operational responsibilities and could be an asset to the party,” she says. “We have a skewed mindset that believes that women are not intellectually or economically strong to carry out a successful campaign or win an election.”

Kanimozhi, Rajya Sabha MP from Tamil Nadu representing the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), believes women have to be twice as hard-working and intelligent to succeed. “Politics, power and party structures are not made to accommodate women. Party workers have told my father (late Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi) not to give tickets to women candidates as it is perceived that they won’t campaign or win effectively,” she says. She was speaking in Delhi at the meet organised by Shakti.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson Shaina NC agrees that representation has not gone beyond tokenism, even if India has women taking up important Cabinet portfolios like defence and external affairs. “Men like to keep their power dynamics alive, so women need to support women. If you are in a position of power, empower

INDIA AND THE WORLD

How India ranks among 193 countries in representation of women in legislature



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, as on December 1, 2018

other women without thinking of them as a threat,” she says.

Even today, certain stereotypes and prejudices influence decisions on the roles or portfolios women can handle, and there are many who do not take women seriously, believes Congress IT cell chief Divya Spandana. “The [Reservation] Bill really needs to pass, and for that, all of us have to come together across party lines, raise our voices and ensure that it is done.”

Krishnaswamy says that Shakti seeks to maximise the impact that has been created by isolated, independent efforts of women’s groups over the years. It is “foolish”, she says, to imagine that everything needs to be built brick by brick from scratch, naming organisations and individuals like Women Power Connect, Aleyamma Vijayan (secretary, Sakhi Women’s Resource Centre) and Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan that are already working towards political rights for women in different capacities.

Shakti’s recent ‘Call Your MP’ campaign, for instance, was also executed with the help of such diverse organisations, where participants called their respective MPs and demanded that they support the Women’s Reservation Bill, which was approved in the Rajya Sabha in 2010, but lapsed in the 15th Lok Sabha. Over 500 people across the country called 543 MPs. Only 373 numbers connected, out of which 130 answered and 127 said they would support the bill.

“There is strength in numbers. The more we aggregate such efforts, the more powerful we will be,” Krishnaswamy says, explaining that Shakti will also focus on finding allies in men every step of the way.

ELECTIONS AND BEYOND

Human rights activists believe that economic policies adversely affect women more than men, and only representation will

ensure empowerment.

Shabnam Hashmi points to the unemployment numbers. “Over 110 lakh jobs were lost in 2018, out of which 88 lakh jobs belonged to women. About 65 lakh of those women were from rural or marginalised areas. So even if we put aside the issue of violence against women, even economically, we are given a raw deal by policy-makers,” says Hashmi, a human rights campaigner who was nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize as part of the ‘1000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe’ initiative. She is not associated with Shakti. “We have to fight our way to get the Reservation Bill passed, negotiate with political parties and convince them to see why it is important to include more women at the policy level,” she says.

Other experts call this a multi-layered problem with links to issues like inaccessible education or the increasing school dropout rate of young girls. “This is a vicious circle. Apart from lack of basic

“Fewer women politicians is the result of fewer girls in schools and colleges.”

SUSHMITA DEV, CONGRESS MP FROM SILCHAR, ASSAM



education, the role of women is often diminished in households and society. They face multiple barriers and intense scrutiny,” says Akriti Gaur, senior resident fellow, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. The Shakti volunteer says that no critical mass representing women in Parliament results in lower public participation and exclusionary policies.

Sushmita Dev, Congress MP from Silchar, Assam, agrees. “Patriarchy begins at home. Fewer women politicians is the result of fewer girls in schools and colleges. Emancipation of women starts with educational and economic empowerment,” she says.

Krishnaswamy realises that this movement cannot be restricted to one election. Shakti, she says, is a work in progress that will continue even if parties do not give more tickets to women this time around. Detractors have often asked her how voting for women is different from voting for, say, a certain caste or religion. “Democracy is first about representation, then about merit. Somebody who is meritorious but not representative of me, cannot fully understand or solve my problems,” she says, comparing it with a situation of expecting rich, white males to understand and represent African-American women. “So let us first ensure women are represented, and then find the most meritorious among them.”

Post-elections, following in the footsteps of women’s caucuses in the US, Krishnaswamy wants to hand-hold women politicians and aspirants. “Campaigning is not an inclusive or systematic practice in India. There is need for training, best-practices sharing and capacity building around electioneering. We want to enable more women to network, raise funds and gather volunteers around their campaigns,” she says. “I firmly believe that every little push matters. A lot can change if we women stand together, across cultural differences and party lines.” **F**

ROBIN SHARMA

‘One can Enjoy Material Things and Still Be Happy’

Author Robin Sharma on why there is nothing wrong with wealth and how one can have a great life simply by waking up early

By RAJIV SINGH

Robin Sharma, leadership guru, self-help expert and best-selling author of *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*, believes materialism can safely, and easily, coexist with happiness. There is a catch, though. “Let material things be your servants and not your Gods,” asserts Sharma. The Canada-based author, who was a lawyer before he quit the profession over two decades ago, was in India in February to promote his latest book, *The 5 AM Club*.

Dressed immaculately in his signature all-black wardrobe, Sharma—whose father was born in Jammu and Kashmir—contends that there is nothing sinful in craving material things. “But I don’t think any great life can be built around these things,” says the writer, who doesn’t like being billed as a ‘guru’. “I am still a work in progress.”

The 5 AM Club, says Sharma, is not only about time management but also self-management. “If you want to live a great life, it’s important to start your day early,” he tells *Forbes India* in an interview. Edited excerpts:

Q Can a materialistic person be a happy individual? Can materialism and happiness coexist?

A materialistic person is someone who gets his identity from materialism, but one can enjoy material things

and still be happy. There is nothing wrong in wealth. It’s the harmony between living and not losing sight of what’s most important that makes for a happy life.

Society has sold us a set of seductions, like if you get more money, more likes on social media, bigger house, beautiful set of shoes and dresses...they will make you happy. That doesn’t lead to sustained happiness. Look at Mahatma Gandhi...

“It’s the harmony between living and not losing sight of what’s important that makes for a happy life.”

he died without any possessions. If possessions were central to a great life, why did he show us otherwise? In many ways, the world is lost. A lot of people are getting confused. They are measuring their personal worth by how many followers they have on social media. There is nothing wrong with social media followers or eating in nice restaurants. In fact, human beings like sensual sensory pleasures; but I don’t think a great life is built around them.

Let material things be your servants and not your Gods. It’s all about training yourself and preparation.

This can happen early in the morning. There’s a quote in *The 5 AM Club* from Spartan Warriors: “Sweat more in training and you will bleed less in war”. So, getting up early when the rest of the world is asleep, winning the battle of the bed, putting mind over the mattress, and giving yourself that extra hour to work on the mind, heart, body, spirit will strengthen your four interior empires. If you work on them when the rest of the world is asleep, you can easily construct the exterior empires.

Q Where are most people going wrong, even if they wake up early?

What most people do, even if they wake up in the morning, is to start checking their emails, WhatsApp or social media feeds. All of a sudden, they lose their cognitive bandwidth. This term—cognitive bandwidth—was used by psychologist Eldar Shafir. Every time you focus on technology, you lose a part of the cognitive bandwidth. Sophie Leroy, a business school professor at the University of Minnesota, coined a great term called ‘attention residue’. It means that people are less productive when they are constantly moving from one task to another, instead of focusing on one thing at a time. So wake up in the morning, watch the news, focus on your phone and you have lost part of your attention. By starting your day in a more focussed



Robin Sharma says his latest book offers a morning protocol to maximise energy, focus, performance and happiness

way, you are much more productive and perform better during the day.

Q Is there anything magical about waking up early in the morning?

Yeah. Anybody who gets up at 5 am, even if she doesn't run my protocol...there is such peacefulness

around, there is something magical about the vibration in the air. Why did all the saints and sages get up early to meditate? Because that's the time when you can be more intimate with your higher nature and deeper wisdom.

I first started talking about

getting up early in *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*. When I studied great women and men in the world, I realised many of them got up early. In fact, 5 am to 8 am is the least distracted time of the day. If you use your early hours well, you can get more done than what most people manage to do in the entire day. Just observing how the most successful and happy people got up early made me interested in the 5 am routine.

Q The thought or idea of getting up early has always existed. Does your book try to create a formal structure around it?

If you look at religious and wisdom traditions across the world, there is one thing in common: Get up before sunrise. In India, we know that the hours before sunrise allow us to think

“Motivation is not something that can be sustained...but using motivation as a synonym for drive is okay.”

deeply and with clarity. They allow you to deal the inner work required to become the hero of your life.

A lot of people are losing themselves. They are busy being busy versus focusing on things that are truly important. What I have tried to do in *The 5 AM Club* is to give people a morning protocol so that they can start their day in a way that will maximise their energy, focus, performance and happiness. After all, what's the point in being successful if you are not happy and peaceful? *The 5 AM Club* is not only about time management but also self-management. If you want to live a great life, it's important to start your day early. The way you begin your day sets up how you live your day. If you can consistently have

great mornings, you will consistently have great days, which means great weeks, quarters, years, and life.

A great life is built on a lot of principles. The first is realising your personal potential. India is one of the first nations in the world to start yoga or meditation...that's about maximising the potential one is born with. That's how you find happiness. Great life is also about being helpful. The more people I help, the happier I become.

Q You are considered to be among the world's top leadership gurus. Of late, the term 'guru' has been in the news for the wrong reasons...the word has been abused as well. What's your take?

Years ago, I wrote a book called *The Greatness Guide* in which the first chapter is on guru. From what I understand, 'Gu' means darkness in Sanskrit and 'ru' means dispel. So a guru is someone who dispels darkness. A real guru is one who helps people leave their shadow and walk into the light. Do I see myself as a guru? I honestly don't. I see myself as a work in progress. If you look at the companies that were once great, like Nokia or Myspace, I think one of the things that happened to them is that they fell in love with their winning formula and success. I just want to be a servant and help people. My father used to quote Rabindranath Tagore and tell me: 'Robin, when you were born, you cried while the world rejoiced. Live your life in such a way that when you die, the world cries, while you rejoice'. If I start thinking of myself as a guru, I probably won't be able to study as much as I do.

Q So you do not like to be called a motivational guru either?

To me, motivation is not something that can be sustained. I do not see myself as somebody who teaches motivation. All my books, including *The 5 AM Club*, are full of neurosciences and real routine

that have helped successful people and heavyweights.

Q Can leadership survive without motivation?

I don't like the word motivation because it has got a bit of a bad name, but using motivation as a synonym for drive is okay. The job of a leader is to get things done. Great leaders are the ones who talk less and do more. That comes from drive. Ambition is not a dirty word...it's not a swear word. Ambition is what allowed a Taj Mahal to be made. A great drive comes from purpose.

Q Can leaders be made? We keep hearing about born leaders...

I believe in karma. Yes, I do believe that some people are born with these (leadership) traits. They do have natural gifts. But geniuses are much more about daily habits

"I believe in karma. Some people are born with these (leadership) traits. But geniuses are much more about daily habits than genetics."

than genetics. Yes, leaders are born, but are also educated. It is stunning how any human being through the power of learning can transform.

Q Do you intend to retire?

Retirement is a dangerous sport. I don't have any intention to retire. I want to be writing and giving presentations until my last breath.

Q Are there enough readers? Are people buying books?

People are going back to reading books. So the book is not dead. Everything is cyclical. Ten years ago, social media wasn't dominant, but now there are a lot of people leaving social media or at least managing it better because they realise that it's not only addictive but also wasting a lot of our time. Addiction to

distraction is the death of creative production. We are putting our phones away and focusing back on building human connections.

Q You were a lawyer before you quit the profession to write books. Should one put everything at stake by listening to one's heart?

Your instinct is always wiser than your intelligence. We should all listen to our heart. The great men and women of the world...if they had listened to their intellect, we wouldn't have had a Gandhi, a Nelson Mandela, or a man on the moon. We have to listen to the deeper wisdom inside of us because that's where the genius lives.

Q What's your India connect?

My father was from Jammu and Kashmir, so coming here brings back some great memories. I love India very much, whether it's art, culture,

food or people. It's a special place to me. I was born in Uganda and then moved to India. Though I didn't spend my childhood here, I have been to the country many times. The last time I was here was five years ago. It's exciting to be here. The progress that the country has made is incredible.

Q Have you picked up Hindi?

I understand Hindi, but haven't watched much of Bollywood stuff. One movie I remember is *Mother India*. It is an iconic movie and I watched it when I was very young.

Q What about Indian food?

I love tandoori chicken, hariyali chicken, butter naan, onion kulcha, raita and mango pickle. My good Indian meal is incomplete without an ice-cold Kingfisher. **F**



FIGHT LIKE A GIRL

The Forbes India W-Power Trailblazers issue celebrates women who have bent norms, fought stereotypes and cemented their space in male-dominated fields

By PANKTI MEHTA KADAKIA



A jig here, a high-five there: US Congress headlines got a lot more flavour in January this year, electing a record number of women who are changing its face. One of those faces is coloured, under 30, and not afraid to shut down her critics with a mix of sharp intelligence and liberated millennial-ness: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), the youngest woman to serve in the US Congress, speaks as eruditely about increasing marginal taxes and controlling fossil fuels as she does about her K-beauty skincare routine. When Republicans attempted to tear her apart for an

old dance video from college, she filmed a now-iconic response of her boogying into her shiny new Congress office, broadcasting an unequivocal message of strength, served with a dollop of wit. ‘Women like me aren’t supposed to run for office’, her campaign began. And here we are.


Very often, women in power are afraid to showcase their personalities, or, indeed, their femininity. “Women leaders are often judged as being too soft-spoken or too abrasive,” Komal Mangtani, senior director and head of engineering and business intelligence at Uber, told us in an interview. “But if there are more of us, and different kinds of us... it would teach people that women have different styles of leadership, and men have to get used to them.”

What AOC represents is a new breed of women willing to balance power with so-called puff: That it’s okay to demand high-level policy changes, but also to discuss your beauty routine on Instagram. That fashion can be used to make political statements. That it’s time to retire the cringe-worthy phrase

‘beauty with brains’, and recognise that there isn’t ever a dichotomy.

It’s been a year of reckoning for Indian women everywhere. Embracing the #MeToo movement, many women have finally spoken up for themselves, and been listened to, too. The *Forbes India* W-Power Trailblazers issue, this year, moves beyond the stars of the boardroom to highlight women who are fighting for their space, in fields traditionally dominated by men. Seema Rao is India’s first female combat trainer—there isn’t an elite armed force she hasn’t taught. Menaka Guruswamy, Supreme Court advocate, has fought long and hard for human rights, the only woman lawyer to contest Section 377. Bhakti Sharma is the first Asian woman and youngest in the world to swim in the freezing Antarctic waters.

Then there are names you know, but sides of them you haven’t seen: Meet Priyanka Chopra Jonas, the astute tech investor; meet Mary Kom, the lifelong student.

Rao speaks of a turning point in her life, a fight that shifted from her ‘being controlled’ to ‘being in control’. Perhaps now is that point for women in India. 



THIRD ACT

Actor, singer and now businesswoman, Priyanka Chopra Jonas is using her celebritydom to improve lives at the intersection of technology and feminism

By SALIL PANCHAL & MONICA BATHIJA



When Priyanka Chopra Jonas got on board as an investor in dating and social media app Bumble, she did a little more than just sign a cheque—she became its face when she brought it to India in December, becoming the company’s brand ambassador, working on the creatives for the ads, and starring in them.

It was the same with her first investment, at coding education school Holberton School of Software Engineering, where she was part of a \$8.2 million funding round that closed last April. Singer and Grammy Award-winning artist NE-YO has been instrumental in inspiring African-Americans to apply at Holberton, and Chopra Jonas is partnering with the school to similarly inspire women.

Eight years after she started her move Westwards, first with

a singing career and then acting in Hollywood, Chopra Jonas, 36, is now taking baby steps into the world of investing, bringing her celebritydom and her skills to her newest endeavours.

After launching her and managing her career in the West, it is entrepreneur-turned-investor Anjula Acharia who seems to have got Chopra Jonas interested in these as well. “I had probably invested in about 20 women-founded consumer companies and Priyanka and I would be talking on the phone and she would ask about things. Once I had some creatives of a direct-to-consumer cosmetics company and she gave me feedback... I asked if she wanted to look at companies with me,” recalls Acharia, who solely manages Chopra Jonas’s career internationally.

She adds that Chopra Jonas’s feedback, from marketing and opportunities they could take advantage of for the product, was

insightful. “That’s what could work for a founder. When you are taking money from someone, you’re not just taking money, you’re taking insights, experience, knowledge and contacts,” Acharia tells *Forbes India* from Silicon Valley. The two are looking at other investing as well as entrepreneurial opportunities.

Chopra Jonas, who says her focus is on tech companies for now, approaches investing in two ways. “First, I like to find out the sentiment around the company. Second, I like to see if the product or service is something I would use... if it could bridge a market gap or if it could disrupt something which already exists,” she says, adding that she takes advice from different people for this. “I definitely confer with Anjula, my manager, because she is also a venture capitalist (VC). I also like to discuss it with my friends and the people that I know who are in tech.”

Chopra Jonas belongs to a rare breed of celebrities, particularly women, to have backed tech companies. Globally, actors Leonardo DiCaprio (MindMaze and Qloo) and Ashton Kutcher (Airbnb and Spotify) have strong portfolios, Beyonce has invested in a tech startup that allows you to pre-order concert merchandise and Tyra Banks has investments in The Muse and ShopTap Industries. In India, the numbers are even lower.

Explaining the marginal presence of celebrities as tech investors,

“WHEN YOU ARE A PUBLIC PERSON... YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO TAKE THE BUSINESS TO MANY MORE CONSUMERS.”

PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS, ACTOR & ENTREPRENEUR

▲
Priyanka Chopra
Jonas (left) with
Whitney Wolfe
Herd, who founded
Bumble in 2014





Rutvik Doshi, managing director of Inventus Capital Partners, a venture capital fund in Silicon Valley and India, says: “Celebrities invest in spaces or businesses they understand or are passionate about. There are very few tech companies that take on celebrities as investors. They do so only if they feel that they can leverage on the celebrity for brand building.” This is what Bumble and Holberton are banking on.

“When you are a public person and attach yourself to a business, you have the ability to take it to so many more consumers because you can leverage the platform you have and give it a face that will travel,” says Chopra Jonas.

Chopra Jonas is well versed with the promotion and marketing of brands: She has been a brand ambassador for select products of Garnier (from the L’Oreal stable) and, since December 2016, has been a global ambassador for P&G’s Pantene. And she seems to be bringing the value-add to her investing—she is a global advisor for Bumble and on the board of trustees at Holberton.

“NE-YO has been instrumental in inspiring black/African-Americans to pursue careers in software engineering at Holberton. We wanted to find a talent who could similarly inspire women. It just so happens that a very good friend of the school, Anjula Acharia, was also Priyanka’s manager. Both Anjula and Priyanka have long championed women and girls, and so our school mission

and their personal missions aligned perfectly. Priyanka was eager to sign on with Holberton immediately upon learning about the school, and has been a terrific partner,” writes Sylvain Kalache, co-founder of Holberton School, in an email. Kalache and his co-founder Julien Barbier started the school to promote diversity in tech education as well as make it financially accessible. They did this by making the programme tuition-free until after students start working in a well-paying job.

“I’m a big fan of technology, of new ideas,” says Chopra Jonas, who aspired to become an aeronautical engineer before she became Miss World in 2000.

Data shows that, in the US alone, only 14 percent of software engineers are women. Like at Holberton, where she chipped in to help democratise technology education, it was Bumble’s women-centric focus that got her



involved in the app as well. “Bumble is an accessory for Indian women who want to have a say, or a choice, in their lives. Most of them don’t have a choice in the matter,” says Chopra Jonas of the social media app that lets women make the first move. “This was one of those breakthrough things that I thought can have potential in India.”

US entrepreneur Whitney Wolfe Herd founded Bumble in December 2014 months after quitting Tinder, claiming sexual harassment by co-founder Justin Mateen. Herd and Tinder settled the case out of court for an undisclosed sum, without admitting guilt.

Following her exit from Tinder she faced a lot of online abuse. “In 2014, I was at my lowest and enduring seemingly endless online abuse from strangers. I didn’t want anyone to feel what I was feeling and knew there needed to be a safe place online for women to connect,” says Herd, 28, who met Chopra Jonas at a Bumble Bizz dinner along with Acharia. Chopra Jonas instantly said she wanted to bring the app to India, she recalls.

Besides the option of looking for romantic partners, Bumble also has features like Bumble Bizz to facilitate business communications and networking, and a BFF mode to look for friends. It has over 1 million first movers (users) in India and, as of December 2018, notched up \$220 million in revenues worldwide.

But Bumble’s good start does not necessarily spell success in a market like India, where Tinder is the leader. “Most VCs don’t look at the No 2,” says Doshi. The Indian market is unique, with dating apps such as Tinder and matrimonial apps like BharatMatrimony and Shaadi.com among others. “There is no room for something in between,” says Doshi.

Chopra Jonas was at the peak of her career in India and Hollywood was nowhere on her radar when Acharia signed her on in 2010. “I don’t think

“WHEN YOU ARE TAKING MONEY FROM SOMEONE... YOU’RE ALSO TAKING INSIGHTS, EXPERIENCE, CONTACTS.”

ANJULA ACHARIA, ENTREPRENEUR-TURNED-INVESTOR

she had really thought about it. She was based in India and she was like why go to a new country where you don't know anyone and start all over again," says Acharia, recalling that it took convincing and a lot of time just to pin her down. "I felt like it took a year just to have a real conversation with her," she says.

Even when she did manage to convince her, the time she got from Priyanka was barely 20 days in a year. "To break into Hollywood, you need to be here 24/7," she says.

Chopra Jonas's journey in the US started with American record producer Jimmy Iovine, the co-founder of Interscope Records, which produced Chopra's first US single 'In My City', featuring rapper will.i.am. Another single 'Exotic' featuring Pitbull followed in 2013. She was also the brand ambassador for Guess before finally landing a role on prime time TV for *Quantico*. She has also acted in three Hollywood movies.

In the midst of all this, Chopra Jonas started her production house Purple Pebble Pictures (PPP) in 2013. The difference with her Bollywood peers—like Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, Aamir Khan, who also had production houses—was that she decided to focus on regional cinema. "When I set up the company, there was minimal involvement from Bollywood in the regional cinema space. To me it was charting a new path in this space. There is so much untapped potential in regional cinema... from the stories to the technicians and actors. Purple Pebble was my way of bridging the gap," says Chopra Jonas, who vets stories/scripts. "When it comes to the choice of films we make or even the font being used on a poster, I am involved hands-on," she adds.

While her mother, Dr Madhu Chopra is the business head, they also have Sandeep Bhargava as CEO, who handles the logistics and operations. Bhargava, who was

earlier chief operating officer at UTV and had launched Studio 18 (a division of Viacom18, part of the Network 18 Group, to which *Forbes India* belongs), is also an advisor to actor Sanjay Dutt for his production house. "Though Chopra wanted to promote regional cinema, she also understood that a production house has to be financially viable," says Bhargava, adding that she is highly involved in the making of a movie. "She reads the scripts and takes a call on casting. When the film goes on floor, we make it a point to send her the rushes on a weekly basis,

Barfi! and *Aitraaz* in her early days. Actresses today would wish for such roles," says Vajir Singh, editor of trade magazine *BoxOfficeIndia*.

However, Inventus's Doshi warns, "Celebrities who are already successful in their careers need to believe in the ventures they are investing in or working with. That is the only way they can give 100 percent time and effort to them."

Chopra Jonas seems sorted on that front. "I came in as someone who is a believer more than anything else," she says of Bumble. "Whether I was an investor or an advisor, all those

CHOPRA JONAS BELONGS TO A RARE BREED OF CELEBRITIES, PARTICULARLY WOMEN, TO HAVE BACKED TECH COMPANIES

and she gives her point of view."


PPP has nine films going on floor this year. "The plan is to make it a mini studio and establish it in regional cinema before taking on Bollywood," says Bhargava. In 2019, PPP will also expand beyond movies to make web series for platforms such as Netflix. Bhargava claims at least 80 percent of the movies produced by them have been profitable.

A successful entrepreneur needs to be ambitious, aggressive and a risk-taker. And if it's the content business, the risk is higher, says Bhargava. "That is the only way to take some big bets and Priyanka has all of these qualities," he says.

As an actor, Chopra Jonas is no stranger to taking risks. Whether it was *Aitraaz* (2004), playing an autistic girl in *Barfi!* (2012), or woman warrior Kashibai in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), she has shown her versatility on screen. "Look at the risks she took for the roles in

things you can bifurcate as much as you want, but when I was sitting at that dinner, I was like wow, this is awesome, I wish I had had that when I was starting out, when I had just moved to Mumbai," she says.

The actor-turned-investor is producing nine movies in 2019, writing a book, acting in two movies, investing in two companies, endorsing several brands and taking Unicef trips (she was appointed a Unicef National Ambassador in 2010). Her quest, she says, "is to do multiple things and be excellent at all of them".

It's something that Acharia says she has seen Chopra Jonas do for her entire career. "When I met Priyanka initially in London... she had a Prada bag and was wearing a scarf from Zara. I said to her you are the only person I know who would be wearing something Prada and something Zara. And she said, 'You've got to be able to mix your brand, you've got to play at every level, you have to be everywhere'." 



MARY KOM
AGE: 36 • Boxer

PUNCH & MARY

The Olympic medallist, six-time World Champion and a mother of three is one of the country's most decorated sportspersons. And she isn't done yet

By KATHAKALI CHANDA

I

It is a rather benign question to trouble a 36-year-old adroit at juggling multiple roles. But asked which has been her most satisfying career achievement to date, Mangte Chungneijang Mary Kom takes a moment to pause, and scrunches her face. "It's difficult to pick one," she says, "I've had so many victories at various levels and each is equally satisfying."

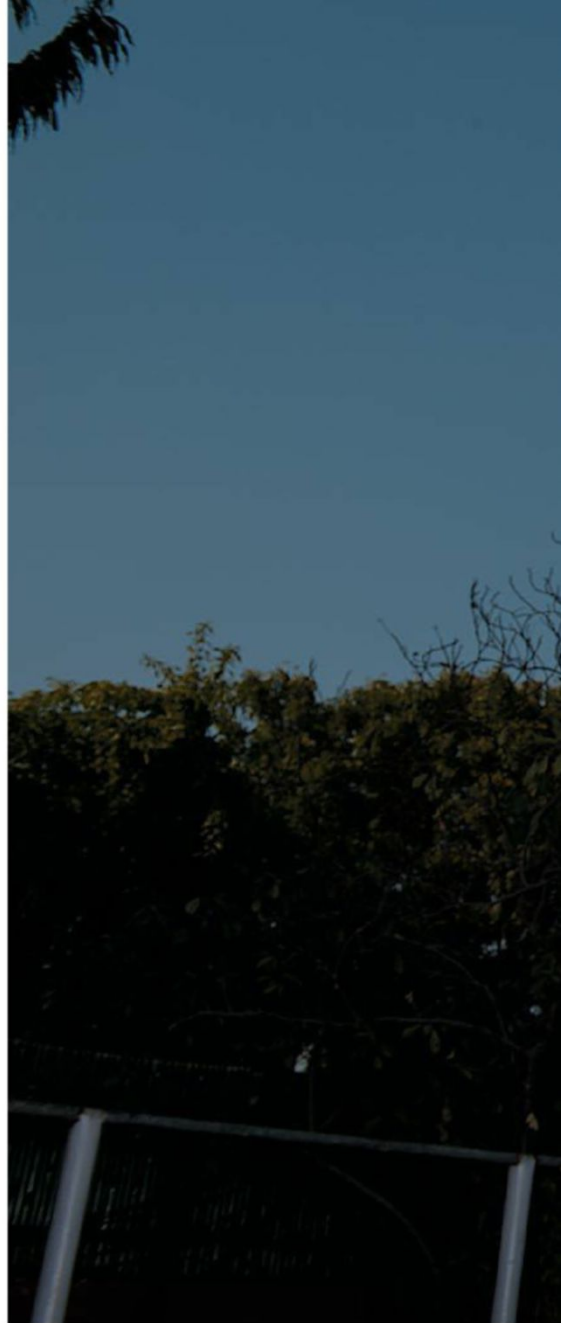
One can perhaps explain Kom's predicament as a problem of plenty. After all, sitting across me at her official residence in Delhi

and hidden behind an affable demeanour—insisting that we pack for the road the cookies and rice crackers she's brought back from Imphal—is one of India's most accomplished sportspersons in recent times. Olympic medallist, six times World Champion (the most for a woman boxer, and tied with Cuban male boxer Felix Savon), the first woman to win the AIBA (International Boxing Association) Legends Award, and the No 1 women's boxer in the association's rankings released in January, Kom has ticked quite a few boxes.

For a boxer with such credentials, a bronze in the London 2012 Olympic Games could very well be another piece of metal that she's picked along the way. But after some prodding, Kom does choose the Olympics—where she won after shifting to a higher 51 kg category from her playbook of 48—as her most satisfying career achievement. For, there's no denying that the bronze brought her recognition of a magnitude that winning five World Championships before didn't. It changed in a heartbeat the years

of travelling by buses and trains, cramming up in a room of four with just a fan in the oppressive Delhi heat, the utter ignorance about nutrition, diet, doctors, physios, what have you. "Earlier, we would just buy glucose and drink. That would be our so-called diet," she says. "We continued boxing, without even knowing if it would be included in the Olympics, just because we wanted to box. With the Olympic medal, people became more aware of women's boxing."

With the Olympic win came help—land and funding—for running her Mary Kom Boxing Academy in Imphal. And, in 2014, when her biopic starring Priyanka Chopra followed,





her fandom spiralled out of control. Now every time Kom steps out on the street, she, and her entire family, are inundated with selfie requests. Going to the nearest shopping mall in Delhi—where she has moved after being nominated to the Rajya Sabha as a Member of Parliament (MP) in 2016—entails prior planning, not just in fixing up an entourage but also her disguise in a scarf, mask or a hoodie. When was the last time you could say that about an Indian sportsperson who isn't a cricketer or shuttler PV Sindhu?

If Kom's CV doesn't yet look impressive enough, add to it the fact that twice she's conquered the ring after giving birth—first in 2007 to

2019 IS A STEPPING STONE TOWARDS KOM'S ULTIMATE GOAL OF WINNING A GOLD AT THE TOKYO OLYMPICS IN 2020

twins Khupneivar and Rechungvar, and then to Prince in 2013. A Twitter tribute to tennis legend Serena Williams from Jelena, the wife of men's world No 1 Novak Djokovic, will help put this in perspective. "This amazing woman...has given birth to her little girl just one day before I gave birth to my girl 10 months ago. I am barely surviving to watch, and

she is RUNNING and playing FINAL of a Grand Slam," Jelena tweeted after the Wimbledon ladies singles final of 2018 where Williams was the runner-up. For Kom, imagine that twice over, in a sport where one has to routinely take body blows.

"It was painful after giving birth, particularly because I had C-sections. When I resumed training,

I didn't give 100 percent. I built up capacity gradually," says Kom.

Dr Nikhil Latey, a physiotherapist and sports scientist who worked with Kom between 2010 and 2016, recalls that once her younger son was born in May 2013, Kom took a 10-month break and returned to training next March. When she joined, with her mum and the child watching from the ringside, she was unfit and had put on post-pregnancy weight. "In the first 20 days, we were quite gentle with her, but she soon got into a routine and shed much of her weight quickly. You could see her feet were moving the way they were supposed to, her punches were coming out the way they were supposed to," says Latey. "By the end of the month, we knew she was back." Six months later, Kom won a gold medal at the Asian Games in Incheon.

Kom says, "Once my training is regular, nobody can beat me easily. Even if I lose, it'll be a close match."

Her quick recovery is facilitated by an extreme self-awareness and understanding of how much her body can cope with. If she hasn't slept well between her morning and evening practice sessions, Kom will dial down the intensity and compensate the day after. It makes her training sessions focussed and smart. "We make juniors run more, but with Mary we prepare standing fitness schedules. If junior boxers are made to run for 40-45 minutes, she'll run in clusters of 7 minutes of medium-speed, 7 minutes fast and 7 minutes slow," says Mohammed Ali Qamar, chief coach for the national women's boxing team.

Inside the ring too, smart is the keyword for Kom. She trains imagining her opponent in her head and executes the plan to perfection during a match. Often, less is more. "Some boxers use all their energy in the first round and can't even lift their hands in the second. Unnecessary



punching kills your energy. A punch on target," she says, thumping her left palm with her right fist, "conserves it."

Her trainer Chhote Lal Yadav, with whom Kom is working since 2016, calls her a boxer in the mould of her idol Muhammad Ali. Like the legend, who is known to have famously floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee, Kom hits quickly and gets out of the way. "Even at 36, I haven't seen such fast punches among Indian boxers. She is faster than 18-year-old trainees and more hardworking than them. Mary trains with the hunger of someone who has just started out," says Yadav. Kom's record-breaking sixth World Championship title in Delhi in November came after convincingly defeating Ukrainian boxer Hanna Okhota, 13 years her junior; Okhota was all of five when Kom bagged her first World Championships podium finish, winning a silver at the 2001 edition of the tournament in the US.

"In sport, we have really talented people about whom we say they were born to do this. For instance, Kapil

Dev was born to be a fast bowler. Mary is in that mould. She was born to box. Her body, muscles and mind are that of a boxer's," says Geet Sethi, former billiards champion and founder of Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ), a not-for-profit foundation that supports top athletes with funding and infrastructure. Kom was signed on by OGQ in 2009 for her conviction to fight and win despite moving up the weight category.

Ten years on, she is still consumed by the deep desire to win. She is one of the earliest ones to report for practice every day and once she is into the boxing hall, she is neither a wife nor a mother nor an MP, "but just a student", says her trainer Yadav. Conversely, when she is at home, she isn't a boxer, but a hands-on mother, who's often feeding her kids, playing with them or giving them the occasional holler to get off the computer or stop fiddling with her phone. "They calm down for a moment, but an hour later, they are back to their old selves," she says. "Just look at this," she holds

▲
Mary Kom with husband Onler and their three kids at an event in New Delhi

up doodled eyes and moustaches on the cover of a magazine, before doubling up with laughter.

Spending time with her children and husband Onler has been easy after the family moved to Delhi. The kids have been admitted to a school nearby. Weekdays still remain chock-a-block with two practice sessions a day and visits to Parliament when the House convenes. Weekends are slightly slow, with only a morning practice session and an off day on Sunday. Come Monday morning, the kids would be off to school and she to the practice session—as she gears up for the World Championships in the second half of the year, a tournament that would hold the qualifying rounds for Olympics 2020—where the family would again recede into the background and into

urgent ones. When the dates were finally given, they coincided with Kom's Asian championships. It was Onler who convinced his wife to fly down to China for the event, where Kom displayed supreme resolve by winning gold. "It shows how she never carries her family worries into the ring," says Latey. "Once the tournament was won, she flew back to Chandigarh to be with her son the day before he got operated."

Suprita Das, author and former sports journalist, recalls, "Over my many interactions with Mary, I've noticed that off the ring, she is a doting mother, while on it she's a tigress, a quick learner and a ferocious fighter. I haven't been able to crack how she does that," she says. "Whenever I've asked her about her seamless transformation from a mother to a

to play with them, they never insist."

Today, Kom could well choose to hang up her gloves, for she already owns a part of the country's sporting history. If not just for her personal glories—an incredible journey from an impoverished family in a remote Manipur village—she could very well be credited with opening up a conversation about a sport that wasn't even part of public consciousness in a cricket-obsessed country, or an Olympic discipline till 2012. In doing that, Kom has not only emulated her role model Dingko Singh—the Manipuri boxer who inspired her to take up the sport with a gold-medal winning performance in 1998 Asiad—but has taken it many times forward. "It's success stories like Mary's that have brought about a change in the attitude of administrators, that if you support our boxers, they'll bring us the medals," says Das.

But Kom isn't done yet. 2019 is a key year for Olympic qualifications and is a stepping stone towards her ultimate goal of winning a gold at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. Till that is done, the thought of retirement isn't even likely to cross her mind. That she's the country's biggest medal hope going into an international tournament is evidence of her calibre and charisma. Like tennis stars Roger Federer and the Williams sisters, Kom is motoring on at an age many of their counterparts would have walked into the sunset.

Once she does stop, there's more boxing through her academy, where she houses and trains aspirants for free. Five of them have, in fact, won medals at the recently-concluded Khelo India Youth Games. Right now though, all that's on the backburner, and the Tokyo Games are firmly ensconced as the bird's eye. Says Das, "Mary doesn't need to do anything more for us. She doesn't owe us anything more. Despite that, she continues to fight and win. This spirit to continue makes her like no one else." 🏆

WHOEVER SAID WOMEN CAN'T HAVE IT ALL HAVE NOT SEEN MARY KOM. OR HER HUSBAND ONLER, ONE OF THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND KOM HAVING IT ALL

the very able hands of Onler who, as many sources would say, is the veritable "rock in Mary's life".

Whoever said women can't have it all has not seen Mary Kom. Or Onler, one of the driving forces behind Kom having it all. Latey remembers driving down with Kom from Patiala, where she was training at the national camp, to Delhi in 2011, when the boxer told him about a heart surgery that one of her twins, Khupneivar, had to undergo. Onler, who had given up his government job to let Mary box, had kept the information from her and only told her when the camp had a break and she was to return home. The surgery was planned at PGI in Chandigarh, close to Patiala, but since it wasn't an emergency, was scheduled only for later, prioritising

boxer and back, she keeps saying I don't know, God helps me do it."

It helps that the children are in it too. While the twins, now 11, would earlier create a fuss while Kom would leave home, they've settled down and come to terms with her schedule over the past several years. "Funnily, the youngest one always knew. He's never cried when I've left, instead would push me to go for practice," says Kom. "Imagine having to bear the guilt of leaving behind a howling kid." Often, when Kom is catching up on rest in between her practice sessions, the kids tiptoe around the house so as not to wake her up. "They love playing football. Look at the number of footballs in the courtyard," she rolls her eyes in mock anger. "But when I am too tired



BHAKTI SHARMA
AGE: 29 • Open water swimmer

TURNING THE TIDE

The Mumbai-born-Udaipur-raised swimmer has swum in all five oceans of the world, sometimes with penguins and fin whales as cheerleaders

By KUNAL PURANDARE

B

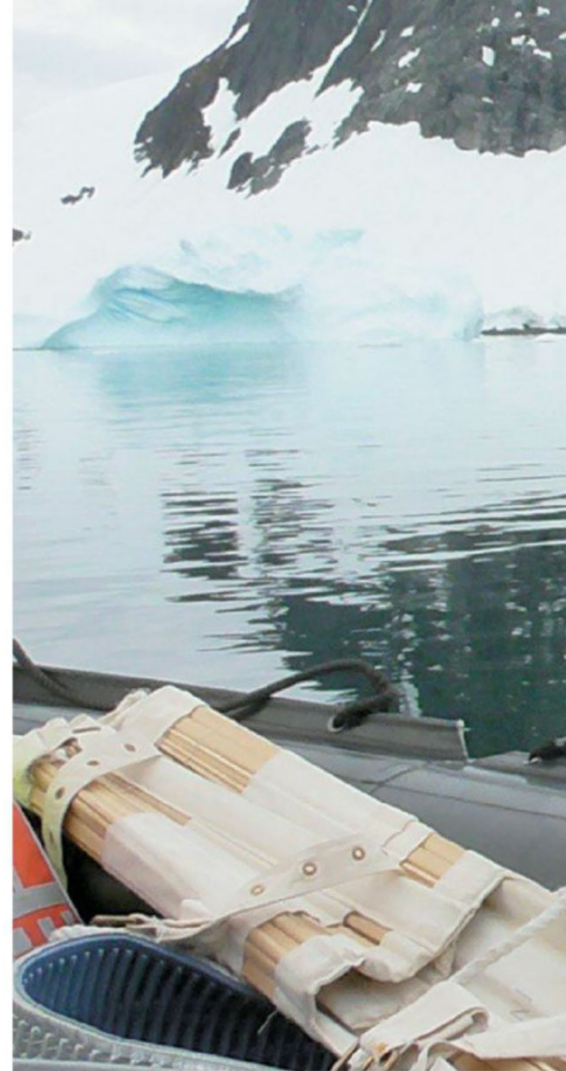
Bhakti Sharma was 16 when she surprised the lady at the immigration counter at London's Heathrow Airport with her answer for 'purpose of visit'. "I'm here to swim the English Channel," she said with all honesty. "What are you here for, again? You must be crazy... it's cold and long," the lady shot back. Sharma merely smiled. Days later, in July 2006, she completed the 36-km solo swim from Shakespeare Beach in Dover, England, to Calais, France, in 13 hours and 55 minutes. Sharma conquered the English Channel

again in 2008, with mother-cum-coach Leena and friend Priyanka Gehlot, becoming the first mother-daughter duo to accomplish the feat.

Water has been Sharma's best friend since Leena pushed her into the deep end in a 12-metre swimming pool at the age of two. By 25, she had achieved the rare distinction of becoming the first Asian woman, and youngest in the world, to complete open swimming in the 1°C Antarctic waters, in a record time of 41.14 minutes (2.3 km). With it, she built an enviable résumé of having swum in all the five oceans in the world (*see box*).

Swimming has meant different things at different times for the Mumbai-born-Udaipur-raised girl, who also swam across eight other seas and channels. "Initially, it was a necessity because one should know how to swim to survive. When I began winning state and district championships, it turned into a competitive sport and it was all about proving myself. With open swims, it was about finding myself," the 29-year-old says.

In the absence of swimming



pools in the desert city of Udaipur, Leena took an annual membership of ₹5,000 with a private hotel and trained her daughter for an hour every day. While the amount was big nearly 25 years ago, it was the social and cultural battles that were harder to fight. A national-level swimmer herself, Leena would also get into the pool, despite taunts from relatives and locals who believed that women should cover their faces with *ghoonghats* (veils).

Leena, though, had spotted the spark in her daughter. "She was too good a swimmer and a quick learner. She picked up the butterfly, the most difficult of all strokes, in a day," says the 53-year-old, who went from pillar to post to understand the requirements of taking her daughter to the oceans of the world.

Fluctuating weather, strong currents and non-linear paths are among the many challenges one encounters in the open sea. Besides,



swimming is a lonely sport. But that's where Sharma evolves as a person. "For long durations, it's just you and the water... you and your thoughts. Rarely do people get to spend so much time with themselves," says Sharma, who recently completed her masters in mass communications from the University of Florida and is pursuing her PhD there.

Sharma's philosophical outlook aside, her sport also calls for fighting adverse situations alone. For instance, during her solo swim in the English Channel, she was stuck at one spot for about two hours. The fact that her parents were in a boat moving

alongside was a big motivation. "I knew I had it in me and that I could struggle a bit more. Sometimes you want to do it not just for yourself but also for the people who made it possible," says Sharma, a recipient of the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award (2012) from then president Pranab Mukherjee.

Premanand Gajinkar, 52, who coached Sharma at Mumbai's Andheri Sports Complex for three months in a year for three years since she was 12, is not surprised by her ability to overcome challenges. "She had immense potential when she came to me. We built her endurance

and strength with designated workouts. A swimmer must have power and confidence to deal with turning currents. Bhakti could easily combat such obstacles," he says. "She practised for two hours in the mornings and two in the evenings, but never complained. She enjoyed those sessions."

For her Antarctic sojourn, Sharma had trained for nearly two months in tough conditions. She quit her job with advertising agency FCBulka in Mumbai and spent most of her time in Udaipur, where the lake water was no match for the cold she would encounter in the Earth's southernmost continent. So, she added 15-20 tonnes of ice in a large tub and suspended herself into it for hours. This went on for 10 days till she realised it could have adverse implications on her health, including putting stress on the heart.

Despite intense preparations, she was all at sea in the Antarctic

“FOR LONG HOURS, IT’S JUST YOU AND THE WATER. RARELY DO PEOPLE SPEND SO MUCH TIME WITH THEMSELVES.”

BHAKTI SHARMA, OPEN WATER SWIMMER

HIGH FIVE

Bhakti Sharma has conquered all five oceans of the world



2003 INDIAN OCEAN

Uran Port to Gateway of India (16 km)

2004 INDIAN OCEAN

Dharamtar to Gateway of India (36 km); completed return journey (72 km) in 2008 with mother Leena and friend Priyanka Gehlot

2007 PACIFIC OCEAN

Swam around the Rock, Alcatraz, San Francisco Bay (6.5 km)

2007 ATLANTIC OCEAN

Bags gold medal in marathon swim around the Key West Island, Florida (21 km)

2010 ARCTIC OCEAN

Becomes youngest swimmer and second individual to swim in four oceans after completing swim in 33 minutes (1.8 km)

2015 SOUTHERN OCEAN

Swims for 41.14 minutes in freezing Antarctic waters (2.3 km); becomes first Asian woman and youngest in the world to do so

during the initial few minutes. The water was far from friendly. “I was ready for the cold, but the water felt heavy because of the melting glaciers. It was dark and greyish, and the salt content was high. It was like pulling through oil,” reminisces Sharma. “For the first few minutes, I thought I won’t be able to do it. But my mental training helped. I decided to take it one stroke at a time.”

Yoga strengthened her mind. While in Udaipur, she meditated and spoke to her teacher (an elderly relative) to dispel doubts and fears that kept creeping in her head. The result was breaking a previous record (of covering 1.6 km in 18 minutes and 10 seconds) set by Britain’s Lewis Pugh in December 2005 at the age of 36. It won her praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi too. Sharma also found an unlikely supporter during that swim: A penguin. “After about 10 minutes into the water, I saw it go under my stomach. I took it as my personal cheerleader,” she says.

Encounters with stingrays, sea lions and jelly fish have given Sharma a glimpse of marine life up close. In fact, during her 2007 swim of the Strait of Gibraltar in the Mediterranean Sea off Spain, she saw a fin to her right. By the time she completed a stroke and looked again, it wasn’t visible. “I thought I had imagined it,” says Sharma, who goes through a range of emotions during her long swims and sings Bollywood songs to entertain

herself. Her mother told her after the swim that a fin whale was indeed by her side for a short while.

Such experiences romanticise the nature of the sport, but they often hide its ugly realities. Lack of acknowledgement for swimming in the country and paucity of financial support are major roadblocks that Sharma points to. “Swimming itself is not the main sport in India,” she rues.

Until her Gibraltar expedition, her family took care of the expenses and logistics. “I am their investment,” says Sharma, who loves travelling to new places. She found partial sponsorship from Hindustan Zinc, a Vedanta Group company, for her Antarctica swim, apart from relying on crowdfunding.


Leena claims they have spent crores on the expeditions and got less than 50 percent in sponsorships. A common refrain

from those she approached for monetary assistance: Why doesn’t she compete in the Olympics instead of doing all this?

Sharma’s father Chandra Shekhar worked for a watch factory in Mumbai before moving to Udaipur to start a marble business. Leena was chief cashier with Bank of India who took voluntary retirement in 2009. They lived in a one-bedroom flat in Udaipur and rented eight homes before buying their own house. “We, as a family, have grown together,” says an emotional Sharma, who aspires to be a successful businessperson.

Sharma went to the US with the intention of training for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. “But I miscalculated the time and energy that it takes. I have not been able to train as much, partly because I am also a teaching assistant and that takes up a lot of my time. This comes with the struggle of not having a sponsor,” she laments, before adding that she will strive hard to compete in the Games.

Sharma sees her achievements as merely meeting the targets that she had set for herself. “Till the Arctic swim, I did not realise the gravity of what I had done. But it has definitely given me a voice at different levels,” says Sharma, referring to the various platforms where she is often invited to narrate her story and encourage young girls to take up the sport.

The tide, she hopes, will turn one day. 

WATER BABY

Sharma has also swum across eight other seas and channels, including

2006
Crossed English Channel

2006
Won Lake Zurich Marathon Swim

2007
Swam 25 km in Gulf of Mexico

2007
Crossed the Strait of Gibraltar (19 km) in the Mediterranean Sea off Spain

2008
Completed English Channel swim in a relay along with mother Leena and friend Priyanka



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GIRLS, UNINTERRUPTED

Over the last few years, young sportswomen have exploded onto the global stage with medal-winning performances. Their stories of perseverance amid hardship are now spurring a legion of determined girls around the country

By MADHU KAPPARATH
with Amit Verma, Mexy Xavier, Anand Sah, Mongjam Ajit Kumar Singh,
Pravin Bajpai, Selvaprakash Lakshmanan, Subrata Biswas for Forbes India





LONG JUMP

Shaili Singh leaps under the watchful eyes of long-jump legend Anju Bobby George at the Sports Authority of India training centre in Kengeri, Bengaluru. Shaili, who's just turned 15, broke the under-16 national record at the Junior Nationals in Ranchi last November. Anju emphasises the importance of training to rid Indian athletes of an inferiority complex that they are overcome with when they compete internationally, and to learn to present themselves as champions.

HOCKEY

At Rajgangpur village in the interiors of Sundargarh district, Odisha, Sunil Tigga, an ex-armyman trains young girls and boys for free. The kids, who can't even afford shoes, hope to make it to formal training academies. Local hockey tournaments are held on weekends where a goat is awarded as the prize.

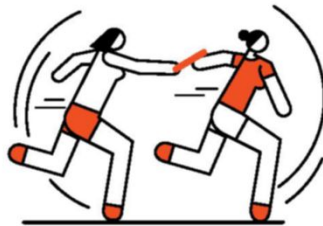
Odisha, which has produced national hockey players such as Gloria Dung Dung and Roselin Dung Dung, has been getting the most marginalised and oppressed groups to the fore through its Sports Hostel scheme, which was launched in 1985. Under the scheme, children between 10 and 14 are scouted from grassroot levels across the state and are trained in a variety of sports.



▼
FOOTBALL

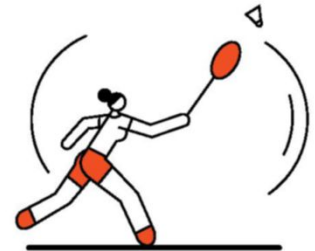
Rinki Majhi, on her way back from training with her under-9 football team at Joshra village in the Somra Bazaar area of Bengal's Hooghly district. Girls like her and Meghna Saha come to train every day, from homes of farmers or construction labourers. Rinki's team travels to Kolkata to play in the Baby League, a talent-scouting league format football competition for children between 4 and 13. The event is underway in Kolkata after completing respective legs in Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Assam.





▲ **BADMINTON**

At the Sports Authority of India Gopichand National Badminton Academy in Hyderabad, the results of an exacting fitness regimen and training—three sessions of two hours every day—are showing on **Meghana Reddy** and other players. Meghana won the doubles gold in under-15 Badminton Asia Championships in Myanmar last October. Her parents, police officer Ravinder Reddy and teacher Katha Reddy, made significant lifestyle and career changes to support their child's schedule and ambition.



▼ **TRACK & FIELD**

Aditi Parab (second from right), who won gold in the under-17 4x400 m relay at the Khelo India Youth Games in January, spent 16 months training on the concrete steps of Dadoji Konddev Stadium in Thane, Mumbai's neighbouring district. The athletes don't step on the stadium's infield as the grass is protected for cricket matches. Seen here (from left) are Aditi's co-trainees Nandini Kaskar, Sanika Nate and Akansha Gavade.





FENCING

Fencing's future hopefuls, **Sowmiya S** and **Vedika Kaushik** from Kerala, travelled in the crowded sleeper coach of the Silchar-Thiruvananthapuram Express, for three days each way, to participate in the Senior National Fencing Championship in Guwahati in February. They are trained by Sports Authority of India's Sagar Lagu at the organisation's centre in Thalassery, Kerala.





▲ WRESTLING

A glassful of fresh buffalo milk and the love of a grandmother are at the heart of wrestler **Bhumi Phogat**'s regimen in the rural hinterland of Rohtak, Haryana, where women wrestlers are a healthy aberration in a patriarchal, feudal society.

Bhumi, who recently won a gold medal at the national wrestling championship held in Cuttack, Odisha, trains at the Chhotu Ram Stadium Wrestling Academy in Rohtak. The academy, which has given India its first Olympic medallist in women's wrestling (Sakshi Malik) and over 31 international wrestlers, is the training ground for more than 100 children, including champions Mansi and Khushi Ahlawat.





SHOOTING

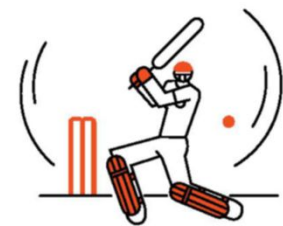
Bustling activity at the Madhya Pradesh State Shooting Academy in Bhopal. The academy has been making news lately with its scientific training programme and a host of medal-winning sharpshooters, including 18-year-old trap shooter Manisha Keer, who made history by becoming the first Indian woman to win a silver in the junior shotgun event at the International Shooting Sports Federation championship in South Korea last September. Olympian Mansher Singh, who specialises in double trap and trap shooting, coaches at the academy.





POLO

In February, young women lined up at the All Manipur Polo Association ground in Iroisemba, Manipur, to learn from senior polo players, despite a shutdown and curfew in capital city Imphal following volatile protests around the Citizen Amendment Bill. Manipur's players, on their famed Manipur ponies, have made a mark around the world in women's polo.



CRICKET

Located in outer Delhi, Shahbad Dairy is a badland with one of the highest rates of missing children. Sant Lal, an activist from Chitrakoot, arrived here in 2007 and set up Saksham, an initiative to empower schoolchildren with support from CRY. In 2014, alarmed by news of abductions and rapes, Lal began thinking of an initiative that would empower girls. He thought of a sport that connects with the young and old alike, and started an all-girls cricket team in 2015. They played a local tournament against a boys' teams. When the girls won and paraded their trophy through the narrow streets, the message came home.

GOING SOLO

Three women who have turned health tech entrepreneurs to solve real problems

By NAINI THAKER

SPOT CHECKS

G

Geethanjali Radhakrishnan narrates the story of a 60-year-old farmer from a remote village in Maharashtra, who caught a skin infection on his leg. The daily wager was on antibiotics for eight years—which cost him ₹1,000 per month—because the local doctors thought it was a bacterial infection. When the sexagenarian farmer was finally told that his leg might need an amputation, he went to a dermatologist in Pune, who told him that it was a fungal infection that could not be treated with antibiotics.

After hearing this farmer's story, Radhakrishnan, a bioengineer from Shanmugha Arts, Science, Technology & Research Academy in Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur district, decided to create something that would enable faster diagnoses of skin infections. In December 2015, she set up Adiuvo Diagnostics in Chennai, which manufactures a handheld device called Skin-Scope. It captures multi-

GEETHANJALI RADHAKRISHNAN

AGE: 29 • Founder and director, Adiuvo Diagnostics

spectral images of the infected area, and uses machine-learning to detect and classify the pathogens non-invasively in under 2 minutes, compared to the usual processes that take three to seven days.

“Our device is the only affordable multispectral imaging device compared to other bulky devices that cost more than ₹14 lakh. The concept of using multi-spectral imaging and a completely non-invasive method makes us stand out,” she says. The device also classifies the infecting bacteria, which helps determine the right treatment. Although Radhakrishnan does not disclose the expected price of the device, she says it will be five to seven times less than what is available in the market. Currently, the device is in its beta-testing stage and will soon be launched in rural and urban markets.

So far the company has received a grant of ₹1 crore from organisations such as Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (Birac) and Villgro Innovation Foundation. Last December, Adiuvo has raised an



undisclosed amount in a pre-series A round of funding from Menterra Ventures.

“We identified the potential of Geethanjali's product through Villgro's Unconvention. Our partner Villgro provided initial incubation funding and product development support. Geethanjali and her team showed excellent execution to accelerate their product development and path to market,” says Mukesh Sharma, co-founder and managing director, Menterra Ventures. 

N

Necessity is truly the mother of invention, especially in the case of Rajlakshmi Borthakur. An IT engineer by profession, Borthakur decided to become a self-taught expert on neurology to understand her son's epilepsy. Years of research and desperation led her to set up Bengaluru-based TerraBlue XT in 2016. "Soon after my son was born in 2011, I started reading papers, journals and medical books on neurology. With some knowledge on how the brain works, and my fair understanding in electronics, I came up with a concept of the device and then hired a fresher to help create a prototype," says the first generation entrepreneur.

The biomedical wearable ring called TJay, which is yet to be launched commercially, is embedded with sensors, and can predict epilepsy attacks through the patient's blood pressure and pulse rate. Signals are transmitted in real time for doctors to take the right decisions.

"I submitted my work for the Innovate for Digital India Challenge in 2016 and it was among the top three out of 1,900 startups," says Borthakur, who was a winner of the Women Transforming India Awards in 2017, presented by NITI Aayog, in partnership with MyGov and the United Nations.

The company received funding from the Biotechnology Ignition Grant from the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council, Karnataka government's Idea2PoC Grant, angel investors, as well as Centre For Innovation Incubation & Entrepreneurship (CIIE) of IIM Ahmedabad, and Nedfi Venture

FINGER ON THE PULSE



Capital Limited. Vipul Patel, vice president, investments, CIIE, says, "The space and problem Rajlakshmi and team were solving was something that made us back the team and her venture.

Very few people were at the time attempting to cater to early detection of epilepsy."

But, like most entrepreneurs, the IIM-Calcutta alumnus has had her share of ups and downs. "In the past three years, I've spent a lot of time away from family and put all my money into this company. There have been times when I've not had money to pay salaries, a lot of my employees threatened me... it was unimaginable mental trauma. But I wanted to keep the company alive, even if it was a one-woman company," Borthakur recounts. "Investors have told me I'm

RAJLAKSHMI BORTHAKUR
AGE: 41 • Founder and CEO, TerraBlue XT



not CEO material and that I am too inexperienced for a global project. One of them said, he will only provide funding if I am replaced."

Borthakur proudly calls her son 'a catalyst for change', but credits her success to her daughter Dibyalakshmi, mother Junu Medhi and mother-in-law Minoti Borthakur. "My 17-year-old daughter has stopped going to college, to support me and look after her brother, which is a huge sacrifice. And my mother-in-law has been a huge support, taking care of my children while I am constantly travelling."

Borathakur and her team are now working on another connected wearable device called Xaant. It will measure one's physical and mental health to be able to identify an individual's calmness levels. **F**



SUBHADRA DRAVIDA
Age: 40 • Founder and CEO,
Transcell Biologics

CELLULAR CURES

A

“As a child I dreamt of discovering the Holy Grail, and I decided to pick science as my weapon,” says Subhadra Dravida, founder and CEO, Transcell Biologics. The stem-cell researcher-turned-entrepreneur strongly believes in translational research, and feels entrepreneurship was the logical extension of her research journey. “I have always felt that I have a magical power to cure the suffering and entrepreneurship is the catalyst, which will help me reach the finish line.”

Transcell Biologics, started in 2009, is a Hyderabad-based biotech company that uses transformative stem cell-based products and solutions to treat chronic and debilitating diseases. The company commercialised its bio banking vertical (cryopreserving donor cells for regenerative and personalised medicine) in 2011. “We started with the biobanking vertical. And recently have moved into developing stem cell-based models that are being advocated as alternatives to the animal testing for pharma companies and researchers,” says Dravida. So far, Transcell Biologics has received \$3.5 million in funding from a couple of HNIs from Hyderabad, and the Indian Angel Network (IAN).

“I liked the fact that they had bootstrapped their way and were also working on an asset light model, leveraging her lab and academia

connects. The potential high value intellectual property that was on the table—albeit the need for patient capital—was a final kicker in terms of the upside,” says Sanjay Jesrani, founder and CEO, Go North Ventures, part of the IAN network.

Dravida is a postgraduate in industrial biotechnology, with a PhD from University of Ottawa, Canada. She has worked as a researcher at institutes such as the University of North Carolina, and the Ottawa Health Research Institute. In India she has worked at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology and the LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad.

While entrepreneurship wasn’t part of her plans, since she was 16 she knew science was her calling. So what pushed her into setting up her own company? “When I was in Canada, pursuing my PhD for a particular section of my work, I had no option but to wait for eight months, simply because the approvals were taking too long. I realised decision-making from the committees was taking too long, which was very frustrating. I felt that as an entrepreneur I could speed things up,” she explains.

Dravida’s journey as a businesswoman has not been without its set of challenges. “At various stages during my entrepreneurship, I had a tough time securing capital, getting funding, deliverables and team building. It is a continuous examination, and as a solo founder it is tougher.”

Like most women, she has had her fair share of men questioning her. “I have this brilliant ability of forgetting what is not important! I don’t pay too much attention to such people,” she laughs. **F**

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FIGHTING STEREOTYPES

The civilian who has trained the best of India's armed forces

By RUCHIKA SHAH



“On a weekend if I’m in Mumbai, I go to my set-up and spar with men half my age and twice my weight. I box and grapple with them, and take them down on the mat. I get bashed and bruised but give them a hard time until they are knocked out. Now I’m nearing 50, so it gets tougher but you have to work it out somehow,” says India’s first female combat trainer, Dr Seema Rao.

Rao has spent the last 20 years training, without any compensation, over 20,000 soldiers of India’s elite armed forces in close quarter battle (CQB), which is armed and unarmed battle within 30 yards.

She has received three Army Chief Citations, a US President’s Volunteer Service Award and a World Peace Diplomat Award for her service.

Despite being a doctor by training, Rao decided to give up the financial stability that comes with practising medicine and instead dedicated her life to train the armed forces, and has spent most of the last two decades in scorching deserts, snow-clad mountains and jungles, training young personnel. Her ability to innovate upon traditional combat methods, and her physical and mental strength, have paved the way for more women to enter the male-dominated military.

At her home in Mumbai, her living room reflects her multifaceted life: A table full of trophies, a rifle leaning behind it, photographs from training sessions and award

ceremonies, a cabinet of medals, and books on a vast range of subjects.

In the last 20 years, there isn’t an elite Indian armed force that Rao hasn’t trained. Along with her husband Honorary Major Dr Deepak Rao, she has trained personnel from the state police forces, the air force and navy, border security forces, anti-terror squads, and national security guards in unarmed combat training, team-on-team tactics, pioneering innovations in close quarter combat, and reflex shooting techniques.

But, she says, it was destiny: “We were just two enthusiastic youngsters trying to make a difference. Some forces found our work to be worthy and it just worked out.”

Rao had trained in boxing, taekwondo, firefighting and rifle shooting, with then fellow-student and martial arts aficionado Deepak Rao while they were in medical school

RAO DECIDED TO GIVE UP THE FINANCIAL STABILITY THAT COMES FROM BEING A DOCTOR AND DEDICATED HER LIFE TO TRAIN THE ARMED FORCES





▲
(Left) Seema Rao, who can shoot an apple off her husband's head with an AK-47 at 75 yards, at the Corps Battle School in Kashmir

together. By the time she graduated she was a black belt in taekwondo and had finished an adventure course from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute with a medal despite a knee injury.

But when it came to military training, the odds were stacked against her. First, by tradition, the military is averse to civilians. Second, taking advice about military and combat techniques from a civilian is unheard of, let alone letting them become a trainer. Third, it's even tougher to break into the inner circuit for a woman.

She proved it all wrong. "I knew I had to hone my physical skills and abilities, so I worked hard. The forces that were open to what we brought

to the table, welcomed us," she says. The ones that weren't, didn't.

Their first assignment was with the Pune City Police in the early

1990s. A chance meeting with the commandant of the Pune Police—while on a morning walk—and a quick demonstration of their skills was enough to impress him. The Raos were invited to conduct a workshop in unarmed combat for the Pune Police. He then recommended them to the Mumbai Police. "It got the ball rolling," Rao says.

"They taught our forces everything about fitness, how to eat, exercise, reduce weight," says VS Deshmukh, retired Additional Director General of Police and Commissioner, State Intelligence Department,

who was in charge of the training seminars conducted by the Raos.

"I gave them letters of recommendations, and since then they have done excellent work everywhere. I'm 74 and she's still my fitness expert and decides my routine."

Their first national assignment came in 1997 when then Mumbai Police Commissioner RS Tyagi became the director general of the National Security Guard (NSG). While in the late 1990s, Retired Brigadier Balbir Singh gave them their big break—a meeting with then Army Chief General Shankar Roychowdhury, which culminated in a six-week course organised for the Parachute Regiment Training Centre in Bengaluru.

"There are a lot of sharpshooters outside the Army. Once you get into the art of warfare, you don't have to be in uniform to make a difference," says Singh, who has spent a month and a half in training camps with the couple, and knows them since their early days.

Even as assignments started piling up, Rao started training rigorously to become an ace shooter. "I can shoot an apple off my husband's head with an AK-47 at 75 yards," she says with a smile, a feat that was achieved when her abilities were questioned by a trainee at a camp and has since become part of their demonstrations.

The couple has developed the Rao Reflex Shooting Method, used by the Indian military, which is used to shoot quickly and accurately without spending time taking aim, as if by reflex. "At close quarters, you need to shoot first before the enemy's fire rips you apart. The technique trains you to do that," she explains. She can shoot five rounds of a 9mm pistol at a target in under two minutes.

"Anyone can shoot, but improving the reflexes of your arms, and good arm-and-eye coordination means when you fire at a person, it will hit. It makes all the difference,

and that's what they brought to the table," says Singh. They also made unarmed combat more interesting for the troops, he adds.

Battle and combat techniques continuously evolve, based on environment, technology, weaponry and ammunition. With terrorism on the rise in India in the late 1990s, Rao saw the need to innovate CQB techniques. "Terrorist encounters take place at 30 to 40 yards, rather than 500 yards of conventional battle, and may include civilian hostages and concrete walls. So you need CQB techniques," she says.

Being a seventh-degree black belt in unarmed combat, she trains soldiers to tackle the enemy at close quarters even without ammunition. Once your ammunition is over, she explains, there can be a hand-to-hand combat or hand-to-weapon combat. This is where her training in Bruce Lee's philosophy of martial arts—Jeet Kune Do (JKD) is based on the philosophy of intercepting an attack before it takes place, and retaliating with minimum energy and movement—comes handy. She's one of five female trainers of JKD in the world, and also the most senior. "It teaches us the vital areas in a human body. The science is where I strike with my hand or weapon, to handicap, maim or cripple the enemy. This helps in close encounters," she says.

Rao has also done courses in mountaineering, rock climbing and scuba diving to understand different terrains and the difficulties commandos may face. "Sometimes the cold makes your fingers go numb, and you can't hold the weapon. It tests you, but there can be no excuses."

In 2010, Rao was made an approved CQB training resource for the government after the Ministry of Home Affairs ordered a pilot course to check the veracity of their training. In 2011, her husband

A HEAD INJURY ONCE CAUSED AMNESIA THAT LASTED WEEKS, AND SHE HAS BEEN SHOT AT BY INSURGENTS. BUT QUITTING WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION

Deepak was made Honorary Major of the Territorial Army for his contribution to the armed forces. "There is no provision for women to get ranked in the Army till today. So she [Seema] missed the honour," he says. But she has no regrets.

But the path to success has been strewn with personal sacrifices. Rao decided to forgo having a child to remain dedicated to her work, and later adopted a girl.

"Motherhood is beautiful, but it causes many physical changes. I have to be in top form," she says. A head injury on assignment once caused amnesia that lasted weeks, and she has been shot at by insurgents. A monkey rope exercise at 50 feet gone awry led to a spinal fracture tying her down to a bed. But quitting was out of the question.

Would she do it any other way? "I think I've lived well. With all its ups and down and with all the strife, this is the life I want to live," she says with a smile.

While dedicating their life to the armed forces has been intellectually and spiritually fulfilling, doing it without compensation—the armed forces only provided logistics, and boarding—also meant that at times it was difficult for them to make ends meet. "We had to break our fixed deposits, but then, we always knew the path wasn't going to be rosy," she adds.

In 2003, they set up the Academy of Combat Training in Mumbai to train corporates, of which she's the technical director. "Finally, money started coming in," she says.

Deshmukh adds, "I've seen the girls in her academy fight. They learn how to defend themselves, and can take their opponent down mercilessly."


What has been the pinnacle of success for her? "Former Army Commander General Deepak Kapoor directing us to train battle schools in the Kashmir Valley, and later, former Army Commander General VK Singh asking us to train counter terror training schools in Assam," she says easily.

Last year, Rao trained the Central Industrial Security Force Regiment Training School (CISF), the Air Force Academy and police forces in Bengaluru and Belgaum, in Karnataka.

She also spent the better part of last year writing a book on the aspects of explosive and IED recognition, which found recognition among the Indian forces, CISF, police forces, security units of Infosys, Isro, and the Mumbai airport.

Her previous eight books have found a place in the libraries of the Indian armed forces and the US's Federal Bureau of Investigation.

While she takes up fewer assignments now, she uses her story to make a difference to society. She has five Ted Talks under her belt and is often invited to share her story with the youth.

Recently, she spoke at the National Women's Parliament in Amravati, Maharashtra, addressing 15,000 young girls. "I like my military assignments, but I like contributing to society too. I hope that my story will inspire the youth—especially women—to break out of their shells and explore their inner attributes, even if it means taking an unconventional path." 



KOMAL MANGTANI

Senior director, and head of engineering and business intelligence, Uber

‘WOMEN IN POWER HAVE WORKED DOUBLY HARD’

The influential technology leader speaks about the challenges of nurturing female managers, and how Uber is becoming a better place for women

By PANKTI MEHTA KADAKIA

F

From Surat to Silicon Valley, Komal Mangtani has had a bumpy ride to success. Now senior director, and head of engineering and business intelligence at Uber, Mangtani is one of the small but growing group of women leaders in the global technology world. She was on the *Forbes* list of ‘The World’s Top 50 Women in Tech 2018’, and works extensively with communities such as Women Who Code and Girls Who

Code, in order to encourage more female participation in technology.

On a visit to Hyderabad, she spoke with *Forbes India* about the obstacles she has had to overcome, her work with women, and the public storm that Uber’s former CEO Travis Kalanick left for the team to weather—allegations of ignoring hundreds of harassment claims, objectifying women employees, invoking gender biases and giving Uber an all-round disgraceful reputation for women at work. Excerpts:

Q Growing up in a traditional Indian family, you had to battle various stereotypes to pursue a career in technology. Can you tell us about your journey?

I come from a conservative family, people who were loving, but not necessarily giving me the right feedback. Back then, travelling 200 km to study, staying in a hostel, was all a no-no. I distinctly remember crying, trying to convince my family this was the right thing for me. I was very clear

that sitting in a society with tight norms is not going to work for me. I wanted to do something different.

My family’s concerns were mostly around safety. When I look at it, I see that the growth of many women is stunted by this concern and we need to tackle the root cause of it. For me, however, computers became the key to my independence. Coding was like my version of video games. You have to think, analyse, solve problems—and if the code doesn’t work, it becomes even more engaging, to the extent that you forget everything else until it does. Soon, it became the answer to me becoming self-dependent, and finding some purpose in life. My parents had to convince my relatives that this was okay.

I graduated in computer engineering, and I started doing a job, which was another big taboo. It was considered that if a woman did a job, the family was poor. We had to break through that notion as a family, and my father fought many of these battles for me.



Q What has changed for women in technology between now and then?

It has become better from those days, when it was questionable whether or not a woman would even try to get into college. But in some factions, it has not yet. Even once you graduate, entering the workforce is a different ballgame. You deal with unconscious biases, without even recognising them as such, and end up blaming yourself. I think the biggest hurdle still remains when women assume that certain failures are their own, but, in fact, are more to do with their circumstances.

The other piece is just lack of support. I've seen this at Uber, at VMware, and everywhere else too, where women face challenges but don't reach out to each other. Perhaps because there aren't enough of us, women end up thinking their struggles are unique to them. If I could send one message to women, it would be this: Anything you are going through,

someone else has already faced and figured something out for it. Reach out. My biggest apprehension is with women who don't, and end up leaving the workforce early as a result.

Another problem is that even as you grow within an organisation, people with the best intentions overlook you for critical projects. There's a lack of opportunity to show your potential. That's something we need to work on. How do you solve it when you aren't even given the opportunity? That's a big reason women have a hard time scratching the glass ceiling, forget breaking it.

Q Would you say you have had to work extra hard as a woman to counter this perspective and prove yourself?

I think all women have to work doubly hard. You have to make your contributions very objective, very black and white, to avoid any arguments around it. I have root-

caused this to the fact that people have just not seen enough women in the workforce. Women tend to think and act differently, and that's often seen as them not having the right kind of 'executive style' or calibre. But if there are more of us, and if there are different kinds of us—you could have pink hair, for instance—it would teach people that there isn't one correct style of leadership.

Many times, our soft-spokenness is not considered a good managerial approach. At other times, if we try to move towards being very direct, it's considered abrasive. It's a tight rope we walk on. Often, I see interview feedback like 'she's great, she has the technical skills, but she was unable to articulate her problems'. Women have different styles of communicating, and men have to get used to that.

Then there's a hard challenge that I still haven't figured out—where you have women in the organisation and you see full potential in them, you want to promote and encourage them, but they don't want that from you. Then you're struggling with this ethical dilemma: Am I pushing too hard? What is real freedom? Freedom is doing whatever the person wants, not forced empowerment, when they are okay with what they are doing. That's a piece I need to figure out, especially with the promotion cycle going on right now.

Q Uber has been accused of being insensitive to its women employees, with serious allegations of ignoring harassment, gaslighting and propagating gender inequalities. What are some of the lessons you have learnt, and what has changed?

One of the things I've learnt is sometimes the issues are deeper than they seem, so you need to spend more time with women to understand the depth of what's going on. It may be local to that particular team or group, and others might not be aware or be



able to understand it. Many women felt like the Uber these women were describing was not the one that they worked at. But it happened. So as a company, we started focusing heavily on having various support systems in HR, legal, immigration policies etc, so people could describe what they were facing. We realised we need to create not just an engineering excellence team but supporting functions as well. One thing I'm proud of at Uber and of Dara [Khosrowshahi, CEO of Uber], is that we are now quick to realise what we are missing, and we are not afraid to acknowledge our mistakes. And we work hard to improve them.

Our performance review is now radically different. There were various levels of issues, even with gender pay inequality—and not just gender, but equal pay for equal work as a whole. While we fixed that as a 'one-time' investment, I see that the levelling itself is wrong across the industry. At Uber, we made a conscious effort to relook at the levels of our women. In my 21 years, this is the first time I've seen a company go to this length. We've set a process where these things are caught on a day-to-day basis. Many companies revise their promotion process such that more women are promoted, but what they miss out on are the women who aren't even nominated for the process. We have made algorithmic ways to identify certain people with tenure; the system flags them, and it triggers a dialogue with the manager about why they are not getting promoted, whether there are opportunities for growth we are missing, does he or she need a mentor.

Q What kept you motivated at Uber during this storm?

You have faith in the system if it's ready to listen, and acknowledge the problem. I'm very proud to say that Uber was. It didn't shy away from the



problems. Dara openly made a list of things we had to fix and make a priority. And they were willing to listen to ideas from the ground. If they were superficial fixes, I would have left, because I fundamentally believe that you have to fix things by listening to people on the ground. That's where the real problems and solutions lie.

Q What initiatives has Uber undertaken to encourage women to build communities?

Recently, we've started what we call the Uber sponsorship programme, and this is different from mentorship. As a mentor, you give advice, but you are not personally vested in the success of the person. As a sponsor, you are literally investing time to identify opportunities that enable the person to rise to the next level, you are advocating their work, and so forth. Every executive in Uber at a certain level has to sign up to be a sponsor, and they have to pick one minority community person to start with, and help them grow their career.

We also have a fun internal group called #LadyEng, which predates me. It started out with the women engineers coming together for lunch to discuss what they're working on and their issues, if any, but it has really evolved. The girls now want high quality content. So when we meet,

▲
Uber's sponsorship programme supports women and minorities

we call external speakers so they get a perspective on what is unique to Uber, and what are the challenges that are not unique to Uber. For

instance, I get questions as nuanced as, 'If my manager doesn't understand my value, should I continue to work there and improve him, or should I just move on to another team?'

It's a programme that's grounded in day-to-day challenges. But it led us to define certain key performance indicators (KPIs), beyond our regular business metrics. For instance, we now measure ourselves in metrics such as how many women we have retained within Uber. Only when we retain existing women can we say we should have a better hiring pipeline for women, otherwise it's a leaky pipeline.

Q What advice do you have for aspiring women leaders?

I personally feel that we don't approach our careers in the way that men do. Men tend to carve out a brand for themselves, and they don't let the world define them. Women, largely, just work hard and try to do the right thing every day. But sometimes that's not enough. You need to know where you're going and not be bogged down by failures. Have a clear purpose, and move towards it—and don't let anyone else define you. 📌

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Forbes INDIA



LADIES FIRST

Two women who are helming companies in the hurly burly of manufacturing

By SAMAR SRIVASTAVA

QUALITY FOCUS

I

In 2006, among the first tasks of Vinati Saraf Mutreja, 34, when she joined the company her father had named after her, was to get the quality of a key product right. Vinati Organics had been a maker of a vinyl polymer called ATBS (2-Acrylamido 2-Methylpropane Sulphonic Acid) that finds usage in industries like textiles and water treatment, but had been unable to get the quality right. The market was there for the taking as customers wanted reliable and dependable supply. If the company could get the quality right, it had a long growth runway ahead.

Saraf, who has a bachelor's in finance from the Wharton School and applied science from the University of Pennsylvania, did get it right, with help from a consultant, and today Vinati Organics has a 55 percent share of the global market for ATBS. "The whole process of getting the product right also allowed me to gain

acceptability within the company," says Saraf, who was just 22 when she joined. Over the years she has time and again proved her mettle even as she acknowledges that she was "at the right place at the right time" and part of a business, specialty chemicals, that had huge tailwinds.

In the last five years, specialty chemicals have been a sweet spot for Indian manufacturing. Used in a variety of industries from adhesives to fragrances and lubricants to paints, these formulations add to the composition and influence the performance of the end product. Part of the reason for Indian companies doing well in this business has been the pullback from Chinese manufacturers due to pollution concerns. These typically long-term B2B contracts have resulted in several Indian specialty chemical manufacturers expanding product lines.

Initially Indian investors painted all specialty chemical companies with the same broad brush. Now

a well-discovered sector has seen the market discriminate between manufacturers and several specialty chemical makers haven't been able to sustain sales or valuation momentum.

Vinati Organics, which had a ₹20 crore market cap when Saraf joined in 2006, is now worth ₹8,200 crore on the bourses—an annual gain of 58.8 percent. As the company has entered new product lines and expanded capacity, revenues have compounded at 22.1 percent to ₹743 crore in the same period while profits have risen by 38 percent a year to ₹144 crore. (In the first nine months of the current financial year, revenues are up by 38 percent to ₹1,029 crore and profits by 75 percent to ₹252 crore.) At an earnings multiple of 32 times, the stock is pricing in rapid future growth.

When Saraf looks back at the company's performance, it falls in the realm of too good to be true. In 1990, her father Vinod Saraf, then 37, who had been working with Aditya Birla decided to start out on his own. The government of Maharashtra had invited applications for the setting up of an IBB (iso butylbenzene) plant and a loan from ICICI allowed

**VINATI SARAF HAS TRANSFORMED
HER FAMILY BUSINESS INTO A LEADING
SPECIALTY CHEMICAL MAKER**

VINATI SARAF MUTREJA

AGE: 34 • MD & CEO,
Vinati Organics

Saraf to set up a factory in Mahad, Maharashtra. He used the next decade to reinvest dividends into the company and kept upping his stake in the business. He remains responsible for product ideation at the company.

For the first decade, the company stuck to IBB, which is used as a raw material in the manufacture of Ibuprofen, a painkiller. Steady demand and the shutting down of SI Chemicals has meant that there are now only two global suppliers. A turning point for Vinati was when the company cracked the US market in 2008. “We now have the scale, a fully depreciated plant and global capacity after the shutting down of suppliers in the US, UK and China have given us long-term visibility on demand,” says Saraf. The company has a 65 percent global market share of IBB.

In 2011, Vinati got into a third product isobutylene, a colourless flammable gas that is a raw material for ATBS and built a 70 percent share in the India market. ATBS has large capacity expansions planned, taking it up by 12,000 tonnes from the current 26,000 tonnes. Saraf who played an instrumental role in getting ATBS product quality right also moved the company to selling IBB through contracts rather than the spot market, resulting in better margins and gaining global market share. Her efforts saw her being rewarded with the managing director position in October 2018.

With Vinati growing quickly over the last decade, Saraf and her father have the enviable task of deciding what to do with their earnings. With their stake already at 74 percent, hiking it is not an option. The company could return cash to shareholders but apart from a buyback in 2018, Saraf has for now chosen to get into newer products



that will give the company a 20 percent return on investment and a five-year payback. Saraf says the company is looking at 10-12 products that it could potentially manufacture.

An ace up Saraf's sleeve is the introduction of para amino phenol which is in a trial phase (used in the manufacture of paracetamol) and

four types of butylated phenol, and an expansion of the ATBS capacity.

These have the potential to double top line to ₹1,700-1,800 crore without the addition of any debt. A slip-up here could see the market de-rate the stock, but with Saraf's past track record the market is for now willing to give her the benefit of doubt. **F**



HARSHBEENA ZAVERI
AGE: 58 • Managing Director,
NRB Bearings

RIGHT BEARINGS

I

In 1997, after a little over a decade at NRB Bearings, Harshbeena Sahney Zaveri, 58, came up with an idea that the board thought was crazy. She wanted the company to set up its own research and development (R&D) centre and not be reliant on partners SNR and Torrington for technology.

As most businessmen (and women) know, money spent on research may or may not produce the desired results. Small auto component companies—NRB Bearings had a sub-₹50 crore market cap then—can ill afford to take expensive detours. Their everyday business involves manufacturing parts and reducing costs in that endeavour. Net margins are in the 5-7 percent range. “I wanted a company that, in time, had much better margins than the average and the only way it could be done was with our own technology,” she says.

Not willing to take a chance, the board told Zaveri it didn’t have the ₹12-20 crore she needed. Undeterred, she decided to renegotiate NRB’s royalty agreement with her partners and use the money saved to set up the centre. Three years on, the company had Daimler and Renault as customers and Zaveri moved up to the title of president. Her father,

the late Tirlochan Singh Sahney, had set up the company in 1965.

The decision transformed the company and has allowed NRB Bearings to compete head-on with multinational rivals. The company makes needle roller bushes, ball bearings and auto components for customers that include Maruti Suzuki, Bajaj Auto and Electrolux as well as clients in defence and aerospace. A loyal customer base and specialised products make for net profit margins of 10.2 percent, among the highest in the auto component universe and at par with NRB’s multinational competitors in bearings.

While revenues in the last five years have risen by 7.7 percent a year to ₹855 crore, profits have increased at twice the rate at 14.1 percent to ₹91 crore. For now, the market believes

the Thane plant. She noticed a divide between supervisors and workers and says there was a “colonial mindset where people looked up to our joint venture partner, Nadella”. When she questioned why things were done in a certain manner, that came the answer: That’s the way the partner did it.

Zaveri resolved to work on building a culture where employees had the confidence to make the same products better. (It was this experience that eventually led to the setting up of the R&D centre.) Three years on, the shop floor made her well-versed with the products NRB makes and the needs of customers. It also taught her an important lesson on size and scale. “To me, size without profitability means nothing,” she says.

India’s largest auto component company Motherson Sumi has a profit after tax margin of 2.8 percent compared to 10.2 percent for NRB. Unlike auto component companies that have expanded to new product

HARSHBEENA ZAVERI TURNED AROUND A BEARINGS COMPANY INTO A FORMIDABLE RIVAL FOR MNCs

NRB is primed for faster growth. As a result, in the same period, market cap has moved up by 35.86 percent a year to ₹1,765 crore. The company’s economic value added moved up from ₹7.6 crore in 2016-17 to ₹34.98 crore in 2017-18.

One reason why Zaveri hasn’t been afraid to take bold calls is because she’s worked her way to the managing director’s chair all the way from the shop floor. In 1986, the first job for the Wellesley College graduate was at

areas and geographies, NRB has chosen to stick to its original knitting and set up two facilities in Germany and Thailand. The company has made sure there is no quality compromise at its Indian plants. When local steel was not up to the mark in the late 1980s, Zaveri would travel to Delhi to secure an import licence for imported steel.

Today a large number of bearings NRB makes are custom engineered



and custom made. She's able to sit down with the engineering team and go through computer aided designs (CAD) of their bearings and suggest changes. It's a feat she is justifiably proud of.

In addition to working on the shop floor, Zaveri, in the 1990s, maintained a punishing schedule, visiting customers as well as joint venture partners globally, and was an early believer in the rise of Japan. She worked on taking the company

public in 1995. "I believe that work-life balance doesn't exist and one must involve your children (and family) in what you do," she says, narrating an incident about how her son would proudly tell people that her mother was invited to Tata Motors' Pune plant for the launch of the Indica. She'd make sure she took her children along with her when she went to meet customers and suppliers.

With that kind of commitment, it is hardly surprising that Zaveri says her

"life is integrated with the company" even as she spends time mentoring young women for whom it is important to have "defined long-term goals". More recently, she has been part of the founding team at Ashoka University. Even as the company is on auto pilot with two chief operating officers, the CFO and a head of technology reporting to her, Zaveri enjoys spending time creating future leaders and believes in the immense value of learning by seeing. 



SHAKA, SIPIKA & SEEMA BHAT

AGE: 34, 37, 31 • Co-founders,
Homeland Fashion and Lifestyles

I

It's a baggage that Shaka Bhat has been carrying since 1990 when she was in junior kindergarten in Kashmir. The last childhood memory that the 34-year-old entrepreneur in Mumbai can vividly recall is that of being carried away in her father's arms, along with her two sisters, Sipika and Seema, aged two and eight, when Pandits had to flee Kashmir because of terrorism.

"We were forced to leave Anantnag," recalls Shaka, who was five then. "The pain of leaving my homeland is still with me... You get a name from your mother, but your identity from your motherland," she says, as her eyes well up. The anguish in Shaka's voice is palpable. "We are



▲ Shaka (left) and Sipika Bhat, co-founders, Shaka

BAGS AND BAGGAGE

How the Bhat sisters from Anantnag are trying to make an emotional connect with their 'lost' homeland through their business

By RAJIV SINGH

still hunting for our identities.”

Sitting at a swimming pool in a five-star hotel in Juhu, Mumbai, Shaka stares at the sea. Sister Sipika comes to her rescue as she struggles for words. “Our heart still pines for our home,” says Sipika, dressed in a traditional Kashmiri attire with the dominant aari work—crewel embroidery—on her shawl.

The three sisters are now trying to make sense of their ‘lost’ homeland by carving a new identity as entrepreneurs. Shaka, a premium handbag brand co-founded by the trio under the parent umbrella of Homeland Fashion and Lifestyles and launched last April, is set to close the first year of operations with revenue of a little under a crore.

With prices ranging from ₹6,000 to ₹16,000, the bags are available on ecommerce marketplaces like Myntra and Amazon. The brand is now looking to expand its offline reach across the top metros.

The trigger to start a handbag brand, though, was not emotional. During her stint with Deloitte as a corporate finance executive, Shaka faced problems while carrying two handbags—one for her laptop and another for her personal belongings. However, her search for a bag that married aesthetics and functionality remained elusive.

“I knew there was a huge gap in the market,” she says. Her realisation coincided with the feeling that her corporate job was not rewarding in terms of job satisfaction. “I realised I was not made for chartered accountancy.”

In early 2010, Shaka quit her corporate job, moved to Delhi and worked for a few years with a couple of export houses that manufactured leather accessories and shoes for supplying to multinational brands.

She also spent time in Kolkata, trying to figure out quality sourcing of leather. The experience was enriching. “This is where I honed

my skills of designing and fed my passion for bags,” says Shaka, who looks after the design and sourcing part of the business.

While Sipika runs the operations, Seema manages the overseas sales from Canada. Commenting on the minimalistic design of the bags, Sipika stresses that the focus is on functionality. “The idea is to make the bag look as beautiful from inside as from outside,” she says.

From carving a space for laptops and phones to chargers, make-up kits, books and car keys, the compartments have been designed for ample space and style.

“It’s a bag for women, by women,” grins Sipika, adding that they are made in Kolkata but designed by Shaka. “It’s her baby, being brought up by all three of us.”

“DAMAGED PEOPLE ARE DANGEROUS. OUR BAGGAGE MAKES US FEARLESS AND PLUCKY.”

SHAKA BHAT,
CO-FOUNDER, SHAKA

“THE FOCUS IS ON FUNCTIONALITY. THE IDEA IS TO MAKE THE BAG LOOK AS BEAUTIFUL FROM INSIDE AS FROM OUTSIDE.”

SIPIKA BHAT,
CO-FOUNDER, SHAKA

After leaving Kashmir, Shaka’s parents lived in a refugee camp for a year and then settled in Jammu. The sisters completed their schooling in Jammu and pursued higher education in Mumbai and Pune.

After working with Bank of America for five years in Mumbai and Hyderabad, Seema relocated to Canada in 2014, while Sipika completed her MBA and worked in Pune.

Marketing experts reckon that the Bhat sisters’ efforts in carving out a space in the premium handbag market in India might bear fruit. Reason: Online marketplaces have created opportunities to build a brand that doesn’t charge a premium for its pedigree or tag.

The success of private labels of ecommerce players reinforces the fact that there is ample headroom for growth for brands willing to innovate.

“This is the right time to launch a desi brand with a strong emotional connect and narrative,” says Ashita Aggarwal, professor of marketing at SP Jain Institute of Management & Research.

What also gives the Bhat sisters a chance is their deliberate move to not position the brand solely for millennials.

The decision to not splash the product with a rainbow of colours also caters to the taste of a strong segment of the working population. “At times being subtle and underplaying with colours works,” she says.

“The biggest challenge for Shaka is almost zero visibility,” explains Aggarwal. The brand, she lets on, also has to work on expanding its offline presence.

What about the fight from established Indian and foreign players? Shaka sounds confident. “Damaged people are dangerous,” she says, alluding to the loss of homeland that the sisters are living with. “Our baggage makes us fearless and plucky.” **F**



SILK ROUTE

The owner of family-run textile firm Seematti has redefined the sari landscape in Kerala

By MANU BALACHANDRAN

B

BEENA KANNAN

AGE: 59 • CEO and lead designer, Seematti

Beena Kannan is no ordinary fashionista. The 59-year-old has a very strong grip on the saris—encompassing the entire range from daily wear ones to bridal—that women across Kerala wear. Kannan, the owner of Seematti, one of Kerala’s oldest and largest textile outlets, took over the reins of the 109-year-old company in 2000 and has ensured that it remains relevant to the masses even today.

Seematti has two large stores, in Kottayam and Kochi—each more than 5 lakh square feet—in Kerala. Seematti’s saris, especially the bridal collection, combine traditional designs with contemporary ones, while also experimenting with materials and weaves. The saris are all the rage in the state, and Seematti’s stores see a footfall of over 10,000 people daily.

Four decades ago, Seematti had over 30 stores across the country, some in Kerala managed and run by other family members.







But her father realised it was increasingly difficult to operate on a countrywide scale and they decided to concentrate on just Kerala.

“My grandfather had started the company,” Kannan says. “There were many branches of the showroom across Kerala, run by his brothers and their children, too. Those have eventually shut down, and now I am the sole owner of Seematti. My focus is currently on the two showrooms.”

Kannan started in the business as her father’s secretary. “I wanted to be a doctor or an advocate but my father told me I would be wasting a seat if I did that. He always wanted me to join the family business,” says Kannan who studied botany at BCM College in Kottayam, before joining the family business in 1980. “Within three days of giving my examinations, I had begun working in the company,” says Kannan. “I was the only child, and even though not many women worked in our community, my husband and father were keen on me joining the business.”

In the initial years, Kannan balanced work and parenthood, even as her father and husband were actively involved in the business. “The shop was close to the house, and I would shuttle between the two,” she says. In 2000, Kannan’s husband passed away, and Kannan took over the reins of the company from her ageing father.

She immediately started putting in an effort to understand the business better. “I knew what I had to do, and it was a serious job at hand. I began travelling to meet weavers across Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala to understand the business well,” says Kannan.

She also got more actively involved in the designing, something she seems to have a natural knack for. “Designing saris is something I have in my blood,” Kannan says. “I spend a

lot of time on the floor, listening and observing customers on their colour preferences, the kind of materials and their tastes. Based on that, I work with my team on developing new designs,” says Kannan, who is also the lead designer at Seematti.

Kannan brought in new designs, focussing on bridal wear and curating clothes from across the country that would appeal to Kerala’s populace. The designs often give the traditional a modern twist, by using non-traditional colours, or using borders with contemporary patterns.

Seematti’s fortunes began to swell, and she led the expansion of the two stores to accommodate more people and products. “We didn’t have so much money. We

“KANNAN CAN VERY WELL BE CREDITED FOR REDEFINING THE FASHION LANDSCAPE OF KERALA.”

kept expanding the stores as we made more money,” says Kannan.

On the ball with fashion and trends, she also ensured brand visibility with ad campaigns and fashion shows. Among the people who have walked the ramp for Kannan at her bridal shows are actors like Mandira Bedi, Raveena Tandon, Urmila Matondkar, Lisa Hayden, and Deepika Padukone.

Seematti also found a place in the Guinness Book of World Records & Limca Book of Records in 2007 for presenting the world’s longest silk saree, measuring half a kilometre. The sari, unveiled on India’s 60th Independence Day, features images of Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa and the Taj Mahal among others.

According to estimates, Seematti today has a turnover in excess of ₹500 crore. Much of Kannan’s focus remains bridal and daily wear, though Seematti also stocks men’s and kids’ apparel. The company’s saris range from ₹1,000 to more than ₹1 lakh, and it also retails clothes of major brands in the men’s section.

“Injecting new energy into a successful family-run business and doing complete justice to that legacy is no mean task, but to also be able to take that business to staggering new heights is truly commendable,” says Alan Alexander, founder, and creative director, at design label Kaleekal. “Over the past couple of decades, Beena Kannan has single-handedly managed just that. She is a pioneer in many ways and can very well be credited for redefining the fashion landscape of the state and what fashion has come to mean for the masses in Kerala. When she got into the industry, even though there were other similar big players in the same segment, they were all perceived as corporate entities. Beena was the first face that became synonymous with fashion, particularly bridal fashion and through fashion shows, ad campaigns, televised shows and print ads she successfully brought fashion to the midst of the state’s general populace.”

Kannan credits her undying love for saris for the success she has found over the past few years. “I am generally good at identifying patterns and designs that will appeal to people,” says Kannan who is constantly travelling across the country to meet suppliers and weavers to create her line.

And though many businesses are moving online, Kannan isn’t jumping on to that bandwagon yet. “I have heard so many people complain about the kind of products they get when they shop online,” Kannan says. “For sarees that are cheap, online is a good platform. But I believe my customers will come to the store to buy a few but good products.”



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THE BUSINESS OF DESIGN

The chief design officer at Titan has been helping create products that merge aesthetics with profitability

By BENU JOSHI ROUTH

and consumer understanding, ensuring the design team, then small, created winning products.

“It wasn’t about creating the most beautiful product, but the most differentiated one. It had to be relevant to the market. That’s the big value-add I brought to the team, which was anyway creatively talented,” says Kant, who was the business head of the watches design studio from 2005 to 2010.

Design, until then, despite being a key enabler, was a support function at the company. With her efforts, it became a more integral part of the business. “The advantage was that I was not thinking as a designer, I was always thinking from the business point of view, therefore, the degree of success also increased.”

Kant, who joined Titan Company Ltd at 22 after her post-graduation in Operations Research with Computer Science, has been with the company for 28 years and is now its chief design officer, handling design, innovation and development.

As someone who made a dramatic shift in her career, Kant feels design education should include design management. “Your ability to influence your stakeholder

when you create something is very important. To be successful, apart from mastering the skill sets, business sense should be taught to designers. Many designers who become entrepreneurs do not succeed because they don’t have a grounding in that.”

One must also understand, she says, that to remain relevant, the design of a product has to sometimes undergo transformation to keep pace with changing consumer preferences and trends. Take Titan’s Edge, for example. The watch—the slimmest in the world—has had several reincarnations since it was launched 15 years ago in 2002. In 2007, the first Edge collection of simple classic watches was replaced by slightly bigger watches with modern design aesthetics, targeting younger buyers. Then came Edge Skeletal, with its minimalistic design and crafted in titanium, which also made it the lightest in its category. This watch won the 2014 Red Dot Design award. Later, Edge Ceramic became the slimmest watch in a premium material combination of ceramic and sapphire.

Similarly, Titan Raga watches for women went through a revision to suit changing requirements of the Indian woman. What was initially designed

Design did not come naturally to Revathi Kant. From 1995 to 2005, she had handled marketing functions for Titan Industries, including as marketing head, looking after their operations for West Asia and Africa, based out of Dubai. So when she was approached to head Titan’s design studio in 2005, she was apprehensive. “They were considering bringing a non-designer head,” she says, and though unsure, she took up the offer.

Kant’s roles had always been consumer-facing. While she had launched several products she had never gone behind the scenes and worked with designers. But she brought front-end knowledge of business, pricing



as jewellery, is now being transformed into a chic contemporary watch.

With smartwatches coming in, Kant is frank that they have not been the first movers in that segment. “Our future lies in staying true to our DNA, and making our analog watches smart. The convergence of design and technology is the future. We need to add more facets to continue to reinvent ourselves to remain relevant,” she says. To stay abreast of competition, Kant has to ensure that her team is constantly innovating, creating products that are aspirational yet affordable. “These are all opposites coming together. You’ve got to be much lower in price but your quality has to be great,” says Kant.

After being in the watch business for 20 years, in 2010, Kant moved to Titan’s jewellery brand Tanishq, which is the largest division of the company, as head of design, innovation and development. It


was a larger portfolio, but again, though she knew little about jewellery, she brought in her understanding of business.

In December 2017, Kant was elevated to chief design officer, and is in charge of the Design Excellence Centre that caters to the design needs of the entire organisation across categories, with a design team of 70, and separate teams for product innovation and trend research; she is based in Bengaluru. Her role is to understand the business, translate it for her team, take strategic calls and define the design directions. She continues to bring in the marketing perspective before the product goes out to the customer.

“When we started 30 years ago we were one brand, one category.” Today the company boasts a portfolio of many brands in watches such as Titan, Sonata, Fastrack, Xylys, Zoop among others. In jewellery, there

is Tanishq, Zoya (a luxury brand) and Mia (jewellery for working women). “We are creating a lot of new products as that is a key driver for all our businesses.” says Kant.

“What is so impressive about Revathi is the wholesomeness she brings to the job. First and foremost, she is quite committed to the form+function aspect of design and pays as much attention to ergonomics and durability as to style,” says CK Venkataraman, CEO, Jewellery Division, Titan Company.

He adds that she sets very high standards for herself and her team on originality and quality. “She has an exceptional business focus and has brought price-pointing and profitability into the consciousness of every design team member. With all this, she has brought design into the centre of Tanishq’s strategy where you simply cannot think of Tanishq today without thinking of design.” 



STORIES IN STONE

The founder of Abha Narain Lambah Associates brings back glamour to India's significant buildings in a profession that is anything but glamorous

By PANKTI MEHTA KADAKIA



A few steps from Carter Road's seafront, conservation architect Abha Narain Lambah's office is elegant and characteristic. One wall is papered in a black-and-white vintage print of old Crawford Market, one of Mumbai's iconic buildings that Lambah takes credit for restoring. Another wall is punctuated with neatly framed certificates written in calligraphy, the kind you would see at a decorated doctor's office. This analogy continues into our conversation.

"You join architecture, as medicine, because you're idealistic about making a difference," says Lambah. "In conservation, you cannot come up with a formula and apply it to every site. The sites are as varied as a Buddhist temple in Ladakh or

an assembly building designed by Le Corbusier in Chandigarh, or a posh palace in Patiala. You diagnose a building the same way a doctor diagnoses a human being. You first listen, read, see and understand it, and then look at how you are going to suggest interventions."

Lambah, 48, the principal architect and founder of Abha Narain Lambah Associates, has refurbished many of India's historic buildings over a 25-year-career. You'll find her invisible signature on the Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad; the 15th-century Maitreya Temple Basgo in Ladakh; the Golconda Fort, Charminar and Qutb Shahi Tombs in Hyderabad; the Bikaner House in New Delhi.

Based in Mumbai, she has worked on some of the city's most prominent buildings as well, including the Bombay High Court, Asiatic Society Library & Town Hall, the BMC headquarters, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya museum and the Royal Opera House, which has regained its splendour and status as a cultural hub since reopening in 2016.

Most recently, Lambah unveiled the refreshed Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue in Kala Ghoda, returned to its original colour palette and resplendent Victorian interiors. As the architect fields phone calls and messages through our conversation,

it is apparent that she is enthusiastic about what's next on her table: Returning the sheen to the towering Gateway of India and putting together the ₹100-crore-plus Bal Thackeray Memorial at Shivaji Park.

Lambah studied architecture at New Delhi's School of Planning and Architecture, and was fascinated by the monuments of the Sultanate period there. "A common story is that you get into architecture because you've read *The Fountainhead* and seen interesting buildings," she says. "For me too, it was a question of 'Why should Howard Roark be a male figure? Why can't Howard Roark be a woman?'"

Throughout her education, Lambah was enamoured by architects like Joseph Allen Stein, an American architect who worked extensively in India. Stein had worked on the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi and other buildings, "which were contemporary, but held their own against historic monuments". "It was my mission to work with Stein before he retired," says Lambah with a smile. "I was the last architect to work there before his practice closed... he nudged me in the direction of conservation, recognising that I have an active interest in it. I wasn't working to build my portfolio in that direction, or even thinking along those lines back then."



The nudge was well-directed. In her long career, Lambah has worked with village councils and royal families, politicians and storied colleges, but has shied away from taking up assignments for private homes or doing interiors for rich clients. “I’ve never been spurred by that,” she says. “I would rather take up a challenging project that deals with streetscapes—through historic towns like Jaipur, or the Fort area in Bombay, even Kanchipuram. I want to have made at least one city better than I saw it, or be able to keep something that is precious from decaying or disappearing.”

Conserving a historic building is a sensitive job, one that involves taking on the onus of telling a version of history. Many of the structures are decrepit and dangerous, having been vacant and ignored for decades. “Fortunately, I’ve had no accidents yet, but I’ve had recurring nightmares,” she says. “When I had taken up the 15th-century Maitreya Buddha temple in Ladakh, I would wake up sweating, imagining the whole building caving in on me. I was dealing with a centuries-old fragile mud building, which was already on World Monuments Fund’s watch list of the 100 most endangered sites of the world. I was so scared that nothing I do should damage it in any way.”

The project was also particularly difficult—Lambah recalls working in sub-zero temperatures without electricity or telephones, and without proper toilets—just a mud hole in the ground. “Equally challenging was working in 46° Celsius heat in Hampi, getting a conservation site going. I think the buildings look glamorous at the end of the day, but the profession is anything but,” she says.

It’s been 13 years since the Ladakh project was completed. “An architecture professor of mine would always say that after a project, if

your client and you can have a civil conversation over coffee, it means it was successful. Thankfully, the King of Ladakh and I have turned out to be the best of friends, so I’m pleased with how that turned out.”

India has a poor archival programme, which means Lambah and other architects have few references to work with when determining a building’s original appearance. The Royal Opera House, for example, had been converted to an art-deco, single-screen cinema hall for decades before it closed down, and there were few allusions to its earliest opera-theatre avatar.

“Out of the blue, I got an email from a professor teaching theatre in Australia who had come across this opening catalogue of the first show at the Opera House—a black-and-white

Kapurthala, my greatest source of information was the grandson of Maharaja Jagatjit Singh, a brigadier, Sukhjot Singh. He remembered from his childhood the colour schemes, materials, even missing chandeliers. He led us to find the chandeliers locked away in storage.”

For projects in Ladakh, Lambah sought the help of old craftsmen, who, in their 90s, remembered the right mix of clays for different parts of the building.

GLASS CEILING

Architecture—especially conservation—has been male-dominated in India, and Lambah has worked to define her own rules. Mary Woods, an American professor and author of a book called *Women Architects in India: Histories of*

LAMBAH RECALLS WORKING IN SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES IN LADAKH WITHOUT ELECTRICITY, TELEPHONES OR PROPER TOILETS

pamphlet,” Lambah recalls. “It was so interesting because we were then able to recreate the side balconies and the final finish was completely validated by the old photographs.”

“Abha’s exemplary work while restoring the Royal Opera House ensured that it glitters as brightly as it once did,” says Maharani Kumud Kumari of Gonal, the erstwhile royal family that owns the city opera house.

Sometimes, on peeling back layers of paint, the building reveals itself—as in the case of the synagogue and the BMC headquarters, where Lambah’s team found the original colour palette and stencil bands of motifs obscured under the layers. At other times, “you have to rely on oral tradition,” says Lambah. “In the case of the Moorish Mosque,

Practice in Mumbai and Delhi, recalled an anecdote that Lambah shared with her during her research, in an interview to *Mumbai Mirror*. “Once, when Abha was working on one of her restoration projects, she was encountering not outright resistance but passive opposition,” Woods told the daily. “Things really changed when she climbed the bamboo scaffolding in her sari. It was almost as if they were daring her to do that, a way of physically testing her resolve.”

“I’ve never been a conformist, so my gender has never got in the way,” Lambah says. “I’ve done some admittedly bizarre things—my daughter has grown up on sites, for instance—and clients have accepted it. You have to push the envelope and find things that work for you. If



I said I have a child and I can't take her to site and, therefore, I'll stop working, that would be a choice I was making. But I chose to take her to site, and as a result, I never really took a break. My entire maternity leave was exactly 20 days at my mom's place in Delhi. I flew back with my daughter and went straight for a meeting with the Horniman Circle Association."

"Abha has had to operate in a world that's dominated by men's influence, and her journey has been remarkable," says architect and urban planner PK Das. "She is not only adept at the planning and designing, but also in making sure that her projects see implementation all the way through."

Implementation isn't an easy task. For instance, with the Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue, it took 10 years to find a sponsor for the restoration as most are wary of touching religious institutions. Eventually, Lambah and the synagogue team found a partner in the JSW Group conglomerate's Sangita Jindal. The group financed most of the ₹5 crore project. "Considering we have such a vast heritage and a hugely under-funded conservation programme, we

need to look at better financial mechanisms—what kind of economic incentives we can give to privately-owned heritage, how to disincentivise the demolition of old buildings," says Lambah.

"We talk about recycling energy, water, paper, but recycling buildings would actually create a much bigger green impact, considering the energy that goes into constructing a new building," she adds.

Finding funds is a challenge, especially for non-governmental buildings, she says, adding that India could look to other parts of the world for lessons in best practices. England has a national lottery fund that releases money for conservation each year, regardless of whether the buildings are owned by the government. In places like Venice, many tax breaks and credits are offered if you help restore a historic building.


"We also need to stop thinking in a monument-centric manner, but think in terms of streetscapes," she says. "The public realm of a city is defined

▲
It took 10 years to find a sponsor for the restoration of the Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue in Mumbai

by what you see as a whole historic neighbourhood, not just one building that's beautiful, when the rest of them are falling to pieces, or full

of new glass and aluminium."

Mumbai, she says, has the most fabulous groups of buildings, as in the art-deco sweep, or the buildings along Princess Street, which, unfortunately, lie decrepit and messed up with bad signage. "Ballard Estate is no less in terms of beauty than Paris... a bit of maintenance, illuminating them at night, keeping the facades clean of additions and alterations could make a huge difference to the way people perceive the city."

Lambah's one unfinished dream is to restore a significant building in Kashmir, where her mother's side of the family comes from, and where she spent many childhood summers. "I've always had a deep desire to work in Kashmir, given my obvious connection to it. In my head, I've identified all the buildings there I could work on. We've been shortlisted for a project there. But until we clinch the project, I'll remain waiting." 



KEYA VASWANI & NIDHI KAMATH
AGES: 28, 29 ■ Co-founders and managing partners, Storyloom Films

WEAVING THEIR MAGIC

The designer-turned-filmmaker duo is on a mission to help the centuries-old tradition of Indian crafts regain its place in the sun

By BENU JOSHI ROUTH



During their four-year journey at the Indian Institute of Crafts & Design (IICD), the product designer duo of Nidhi Kamath, 29, and Keya Vaswani, 28, realised that city dwellers like them had a preconceived notion about India. “Fact is only 30 percent of us live in cities, while the rest of the population lives in villages and towns or what we call ‘rural India’,” says Kamath. Adds Vaswani: “Our education helped us break that notion. It drove us to explore the place we are living in, through crafts. We travelled to beautiful villages, lived with the craftsmen and were learning from them. We

experienced ‘rural’ India first-hand.”

Kamath and Vaswani were concerned that India’s centuries-old tradition of craft has been forgotten and undervalued. The second-largest occupation in India after agriculture employs nearly 70 lakh Indians in 744 craft clusters. The pair wanted to go beyond a product and celebrate the story behind it.

In 2013, Kamath and Vaswani, who were trained in Hard Material Application, deviated from the normal course in their graduation project. Instead of creating products, they worked on a short film called *Threads of Banaras*, which focussed on the crisis in the traditional silk craft sector of Banaras. The world famous banarasi silk, which flourished in India since the 18th century, is now under threat because of changing trends in fashion, government policies and laws against child labour. The

10-minute short film portrayed views of artisans, traders and researchers.

Says textile designer and historian Rahul Jain, who was consulted for the project: “Their film became a wider inquiry into India, into culture, into change and things that defined India as a civilisation. And a lot of it was present in a timeless setting like Varanasi, where everything is 100 times more intense than what you would find in a metro. I thought it was wonderful coming from somebody who had no background in films.”

The film marked the beginning of their journey to showcase the crafts of India via films. Soon after graduation, Kamath and Vaswani launched their filmmaking career with Storyloom Films. They honed their filmmaking by following YouTube tutorials and seeking feedback from filmmakers whose work they were inspired by. The advantage of being designers

IN THEIR SIX-YEAR CAREER, KAMATH AND VASWANI HAVE PRODUCED 36 FILMS ON VARIOUS CRAFTS OF INDIA



Keya Vaswani (left) and Nidhi Kamath hope to collaborate with other filmmakers to tell stories of talented artisans



first and then filmmakers was that, as designers, they were able to understand and appreciate how much time and effort goes into creating the product they were filming, and also under what circumstances it was created. This helped them represent the craft in the best light they can.

In 2016, *Weaves of Maheshwar* won the Rajat Kamal at the 63rd National Film Awards as best promotional film for crafts in the non-fiction category. The film was part of a fellowship under Pari, or People's Archive of Rural India. A story about craft revival in the city of Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh, the documentary revolves around various journeys of people who

where we belong," says Vaswani.

There is an unhurried pace to their films, with the soothing music and visual treatment allowing the audience to immerse themselves into the subject and understand each process. "And this is exactly what we want our films to be in today's digitally-driven fast-paced world, because this is what craft is all about: Patience," says Vaswani.

Despite their personal commitments, Kamath and Vaswani travel extensively to shoot in different locations. As women, they find it easier to be allowed into the homes of craftsmen where sometimes they have to live with their families for several days. The villagers are warm and welcoming and always concerned about their safety. In turn, the duo is sensitive to

the Heritage Film Festival in 2014.

Among the many things the duo has learnt from their filmmaking experience is how knowledge sharing is a common trait among these skilled craftsmen. They have the warmest hearts and are always ready to share the nuances of their craft, their delicious food, folklores and their rich experiences. "If we broaden our understanding of education, we will realise that the traditional art and craft practices were always a part of the guru shishya parampara. In today's context this can be considered as home schooling and maybe that's why India is still producing 90 percent of the world's handloom," says Kamath.

During one of their trips to Bhuj for a film on bandhani (a tie and dye textile), they asked the craftsman, Abdul Khatri, to share some folklore on the technique. His reply (translated from Hindi): "It is believed that a Sufi saint tied many tiny strings on a silk cloth with a wish. To this day each string on a bandhani is tied with a prayer." Vaswani found that inspirational. "Imagine if all of us worked with such noble intentions, how enthusiastic and positive our lives would be," she smiles.

Drawn to spirituality, meditation offers the duo some much-needed respite from their hectic schedule. Spirituality percolates through their work in the form of beautiful pauses. Their films reflect the same softness and femininity.

Vaswani and Kamath look forward to learning from other talented filmmakers and hope to collaborate to create meaningful films that show the unique craft and talented artisans of India. "We share a common belief to weave unforgettable stories on the warp of time," says Kamath. With their films they want to spread the message that the living traditional art mirrors a living culture and that, when we lose an art, we lose people, we lose a culture. 

AS DESIGNERS, THEY UNDERSTAND THE EFFORT THAT GOES INTO MAKING THE PRODUCT THEY ARE FILMING

have made this change possible. In an era in which machines are taking over the world, India is the only country that still produces 90 percent handloom. *Weaves of Maheshwar* portrays this strength of Indian textiles and the country's rich craft sector. The protagonists are a group of people who have facilitated this change. The film has various perspectives of a businessman, an entrepreneur, migratory weavers, young weavers and a craft expert.

"It was the story of the journey of a craft on the verge of extinction. Also, the story is not just about how it survived but a lesson for us—the filmmakers, as well as viewers—as to how we can all contribute to the craft sector and save it from extinction. And more than all this, it gives us a sense of pride, of who we are and

their comfort and space, and is able to start a conversation more easily.

In their six-year filmmaking career, Kamath and Vaswani have produced 35 short films and one documentary on various crafts of India for clients such as Anantaya (a Jaipur-based craft and design studio), Good Earth, L'affaire (a brand launched by Shri Satya Paul that celebrates Indian textile heritage), IMG Reliance, British Council and Flipkart, among others.

Films such as *Risa*, *Chandrani The Pasra Weaver* and *Weaving the Lost Tradition* that showcase women weavers and the crafting techniques of Tripura were recently screened at the 2019 Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai; *Namda*, the short film on the Rajasthani craft of namda (felt), won a Special Jury Award at



IT'S NOT OKAY

The victim-turned-crusader against sexual harassment at the workplace uses art to sensitise company employees

By RAJIV SINGH



On a chilly winter morning in February, Shikha Mittal is getting ready to launch a 'surgical strike.' Addressing her troop of over a dozen 'foot-soldiers' in Delhi—all dressed in colourful jackets, ripped jeans, bright sweaters, and armed with tambourines, flutes and drums—Mittal breaks into a pep talk. "How is the *josh*?" asks the 35-year-old, borrowing a punchline from the Hindi film *Uri*. "High, ma'am," her 'army' shouts.

The deafening cheer from the mix of spirited young men and women reverberates in the small neighbourhood park in South Delhi's Greater Kailash colony. A handful of morning joggers find it amusing. Those practising laughter yoga take a break and stare at the bunch, which

looks like a street theatre group rehearsing before the main act.

Meanwhile, Mittal draws another uncanny parallel with *Uri*, a film based on India's supposed 'surgical strikes' on Pakistan in 2016. "We never started it," she says, alluding to unprovoked aggression of a different kind: Sexual harassment at the workplace. "But we will bloody well finish it." Mittal is the founder of Be.artsy, a for-profit social organisation that uses skits and theatre to create awareness against sexual harassment at the workplace.

"It's not okay to tolerate," Mittal stresses, as she ends her brief motivational session. People in the street play group throw their clenched fists in air and shout '*Jai Hind*', before heading to the corporate office of a foreign bank in Gurugram to conduct an awareness session.

Retreating into her one-bedroom rented apartment in Greater Kailash, Mittal elaborates how women have to

fight every day at the workplace to keep sexual predators at bay. The passion that helps her champion this cause, and take it from strength to strength, perhaps comes from the fact that Mittal has had to quit as many as 14 jobs in six years—between 2004 and 2010—most of them due to sexual harassment, and has recently come out of a troubled marriage.

Disillusioned with the corporate world, Mittal turned entrepreneur in early 2010 by starting a not-for-profit organisation called Be.cause, which was geared to facilitate cultural exchange between the Commonwealth nations. The idea, she believes, was way ahead of its time; within six months, the venture shuttered.

Though the failure might have been due to the business model that couldn't find many takers, there was something more to it. Mittal was yet to come to terms

"BE.ARTSY PLAYED A CRITICAL ROLE IN OUR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION JOURNEY TO IMPACT MINDSETS, WHICH IS NOT EASY."

PAVITRA SINGH, HR DIRECTOR (TALENT ACQUISITION) FOR PEPSICO, ASIA, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



“IT’S NOT OKAY TO STAY VICTIM. SPEAK OUT WHENEVER IT [HARASSMENT] HAPPENS. AT THAT MOMENT, AT THAT TIME.”

SHIKHA MITTAL, FOUNDER,
BE.ARTSY

with her troubled past. A streak of sexual harassment incidents still haunted her. “I was running away from the ghost. But I forgot that the best way to fight it is to confront it head-on,” she recounts, adding that a street play on *kachra* (garbage) became a turning point in her life.

DUMP THE ‘GARBAGE’

In 2010, Mittal chanced upon a street play by the dramatics society of the Hindu College in North Delhi. Though it was themed around sanitation awareness, Mittal realised that the garbage in her life—sexual harassment—needed to be done away with too. “The only way I could do this was to create awareness against sexual harassment among corporates by using art as a weapon,” she recounts.

Be.artsy was rolled out in October 2010. Over eight years into the venture, Mittal is set to close the 2019 March-ending fiscal with revenue of over ₹1 crore, and counts PepsiCo, Amex, Vodafone, British Telecom and Tata Coffee among clients.

The journey, though, has not been easy, largely for two reasons. One, few companies spoke about sexual harassment, and victims rarely came out. Two, it was a tough task to



make companies realise the need to sensitise their workforce, as sexual harassment was not considered to be a problem big enough for companies to allocate financial resources. Interestingly, after two years of struggle, PepsiCo offered Mittal her first big break in 2013.

“Be.artsy played a critical role in our diversity and inclusion journey to wpoints out Pavitra Singh, human resource director (talent acquisition) for PepsiCo, Asia, Middle East and North Africa. Art, she continues, is a beautiful and powerful form of expressing without any biases. “I was blown away with the impact of street theatre and how it could be used so well to communicate in the corporate world.”

PepsiCo initially leveraged street theatre to create awareness about gender stereotypes. Mittal’s campaign, titled Mind Bugs, was

BE.ARTSY

◆ Is a for-profit social organisation that uses street theatre to address sexual harassment in the workplace. It also conducts campaigns around corporate social responsibility, inclusion and diversity, and financial literacy

◆ Founded in October 2010, Be.artsy clocked revenue of ₹4 lakh in first year of operations; closed last year with a revenue of ₹64 lakh and is clocking a run rate of over ₹1 crore for 2018-19

◆ Clients include PepsiCo, Marriott, Accor Hotels, Amex, British Telecom, Tata Coffee, National Stock Exchange, G&D, Asian Paints, Indigo and HUL

the campaign won the prestigious Global Harvey C Russell Inclusion Award, which is named after a member of the all-black sales force that was created in 1947 to sell Pepsi to the African-American community. Russell later became vice president of the US multinational in 1962. The journey of Be.artsy, says Singh, has been moulded by what Mittal had experienced in her

short skirt was misconstrued by her 50-year-old senior as a ‘soft signal’.

Mittal shrugged off the initial suggestive remarks, which only emboldened her boss. One evening, on her way back after a client meeting in his car, she suddenly felt a hand on her thigh. Mittal froze, tried to push the hand away and jumped out of the car at the first red light. With tears rolling down her cheeks, she took an auto and rushed home. “I couldn’t discuss it with my parents. I was scared. They could have told me not to work.” She left her internship without informing anybody at her office. “I was too naïve. I thought he was a senior guy and nobody would believe me.”

At her second job, in 2006, Shikha’s ‘way of dressing’ became a subject of gossip among male colleagues. “After a year or so, I couldn’t take their crap anymore and quit.” At the third job with an event management company, her boss asked her to sleep with him. This time, Shikha mustered the courage to lodge a complaint. “But I was told that my boss gets business worth lakhs every month. So either I had to tolerate, or quit,” she says. Over the next five years, the same script played out, with the same results.

Shikha finally quit the corporate world in 2010 and decided to do something of her own. Sunieta Ojha, a Supreme Court lawyer who coordinates with Mittal on cases of sexual harassment at workplaces, says that her grit as an entrepreneur is largely due to the fact that a survivor has turned into a crusader. “The same corporate world that forced her to change multiple jobs now invites her to speak to their employees and sensitise them about laws on sexual harassment,” adds Ojha.

Mittal feels she may have blundered by not speaking out in the past. “It’s not okay to stay victim. Speak out whenever it [harassment] happens. At that moment, at that time.” **F**

“THE SAME CORPORATE WORLD THAT FORCED HER [MITTAL] TO CHANGE MULTIPLE JOBS NOW INVITES HER TO SENSITISE THEIR EMPLOYEES ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT.”

SUNEITA OJHA, SUPREME COURT LAWYER

designed to playback everyday situations at work where individual biases come to the fore. It was performed several times for internal audiences, as well as externally for other corporates. Buoyed by the feedback, the beverage giant expanded the scope of training and started to also build awareness on sexual harassment at the workplace. The play was also translated into nine languages in order to connect with frontline employees. “The response was overwhelming. It not only sparked dialogues but also brought about a deeper behaviour change,” recalls Singh, adding that

professional and personal life. “It hasn’t been easy for her, but she has always hunted for light at the end of the tunnel,” Singh adds.

NOT OKAY TO KEEP QUIET

Mittal first faced sexual harassment as an intern at a private FM radio station in Delhi in 2005. For the 21-year old history graduate from Khalsa College, who had a postgraduate diploma in mass communication from Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, life was meant to be lived on one’s own terms. Dressing, for her, was always a part of one’s personality and mindset. Unfortunately, her



TAKING THE LAW INTO HER HANDS

For this expert in Constitutional Law, defending the rights of citizens is about doing what she loves

By MANU BALACHANDRAN

I

In the corridors of India's Supreme Court, Menaka Guruswamy, 44, has a reputation for being a fearless fighter. As one of the lawyers who argued against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, she was instrumental in the scrapping of the law that made homosexuality a crime. Guruswamy had appeared on behalf of petitioners from the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

An expert in Constitutional Law, Guruswamy has also been doggedly pursuing cases that seek to rewrite many such colonial-era laws. For instance, she is assisting

an ongoing investigation into alleged fake encounters by the Indian Army and other security personnel in Manipur, where the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act or AFSPA, 1958, is in force. The AFSPA finds its roots in an ordinance promulgated during the Quit India movement.

"It is unfortunate that many of the reforms to colonial laws have to be made by the judiciary and not by the legislature," says Guruswamy. "These laws were to keep people as subjects and shouldn't have any space in a democracy. There haven't been many thoughtful, persistent reforms since Independence."

Guruswamy has also been instrumental in defending a provision in the Right to Education Act that mandated all private schools to admit disadvantaged children, and has fought to ensure a minimum fixed tenure of three years in a post for civil servants.

The daughter of Mohan Guruswamy, a former advisor to the ministry of finance, Guruswamy developed a passion for Constitutional Rights as a student at the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, which she

joined in 1992. The NLSIU, which had started in 1987, was still in its infancy. "I had no idea about the prospects at that time," Guruswamy says. "The idea was that I would see how the experience was for a year, and if I didn't like it, I had the freedom to come back."

But NLSIU was a game changer. "It was a functional university and they had an approach to teaching that had been lost," Guruswamy recalls. Books were precious, and often 70 students would share four books between themselves. This made Guruswamy cherish them, and her studies, even more.

In 1997, Guruswamy graduated and began working full time for India's attorney general, where she focussed on litigation and understood what the law can do, particularly constitutional law. A year-and-a-half later she went to Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, where she completed her PhD. Since then, she has been consulting with the United Nations, and has supported the drafting of the constitution in Nepal.

"You see different parts of the world, and you begin to think of the similarities, the differences, and



navigating the fears of the common man,” Guruswamy says. “In India, the drafters of our Constitution carefully navigated such fears, especially at a time when India was witnessing a bloodbath with Partition. It’s a different thing that if the drafters were here today, they would only ask ‘have you not learnt anything?’”

Since her return to India, she has worked on several high-profile cases, including the 2G spectrum

scam and AgustaWestland bribery scandal. Today, she has at least six lawyers working for her. Guruswamy also spends her time in the US, teaching at Columbia University, even as she writes books. Her first co-edited work, *Founding Moments in Constitutionalism*, will be published this year, while her second book is under works.

“Honestly, it doesn’t feel like work since it’s doing something I love. Every

day you get to meet people who live in such harsh conditions and still live their life with humour. That’s what I love about my job,” says Guruswamy.

But, it’s not just the thrill of meeting people and ensuring justice for them that have kept her going. She has been keeping a list close to her heart since she graduated; a list of constitutional reforms that she wants to fight for. “It is interesting to see how many real law reforms have been brought in over the years,” says Guruswamy. “I want to keep the fight on.”

Then, there are also newer areas of law, particularly related to technology and artificial intelligence that she wants to study. “Globally, these are areas that have begun to gain attention, and they are important to India too,” says Guruswamy. Along the way, she draws much inspiration from changes in the judiciary over the past few years, particularly since many more women are entering the judicial services. “I would love to have more women lawyers at the bar,” says Guruswamy. “And I can already feel the change.”

Last year, for all the remarkable work that she has been doing, Guruswamy’s portrait was hung at the Milner Hall in Rhodes House—since she was a Rhodes scholar—in Oxford University. Guruswamy’s is the first portrait of a scholar from India.

“Menaka is phenomenal,” says Neeha Nagpal, an associate partner with Agarwal Law Associates, who fought on behalf of Keshav Suri, a petitioner against Section 377. “She is an iron lady, an intellectual, and extremely intelligent. She can present a case in a remarkable manner, and ensure that even if the judges are in a rush, they hear it properly.”

As she takes up more cases, Guruswamy, an avid trekker and fitness enthusiast, knows that her ability to stay calm and laugh more will see her through. “When you grow older, you have this ability to laugh more, and be more patient and confident.” **F**



(From left)
**MAHIMA KUKREJA,
SANDHYA MENON,
RITUPARNA CHATTERJEE**
AGE: 28, 39, 38 • #MeToo crusaders



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VOICES OF CHANGE

Three women have brought sexual harassment conversations in the public domain. Now they demand a collective effort to keep the movement going

By NAANDIKA TRIPATHI

The #MeToo movement has opened up conversation on sexual and other forms of harassment that were otherwise brushed under the carpet. While Tarana Burke, 45, can be credited for starting the movement in America in 2006, it gathered steam only in 2017 when several public figures in the US were shamed. India was quick to follow suit, with crusaders standing up to their oppressors, and helping others do the same. Writer-comic Mahima Kukreja, 28, created a furore in late 2018

when she called out comedian Utsav Chakraborty on Twitter for sending explicit photos to her and other women, apart from asking for nudes. Immediately after, journalist Sandhya Menon, 39, spoke up about the sexual harassment she was subjected to by senior editors, encouraging others to speak up. Journalist Rituparna Chatterjee, 38, has even created a Twitter account (@IndiaMeToo).

The challenge now, the trio admits, is to collectively keep the issue relevant. “The movement is of

women, by women and for women. But the onus to sustain it is not only on them,” says Chatterjee. “Now is the time and opportunity for men to do what is right—reflect and help take the conversation forward using their privilege and space—for governments to listen and fix broken systems, for organisations to address sexual harassment as a serious issue and society to find ways for reparation and change.”

The fear of speaking up is something that women grapple with



even today, although social media has allowed many to share their ordeals anonymously. “I still get many DMs [on Twitter]...many women don’t want to come out publicly at all. In fact, there are women who just want their stories to be heard, and not shared,” says Kukreja.

More than 38 percent women in India have faced sexual harassment at their workplaces in the IT sector, according to several reports, including one by Ernst & Young. The banking industry tops the list. However, over 70 percent women did not report these incidents because they were worried about the repercussions.

Menon believes that this is an issue for everyone to own and solve. “Women cannot rely on other loud voices; if they have a voice, they should make themselves heard,” she says. Twitter has been useful in this regard. “The facilitation of connections, networking, and amplification during the movement was only possible because of this platform,” says Kukreja.

While awareness and discussion

on sexual harassment have emboldened many to name and shame perpetrators, the marginalised continue to deal with trust issues. For instance, in 2017, Raya Sarkar, a Dalit law student and sexual assault survivor—who identifies as transgender—crowdsourced a list of Indian academics who had sexually harassed students, and published it on Facebook. It remains largely unacknowledged.


“Whenever a Dalit person/woman takes an initiative, there is no backing from upper caste feminists. They don’t even get legal help or therapy sessions,” says Divya Kandukuri, 22, an activist who fights for the rights of the marginalised. “Every Bahujan woman is a #MeToo champion... they did not have a Twitter account but came out with their stories. Each one of them is a brave warrior because they fight problems like caste, gender and minority biases on a daily basis.” Chatterjee believes that the mainstream media should have brought stories of such women to the fore, instead of just focussing

on celebrities who had been outed. “MeToo is not just led by urban women. There are many women in smaller towns, cities and villages, who, through non-governmental organisations, media or directly, have spoken about sexual abuse in the past,” explains Chatterjee, pointing to women like Bhanwari Devi—a rape survivor from Rajasthan, whose public complaint led to the formation of Vishakha guidelines to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace—and many others from oppressed communities who are leading a 10,000 kilometre Dignity March to fight the stigma of sexual assault.

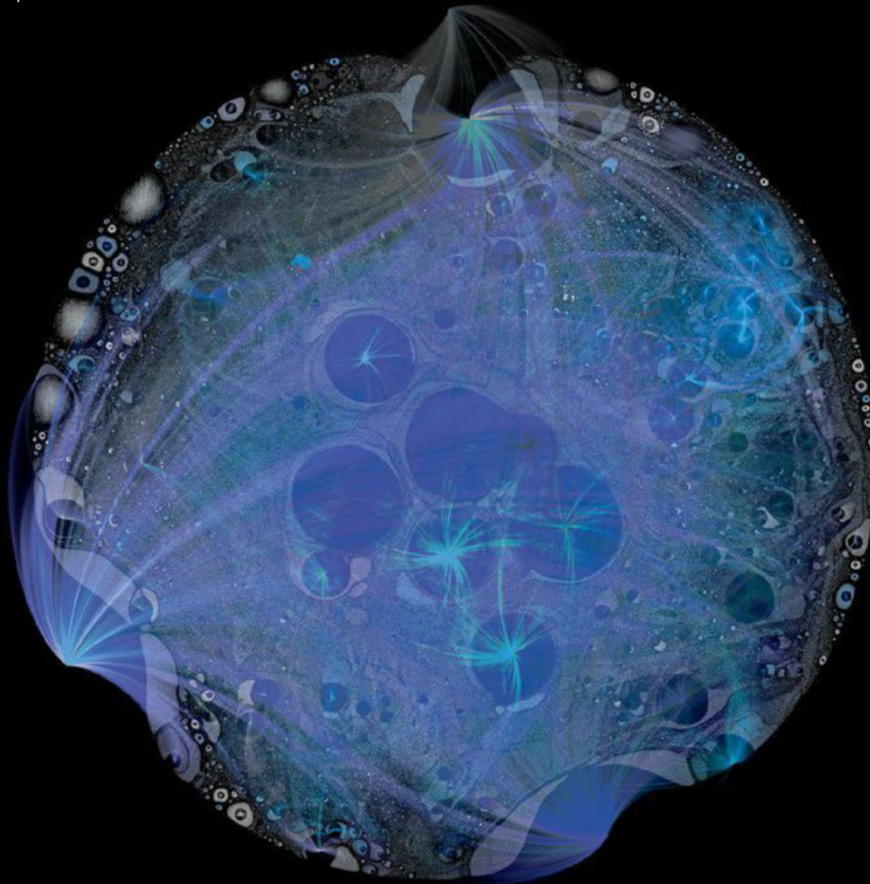
Senior advocate Indira Jaisingh says it’s unfair to categorise women as urban or rural. “Our institutions need to invest in building awareness among vulnerable women and come up with affirmative action to prevent sexual harassment. While society has been forced to change, the law lags behind,” she says.

The barrage of #MeToo stories has prompted corporates to set up an internal complaints committee as well as ensure POSH (Policy on Prevention of Sexual Harassment) compliance at the workplace.

The trio maintain that these slow but steady changes have been worth the emotional stress they have had to experience as the movement unfolded. “These have been exhausting months for every person who spoke about their trauma, for those who heard hundreds of such stories on a daily basis, and for people who helped survivors bring these stories out and connected them with resources,” says Chatterjee, adding that such conversations were the need of the hour. “Systems take decades to change if society is reluctant to address patriarchy.”

Now, they demand concrete action to end the menace. “We did the work which the government and corporates should’ve done...we need answers from them about the steps they have taken,” says Menon. 

What does a blockchain look like? Using Google's BigQuery, a Danish designer created this visualisation of the blockchain for the XRP cryptocurrency. Every speck is a wallet or user. Swirls represent payments, and craters are XRP whales like exchanges Binance, Poloniex and crypto debit card startup Wirex



CLOUD

Googling Blockchain

In the late 1990s, Google transformed the web by creating a fast, accurate and easy-to-use search engine. Now it could do the same for the blockchain, the technology underlying cryptocurrencies like bitcoin and ethereum

By MICHAEL DEL CASTILLO

COURTESY THOMAS SILKJAER

It's a balmy 80 degrees on a mid-December day in Singapore, and something is puzzling Allen Day, a 41-year-old data scientist. Using the tools he has developed at Google, he can see a mysterious concerted usage of artificial intelligence (AI) on the blockchain for ethereum. Ether is the world's third-largest cryptocurrency (after bitcoin and XRP), and it still sports a market cap of some \$11 billion despite losing 83 percent of its value in 2018. Peering into its blockchain—the distributed database of transactions underpinning the cryptocurrency—Day detects a “whole bunch” of “autonomous agents” moving funds around “in an automated fashion”. While he doesn't yet know who has created the AI, he suspects they could be the agents of cryptocurrency exchanges trading among themselves in order to artificially inflate ether's price.

“It's not really just single agents doing things on their own,” Day says from Google's Asia-Pacific headquarters. “They're forming with other agents to have some larger group effect.”

Day's official title is senior developer advocate for Google Cloud, but he describes his role as “customer zero” for the company's cloud computing efforts. As such it's his job to anticipate demand before a product even exists, and he thinks making the blockchain more accessible is the next big thing. Just as Google enabled (and ultimately profited) from making the internet more usable 20 years ago, its next billions may come from shining a bright light on blockchains. If Day is successful, the world will know whether blockchain's real usage is living up to its hype.

Last year Day and a small team of open-source developers quietly began loading data for the entire bitcoin and ethereum blockchains into Google's big-data analytics platform, BigQuery. Then, with the help of outside developer Evgeny Medvedev,

he created a suite of sophisticated software to search the data.

In spite of a total lack of publicity, word of the project spread quickly among crypto-minded coders. In the past year, more than 500 projects were created using the new tools, trying to do everything from predicting the price of bitcoin to analysing wealth disparity among ether holders.

When it comes to cloud computing, Google is far behind Amazon and Microsoft. Last year Google pocketed an estimated \$3 billion in revenue from cloud services. Amazon and Microsoft, meanwhile, generated about \$27 billion and \$10 billion, respectively.

Day is hoping that his project, known as Blockchain ETL (extract, transform, load), will help even the playing field. But even here

Google is far behind Amazon and Microsoft in cloud computing

Google is trying to catch up. Amazon entered blockchain in a big way in 2018 with a suite of tools for building and managing distributed ledgers. Microsoft got into the space in 2015, when it released tools for ethereum's blockchain. It now hosts a range of services as part of its Azure Blockchain Workbench. But while Amazon and Microsoft are focusing on making it easier to build blockchain apps, Day is focusing on exposing how blockchains are actually being used, and by whom.

“In the future, moving more economic activity on chain won't just require a consensus level of trust,” says Day, referring to the core validating mechanism of blockchain technology. “It will require having some trust in knowing about who it is you're actually interacting with.” In other words,

if blockchain is to go mainstream, some of its beloved anonymity features will have to be abandoned.

A native of Placer County, California, Day got his first computer at the age of 5 and a few years later started writing simple programs. A fascination with volcanoes and dinosaurs turned his interest to life sciences, and he ultimately graduated from the University of Oregon with a dual degree in biology and Mandarin in 2000. From there he headed to UCLA to pursue a doctorate in human genetics and helped build a computer program to browse the genome.

It was at UCLA where Day began relying on distributed computing, a concept that is core to blockchains, which store their data on a large network of individual computers. In the early 2000s Day needed to analyse the massive amounts of data that make up the human genome. To solve this problem he hooked many small computers together, vastly increasing their power.

“Distributed-systems technology has been in my tool kit for a while,” Day says. “I could see there were interesting characteristics of blockchains that could run a global supercomputer.”

Hired in 2016 to work in the health and bioinformatics areas of Google, Day segued to blockchains, the hottest distributed-computing effort on the planet. But the talents he had honed—sequencing genomes for infectious diseases in real time and using AI to increase rice yields—were not easily applied to decoding blockchain.

Before Day and Medvedev released their tools, just searching a blockchain required specialised software called “block explorers”, which let users hunt only for specific transactions, each labelled with a unique tangle of 26-plus alphanumeric characters. Google's Blockchain ETL, by contrast, lets users make more generalised searches of entire ecosystems of transactions.

To demonstrate how customers



Before joining Google's cloud team in Singapore and becoming its de facto blockchain evangelist, genetics PhD Allen Day attended the Academy of Magical Arts in Los Angeles

could use Blockchain ETL to make improvements to the crypto economy, Day has used his tools to examine the so-called hard fork, or an irrevocable split in a blockchain database, that created a new cryptocurrency—bitcoin cash—from bitcoin in the summer of 2017.

This particular split was the result of a Hatfield and McCoy “war” within the bitcoin community between a group who wanted to leave bitcoin as it was and another who wanted to develop a currency that, like cash, was cheaper and faster to use for small payments. Using Google’s BigQuery, Day discovered that bitcoin cash, rather than increasing so-called micro-transactions, as the defecting developers claimed, was actually being hoarded among big holders of bitcoin cash. “I’m very interested to quantify what’s happening so that we

can see where the legitimate use cases are for blockchain,” Day says. “Then we can move to the next use case and develop out what these technologies are really appropriate for.”


Day’s work is inspiring others. Tomasz Kolinko is a Warsaw-based programmer and the creator of a service that analyses smart contracts, a feature of certain blockchains that is designed to transparently enforce contractual obligations like collateralised loans but with less reliance on third parties, like lawyers. Kolinko was frustrated with his blockchain queries.

In December, Kolinko met Day at a hackathon in Singapore. Within a month of the meeting, Kolinko was using Google’s tools to search for a smart contract feature called a “self-destruct”, designed to limit a contract’s life span. Using his own

software in conjunction with Day’s, Kolinko took 23 seconds to search 1.2 million smart contracts—something that would have taken hours before. The result: Almost 700 of them had left open a self-destruct feature that would let anyone instantly kill the smart contract, whether that person was authorised or not. “In the past you couldn’t just easily check all the contracts that were using it,” Kolinko says. “This tool is both the most scary and most inspiring I’ve ever built.”

Day is now expanding beyond bitcoin and ethereum. Litecoin, zcash, dash, bitcoin cash, ethereum classic and dogecoin are being added to BigQuery. Independent developers are loading their own crypto data sets on Google. Last August, a Dutch developer named Wietse Wind uploaded the entire 400 gigabytes of transaction data from Ripple’s XRP blockchain, another popular cryptocurrency, into BigQuery. Wind’s data, which he updates every 15 minutes, prompted a Danish designer named Thomas Silkjaer to create a heat map of crypto flows. The resulting colourful orb reveals at a glance more than a million crypto wallets, including big exchanges like Binance and London’s crypto debit card startup Wirex, which are neck deep in XRP transactions.

“Google has been a bit of a sleeping giant in blockchain,” says BlockApps CEO Kieren James-Lubin, who is partnering with Google to sell enterprise blockchain apps. In addition to Day’s work, Google has filed numerous patents related to the blockchain, including one in 2018 to use a “lattice” of interoperating blockchains to increase security, a big deal in a world where untold millions of crypto have been stolen by hackers. The company is also pushing its developers to build apps on the ethereum blockchain, and Google’s venture arm, GV, has made a number of significant investments in crypto startups.

The giant, it seems, is waking up. 

UBER EATS

Uber's Secret Gold Mine

Uber Eats could make up a tenth of the ride-hailing giant's revenue this year, impressive news for investors in its IPO. But well-capitalised rivals are already trying to tap the same vein

By BIZ CARSON

When early investors were pitched on Uber's original plan for a car-service app in 2008, it wasn't until the second-to-last slide that they heard delivery could be another moneymaker for the business. Ten years later, delivery is no longer an afterthought.

According to projections from its CEO, Dara Khosrowshahi, Uber Eats is on track to deliver some \$10 billion worth of food worldwide this year, up from an estimated \$6 billion-plus last year. Uber takes a 30 percent cut and a delivery fee, then pays drivers, suggesting that Uber Eats could generate at least \$1 billion in revenue this year, or an estimated 7



Chow time: Since the launch of Uber Eats, its leader, Jason Droege, has had 18 percent of all of his meals from Eats, including this bowl of noodles

TIM PANNEL FOR FORBES

percent to 10 percent of the total. That means Uber Eats is already among the planet's largest food-delivery services and ranks second in the US behind rival Grubhub (likely \$1 billion in 2018 revenue) and ahead of competition like Caviar, Postmates and DoorDash.

Uber could certainly use the extra calories. The money-losing San Francisco-based company was valued at some \$76 billion when it last raised money, in August 2018, and bankers hope its IPO, slated for later this year, could boost that to \$120 billion. The problem is, there is no way Uber's core ride-hailing business is worth that much. Its explosive growth is showing signs of slowing, and internationally the taxi service has struggled, selling its China operations to local rival Didi Chuxing in August 2016, as well as its stakes in Southeast Asia.

Uber's self-driving-car business, once considered the answer to rising driver costs, suspended testing and fired workers after an autonomous Uber killed a pedestrian in March 2018.

Now, as Uber prepares to tell investors why they should buy its stock instead of rival Lyft's, Uber Eats looks like a distinguishing factor.

"When I first joined Uber, I think Uber was much more associated with ride-hailing and Eats was this interesting part-time endeavour," says Khosrowshahi, who took over as CEO in August 2017. "It has since exploded, in a good way, into a truly significant business."

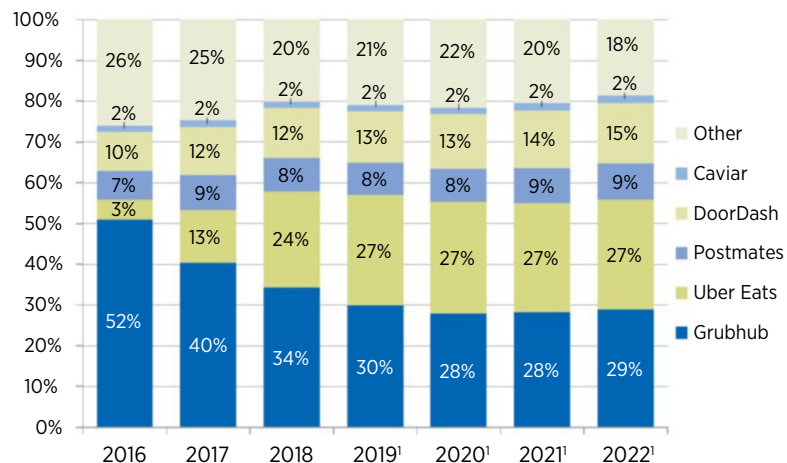
But despite the growth, Uber Eats is losing lots of money, and even Khosrowshahi doesn't know when it will be profitable. Potential Uber investors will have to decide: Is food delivery a smart bet on future growth or a fool's errand in a crowded market?

It's a question familiar to Jason Droege, the 40-year-old protégé of former CEO Travis Kalanick.

Droege has run Uber Eats since its 2014 inception, and some of the most critical voices he had to overcome were from Uber's pre-IPO

Gobbling Market Share

Since 2016, Uber Eats has grown from less than 5 percent of the US food delivery market to nearly 25 percent, and it's expected to keep getting fatter



¹Estimate Source: Wedbush Securities Estimates

investors, who thought the company was on a path to recreate the terrible economics of Web 1.0 failures Web van, which blew through over \$700 million trying to re-engineer grocery delivery in the late 1990s, and Kozmo.com, which spent nearly \$300 million trying to deliver video games and convenience-store fare.

Droege shrugs off the comparisons—and the competition. "The world was telling us this was a crowded space. But our hypothesis was it wasn't," he says.

Making money on delivery isn't easy. Sure, Uber Eats gets a hefty

chunk of a restaurant's bill and charges a delivery fee, generally between \$2 to \$8. But Uber has to pay the driver to pick up and drop off the food, plus market the service. Uber's share of the bill is lower, on average, than in the ride-hailing business. Restaurants are, at best, semi-willing partners that can ill afford a 30 percent blow to their bottom lines. And since Uber isn't (yet) willing to have your meal share a ride with a paying customer, there are fewer network efficiencies to capitalise on.

Its largest competitor, publicly traded Grubhub, has proved you can make a profit in this business.

That success has made it a formidable rival, and it's not the only one: Just in the US, Uber competes against Square subsidiary Caviar, well-capitalised startups DoorDash and Postmates, and the potential giant in the wings, Amazon.

Kalanick recruited Droege, with whom he had co-founded a file-sharing startup as undergraduates at UCLA, in March 2014 to head what was loosely called Uber Everything. His mandate: Find a service that could become as big as ride-hailing. Droege tried delivering

"When I joined Uber, Eats was this interesting part-time endeavour. It has since exploded, in a good way, into a truly significant business."

DARA KHOSROWSHAH,
CEO, UBER

everything from diapers and deodorant to daisies and dry cleaning. Nothing worked—except food.

After a few stunts like delivering ice cream and BBQ on the Fourth of July, Uber made its first serious attempt with Uber Fresh. Fresh had drivers circling city blocks with coolers full of soups and sandwiches ready for delivery within minutes. On launch day in Los Angeles in August 2014, the Uber team sold hundreds of meals in an hour and a half, a giant leap from the eight orders a day for deodorant. “The signal spike was big,” Droege says.

It was the right market but the wrong product.

Magical as it was to have a driver show up with a burrito in 5 minutes at the tap of an app, Droege realised customers would wait 30 minutes if they could order any meal they wanted. Internally the team quietly started work on Project Agora (Greek for marketplace) to launch Uber Eats. They started in Toronto in 2015, chosen because competition was lighter than in a city like New York, and then expanded to Miami, Houston and secondary cities like Tacoma, Washington. A couple of markets (Miami and Atlanta) became profitable in 2017, proving that the business was possible, at least in certain places. But just as Uber Eats was getting traction, Uber’s executive team fell apart in the wake of reports of sexual harassment, gender discrimination and questionable business ethics. Ultimately, Kalanick was ousted, and other groups, like self-driving cars, lost their department heads. But Droege and his team of nearly 2,000 remained mostly unscathed. He admits it was a “tough year”, but he told his team to keep their heads down and execute.

What’s most exciting to Uber executives is that many Eats customers don’t even use the ride-hailing service: Last year, four of every ten people who used Eats were new to Uber, giving the company access to fresh customers who might later be



Dara Khosrowshahi, Uber’s CEO, has left much of Eats to Droege. “Honestly, I’m there to do the corporate grunt work,” he says

convinced to give the car service a try.

“Of all the side bets that Uber has made over the years, whether it’s autonomous or delivering other things or different modalities of transportation, this has come out as the clear number one in scale and executive attention,” says Mike Ghaffary, the former CEO of delivery rival Eat24.

Eats is closing in on Grubhub. In 2016, Grubhub controlled over half the market, says Wedbush analyst Ygal Arounian.

Its market share dropped to 34 percent in 2018, while Eats’ grew

“Of all the side bets that Uber has made over the years, this has come out as the clear number one in scale and executive attention.”

MIKE GHAFFARY,
FORMER CEO, EAT24

from 3 percent to 24 percent. “The pace of their expansion has caught everyone off guard,” Arounian says.

But the tailwinds helping Eats, such as a generation turning to their phones first when hungry, also propelled its opponents. In 2018, DoorDash raised about \$1 billion in venture funding and nearly tripled its valuation to \$4 billion. Postmates also raised \$400 million in the last six months of 2018 and now has a valuation of \$1.9 billion. Both competitors also benefit from their single-minded focus on food delivery.

To trim costs, Uber Eats batches orders so a driver can pick up multiple meals at once. It’s also enticing customers with free delivery from restaurants that already have a courier en route. But Khosrowshahi draws the line when it comes to pairing passengers with pad thai: “We don’t want your experience to suffer because it may be good for our business.”

To grow further, Uber Eats needs to win over more customers and restaurants.

Droege is betting partnerships with McDonald’s and Starbucks will entice customers to open the Uber Eats app instead of a competitor’s.

Uber is also copying Grubhub’s core business model and letting some restaurants do their own deliveries in exchange for a bigger take of the bill.

Success depends on convincing restaurant owners like Simon Mikhail, of Si-Pie Pizzeria in Chicago, that Eats trumps its rivals. Mikhail works with more than a dozen delivery services, but only Uber Eats approached him with an idea for a virtual restaurant, after it noticed how many folks in the neighbourhood were searching for fried chicken. Now he sells 160 pounds of chicken a week, exclusively through Uber Eats app. “They do cut into profit a little bit, but it’s worth it,” he says.

Will investors decide that Uber Eats is also worth it? That’s now up to Droege to deliver. **F**

INTUITIVE SURGICAL

Robots, Robots Everywhere

For 20 years Intuitive Surgical owned its market. Now the operating room is getting crowded

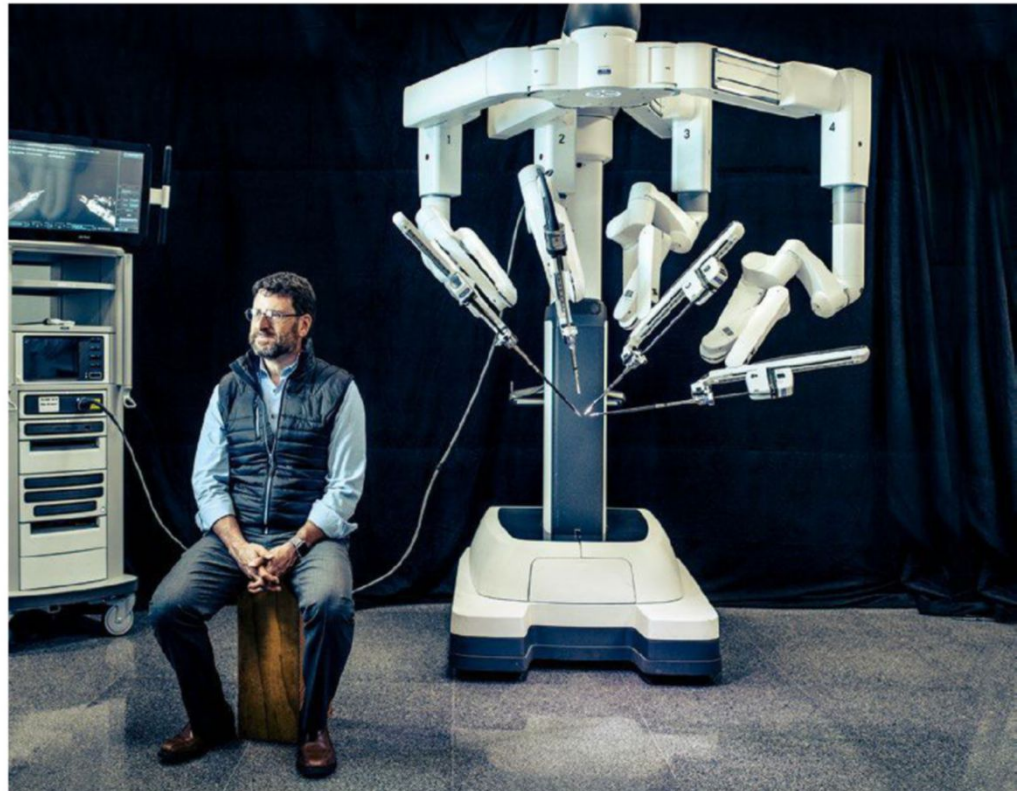
By MICHELA TINDERA

It was the femoral artery of a rat that piqued the curiosity of Gary Guthart. Then a new hire at a research institute spun from Stanford University, he was assigned to a surgical robotics lab. He was asked to sew a severed artery back together by hand, and then to try it again with a prototype robot.

“That’s what people have to do in surgery?” Guthart recalls thinking. “That looks like both a really interesting, important problem and a really hard problem, and that got me really excited.”

Three years later, in 1996, Guthart was working at a startup called Intuitive Surgical, which had licensed technology from the institute, SRI International. Intuitive launched a robotic surgical helper, branded da Vinci, in 1998. The da Vinci would go on to change surgery in the same way the iPhone has transformed cellphone use.

Today, nearly 5,000 da Vincis are in operating rooms, used in one million surgeries per year. Intuitive went public just after the tech bubble peaked in 2000, and still the stock ended the decade 17 times higher than at its IPO. Why? Because, until now, Intuitive has had the business to itself. The price tag on a da Vinci is about \$1.5 million. Plus, it sells about \$1,900 in replacement parts per operation. The company’s 30 percent net profit margin eclipses Microsoft’s.



CEO Gary Guthart next to Intuitive Surgical's fourth-generation da Vinci Xi robot at the company headquarters in Sunnyvale, California

Guthart, 53, has been chief executive since 2010 and is sitting on \$315 million worth of Intuitive stock and options. But now he’s going to have to work a little harder. Medtronic, a medical-device maker with sales eight times Intuitive’s, and Verb Surgical, a partnership between Johnson & Johnson and Alphabet, are expected to enter the surgery robot market in the next year.

They’re likely to compete on price.

There’s another problem, much like the one that caused Apple to recently warn on sales: After a period of explosive growth, a pioneer confronts saturation in its original markets. A plateauing of sales is inevitable. Morningstar analyst Alex Morozov expects Intuitive’s rich multiple (41 times expected 2019 net) to come down. He rates the stock a sell.

And yet Guthart and Intuitive have somehow defied gravity so far. In 2012, a national advisory panel declared that some prostate cancer screening (and the resulting surgeries) did more harm than good; still, prostatectomies are common, and Intuitive's machine is used in at least 80 percent of them. Last year the company increased its revenue by 19 percent to \$3.7 billion, on which it netted \$1.1 billion. Guthart is moving into new territory with a machine to help doctors inspect lungs for cancer. He is expanding abroad. He is pushing the da Vinci into stomach-shrinking surgery.

Guthart, the son of a defence engineer and a science teacher, grew up in Sunnyvale, California, just a few miles from where Intuitive's headquarters now lie. His high school math teacher snagged him an internship writing code at a Nasa research operation, where he was the youngest person in the lab. He got engineering degrees at UC Berkeley and Caltech, with dreams of becoming an academic. But a professor turned him down for a postdoc. "I think you're a bright enough person," Guthart remembers him saying. "But I don't think you would make a good professor. You don't like to write, and you spend a lot of time chatting with people."

Two months later Guthart found a job at SRI, where he was drafted by a robotics startup founded by surgeon Frederic Moll, engineer Robert Younge and venture capitalist John Freund. They licensed technology from the research institute, which had received funding from the Defence Department to build a system that would enable a surgeon to operate a battlefield robot remotely. That idea never panned out, but the startup, Intuitive Surgical, had plans to improve minimally invasive surgery, a new technique at the time.

In 1998 surgeons used the da Vinci to perform what the company reported to be the world's first

computer-enhanced closed-chest heart surgeries, like mitral-valve repair. But robotic cardiac procedures didn't get a big uptake in a market where doctors were focused on a different medical innovation: Heart stents.

In 2001 the da Vinci got a big break when the Food & Drug Administration cleared it for prostate surgery. Dr Ben Davies, a professor of urology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, has been using it for the six to seven prostatectomies he's been doing every week for the past decade. Before the robot came along, he says, this very invasive open procedure would be a challenge because the prostate gland is surrounded by sensitive parts of the body that need to be delicately dissected. The result could be lots of blood loss. With robotics,

is not a huge portion of Intuitive's business, Guthart told investors in January he expects some impact.

What's Guthart going to do about the new competitors, which could attack all of Intuitive's markets? Its first-mover advantage should help for a while. Hospitals invest in training and equipment for the da Vinci, which could make it harder for them to switch. Intuitive is adding features to the da Vinci that seem plucked from a medical bag of health care buzzwords: Augmented reality, big data analytics and artificial intelligence, advances aimed at keeping Intuitive's technology in the lead.

Still, Guthart aims to take the company beyond the da Vinci. The Ion is a robotic-assisted bronchoscope awaiting FDA clearance. Guthart says the device could have helped his mother when

Today, nearly 5,000 da Vincis are in operating rooms, used in one million surgeries per year

the doctor operates the precise controls while watching a feed from a camera set inside the patient. Blood loss is "minuscule", Davies says.

Sales dipped in 2014, after the bad review of prostate screening and a warning about robotic hysterectomies from the head of the major US professional group for ob/gyns. Intuitive got back on track by expanding into hernia repairs, which accounted for 12 percent of da Vinci procedures in 2017, according to one analyst's estimate. But then there was yet another complication. *The New England Journal of Medicine* published two studies showing that women who had a minimally invasive hysterectomy—whether robotic or not—to treat early-stage cervical cancer were more likely to die later of the disease than they were with open surgery. While radical hysterectomy to treat cervical cancer

she was successfully treated for lung cancer seven years ago. Someday, the tool might become a way to destroy cancer cells inside the lung, much as gastroenterologists can both detect and remove precancerous polyps during a colonoscopy.

But this time Intuitive won't be the first to market. In 2003, Moll left the company he had co-founded and later started a rival medical robotics company called Auris Health, attracting more than \$700 million in venture capital. Auris received FDA clearance in March 2018 for a device to perform lung biopsies. Intuitive has sued, alleging patent infringement, and Guthart says he's not in regular contact with his former boss, whose company denies the charges. The case is pending. All things considered, it's fair to expect Guthart's next nine years to be more of a battle than his last nine. **F**

RIDER HORSE GROUP

Racing Ahead

What do Inner Mongolia, New Zealand, horses and wolves have in common? Colourful businessman Lin Lang. His company, Rider Horse Group, is boosting the Kiwi equine industry

By JENNIFER WELLS



The horse whisperer: "It's natural to ride," says Lin Lang

His first encounter with Manchurian entrepreneur Lin Lang was back in 2012. Andrew Birch, head of New Zealand Thoroughbred Marketing, was sitting in his office in Hamilton when a woman walked in off the street. She worked for a local veterinary-supply company, she said, and was making inquiries on behalf of a gentleman in Inner Mongolia keen to import horses from New Zealand.

Birch loaded her up with information, but "the minute she left I had to look on Google Maps to see where Inner Mongolia was", he says. Within the month, Lang was in New Zealand, and armed with a stud-and-stable directory, he

travelled around the country buying 65 horses privately. That was June. In December he was back to buy more.

Since then the chairman and chief executive of Rider Horse Group, which owns China's largest horse farm, has become one of the most consequential players in New Zealand racing and breeding circles. He's expanded mainland Chinese interest and investment in the sector, aggressively buying privately and at auction to become the biggest importer of New Zealand horses in China, while bringing wealthy mainland buyers to New Zealand to view what's on the block. He's chartered 15 planes since 2012 to transport 1,484 horses. "About 90 percent of our clients

buy New Zealand horses," Lang, 50, says through an interpreter.

Australia remains the top overseas purchaser of New Zealand bloodstock, capturing 70 percent of total exports last season, followed by Hong Kong and Singapore. But China is coming up fast on No 3 and is the industry's biggest emerging market, says Andrew Seabrook, managing director of New Zealand Bloodstock, a bloodstock-sales leader in Karaka, south Auckland. Last year Chinese buyers made up 5 percent of the buying bench at NZB sales, spending \$3.9 million, up from zero six years ago. "We took the first Thoroughbreds up to China in 1993," he says. "At that time we thought [the market] was going to take off. But it wasn't until Mr Lang came that it really started to happen." Following Lang's first purchase, the Chinese flag was added to the international array at the auction house. "There is no doubt his influence in helping to open the Chinese market has been significant."

It's a day's journey from Rider Horse's waterfront office in Auckland to the company's headquarters in the waving grasslands of Inner Mongolia, an autonomous region in northern China where a deep cultural affinity for horses goes back thousands of years. In addition to a hotel and a restaurant, the complex includes a 2,000-acre farm with stables, a racetrack and a grandstand, a feed mill, a breeding centre and livestock trading, veterinary and quarantine facilities. It's also home to Lang's favourite pets—two wolves and a falcon. His surname has the same pronunciation as wolf in Chinese, giving rise to his widely used English moniker, Mr Wolf.

Hailing from Jilin Province, Lang got a job after college working for a state-owned truck maker. "But this was the 1990s in China, and you had this atmosphere," says Victoria Wang, bloodstock manager at Rider Horse. "A lot of people jumped out of government jobs to start their own

businesses.” He launched a number of small ventures; one sold ice cream and another made furniture. He made real money with a hot pot restaurant, which he expanded into a chain of ten (there are four now), reinvesting the profits in property and eventually establishing a riding club to indulge his passion for horses. He began racing half-bloods to compete against other horse owners and have some fun.

In 2006 Lang got a phone call from officials in Khorchin in Inner Mongolia, promising land and subsidies in exchange for shifting the club’s operations there to build up the local equine industry. Today Rider Horse employs 700 people in Khorchin involved with the care and trade of more than 4,500 horses—including 900 Thoroughbreds—and is the largest horse importer and supplier in China. The group also owns a track-and-stables complex in Hunan for year-round training and racing. Rider Horse says it posted \$31 million in sales last year, up by 300 percent from four years ago, while net profit has doubled to \$6.1 million over the same period.

Lang holds the biggest stake among 21 shareholders. The company became the first in China’s nascent horse sector to receive venture capital, and it’s secured \$72 million in five rounds of funding. He has long talked of a public offering on Shenzhen’s ChiNext—though he says the timing still isn’t right—and that would make Rider Horse the country’s only listed equine company. Besides meeting the recreational demand for horses, the company is one of China’s biggest race organisers; horses compete for limited prize money.

After building a small racing team in Khorchin, Lang branched out, buying several horses in the US to race in Macau. Then he turned to New Zealand, with the country’s free-trade agreement with China, an advantageous exchange rate, a



Equine cubicle life: Lang is the biggest importer of New Zealand horses in China—1,484 so far

ready infrastructure for livestock export and the market’s reputation for quality fuelling his interest. He saw a niche in buying a mix of horses at the bottom end of the market, including Standardbreds and ponies, helping Kiwi breeders offload excess stock while filling the demand for horses in China. Says New Zealand Thoroughbred Marketing’s Birch, “They have certainly cast the net far and wide, and it created a market for stock that might otherwise have been viewed as non-commercial.”

Lang has spent \$9.5 million on Kiwi-bred horses since 2012 and leaves his larger purchases in New Zealand to be trained. The watershed was his “very lucky” 2013 auction purchase of an outstanding Thoroughbred named Mongolian Khan for \$180,000. Two years later it became the first Chinese-owned racehorse to win an international Group One event and the first horse in nearly 30 years to win both the New Zealand and Australian derbies, drawing cheering spectators from China to the events and raising Lang’s

profile at home. He has brought some 190 clients and friends to New Zealand, and one is Zhang Yuesheng, the head of Chinese conglomerate Yulong Investment Group and owner of three horse farms in Australia and a racetrack and stables in China. He’s been a significant investor in New Zealand bloodstock since 2015.

Chinese investment in New Zealand horses has doubled over the past few years, says Alan Fu, managing director of New Zealand Chinese Jockey Club. But this year New Zealand slipped from its position as the second-biggest supplier of horses to China, with Australia coming in at No 2 behind Europe. The primary reason is Australia’s capacity to outspend New Zealand in marketing and sponsorships, he says, but he also cautions that New Zealand has become heavily

reliant on Rider Horse. The key is to extend the market, he adds. “We are starting to form relationships with multiple parties and make it more open for Chinese buyers.”

In August, Lang took over a 300-acre horse stud in Hamilton, where he will house some of the 150 Thoroughbreds he keeps in New Zealand. It will also underpin the group’s strategic shift to breeding, where Lang sees the most profit. Rider Horse has just added a third stallion to its lineup in New Zealand and has purchased 110 broodmares to support them. The progeny of now-retired Mongolian Khan will go on sale next month for the first time and are widely expected to be popular.

For the immediate future, Rider Horse’s focus is firmly on New Zealand, but further down the track, the plan is to sell top-selected progeny not only in New Zealand but also in Australia and the northern hemisphere. For Lang, it’s all about the horses. “It’s natural to ride,” says the married father of four, adding, a touch wistfully, that he’s now too busy. **F**

IN THE SPIRIT OF THINGS

Abhishek Khaitan of Radico has stepped into the world of restaurants, while bringing his celebrated whisky home to the Indian market

By **Anoothi Vishal**

Vanilla, apricot, apple, spice... It is mid day and a tad too early to start drinking whisky, but had we been sipping on the Rampur single malt, arguably the best Indian whisky at the moment, its notes would have matched perfectly with the roast duck placed before us, waiting to be carved, dabbed with thick plum sauce and rolled into gossamer pancakes.

I am sitting at the new TCK (The China Kitchen) in Gurugram's Cyber Hub, chatting with Abhishek Khaitan, 45, managing director of Radico Khaitan, one of India's largest spirits companies. It is about to launch its Rampur single malt in India in February, and that is big news considering the single malt has garnered much attention with whisky connoisseurs ever since its launch two years ago for the export markets in the US, Europe and Africa.

As per the strategy also followed by other premium Indian whiskies, Amrut and Paul John, Rampur is ready to be showcased in India as well, albeit in limited numbers. I am expecting this conversation with Khaitan to be a spirited one, naturally, and we have got off to a suitably entertaining start with Khaitan regaling me with stories

of his younger days in Bengaluru when he loved frequenting bars. "I practice what I preach," he chuckles.

The reason we are dining at TCK is because Khaitan, in 2019, invested in the restaurant which he plans to take nationwide. This investment in the restaurants space is his private project, where he has partnered with Amritesh Jatia, a director in Asian Hotels that owns the Hotel Hyatt Regency in Delhi, and Padmanabh Mandelia, assistant vice president at Radico Khaitan.

TCK, which opened in January, is their first project, and a spin-off on The China Kitchen at Hyatt. Though spirits has been on the agenda, Khaitan wants us to check out his latest baby. Dishes conceptualised for this new, standalone, smaller-but-chicer format by three expat Chinese chefs are rolling in, as we sit forking up broccoli and snow peas.

"Why have you got into the restaurant space," I ask, "when you know that profits are slim and most restaurant companies are slipping on scalability." Khaitan is undaunted. He is sure he can make his newest venture work, and besides, as he says, business should be done with passion. "You have to give your dream a chance,"



he says. This is what he has always done, even with the spirits business.

Khaitan had entered Radico Khaitan, his family's distilling business, in 1997 as a 23-year-old at a time of transition from making bulk products to establishing their own brands. Until then, Rampur Distillery and Chemical Company, as Radico Khaitan was then called, produced alcohol for other liquor companies such as Shaw Wallace, United



Abhishek
Khaitan
invested in
Gurugram's
TCK (The
China Kitchen)
this year



Breweries and Mohan Meakins. “Even as a pub-hopping student in Bengaluru, I wanted to have my own brands,” Khaitan remembers. That opportunity presented itself soon after he joined the business, which was suffering losses after the distillery lost contracts. There seemed to be no other option but to create something of their own.

In 1999, Khaitan, who had hired 100 people, “whose average age was 23 years, because I could not afford more

experienced professionals,” launched 8 PM, a blended IMFL whisky, lower in price than imported scotch brands, and it hit the bull’s eye. One million cases were sold in the first year itself and it became one of the highest selling whiskies in the world at that time. To create his first brand, Khaitan had to battle the old timers in his father’s company to change the company’s name to a more chic ‘Radico’. “It took me two months to convince them

that no one would buy whisky from a company called Rampur Distillery and Chemical Company,” he smiles.

If this was the inception of a dream, there have been others that Khaitan has continued to follow. In the mid 2000s, at a nightclub in Las Vegas, Khaitan, had another epiphany. “I saw all the tables ordering bottles of Grey Goose vodka,” he recalls. Vodka was having a global moment, but in India its consumption was a fraction



Khaitan plans to take TCK (left) nationwide; the 'cigar' at the restaurant is actually chocolate and the ash comes from broken bits of sweet almonds

of the global rate (it accounts for 3.5 percent of spirits consumption annually in India, compared to 32 percent globally). However, convinced that younger, party-going Indians would want an indigenous vodka priced higher than other India-made vodkas but lower than imported ones, Khaitan launched Magic Moments in 2006. It was a direct competition to Diageo's Smirnoff that had helped grow the vodka market in India.

"When I came back from Vegas, I wanted to launch the vodka and


a popular best-seller at Hyatt's The China Kitchen for over a decade, Khaitan's eyes light up, "Oh, we must have that too," calling for what is essentially a poshed up chilli chicken, where chunky bell peppers have been replaced by beautiful round whole red chillies, glistening in oil.

The conversation veers back to restaurants, and Khaitan mentions this is not his first time as a restaurateur. About a decade ago, he had got together with friends like Dabur's Amit Burman (who now runs the

lead the spirits business, has been looking to up the game by playing in the upscale segment. This is perhaps also because he has realised that this would be the only effective strategy against foreign brands looking to play the price game. By creating Rampur, packaging it in a silken pouch that is reminiscent of India's erstwhile princely state and the culture of luxury, and then selling it only internationally to create an aura of desirability ("there is a demand for anything that is scarce," he says), Khaitan entered the luxury league in the spirits business.

Then, last year, he created Jaisalmer, an Indian craft gin that, again, is to be made and marketed in limited quantities as a high-end, high quality spirit associated with images of royalty, luxury and opulence.

Apart from foreign brands, Indian craft gins like the Goa-produced Hapusa, Strangers and Sons, and now Jaisalmer are shaking up a category once dominated with low-on-quality-and-price products made domestically.

As we discuss the merits of these, the dessert tray comes up. Individual portions of pudding, layered cake and other bites are arranged artfully but the show stealer is the 'cigar'. As we bite into it, we realise that it is chocolate, and the "ash" comes from broken bits of sweet almonds. Inventiveness can be sweet. 

As a pub-hopping student in Bengaluru, Khaitan wanted to have his own brands

told my father, who asked me for a business plan. I told him, there was no business plan, just my belief that it would work," says Khaitan.

While Khaitan has been telling us about his beliefs as an entrepreneur, lady finger 'sashimi' arrives at the table. This is just a salad of steamed okra and one of the inventive, healthy options on the menu. Then, there are bao dumplings with syringes full of balsamic and truffle oil injected into them, more proof of the chef and Khaitan's desire for inventiveness.

However, when we rave about the tried-and-tested Bullet Chicken,

restaurant company LiteBite, with several brands) and the Somany Group's Abhishek Somany to open The Forum, a splashy lounge bar in Delhi. As a young food critic, I remember going to The Forum, but coming back more impressed with the huge investment (for that time) of ₹2.5 crore, according to market sources, it had attracted. The restaurant world had been abuzz with this scale, as more modest restaurants could be set up for ₹40-70 lakh.

If Rampur, as an Indian single malt, is the toast of the whisky drinking world, Khaitan, forever in a quest to

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MEXY XAVIER



Cricketers Mahela Jayawardene (left) and Kumar Sangakkara (right) invested in chef Dharshan Munidasa's Ministry of Crab and remain actively involved

PINGER ATTACK

After a delay of almost a year, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Crab opens in Mumbai. With a no-freeze policy, it aims to introduce India to its own breed of export-quality crustaceans

By **Pankti Mehta Kadakia**

The Ministry takes its identity seriously. Straight up on the menu, you're greeted first with a firm 'Declaration' of what the Sri Lankan restaurant chain, No. 25 on the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants list, espouses. Next, a detailed 'Constitution', from which the Articles mandating a no-freeze policy or an optional use of cutleries come. Disclaimers are everywhere: Availability of crab sizes depends on the weather gods and various other factors. In the original Colombo outpost, which is located inside a heritage 400-year-old former Dutch hospital, another one goes: Your chair may wobble a bit, but we hope you will enjoy such charms.

The philosophy continues with the design too. In all Ministry of Crab (MoC) outlets around the world, including the new 6,000-sq-ft space in Mumbai's Khar, which opened in early February, a funky counter above the restaurant pass, backlit for both function and effect, showcases the kinds of crab on the menu. If the light is out, that particular

variety is unavailable. It possibly hasn't been caught on the day. For the diner, it's a game of chance.

"The crabs have to come to us alive," says Dharshan Munidasa, the restaurant's half-Sri Lankan, half-Japanese chef and founder. "We are not a farm-crab restaurant. Every crab is caught wild on the day, and our menu changes according to their availability. It's challenging, because no one has done this before. But we won't use sub-par or frozen seafood."

Much of this steadfast dedication to ingredients—as well as the philosophy of running a restaurant largely hinged on one single ingredient—comes from the chef's unique mix of heritage. As a child, Munidasa shuttled between Sri Lanka and Japan (his father's Lankan, mother Japanese), and food was an important part of his early memories. "I was a greedy kid," he says with a smile. "My siblings are much smaller than me, and we joke that it's because I ate all the food."

He also savoured the occasional trips to sushi restaurants in Japan. "When I would come back from Sri Lanka, I would look forward to visiting the same sushi joints," he says. "But Sri Lanka had its own charms. Back then, like in India, we didn't have supermarkets, but we had trees. We picked the fruit directly off them, which, I recognise now, formulated an enjoyable and interactive relationship with the ingredients. We went fishing. My brother and I would make sashimi on our boats with pen knives when we were 10 years old. So yes, both cultures have shaped my cooking philosophy."

The chef says there is nothing common between the two cuisines, but both exist as separate worlds in his mind, independent of each other. "It's like being bilingual," he says. "In the sub-continent, it's common to be able to think in two languages. So I have two distinct palates that are very different from each other. The Sri Lankan palate can handle a lot of spice, while the Japanese palate appreciates subtleties that are cerebral. There's no real marriage



(From left) Pepper Crab, Baked Crab, and Garlic Chilli Freshwater Prawn at MoC. Diners can choose from various curries and marinades, all of which have heavy Sri Lankan roots

between the two—it's like you watch *Seinfeld* and laugh, and watch a Hindi movie and laugh as well."

A student of computer engineering, Munidasa calls himself an 'accidental chef'. He was six months short of earning a degree at Johns Hopkins University in the US when his father passed away, and he returned to Sri Lanka to settle his affairs. "My dad was always talking about doing a Japanese restaurant, so I asked my mom if we should do it now. Initially, she did the cooking, but within a year, I took over the kitchen. I used to cook for myself in college, because I didn't like the food there."

So Munidasa's journey began, without formal training, with Nihonbashi in 1995, a Japanese seafood eatery in Sri Lanka. (At No. 45, Nihonbashi, too, was on the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants list in 2018.) Munidasa did a TV show episode that featured a Sri Lankan crab, shot in Singapore. Sri Lankan crabs were famous, but the joke was that to eat the good ones, you had

to visit Singapore, as most of them would be exported. "Months before MoC opened, I was using that same export-quality crab at Nihonbashi, for very high-end events. That's when I thought about doing a Sri Lankan crab restaurant, for Sri Lanka."

"I never went to culinary school, but what I know is how to choose a crab. Even today, you can't learn that at a school," he adds. "I learned from crab-mongers at the wholesale markets in Sri Lanka. That knowledge is key to what I do even now."

Ministry of Crab was founded in 2011 in Colombo. Soon after, cricketers Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene joined Munidasa as investors. "After that, everything fell into place," says the chef. In the past year, MoC has expanded to Shanghai, Manila and Mumbai. A Bangkok outlet is in the works.

The basics of starting a new restaurant remained the same. "I designed my first restaurant on Excel—I still do that," he says. "If you match the column width and

Sri Lankan crabs were famous, but the joke was that to eat the good ones, you had to visit Singapore as most were exported



row height to the same scale, you have a grid that is scalable. I run the numbers. I know where I stand in terms of break-evens. But the experience of opening so many restaurants is something you can only get from living it. It gets easier with time, as you know the problems.”

The retired cricketers are active participants in the business, reading numbers and their audience closely. “Even while we were playing cricket, we would get regular updates on our sales,” says Sangakkara. “Post our cricketing career, we are even more hands-on. We are expanding and growing rapidly now, and need all hands on deck to keep our core philosophy intact and be careful that the brand remains as it was intended.”

Jayawardene adds that the biggest aspect of running a venture is teamwork. “From the kitchen to the backroom staff, you stay strongly united towards a common purpose, and that’s the only way to control pressure and stay consistent, and take collective responsibility for mistakes. That’s the ethos we have had in cricket, and what we have learnt to bring into our businesses too.”

MoC entered India in partnership with Gourmet Investments Pvt Ltd, a company focussed on bringing



international F&B concepts and brands into India—they are also behind the Pizza Express franchise in the country. Soon, they will bring Nihonbashi to India, too. Many tourists that seek the hard-to-reserve Colombo MoC outlet are Indian and Chinese. Bringing the brand to India, says the team, was a natural choice.

“Mumbai is one of those megacities that isn’t afraid to eat crab,” says Ramit Bharti Mittal, CEO, Gourmet Investments. “It has an extremely awesome cluster effect, which means a large concentration of people who travel frequently, who seek out culinary experiences. And, from a sourcing point of view, it attracts various kinds of importers, too.”

Sourcing is an ongoing challenge. As in Sri Lanka, the best Indian catch too is exported to countries like Singapore and Dubai. “If you’ve eaten good crab in Southeast Asia, chances are it came from this side of the world,” says Deepinder Batth, COO, Gourmet Investments. “The reason you don’t find it here is because it is priced in high US dollar rates, and Indian restaurants have a hard time outbidding global players for it. Dharshan set the game saying that if you want the best crab in the world, it comes at this price. It took

us a while to form relationships with vendors who understand that this is equivalent to export, but to a restaurant within India.”

And come at a price it does. The crabs on the menu begin at ₹1,995 for a half-kilo crustacean and go up to ₹14,395 for a Crabzilla—a 2-kg one, though finding a 2-kg version is rare. Diners can then choose a curry or marinade—pepper crab, chilli crab, curry crab and so on—all of which have heavy Sri Lankan roots.

“The core of Sri Lankan cuisine is our spices—they’re so different from Indian spices. Our curries are much lighter,” says chef Munidasa.

The chef was presented with a challenge unique to Mumbai coming in—to present vegetarian options.

“We have a new section on the menu, but let’s be clear: These are vegetable dishes, not vegetarian dishes. The difference is they are not new dishes created for vegetarians, but vegetable preparations that mimic the original crab dishes, using ingredients such as eggplant, water chestnut, button mushroom and morning glory. The curry and preparations remain the same.”

“We bring international brands into India, but we are not in the game of localising them,” says Mittal of Gourmet Investments. “If the brand fits naturally in India, we can tinker with it a bit—like making this vegetarian menu. But it’s still cooked with the flavour palate and ethos from the ministry internationally.”

For the crabs, customers are given branded bibs and a kit of ‘crab tools’, but are encouraged to dig in with their bare hands. “There’s nothing gimmicky about it, that’s the only way to do it,” says the chef. “It’s like eating pistachio nuts—there’s something about taking the shell out yourself.”

The branding and marketing is focussed too—even with celebrity cricketers on board, and a famous chef, the face of the restaurant remains the crab. That’s in line with the ‘Constitution’ the team set out with. The hero is the ingredient. **F**

'WE'RE TRYING TO WEAN PEOPLE AWAY FROM BOLLYWOOD BOOM BOOM'

NCPA Chairman Khushroo Suntook on Jamshed Bhabha's vision for the performing arts and the institution's rise as a premier centre for art and culture over 50 years

By **Kathakali Chanda**

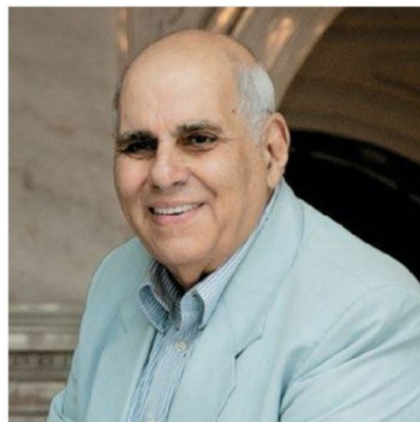
In the 1950s, Jamshed Bhabha, noted philanthropist and the younger brother of Homi Bhabha, the father of India's nuclear programme, sought 8 acres from the Maharashtra government to set up a centre for performing arts. Word has it that he was taken to land's end at Nariman Point and jokingly told, "Do you want the sea?" "Thank you very much, I'll take it," he is known to have shot back.

True to his word, Bhabha took a part of the Arabian Sea and laboriously filled it up for eight years. On that reclaimed plot stands the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA), striding into its 50th year as one of India's premier institutions to foster art and culture. Khushroo Suntook, once a confidant of Bhabha and who took over as NCPA chairman in 2007 after his death, speaks to *Forbes India* about its journey. Edited excerpts:

Q Tell us about the gradual expansion of the NCPA.

When Jamshed Bhabha secured the land at Nariman Point, he got the best in the business—architect Philip Johnson and acoustician Cyril

Harris—to build the Tata Theatre. The brief was that every whisper should be heard in the last row... back in the day, Bhabha didn't allow microphones. There is a story of a great artiste who told him he couldn't perform in the theatre if he couldn't



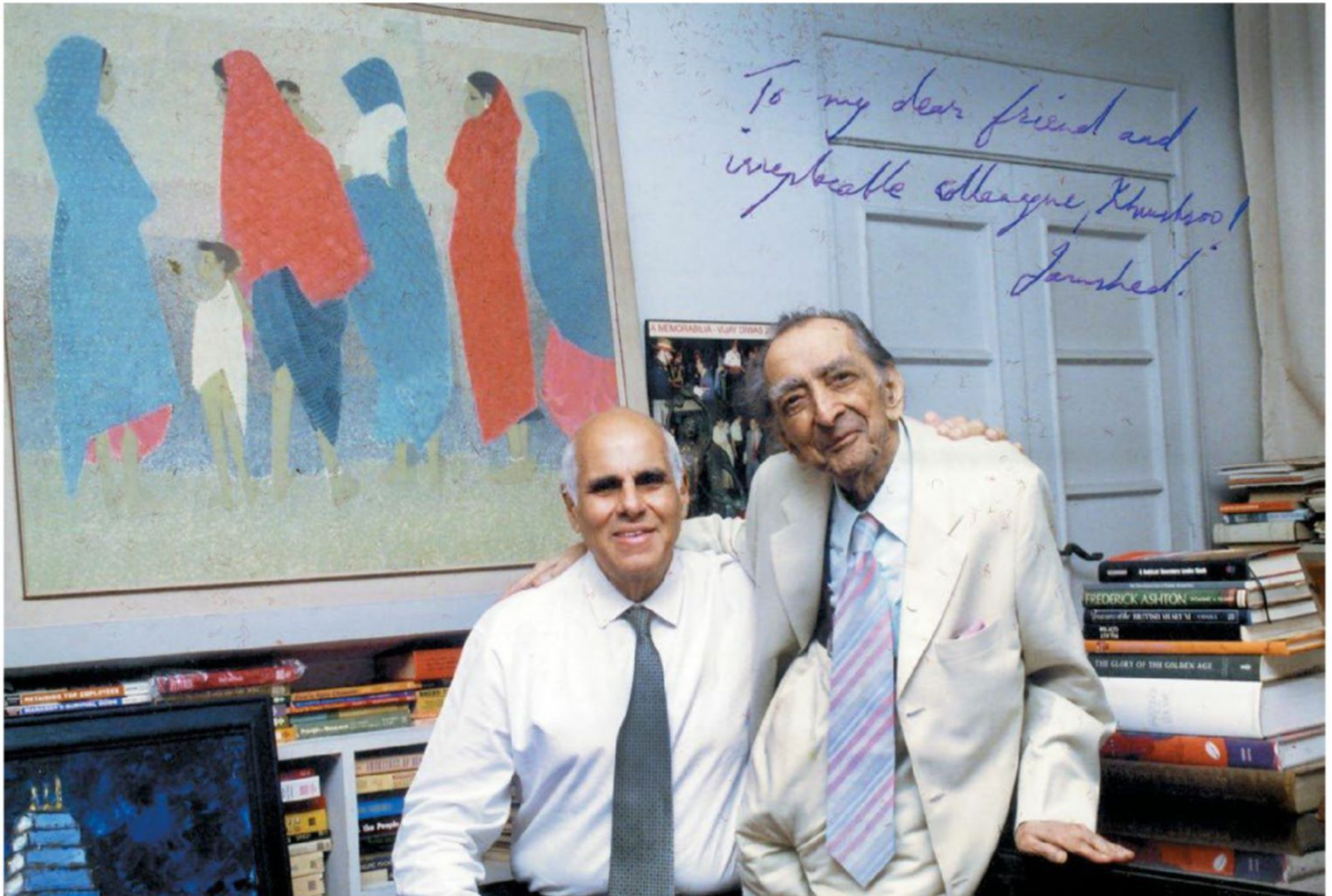
“We would like to push for art criticism. We are ready to fund a course on writing for artistes or journalists.”

use a microphone. He told him, “There’s the door and you won’t have to perform. But now that you’ve said so, let’s have a cup of tea.” He was that kind of a man, never carried a grudge.

Mrs [Indira] Gandhi inaugurated the Tata Theatre in 1980. On the opening night, an Italian opera she was fond of, *Barber of Seville*, was performed. Word has it that she whispered into Dr Bhabha’s ears, “Jamshed this is not an opera house, you should build one”. He took it as a firman.

On New Year’s Eve in 1998, after months of construction and close to its finish, the opera house (now the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre) burnt down. The next day, when the fire was still not fully doused, he called a meeting and told the staff that there will be no recriminations or post-mortem; tomorrow we start reconstruction. It was rebuilt within a year.

For every financial difficulty that came in the way, Bhabha would take out his cheque book without hesitation and sell his personal collection of paintings. When he died, he left us his house. Now



A photograph of Khushroo Suntook with Jamshed Bhabha (right), signed by the latter, taken three weeks before Bhabha's death

we have five theatres, galleries, libraries (with about 11,000 records and 6,000 books on operas), restaurants and even open spaces.

Q What vision did he set for NCPA when he brought you on board as vice chairman in 2000?

When he asked me to join NCPA, he told me he'd give me a nice room, etc, but no salary. But the next moment he said, "No this is wrong, no one should be made to work without a salary, so I'll give you a rupee". One of the joys of working with him was every Sunday morning I would go to his house all dressed up, have breakfast and talk about the future of NCPA. We talked about setting up an academy, a theatre unit, bringing people from abroad.

When I worried about money, he used to reassure me saying, "Whatever I have will be for NCPA when I'm gone." One month, we

didn't have the money to pay salaries and he wrote us a cheque in a flash.

He fell in 2007 and never recovered. I was there in the hospital on the day he died. He looked at me and said, "Don't forget NCPA." A few minutes later he was dead. At 3 pm, we were distributing his ashes on the NCPA compound.

Q NCPA now houses India's only professional symphony orchestra. How did that come about?

Every performing arts centre must possess a genre. The Lincoln Centre has the New York Philharmonic, the Musikverein has the Vienna Philharmonic. But I didn't know how we could afford an orchestra.

Once, in London, I was mesmerised with the performance of a Kazakh group. I went backstage and met [violinist] Marat [Bisengaliev] and requested him to come play in India. He came and impressed Dr Bhabha

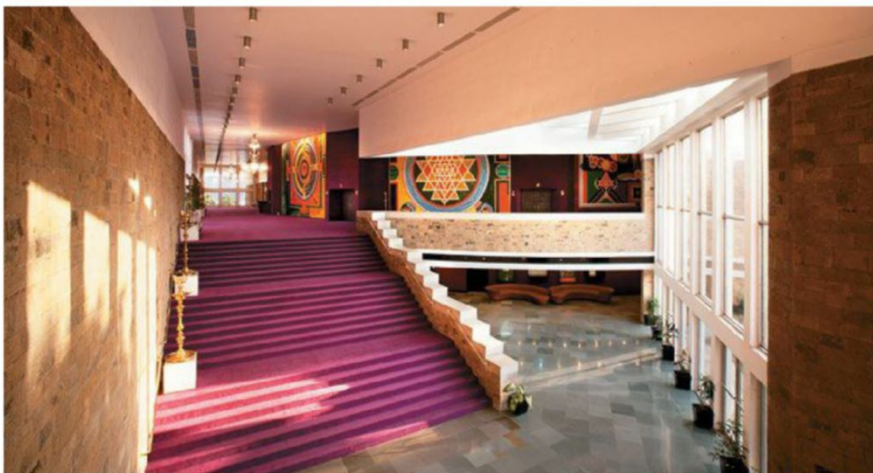
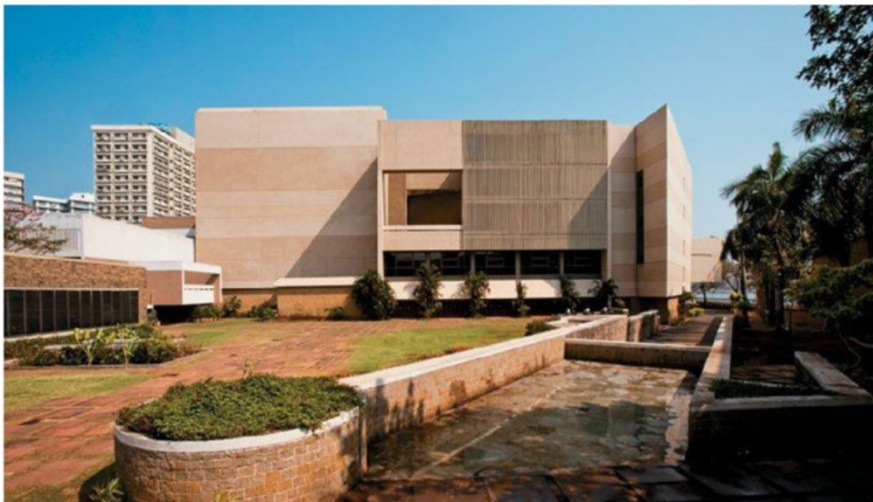
too. I asked Marat why don't we have an orchestra of our own. He agreed, but said he'll take Indians only if they play to his standard.

Out of hundreds at the audition, he chose four or five. As years went by, we couldn't add too many Indians. When I raised the issue with him, he said, "I can give you a formula, but it will take 11 years: We start a school, I'll teach the children, and at the end of their training, they will play in the orchestra." Now, the school is in its seventh year and Marat was ready to take some of the kids on tour to England.

Q What about the growth of Indian art disciplines?

The highest standard of Indian players available today are all playing at NCPA. In fact, Zakir [Hussain] is in our governing council. We've commissioned a tabla concerto with him and taken it to England. Here's an





(From top) The NCPA stands by the Arabian Sea on 8 acres of reclaimed land; a foyer at one of its five theatres; the Symphony Orchestra of India

amalgamation of the orchestra with Indian classical music. We are also taking the guru-shishya parampara all over Maharashtra where we conduct festivals and teach children.

One of the problems in India is we don't pay our artistes well; we are trying to change that. You know who gets paid the most, and even the prime

minister said the film industry is the beacon of culture in India. I am sorry to hear that. What we would very much like to do is to wean the Indian public away from Bollywood boom boom to what our great cultures are.

Q What are the other areas NCPA is looking to promote?

Theatre is now being developed. We've got people from the National Theatre as consultants to promote local theatre. But besides that, we've been screening performances from the Metropolitan Opera. When I had suggested it to one of their representatives at a conference in China in 2010, they had asked who would come to watch them. I later got the [broadcast] feed by speaking to the head of the Met Opera and it's proved to be a great success.

We now have direct broadcast from the Met, from the National Theatre, from the Bolshoi. Our theatre movement is going well. The area we would like to push for is art criticism. We are ready to fund a course on writing for artistes or journalists. The tragedy is that most journalism awards do not include writings on art and culture. If you have one for train accident, rape, murder or politics, why not anything for the finer things in life?

Q What support are you looking from the government?

To give us exemption from very high taxes, and to give us permissions when we want to expand and build. Having said that, the Maharashtra government has been wonderful with us. They are very cooperative, they have two representatives on our council. But if you see the extent the government pushes art and culture in China, there is a long way to go. Or in Europe, where art and culture is a way of life.

Q What are the plans for the golden jubilee celebrations?

First, we'll dress up NCPA and we've got a series of concerts planned. The September season of SOI will be a strong one with singers like Simon O'Neill. And then we'll have some nice surprises, an Italian evening, a fun evening of Viennese music. NCPA still doesn't look very welcoming and has an enter-my-prison look with its big walls. We want to make it a happier place. **F**

2018 BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

By **Shubhabrata Marmar**



like Bentleys. I enjoy their blend of sporty intent and luxurious feel. To be more specific, while the acres of fantastic leather is nice, it's that smooth, intense surge from the giant W12 that really attracts me. The lines of the Continental GT are familiar, but the car is all-new. In fact, while the old Continental GT, the first all-new car under Volkswagen ownership, was based on a Phaeton platform, this one has moved on.

The new Bentley Continental GT is based on the same platform as the new Porsche Panamera. What Bentley engineers will proudly tell you is that the Porsche and Bentley auto-nerd geek-anorak teams worked together. Which means the dynamics of the car aren't just a matter of adapting the Panamera's best bits; Bentley had the opportunity to maximise whatever aspects of the Continental

GT they wanted to. So there's a three-facet rotating display that does a cool twirl in the dash to show you analogue clocks, a blank wooden face, or a 12.3" high-resolution touchscreen, and a diamond-pattern, hand-quilted leather.

The real magic, however, is under the skin. The 6-litre W12 engine is almost all-new. With 900



The engine's acceleration to 100 kmph in 3.7 seconds feels natural and not hurried

Nm of torque on tap, it borders on magic. The engine has so much in reserve that a full-hard acceleration to 100 kmph (in 3.7 seconds) feels natural rather than hurried. They've played with the exhaust flaps, and it sounds brilliant: Ultra-hushed at part throttle, with a lovely growl filling the cabin when you floor it. In Bentley mode—the best to drive with sporty intent—the car is just lovely.

Switch to Sport mode, and everything becomes sharper. This 2.2 tonne car manages to dance. When we got stuck in traffic, the Bentley showed us what luxury is all about, because the chaos and frustration outside was not allowed to enter the cabin.

The new three-chamber air suspension, rear-biased active all-wheel drive, an electronic roll bar and more systems ensure that the Bentley Continental GT is as impressive when the ribbon starts to furl as when the road is arrow-straight.

Although we didn't have the luxury of a racetrack or even a sharp mountain road, those luckier than us say exactly the same thing. That the old Bentley Continental GT was a good car, but not a great one. The new one, on the other hand, is all that. It's a car that understands how to deal with good roads and bad. A car whose electronics and hardware are best friends. A car that weighs a lot, but can dance on its toes like the best of them. And a car that produces 635 PS of power, which means not a lot of supercars are going to come past the Continental GT.

This is important for the simplest of reasons. India is a hard, tough place for a luxury car to thrive. Take on too hard core a sports car, and you'll get defeated by the next speed breaker. Take on something designed for luxury alone, and you'll find yourself wanting to give the car to the chauffeur and take a back seat. But just take a look at this Continental GT. No one can ignore its tremendous street presence. And it's perhaps the most comfy supercar you could buy today. **F**

There is nothing like a concrete life plan to weigh you down. Because if you always have one eye on some future goal, you stop paying attention to the job at hand, miss opportunities that might arise, and stay fixedly on one path, even when a better, newer course might have opened up.

—INDRA NOOYI

Growth and comfort do not coexist.

—GINNI ROMETTY



Do one thing every day that scares you.

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live.

—JK ROWLING



Do what you love and success will follow. Passion is the fuel behind a successful career.

—MEG WHITMAN

Ask for what you want and be prepared to get it.

—MAYA ANGELOU



We need to accept that we won't always make the right decisions, that we'll screw up royally sometimes—understanding that failure is not the opposite of success, it's part of success.

—ARIANNA HUFFINGTON



You can have it all. Just not all at once.

—OPRAH WINFREY

Stick to your true north—build greatness for the long term.

—RUTH PORAT



Champions keep playing until they get it right.

—BILLIE JEAN KING

I always did something I was a little not ready to do. I think that's how you grow. When there's that moment of 'Wow, I'm not really sure I can do this', and you push through those moments, that's when you have a breakthrough.

—MARISSA MAYER



The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud.

—COCO CHANEL

Be less curious about people and more curious about ideas.

—MARIE CURIE

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