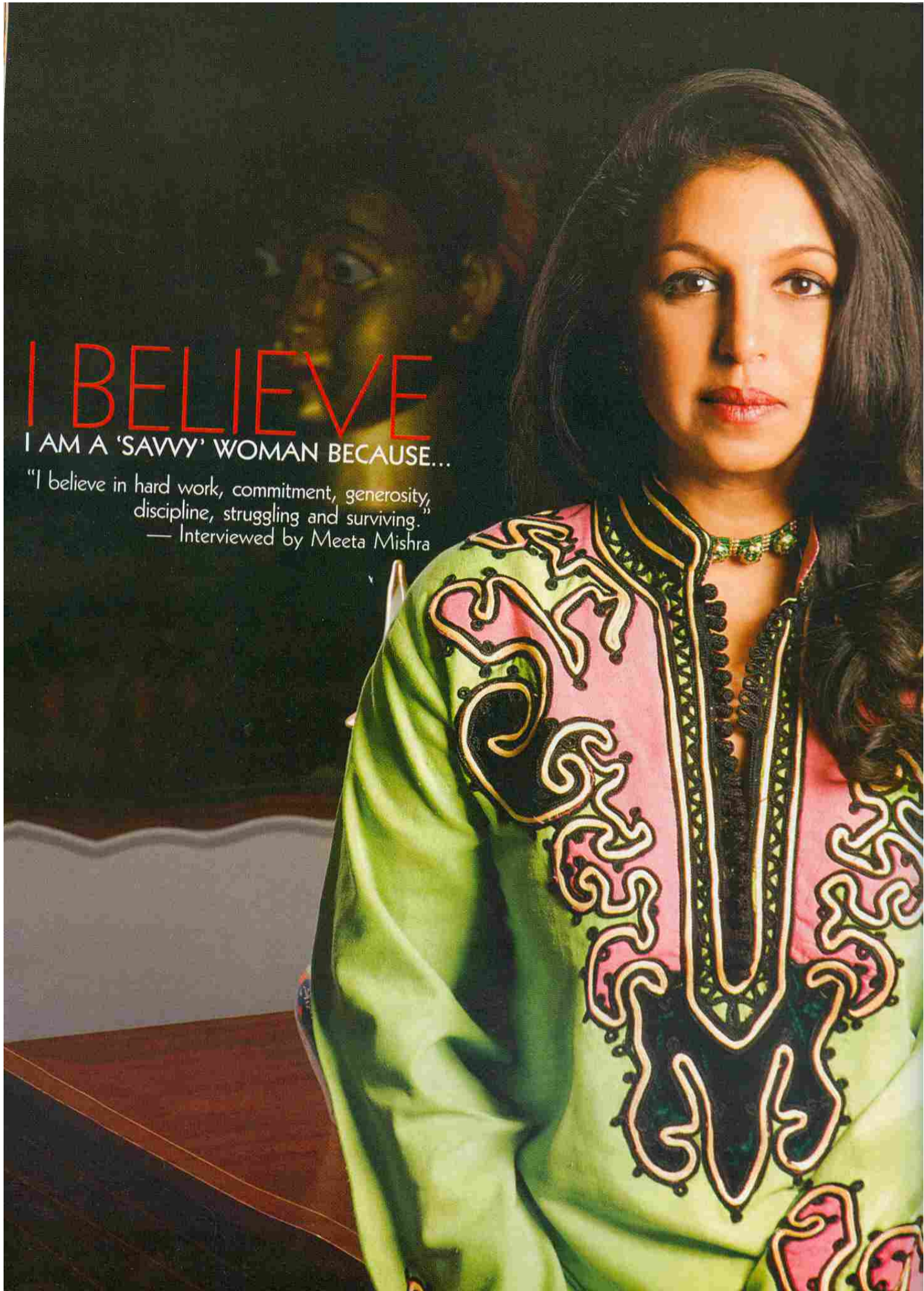


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BELIEVE



I REMEMBER MY FATHER BEING SO PROUD OF THE \$ 8 PER HOUR THAT I EARNED SERVING COFFEE AT MIT TO THE STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS.

I think it is always interesting when someone has struggled, to achieve something.

Everyone has to go through a journey in life and everybody has a story to tell. When people go through a struggle, the way they come out of it shows what kind of people they are and how successful they are. We all go through tough times at some point or the other, it is just that the degree varies...

I spent a simple, happy and loving childhood in Kolkata. I was lucky to have been born into a family that was progressive, well educated and, I believe, evolved. The family that I grew up around - my uncle Jit Paul, my mother Shirin and my father Surrendra, were also very low key and discreet, and so between home and school, these are the values I essentially imbibed. I did my schooling from Loreto House Convent and La Martiniere for Girls, and was a good student - excelled in academics and extra-curricular activities.

Every year, I won the medal for being the 'All

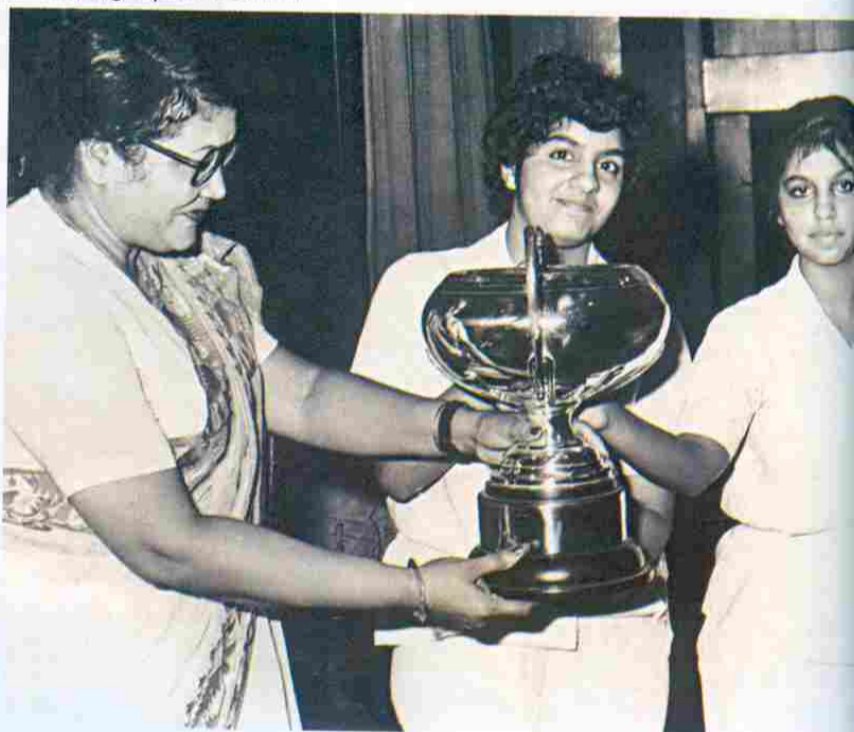
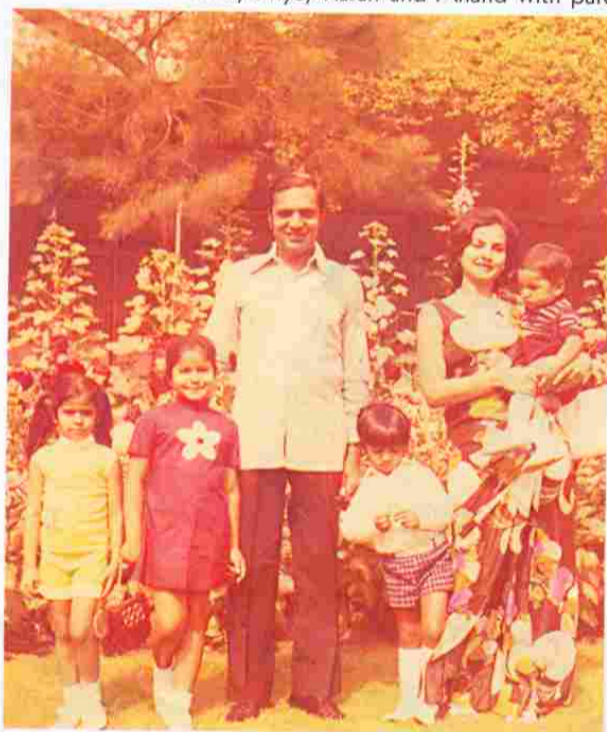
Priti, Priya, Karan and Anand with parents; Winning a prize at school

Rounder' student in my class. I was even the Vice-Head Girl at Loreto (as well as the captain of various sports teams). Loreto instilled conventional values and virtues in me such as humility, charity and discretion, while La Martiniere had a very healthy, competitive environment. So my home, my two schools and the humanity of Kolkata helped shape my values and early personality.

No one cared much which social strata you came from, least of all the nuns in Loreto! Kolkata is a great leveller because people there appreciate you for what you are and not who you are or who you are connected to. I find the same experience in Mumbai but unfortunately not in Delhi.

Teenage years are normally years of confusion. A lot of parents with teen kids that I interact with these days seem to be grappling with teenage angst. But between us siblings - Priya, Karan, Anand and I, there was no such phase. We knew exactly what we wanted to do or perhaps we were gently guided through a path. The communication between our parents and us was very open and they were very progressive in their thought process, so there was not much to rebel against. There were some harmless demands like us wanting to go to a new discotheque or some such thing, and restrictions on that. I, being the younger among the two sisters, used to anyway get away with a lot more.

I am both a creative and practical person. I know it is sometimes difficult to balance both aspects in my

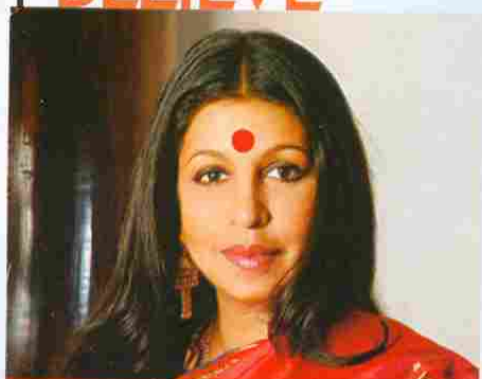


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BELIEVE



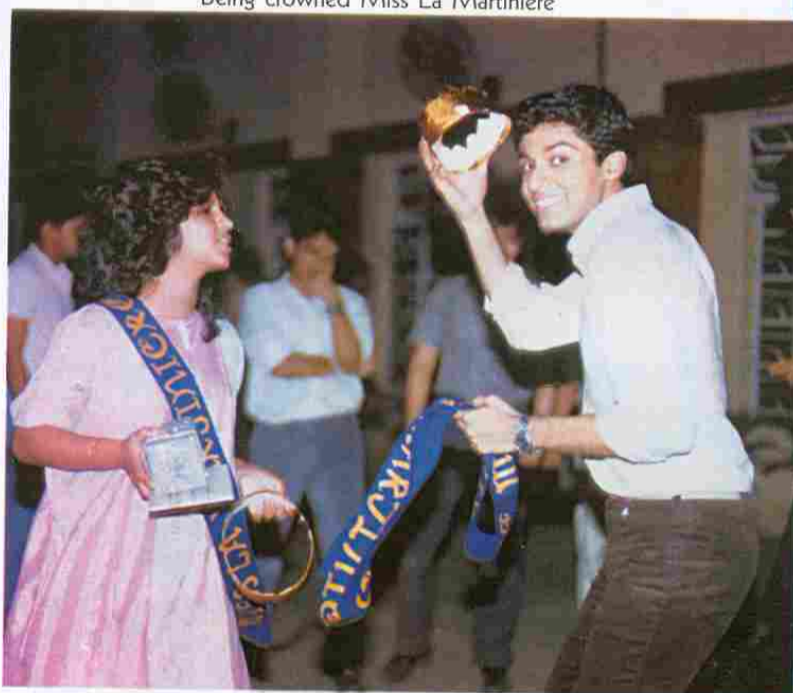
MY YOUNGEST BROTHER, ANAND, DIED IN AN UNFORTUNATE ROAD ACCIDENT. AND NINE MONTHS LATER, MY FATHER WAS CALLOUSLY GUNNED DOWN BY ULFA TERRORISTS.

daily life, but I now know that I need both to keep me happy and in balance. I love art, be it paintings, sculpture or more recently, over the last seven years, video art (I started Apeejay Media Gallery in New Delhi, the first gallery for experimental new media work in India in 2001). I used to paint when I was studying and is the reason I became an architect. Now, I collect art not just for its value but because I really like it. In fact, with my first salary that I got

when I started working in Apeejay Surrendra Group in the summer of 1990, I bought a Francis N Souza painting of Christ from the Dhoomimal Gallery in Connaught Place.

So anyway, going back to my studies, when it came to deciding what I wanted to take up in college, I was very clear it had to be something that combined both creativity and pragmatism. I loved

Being crowned Miss La Martiniere



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painting, drawing, working with my hands, getting messy but I was also pragmatic at heart. I tried architecture, loved it and decided instantly to be an architect. In fact, I have four degrees in architecture. When I was 18, I went straight from Kolkata to Boston and went on to pursue a degree in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA (with a minor in Economics), and much later, I completed my Masters in Design Studies from Harvard University, Graduate School of Design, Cambridge, USA. I always knew that I would go to the US for my studies.

My father had studied there and so had six other members of my family but I was the first girl from my family to go to MIT. The percentage of girls studying at MIT during my father's time in the '50s was about 10, so he

Graduating from Harvard University



thought I would hate being there. In my years, it increased to an exceptional 30 percent. In the summer before I left for MIT and America, my father took me with him around India as he travelled on work and had his famous 'man-to-man' talk with me. He told me about his experience at MIT and advised me on how to handle various situations that may crop up there. I really gained from his advice, and drew confidence from his expectations from me that were not specifically about academics, but about values and how to manage my future life. He also encouraged me to come home during summer holidays to work and to be in touch with my roots. He was very confident about what he expected and wanted nothing less from his daughters (my sister Priya and I), than what he would expect from his sons. That was a great validation for a young girl of 18 about to embark on the next big adventure of her life, and gave me

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BELIEVE



WE HAD TO DEAL WITH OUR PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE GRIEF BUT WE ALSO HAD TO THINK OF THE 50,000 EMPLOYEES WHO MADE THE APEEJAY SURRENDRA FAMILY.

great strength and confidence.

Once in the US, I had the best time of my life. I was just 18, so it was a whole new world opening up before me. It was a fascinating experience and an extremely challenging environment. The students there excelled at what they did and the teachers were so committed that I just loved studying at MIT. I finished my degree when I was 21.

While I was studying,

I was also involved in a number of architectural projects in the USA, and did a couple of fun student-y jobs such as 'waitressing' at the MIT School of Architecture café during free mornings. I remember my father being so proud of the \$ 8 per hour that I earned serving coffee to the students and professors.

A year away from my graduating from MIT, a double tragedy shook our family completely. My youngest brother, Anand, died in an unfortunate road accident with his friend at the wheel. And nine months later, my father was callously gunned down by ULFA terrorists in Assam while he was on a business trip there. It was an enormous shock - one that will take us a lifetime to recover from. Fortunately, my brother Karan was also studying in

a nearby university (political science at Brown University) and we took the same long flight back home. That was the most terrible time for the family, but my mother, showing incredible courage and strength, pulled us all together and through these terrible times.

Under the guidance of my uncle Jit, my mother, my siblings Priya, Karan and I took charge of our company, the Apeejay Surrendra Group. We had to deal with our personal and collective grief but we also had to think of the 50,000 employees who made the Apeejay Surrendra family. I am very lucky to have uncle Jit, my mother, my sister Priya, my brother Karan and my extended family for support and guidance. It was not a time for any of us to indulge in our grief but to get through it, for the survival of the family as well as the future of the business. My sister Priya was already working for The Park Hotels with my father, so she took immediate charge of the hospitality sector of our business. My brother Karan managed the tea business and started new businesses in finance and securities.

I took charge of the shipping business and it was a matter of literally learning to swim or sink. My father was to begin managing the shipping business the very year that he was killed, so it wasn't as if I could step into his shoes. There was no transition, maturing or grooming process into the business for me because I had to suddenly take all decisions. The good thing is that operationally, the whole business was very clearly divided among the three of us. And we have never had any conflict of interest. Each one of us has a lot to do in our respective fields and we work towards making our businesses successful in the interest of the individual companies, and in the larger

Presenting Jaouad with 43 presents in pink on his 43rd birthday; In Korea on business, taking delivery of the ship



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BELIEVE



TO LEARN QUICKLY, I PLACED MY DESK FOR SIX MONTHS IN THE CENTRE OF THE OFFICE SO THAT I COULD OBSERVE WHAT WAS GOING ON AROUND ME.

interest of the Group, since we have ourselves and 50,000 employees who are dependent on its success. So when we or the company does well, everyone collectively benefits.

Today, the Apeejay Group is being ably guided under my brother Karan, who is the Chairman of the Group. We are working hard towards 2010 when the Apeejay Surrendra Group will celebrate 100 years. We are all

looking forward to realizing our goals and celebrating the moment!

However, going back to my father's death, I had to return to MIT for three weeks to finish my course and graduate. I got a job offer in the US but did not take it up. Within a week, I was back at office in India. Soon, I decided to go to the UK to manage the London operations of Apeejay Shipping as I felt the epicentre of the shipping business was there. I just stepped into one of the things that my father was to start managing. I did not have the time to see that being a woman in a hitherto male-dominated business was a serious issue. What was more important was to understand the business, and to get it going. I

With brother Karan and Jaouad

think it was the innocence and confidence of youth that sailed me through. To learn quickly, I placed my desk for six months in the centre of the office so that I could observe what was going on around me and read every scrap of paper that passed through and across that office. It was a great working experience.

After about six months, I was required to take control. And I did something quite drastic. I restructured the company to take on the challenges that we were facing. We had to take advantage of the fact that India was changing post-liberalisation and shipping had been deregulated. It made the business more volatile and dynamic and infinitely more exciting as well as profitable! Since 1990, I have been based at the London office from where I manage our shipping business. Moreover,

Sister Priya with husband Sethu at Priti's mehndi ceremony



I did this while studying various courses in architecture. It was quite challenging to balance work and studies, especially when it wasn't regarded as a virtue in England to work while one is studying. So I could never tell my professors about my business.

I would sneak to the basement of the school to the only phone box in the entire campus to keep a tab on what's going on in the office. Considering that shipping is such a business where one wrong decision could lead to losses in millions, it was quite a challenge to run it efficiently while giving equal attention to my studies.

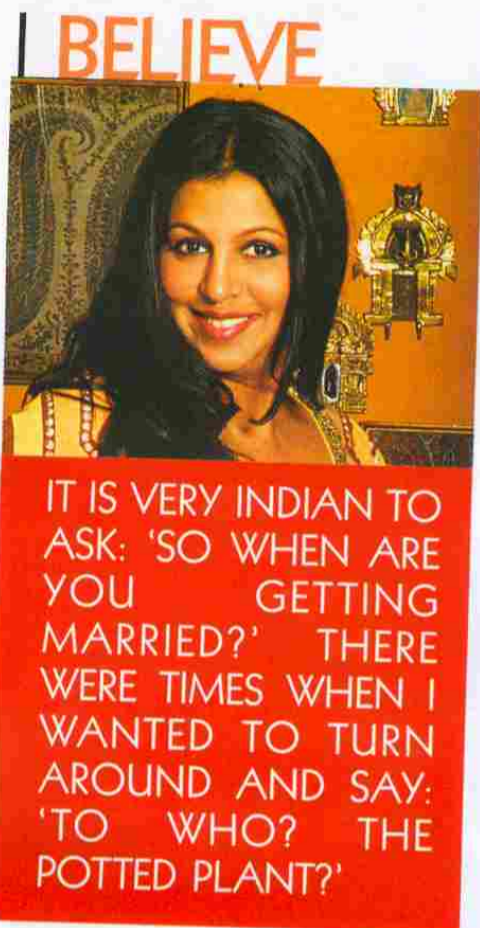
Over the years, shipping has changed. It is affected by what's happening globally. A lot more technology



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is used these days. To survive, you've got to have nerves of steel. You can make or lose a million in a second. Currently, I maintain my directorships in shipping and other industry positions but no longer handle this business operationally. We have a ship named after my older son 'Apeejay Jad' and another one under construction in China which will be named 'Apeejay Kais' after my younger son. I am travelling to China in

it was a really exciting time to be here. I was young and India was happening with liberalization taking the country by storm. There was an emotional reason as well. I wanted to spend time and enjoy life with the people I loved and who meant a lot to me. I didn't want to turn 60, and then regret not having spent enough time when I was young, with the people I love.

During this time, I stumbled upon the Oxford Bookstore on Park Street in Kolkata, and felt we could do much more with it. It had a wonderful ambience with an old-world charm and a great collection of books. I thought we were in the new age and the shop should offer a lot more. Especially since the world of publishing was moving fast. We introduced an alternative art gallery, a *cha bar* and music, and Oxford was re-launched, first in Kolkata and then in other cities. There are now 25 Oxford bookstores dotted around India. We are in all the metros and have penetrated as far as Nagaland. Our aim is to have 65 bookstores in the country by the end of the year and we seem to be on track. When Oxford turns 90 next year, we aim to have 100 stores.

It feels nice to take something out of Kolkata to the rest of India and now globally to Dubai, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Morocco. I feel that women have an edge when it comes to business because they have strong intuitive powers. A combination of intelligence and intuition makes a woman a force to reckon with in any field. I am a goal-oriented person. I am a doer but you do need to think before you do. Buddha said, 'All that we are is a result of what we have thought'. I write my goals down for the next five years. Much like India's five-year plans! And normally, I achieve the goals I set for myself. Before, these were very

November for the naming ceremony.

Other than shipping, architecture has been high on my agenda too. I have been involved with a number of architectural projects overseas. In the spring of '89, I was involved in designing a housing project in Zurich, Switzerland. In the summer of '89, I worked on the construction and design of East Crescent Housing for Paolo Soleri Artist & Architect, Arcosanti, Arizona, and also modelled the Tokyo International Forum competition project. I was placed second for my entry in collaboration with Berlin architect Grvemtucn-Ernst at the Indian Embassy, Berlin, in the fall of '97.

I came back to India in 1997 because I believed that

Delivery of 'Apeejay Jit'; Gifting Jaouad a baby elephant at their wedding



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BELIEVE



I HAD MET MANY WRONG PEOPLE TO FIND MY MR RIGHT, JAOUAD KADIRI FROM MOROCCO.

real goals but as I get older, they seem to be dreams that I hope to translate into reality.

Although most of my life, I've lived partly abroad and also have business interests that spread over continents, I never imagined marrying a foreigner and having a home abroad.

It just happened. I had met many wrong people

to find my Mr Right, Jaouad Kadiri from Morocco.

Both my sister and I married late but we have no regrets. It is very Indian to ask: 'So when are you getting married?'

There were times when I wanted to turn around and say: 'To who? The potted plant?' But I guess that's the way our society is. Marriage defines us.

Coming back to Jaouad, I met him at a common friend's party that Jaouad was hosting at his home in Marrakesh.

Jaouad is known in the real estate business in Morocco, and is called the Moghul of Marrakesh. It was proverbially love at first sight for both of us.

I stayed on in Morocco for 10 very spectacular and wonderful days. Every day, Jaouad would ask me to stay one more night and I would happily oblige. Jaouad is very sporty and inspiring. Whatever he does, he does it with a lot of passion and conviction. The combination of sporty vigour and creativity is

With close friends at the *sangeet* ceremony



very rare, and he has it in him. Even in his business, he is not a mere real estate developer, he develops his dreams. He is a descendent of the founder of Sufism and his family can trace its ancestry back to 48 generations. His father Mostapha Kadiri renounced worldly life in search of spirituality and wrote his family's history, while Jaouad's mother Tourya manages the brood in Morocco.

After that meeting, Jaouad came down to India. He had visited India several times in the past; he loves everything about India – its people, its culture. He had already selected the place where he would have wanted to get married much before he had met me, which was Udaipur. When he came down here, we travelled a lot, like hippies. We would play solitaire for two hours on the computer. Language was a problem since he spoke French and Arabic and I was more comfortable in English.

At the *mehndi* ceremony



He would say red light when he would not be able to get the conversation, and green light when he would be able to understand and contribute! And when he'd run out of English words, he'd say that his battery has finished. It was fun. I am an intensely social and at the same time an intensely private person and Jaouad understood that about me.

Then when I went to attend his 43rd birthday party, I took with me 43 presents in Indian pink. Jaouad is an extravagant man and he loves *rani* pink, so I presented him things made in that colour. I got Rohit Bal to make a whole collection of sarongs, *kurtas*; I gave him music from Pink Floyd, pink feathers, pink pencils, pink champagne... A

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BELIEVE



JAOUAD IS KNOWN IN THE REAL ESTATE BUSINESS IN MOROCCO, AND IS CALLED THE MOGHUL OF MARRAKESH. IT WAS PROVERBIAL LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT FOR BOTH OF US.

day after his party, Jaouad took me on a drive to the mountains and on his way he said, 'You got me 43 gifts but all I wanted was a baby elephant from India'. After a few minutes, he said he'd rather not have a baby elephant but babies with me. And then he said he didn't want anything else but me to spend the rest of his life with. His proposal took me by surprise. I was floored with his style of proposing and immediately said yes!

I had the most special and beautiful

wedding. The celebrations went on for 15 days.

It was a dream wedding that everyone remembers even today. And I gifted Jaouad a baby elephant as a wedding gift, since he proposed to me over an elephant! He was thrilled and he still has it. The baby elephant has grown up a little and so has our relationship.

A lot of people see the pros and cons of a relationship before entering matrimony but I did not think of them at all. I just jumped into it feet first. He proposed to me five weeks after he met me. I believe

With Uncle Jit, Jaouad and mother

in love. I married Jaouad for the way he loved me and the way I felt for him. Agreeing to live with Jaouad in the middle of nowhere in Africa, I must have been truly, madly and irrevocably in love with him. And I also believe in the institution of marriage especially for children; it is very essential that they have a stable and secure family life. I have seen it with my parents and I would like my kids to also experience that love and security.

It is almost five years that I have been married. And in these five years, I have become a mother of two boys. My older son Jad is three-and-a-half years old, and the younger one Kais is two-and-a-half. I used to be into spinning and *ashtanga* yoga before my marriage, but I do not need it anymore since running after them keeps me fit. With my sons coming into my life, there are suddenly so many more people to love that my world has become bigger and better.

With her kids and nephew



Flitting between three continents, working in two countries, taking care of my two kids and husband, phew! And not to forget four languages to grapple with – English, Hindi, French and Arabic. The latter two are the languages that my husband and children are more comfortable with and are spoken in Morocco. As of now, since both my sons are too young to go to school, I take them along with me everywhere I go. Few months ago, we went on a boat trip to Croatia for a holiday that my brother Karan had arranged. Recently, I went to Beijing for the Olympics with them in tow. It was an amazing experience. A whole lot of girls wanted pictures with my sons - the Chinese hadn't seen children with big eyes. It was such a warm and welcome feeling - Jad and Kais felt like baby stars!



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BELIEVE



WITH MY SONS COMING INTO MY LIFE, THERE ARE SUDDENLY SO MANY MORE PEOPLE TO LOVE THAT MY WORLD HAS BECOME BIGGER AND BETTER.

I am also lucky that I am able to spend time with my family back home.

Whenever I am in India, all of us, my sister, mother, uncle, brother and I, make it a point to have lunch together. Since we work in the same building, it becomes convenient to converge at lunch time. A free flowing conversation makes for a good break from work. My sister and I love art, so we discuss that a lot. My brother and I have both handled shipping, so that becomes a common point of discussion between us.

We also try to follow our father's idea of holidaying together once a year in a place that is new to us, like the Croatia trip that my brother Karan had organized.

Many people manage to keep their life going between two countries in today's world, but three gets tricky. I divide my time in such a manner that I spend around six months in Marrakesh (in total), and the rest of the months are divided between London and India. I am multi-tasking but I am enjoying the challenge and

With the love of her life, Jaouad, at the Beijing Olympics



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have just about found my balance after five years. In fact, it is essential for my happiness. I love doing different things at one time. And it is great that in today's world we don't have to make choices. There

Jaouad putting the *tikka* on Priti's head



were choices earlier as well but one had to choose between one and the other. Thanks to technology and sociological changes, men and women today don't need to decide on one thing. They can make multiple choices and pursue their multiple interests with equal commitment.

I feel we are very lucky to live in this age where we don't have to wait till the end of our lives to realise our dreams. I, for one, am the kind of person who gets restless doing the same thing forever. I like to have different interests going at the same time. I am energetic and I like to be constantly on the move. It keeps me happy and involved...