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She walked the unconventional path to realise her dreams. Meet **AMILA SINGHVI**, the only woman in Asia to head one of the region's largest state-of-the art printing plant

SHE'S A picture of simplicity, serenity and humility. But that's just the first impression. Beyond that, Amila Singhvi is a hardcore businesswoman, who knows the intricacies of the business empire she's built over the years. She has turned the fortunes of her company, from a small processing firm into a leading printing and packaging company of the country. Her foresightedness and absolutely hands-on functioning has seen

many and the big news is that IPP could be acquiring an American company soon. She is the recipient of various prestigious awards, including the President's Award for Excellence in Printing. Amila is also adjudged to be among the top 20 leading entrepreneurs of the city. She also writes columns on printing and technology, and has been a keynote speaker at many international seminars. She talks about how she's learnt to never give up.

Unconventional bahu: Hailing from a Marwari family, Amila's entry into the business circuit comes as a surprise but, she asserts, "Yes, it wasn't easy as a young woman in the 80s, but I was determined that I would work. My mother-in-law did resist my stepping out of the house. She would often ask my husband, R.K. Singhvi, 'Why should she work? It's not done in our family.' But that didn't deter me from pursuing my dream." After marriage, Amila spent the first five years handling the administration and coordination of the fam-

years," says Amila. The business mantra was simple: In a competitive market it was essential to stay ahead. "We brought in new technology ahead of time and implemented it before our competitors. Of course, initially, the investment in hi-tech machines does seem to be a burden but when the business picks up, the returns are big."

The turning point came when with an order the Singhvis got from Honda cycle for the printing of brochures for the Milan Fair. It was beyond their capacity to deliver but they strove hard and delivered within the time frame. That's when she decided that if they were to stay in this business, they needed a state-of-the-art system. This was way back in 1990 and after two years of deliberation, Amila decided to invest in two machines that cost about Rs 2 crore. "That was indeed a wise business decision as it brought us to the forefront of niche high quality printing, and we eventually gained momentum," she reminisces.

strict if I want to," she adds.

Chill pill: "I am a compulsive shopper. I can find something to buy from anywhere," she says with a grin. She's simply in love with chunky neckpieces. "I don't care for other pieces of jewellery, but can't resist buying big and striking necklaces which I mix and match with my saris." Amila is a Sudoku fan and has to solve about 5-10 puzzles before she goes to bed.

VIMMY SINHA ■



PRINTING her success

the company grow from strength to strength. As Managing Director of the 150-crore company, International Print-O-Pac Ltd. (IPP), she's involved in the administration, production, technical evaluation, selection of equipments, marketing and export business development.

Amila is a chemistry and law graduate from Mumbai, with little formal technical training in printing. But she remarks confidently with her characteristic humble smile, "My technical knowledge of the printing industry is far better than any of the technical people we have in the company. I have been pretty tech-savvy." Equipped with the finest state-of-art machinery from Germany, Switzerland and Japan, today IPP provides packaging for popular consumer brands like Cadbury's, Maggi, Perk, Horlicks, Dabur, Haldiram and so on. IPP also exports to UK and Ger-

ily's core business of advertising. "I had to cover my head for five years as I worked with my uncle-in-law and brother-in-law," she laughs.

But, that was a long time ago. After 25 years, the company has seen a meteoric rise from a mere investment of just Rs 3 lakh and 10 employees, to Rs 150 crore and about 800 employees, all under her aegis. "It did take a lot of courage to diversify into printing and then packaging," she adds.

"I must add that we have not inherited wealth. My husband, who has been at the forefront of financial advertising in India is the MD of Sobhagya Advertising Service and is a self-made man. We didn't even have a bank balance of Rs 10,000 when we got married. Hence, the pleasure of success for us is much more."

Business fundas: "We have realigned ourselves to the market four times in 25

They first began packaging for local *mehendiwallahs* and *masalawallahs*, till big orders from MNCs began to pour in. "We couldn't sit idle waiting, so we decided to take in anything that came our way."

No bossing around: "My son, Rishabh often tells me that I should behave more like a boss," she confides. In fact, she's more like a mother-figure to her employees, and anyone, right from the peon to a senior executive, can walk into her room. She's very approachable and despite a 500-strong labour force, IPP hasn't had a labour union! "People are generally satisfied here. But, to run an industry, I can be