

Scents of a Startup

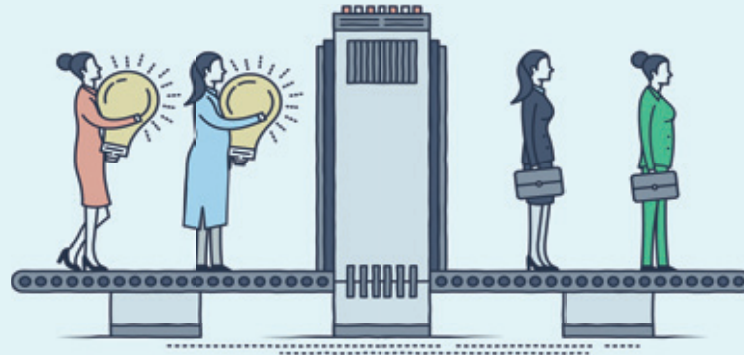
How IIT-Delhi is going about creating an ecosystem for women entrepreneurs

:: Vanita Srivastava

On a lazy Sunday morning, a bunch of around 45 women with different business ideas sit in a classroom in Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi, taking notes on how to transport their ideas into successful business ventures. A session on the legal aspects of doing business is followed by a presentation on 'Being an Entrepreneur', which fleshes out the risks and rewards of starting up.

The women are in the age group of 18 to 57. Some are complete strangers to the startup arena, others have been there, still doing that. While the trajectories of these women are different, they have a common goal – to master the vocabulary of entrepreneurship.

"IIT-Delhi is committed to creating an ecosystem for women entrepreneurs in the country. You empower one woman, you empower an entire generation. There are many studies to show that women-led enterprises are more



profitable. Our vision is to support these women entrepreneurs in every possible way... we wish to see more women founded enterprises and their increased contribution to India's GDP," IIT-Delhi director V Ramgopal Rao says. The spectrum of the businesses being mentored is broad – from organic farming, bee-hiving to tissue reproduction, online

marketing to baking. The participants are ranked on a scale of 1 to 10 based on their experience or the lack of it – 1 is for a woman who has an idea and little else, and 10 for a woman who has a venture that's up, running and scaled.

"We want to create a culture where women empower other women through cooperatives and self-help groups," says Aparna Saroagi, chairperson of the Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Foundation, IIT-Delhi's initiative to train and empower women startup artistes.

The three-month free of cost course has two components: a Startup programme launched on October 1 for 30 women entrepreneurs who wanted to convert their ideas into a business; and an Accelerate programme launched on October 16 for 15 women entrepreneurs running businesses with revenues between ₹25 lakh-3 crore. Here's a peek into some of the women-driven ideas:

Mentoring Mantras, IIT-D Style

A **three-month course** started in October for women with startup ideas and those already running startups

From thousands of applicants, **45 were chosen**

The **course is free of cost** and helps the women **build their business ideas, connect with customers, network and attract funding**

The women will stage a **roadshow at IIT-Delhi** in December to showcase their products

The **next batch will start from January 2017**

Queen Bee

A Femina Miss India finalist, Kanupriya Saigal did her BSc from St Stephen's and an MBA from the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade. After a stint with a news channel she joined a global agri company.

"Did you know it takes approximately a million bee hours to produce a pound of honey; and that bees tap into 2 million flowers and fly 55,000 miles for the same? Yet the bees are so efficient that if a single bee were to fly around the world, she would only consume one ounce of honey in the process," gushes Saigal.

In the course of her work at the agri multinational, Saigal worked with farmers and realised the need to boost their incomes by providing them alternate avenues of earning. Beekeeping, she reckons, is one such excellent source of income. "While doing a project on bees, I discovered that beekeeping is a goldmine which requires little investment of time and money. Unfortunately, activities around apiculture are unorganised. People are inadequately trained to harness high-value beehive products." Saigal adds that the number of people involved in beekeeping, too, is small. According to reports, there is a potential for 200 million bee colonies in India but we have just over 3 million. There is a global shortage of premium grade, accredited, fully traceable honey bee products at competitive market prices. "So I thought, why not create a startup that changes the status quo?"

Saigal, who says her startup is a socially sustainable one, is working on creating a cooperative of beekeepers. In the first phase, BeePositive++ will train existing bee keepers to harvest simpler products like honey and bees wax while simultaneously training more farmers in bee keeping. "In the second phase we will train them to extract more complex products like propolis, royal jelly and bee venom," says Saigal. "These products have a huge market in India and abroad and are used in various industries like the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries."



"While doing a project on bees I discovered that **beekeeping is a goldmine which requires little investment of time and money**"

Kanupriya Saigal, 36
CEO, BeePositive++, which is focused on the bee keeping sector

Connecting the 3D Dots

After completing a Masters in biotechnology from Ulster University, UK, Swati Midha did a doctorate in tissue engineering and regenerative medicine from the same university. That perhaps set the stage for a her startup idea of 3D bioprinting, which is now in its final stage of conception, and which plans to cater to making biocompatible, patient and tissue-specific implants for clinical applications.

"This field has a high socio-economic impact and the number of clinical cases in India as a result of disease and trauma are increasing at a high rate. With this technology we can provide an effective alternative which the current strategies lack," explains Midha.

Midha points out that as biotechnology was her favourite subject since school days, pursuing research in the field of life and health science came naturally to her. "Since the past seven years, extensive research has been done by our lab members (at IIT-Delhi) to optimise various strategies for 3D printing and 3D bioprinting. While progressing on my research at IIT-Delhi under Dr Sourabh Ghosh, we realised the possibility of creating products that are an improvement

"With our technology, we can provide an effective alternative which the current strategies lack"

Swati Midha, 29
working on a startup idea of 3D bioprinting; in the final stage of conception



over current available treatment strategies for tissue grafts. Such a product would have a direct impact on the society."

Midha says that in the last two decades, very few engineered grafts could reach human clinical trials. The major challenge is to replicate the complex 3D architecture and functional dynamics of living tissues. "After several years of lab research in 3D bioprinting technology, we proposed to formulate 3D bioprinted implants that will be patient-specific, site-specific and tissue specific."

These customised 3D printed constructs that assure longevity of implants and efficacy at affordable costs would have a robust market particularly in developing countries, reckons Midha. Her market includes a network of medical practitioners and establishments. "We have already initiated clinical trials with some hospitals and obtained promising results so far."

Midha explains that currently the startup is focused on maxillofacial implants for bone regeneration on the face, and will eventually explore other parts of the body. "As the adoption of the product improves, we will expand our reach to more hospitals."

Getting Better & Batter

She is just 21 and pursuing an MBA, but the business plan is clear-cut: to expand her bakery business both horizontally and vertically. Even as she is focused on academics, Saniya Sarguru is constantly thinking up new elements and flavours. Recent additions include masala chai and gulab jamun cakes, which the plucky entrepreneur claims have been a hit. "This is so satisfying. Each day is a new day for me. I cannot think of doing anything else," she says.

The idea to start baking started with a rejection at the *Master Chef* TV show. "I did not know how to bake and had to pull myself out of the contest. It was demotivating but I did not let my spirit die. I browsed

"Operating from home, I make one cake a day on an average. I get more orders but, since I am studying, I have to balance the two"

Saniya Sarguru, 21

managing director, Baked Beauty, which makes and delivers eggless designer cakes

through YouTube and learnt baking while sitting at home."

After burning dozens of cakes, Sarguru finally got it right, posted the end product on



social media and got a huge response. Today her startup, Baked Beauty, makes eggless designer cakes and delivers to customers in Delhi and NCR region. "Operating from a room in my house, I make one cake a day on an average. I get more orders but, since I am studying, I have to balance the two."

Sarguru points out that her venture currently caters to only cake and confectionery, although she recently expanded to more products including macarons, brownies and chocolates. Next step? "I want to start an app that can lend customisation to a product and also to expand the business beyond cakes."

A Family Package

They're sisters who are Cartoon Network addicts, one pursued a Masters in clinical psychology and the other a Masters in mass communication. A year ago, they decided to use their complementary skills to start up Kidzig, an online marketplace for kids' products that has since branched into accessories for parents, like maternity wear, jewelry, business suits and office accessories.

"It all started with a blog on kids. Many parents would call us and ask for various products on our blog. It was then that we thought why not have a startup that connects the sellers with the buyers," says Aishna.

The Ohris launched a prototype inventory based ecommerce website for Delhi to begin with. Within a month they had registered with over 100 manufactur-

"Within 6 months of starting, we saw parents not only shopping for their kids but also demanding products for themselves"

Aishna 28, and Diksha Ohri, 31

founders, Kidzig, an online marketplace for children and parents

ers to deliver products to other parts of the country. "Simultaneously we worked closely with kids. This involved a lot of one on one interaction with parents and kids. We saw a huge demand, interacted with our sellers and customers and built a synergy between them. We started our research and analysis and decided to create a platform connecting the sellers and buyers," explains Aishna.

Kidzig offers curated products for children up to 14 years. It typically provides all the information for the potential buyers to make a purchase decision by providing personalised results.

Kidzig has some unique categories like gardening, which provides products for nurturing the hobby, family engagement kits, special mind games for skill development of kids. "Within 6 months of starting, we saw parents not only shopping for their kids but also demanding products for themselves. So we added special

categories for the parents. Our tech-based platform allows the sellers to build their online stores with Kidzig and promote their products. Our online market currently has 1,500 verified sellers and 50,000 products." Future plans include taking the online platform overseas, with international customers and sellers.



Go Eco-posititve

She wants to own an organic cafe and write a book on eco-positive eating. Neha Upadhyay, a macrobiotic coach, graduated from King's College London and trained in organic, macrobiotic cooking from Daylesford Organic Cookery School, Whole Food Harmony (UK) and Navdanya Bija Vidyapeeth.

"We believe that most physical and mental diseases find their root cause in our diet or are psychosomatic in nature. Traditional organic farming provides us clean, safe food. Additionally, when organic produce is cooked in copper utensils or earthenware using ancient macrobiotic techniques, the result is tasty and nutritious food," says Upadhyay.

Upadhyay explains that she was working in the UK with children suffering from juvenile diabetes, autism and other neurological problems when she realised that western medications could not be the permanent cure for their problems. "Subsequently I trained myself in macrobiotics and organics as alternative healing practices. Guna was started in 2014 by conducting workshops with farmers and consumers, educating them on the importance of organic farming, conscious eating and eco-positive living. In 2015 we started retailing the

"Guna focuses on the importance of organic farming, conscious eating and eco-positive living"

Neha Upadhyay, 30

CEO, Guna, which trains farmers in organic cultivation and retailing



products."

Guna works with producer organisations that include over 650 farmers from Afghanistan and different states of India such as Ladakh, Kerala, Goa and Uttarakhand to promote eco-positive eating by marketing handmade organic products and conducting macrobiotic food workshops. Procurement involves regular farm visits, meetings with panchayats, and awareness workshops. The startup has partnered with the Save Food Initiative of the United Nations.

Future plans include expanding to the tribal belts of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, a larger product basket of nutritious, indigenous food items, and roping in more women self-help groups; currently Guna works with 650 rural women farmers and 6 farmer-producer organisations.