



Business Today Cover Story

Doing their own thing

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If you want it, go get it, and no excuses like ailing in-laws or small children, please. This seems to be the motto of the six start-up women chosen by *BT* this year. Whether it is excellence in information technology (as exemplified by serial entrepreneur Anupama Arya of Mobera) or an old idea packaged brilliantly (the luxury buses of sisters Shivani and Suparna Chopra), they are beacons of hope for thousands of women—and men?— who have similar dreams but lack a role model or simply need a prod to get going.



Anupama Arya

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40, Co-founder, Mobera Systems

Previous work experience: Co-founder, VivExchange, US; Lucent Technologies, Synoptics/Bay Networks.

Started business at: 35 (first business at 32)

Years as entrepreneur: 8

Initial investment: Rs 1 lakh

Number of employees: 100 (started with 6)

Current turnover: Rs 16 crore (2007-08)

The first thing that strikes you about Arya is her happy-go-lucky nature (helps tackle challenges). She and husband Puneet Vatsayan set up Mobera in Chandigarh after relocating from the US to be with her ailing mother-in-law. It was a humbling experience, not least because of her gender: people think “you are incompetent and a freeloader on your husband or a gatekeeper.” But, as an MS in computer science handling the engineering and operations part, she could hardly care.

—Tejeesh N.S. Behl



Revathi Roy

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48, *For-She Travels & Logistics*

Previous work experience: Proprietor, UP-VC Windows

Started business at: 47 years

Years as entrepreneur: 1

Initial investment: Rs 14 lakh (from friends and family)

Number of employees: 35

Current turnover: Not willing to disclose

It was her passion for driving that led her to start a pre-paid cab service for women and their families in Mumbai in early 2007. “It’s a service that is by women, for women and of women,” says Revathi Roy, Founder and Managing Director of For-She Travels & Logistics. Roy put together Rs 14 lakh to lease two cars and begin the service. Since then, a tie-up with Orix Auto Infrastructure Services has allowed her to expand the fleet to 21. She has also started drivers’ training academies in Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad to train women chauffeurs. Customers pay Rs 200 flag down followed by Rs 15 per km. Roy’s aim is to empower poor women and help the better-off sections by providing women chauffeurs.

—Anusha Subramanian



Shivani Chopra & Suparna Chopra

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Ages 28&26, The Royal Time Machine

Previous work experience: Shivani worked with Deutsche Bank

Started business at: Shivani: 26 years, Suparna: 24 years

Years as entrepreneur: 2

Initial investment: Rs 5 crore

Number of employees: 15

Current turnover: Not disclosed (likely to be Rs 7.5 crore in 2007-08)

The word luxury is not enough to cover the tourist buses of The Royal Time Machine launched by Delhi sisters Shivani (28) and Suparna (26) Chopra, in May 2006. They have jazzed up the sightseeing with film screenings and cultural programmes. The cuisine, staff and decor are reminiscent of Indian history. MBAs both, Shivani worked with Deutsche Bank before turning entrepreneur. "The growth from a regular job will always be lower than that of a business plan that clicks," says Suparna.

—*Kamya Jaiswal*



Sapna Gupta

Sapna Gupta

36, Founder and Director, Air Hostess Academy

Previous work experience: Taught for 5 years as a travel and tourism expert

Started business at: 26 years **Years as entrepreneur:** 10

Initial investment: Rs 1 lakh

Number of employees: 700

Current turnover: Rs 80 crore

The thriving business, Sapna Gupta is quick to point out, was not given to her by her parents. "We put our hearts, blood and souls into it," says Gupta proudly. She and her husband spotted the opportunity to ride the crest of a booming service sector economy. She now intends to open centres overseas, in addition to the 20 more in India, by the end of 2009. But it was not a cakewalk. "In the early years, it was difficult to explain the concept of AHA as there was nothing similar," she says. Her daughter, now eight, and husband Akash Gupta were supportive. Did she feel any guilt pangs when her daughter was young? No, is the emphatic answer. "It is now that she needs me more for the tennis matches and the growing up phase," Gupta adds. Her advice to other young entrepreneurs: just get going.

—*Shalini S. Dagar*



Shaleen Raizada

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39, MD, Sanshadow Consultants Private Ltd.

Previous work experience: Academic at National Physical Laboratories

Starting business at: 35 years

Years as entrepreneur: 4

Initial investment: N.A.

Number of employees: 20 people and 40 consultants

Current turnover: Not disclosed

When I finished my masters in physics, I thought I knew everything there was to know in physics, and then, I started my doctorate and discovered I knew nothing at all," Shaleen Raizada jokes. However, by her own admission, she knew nothing at all about running a business when she set up Sanshadow in August 2004. "I had no clue what a cash book was," she laughs. Today, she has angel funding and doesn't need to dip into her husband's bank account anymore. Sanshadow is a consultancy for intellectual property and Raizada believes that there is a lot of IP residing across Indian industry.

—*Kushan Mitra*