

Chandana Banerjee

Mompreneurs!

These enterprising moms create for multicultural munchkins

Businesses are often born out of a passion to create and an urge to be your own boss. In the case of the entrepreneurs featured below, their ventures were inspired by their own children and their unique needs, as well as the desire to fill a perceived gap in the market. We introduce you to a bunch of feisty “mompreneurs,” businesswomen who create for multicultural munchkins.

Organic Goodies for Little Pakoras:

India was on Sonia Gupta’s mind when she launched My Little Pakora in 2008. After nine years in start-up technology companies, this mommy of two little munchkins started a line of organic clothing for babies and toddlers—cute little onesies and garments with very Indian motifs and names like Bandar and Sher. The business, inspired by her then nine-month-old daughter, Anika, offers clothes that are made of 100% organic cotton with eco-friendly dyes.

“My Little Pakora reflects the history of long-standing principles of natural and organic living that is fundamental to my heritage,” explains



Sonia Gupta with Anika

Gupta, who also runs a web resource center choc-a-bloc with articles on natural food, home remedies, yoga and meditation, alternative medicine, and green and sustainable living at <http://mylittlepakora.com>.

Says Gupta, “As parents, we all want to raise our children in the healthiest way we can. By combining the traditions of non-Western cultures with the latest information about organic living, My Little Pakora gives parents unique ideas, education, and practical support to help them live healthier for their own families and the larger environment.”

Like all businesses, customer feedback is not only essential but very important for deciding the course of the venture. In this case, fantastic feedback from parents has spurred Gupta to work on a new line of clothing, Rangoli, that she plans to launch in 2011. “It is full of color, as the name Rangoli exemplifies. We are excited to roll-out an expanded infant line with Kimono onesies, jumpers, and printed sundresses. This line will mark the launch of a new Toddler Girls & Boys lineup with sizes up to 5T.”

Knowledge With an Indian Flavor:

Los Angeles-based mompreneur Aruna Hatti, who practices law part-time, was motivated to start her own knowledge accessories venture after she noticed the lack of games and play items with an Indian flavor.

“When I was pregnant with my first in 2006, I began noticing all the catchy English (and Spanish and French) toys that were available, and wondered why there weren’t any for Indian languages.” As she mulled over this, Hatti soon realized that she had to create some that were rooted in Indian culture, and would be attractive, interesting, and a match for toys available in other languages. “After two years of development and product testing, Gnaana launched in Fall 2009.” Gnaana (<http://gnaana.com>) offers parents an array of attractive toys, puzzles, recipe cards, and accessories, to help children play, learn, and connect to



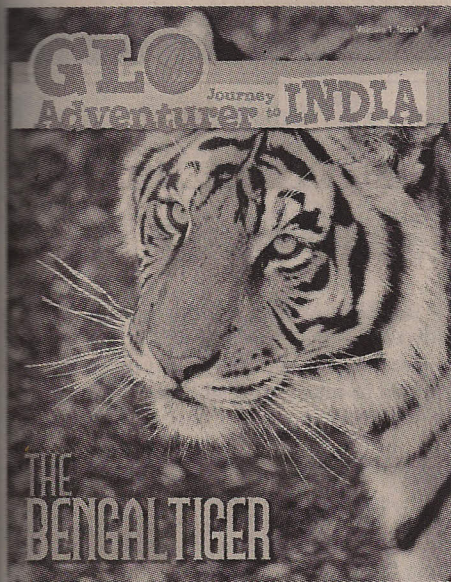
Aruna Hatti

their Indian roots. The website offers pick up handmade books, alphabet blocks in regional languages, and many other products that reflect on their Indian heritage.

Explains Hatti, “Many parents, particularly those like me who were raised outside of India, are at a loss when it comes to incorporating Indian culture into family life. The parents may speak to their kids in their native language, eat Indian food, or play Indian music, but when it comes to interactive play—the way kids learn best—the choice is always something non-Indian. India presents a fantastical paradise for children, but very rarely is India presented to children in a way that captures their imagination, that lights the fire [of their curiosity], and that’s what we are trying to do,” she adds.

Being a mompreneur is not only about thinking of apt ideas to light that fire in American Indian kids, but it’s also about juggling various roles—that of a professional, a mother and wife, and businesswoman. And it’s anything but easy. “I think the secret for me is carving out blocks of time,” quips Hatti, who enjoys travelling to “Planet Fisiko” in her son’s spaceship and mingling with Telugu-speaking aliens, when she is not working, ideating, and planning.

An Indian Adventure: It was her passion to



provide children with interesting and relevant content about India that led Deepa Venky to start Glo Adventurer, a magazine for kids to learn about the country. "We didn't find anything that catered to a child's desire to sometimes just dive in and devour a topic of interest. I just HAD to start Glo Adventurer (<http://www.gloadventurer.com/>) because there wasn't quality content available about India— either online or in print."

The first product offered by Zorvi Media—Venky's company, which plans to take the magazine to other countries in the future—Glo Adventurer was born out of a deep desire to create a children's magazine that kids from any culture would enjoy. "The entire magazine focuses on one topic but from multiple perspectives. So, it's not just about how things are in India. It also discusses how it compares to other countries/cultures." Whether a child wishes to devour the magazine in one sitting or relish bite-sized portions, Glo Adventurer lets young readers enjoy the magazine the way they want to. "We like to think of it as a collectible," adds Venky.

The cheerful, information-packed and subject-appropriate magazines are very different from the mythological and academic books on India that are available for kids today. It also works as an invaluable resource to understand India better. Venky shares an anecdote, "We had one American family who adopted a child from India and they felt that Glo Adventurer helped them and their child stay connected with India."

Interestingly, running this magazine and media house is not the only thing that this mompreneur does. She also has a day job in IT. "The mornings are for my job and I am very particular about spending my evenings with my son. But the nights are for Glo—and some weekend hours too," she smiles, heaping on the credit to her better half, whom she terms as "the world's most supportive husband."

More Mompreneurs

Baby Hindustani: Run by Ruchira Agarwal, a software engineer by profession, this venture is about helping Indian kids in several countries across the world preserve the richness of their culture through Indian languages. "Baby Hindustani produces high quality, innovative, educational and entertaining DVDs that supplement parents' efforts to teach Indian Languages to their children," announces their website. <http://www.babyhindustani.com/>

Hindi Gym: Hindi Gym is a free, online resource filled with ready-to-print Hindi learning worksheets and learning materials. Conceptualized and launched by Aarti Chandani in 2008, this resource promises to enhance the learning experience for all kids out there, who'd like to learn the language, at home or at school. <http://www.hindigym.com/>

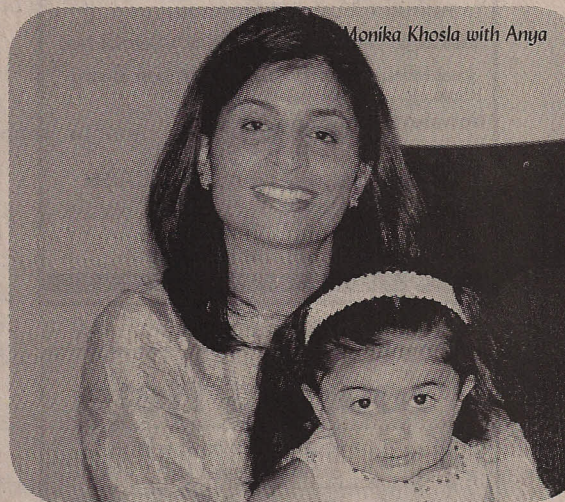
Cupcakes & Pastries: This delicious company that "creates dresses that can be worn to afternoon mother-daughter tea parties where tea, cookies, candies, cupcakes and pastries are served" is the brainchild of Inshi Khanna. Launched in 2009 and inspired by Khanna's little daughter, the venture retails timeless dresses at an affordable cost at stores across America. <http://www.cupcakesandpastries.com/>

She adds, "While Glo is a lot of work, it's also a blessing because we try to be very structured with our lives and we plan things ahead of time."

Stories Go Desi: In 2003, Monica Khosla was scouring the market for a gift that would be a reflection of India. "At that time my older brother and his wife were expecting their first child and I wanted the gift to be unique. Having failed to find anything, I decided to start Desi Knowledge (<http://desiknowledge.org>) with a mission to connect families abroad to India's rich values and heritage," explains this mompreneur, who makes sure that her collection of books and comics introduces Indian wisdom, stories, and mythologies to children who are growing up in a western, multicultural environment.

For Khosla, it's all about making a 5,000-year-old culture fun and relevant to the iPhone generation. Her treasure chest of reading material includes bilingual bedtime stories, Amar Chitra Katha comics that work well as history/mythology lessons and gifts, and CDs of cute rhymes that probably our grandmothers chanted to us. "They teach life lessons to kids in a manner that is engaging and easily understandable, and are woven into everyday routines," quips Khosla.

The concept and the products are alluring and interesting, and draw customers both American and Asian. Khosla shares a couple of stories that makes Desi Knowledge special. "We have an American dad who, year after year, comes to our booth at the Independence Day festival in Fremont with a list of 20 comics that he wants to mail to his son who lives



in the midwest. A desi mom used our products to create a "Hanuman goodie bags" for her son's birthday. ■

Chandana Banerjee is an independent writer based in India. She writes for various media like websites, newspapers, magazines, ebooks, e-learning and corporate communications. She also has her own writing company—Pink Elephant Writing Studio.