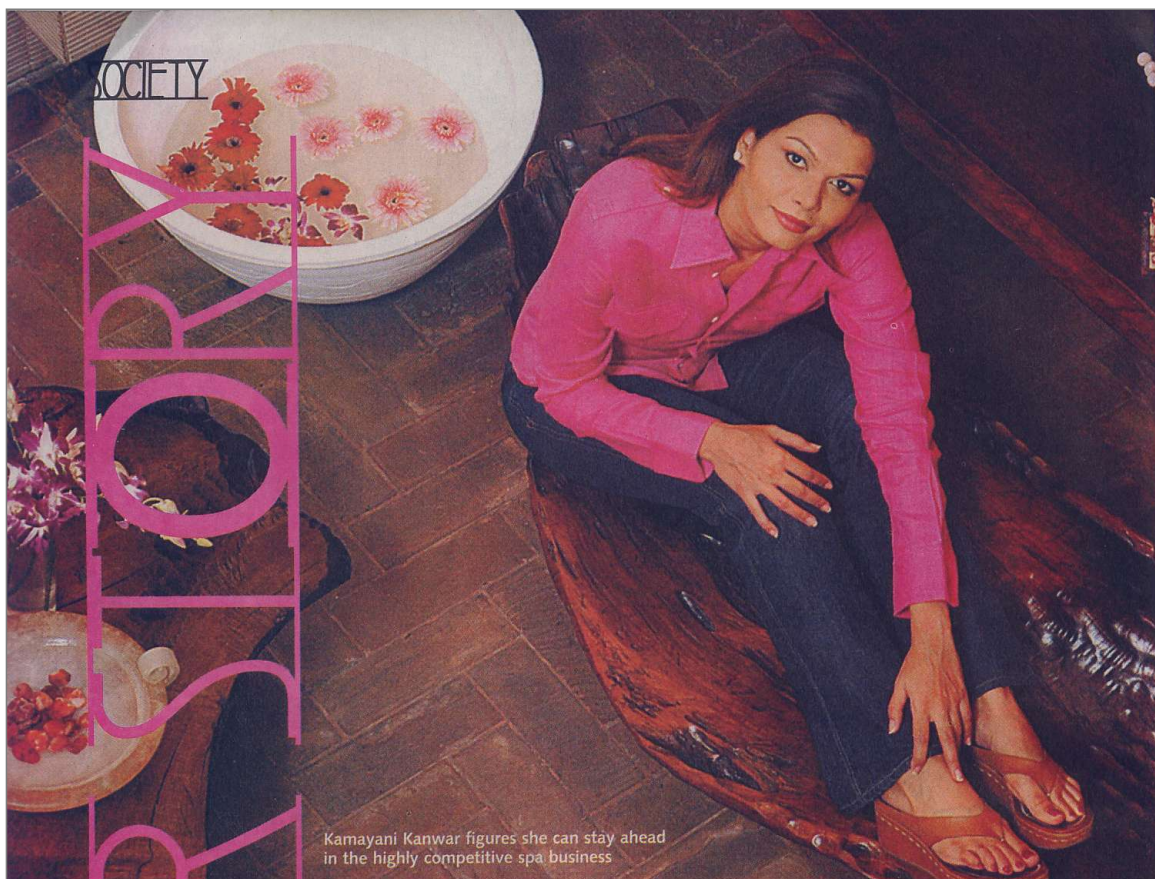


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Kamayani Kanwar figures she can stay ahead in the highly competitive spa business

COVER

The career queens

The wives of top industrialists are now out to make their own fortunes, says Hoihnu Hauzel

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What do Kamayani Kanwar and Divya Burman have in common? That's simple: they both have multi-millionaire husbands who control gigantic and profitable industrial empires. They could, if they so desired, live a life of leisure dividing their time between shopping, lunching and spending hours beautifying themselves in a salon or spa.

You might, in fact, catch Kamayani trying out a beauty treatment or two. But that's only market research for her swanky spa, Asian Roots. On her way to a holiday in Spain recently she was making plans to check out the latest in the beauty game. "I've heard of a painless waxing technique that's done there. I'll be trying it out," says Kamayani, who's the wife of Raaja Kanwar, managing director, Apollo International, a part of the Rs 3,000-crore Apollo Tyres group.

For Divya Burman it's a question of juggling time schedules and businesses. She runs Wax Works, which makes designer candles and she has now diversified into fashion design, making women's clubwear. Her new label's called Diva and she's hoping to sell her colourful outfits in fashion hotspots like London, New York and even Beirut. "It's a total commitment," says Divya, the wife of Amit Burman, executive director, Dabur Foods.

The wives of tycoons like Burman and Kanwar would, once upon a time, have been leading lights on the Ladies Who Lunch circuit. They would have divided time between their children and overseeing the staff in their palatial mansions. Today, they are striking out bravely, hoping to find a small niche of their own in the modern world. "I feel a sense of pride at Sheetal's initiative and ability to do things on her own," says Pranav Ansal, chairman, Ansal Township & Land Development, one of the country's largest developers. His wife, Sheetal Ansal has dabbled in event management, runs two schools and is also the former president of the Ladies Wing of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). "It's mental stimulation," she says.

The modern-day tycoon's wife seeking a challenge or 'mental stimula-



Sangeeta and Rajiv Gupta have just put their money into Delhi's prestigious pre-nursery school, The Playhouse

In the old days they would have been leading lights of the Ladies Who Lunch brigade. But today they are striking out bravely on their own

tion' can be found trying her hand at a variety of professions or businesses. They could be managing schools or art galleries or developing their creative skills as designers. Perhaps, not surprisingly, you won't find them on the factory floor or in rough and tough professions that might take them to the scrubbiest parts of town or country.

Nevertheless, they've figured how to use their money smartly and get into a profession where they have a skill or a special interest. Take a look at Sangeeta

Gupta, wife of Rajeev Gupta, managing director, Orchid Infrastructure Builders and Developers. The Guptas have become partners in one of Delhi's oldest pre-schools, The Playhouse.

Sangeeta has been braving the summer sun in the last few months supervising builders as they gave final touches to the school building. "We wanted to surprise the kids when they returned to school after the summer break," she says. Her husband, meanwhile, has been working to sell a new

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Mandira Lamba took over Nitanjali art gallery from her mother and plans to take it places

township in Gurgaon.

Most of the wives are cashing in on subjects that they are familiar with. Shefali Somani and Mandira Lamba, for instance, both run art galleries. Mandira is married to Dhruv Lamba managing director, Kwaliti Group. Says Mandira who runs Nitanjali art gallery: "If you got it in your belly, you've got it. I believe people should have a career of their own." Nitanjali was opened by Mandira's mother. "I took over from her," says Mandira who studied fashion in New York and who used her time in the bustling city to develop her eye for art by visiting galleries.

Similarly, Shefali Somani, wife of Ashish Somani, owner of Lanstace Construction that is into housing and commercial buildings, opened Art & Soul, a gallery in Friends Colony 10 years ago. "I often visited Calcutta which was the hub of Indian art and saw many young talented artists who had no exposure," says Shefali who started by exhibiting works of young artists from different parts of the country.

But even the art world can be



Sheetal Ansal has dabbled in event management and also runs two schools

brutally competitive and you have to work hard to stay ahead. Shefali says she travels to the interiors of India once in two months. "I have to locate new artists and personally select art that we exhibit in the gallery," she says. Next year she plans to have a group show in New York.

Similarly, Mandira is getting more ambitious about her business ventures. She was introduced to the world of art by her father who was an avid collector and she recently flew in 11 Pakistani artists for a group exhibition. She's also about to diversify and will be selling outfits by Pakistani designer Maria B. Says Mandira: "I am importing her products and will be supplying to big stores in the country."

Are these profitable ventures? "It all depends," says Divya who along with her business partner designs candles for theme parties for affluent clients. "The price really depends on the theme and the size of the party. If it is complicated with corals encrusted, or perfumed, it could cost anything from Rs 4,000 to Rs 20,000 per set," says Divya.

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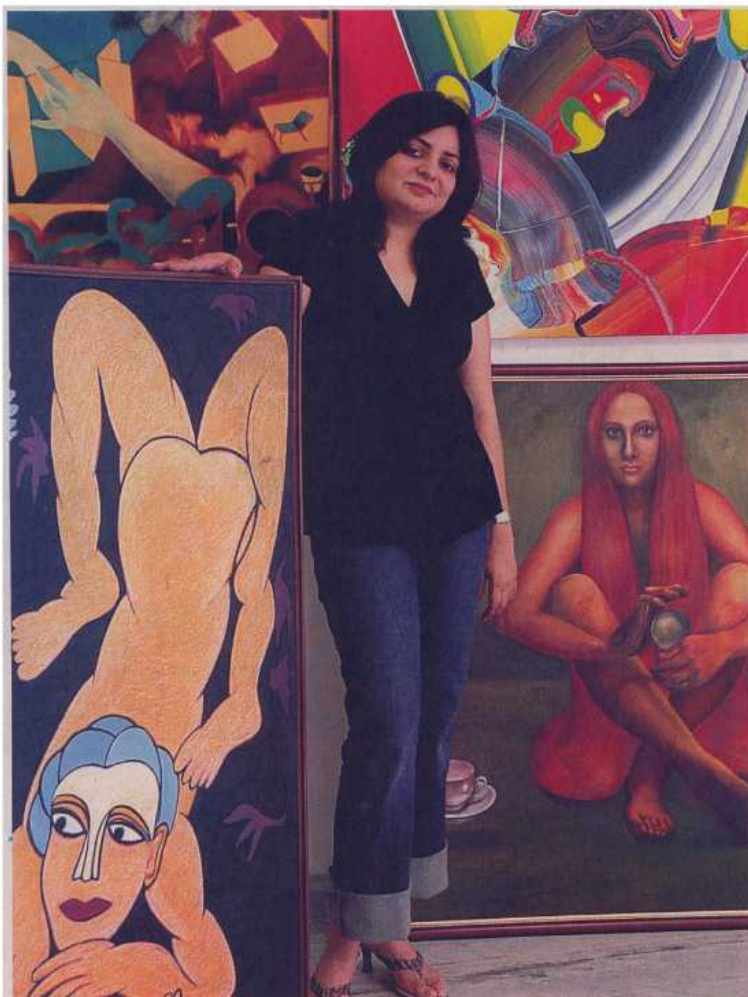
Some have gone ahead even without any formal training like Deepika Jindal who has given a new twist to the family business. "Steel was a godsend for me. I was a housewife and I did not even have the confidence that I could do it. I have never worked in my life and as I look back I cannot imagine that it could take me this far," says the wife of Ratan Jindal of the Rs 2,500-crore Jindal Stainless. Deepika has launched the company's lifestyle division which is called Art d'Inox.

Deepika had to start from scratch and began two years ago by hiring a team of designers who came up with innovative lifestyle products made from steel. In August, she has a glass exhibition with Hemi Bawa and next year, she'll be doing a steel sculpture show which will probably be the first of its kind in this country. There were challenges of course as Deepika says. "When I began two years ago, it was confusing. I started in a little space in our main office building. We did not know what to produce and what all to



Deepika Jindal has given a new twist to the family business by launching Art D'inox, the lifestyle division of Jindal Stainless

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Supportive in-laws have meant that Shefali Somani could devote more time to her art gallery, Art & Soul

You probably won't find them on the factory floor or in rough and tough professions that might take them to the scrubbiest parts of town or country

do. Now, things are more refined."

Deepika is already thinking bigger and is hoping to open more outlets. "In addition to the three outlets in Delhi, Mumbai and Gurgaon, I am also open to franchises for the south Indian market," she says.

One wife who has broken all bounds is Shabnam Singhal, wife of Saurabh

Singhal, managing director, Biotech International, a firm that deals with biotechnology for the agriculture and health sectors. Even though Shabnam has no training in marketing, she is now vice president marketing, Biotech International. In addition, she has her own real estate firm Vipps India that has clients like Amby Valley and JMD

Kohimor, a luxury mall that's soon opening in south Delhi. Shabnam, a graduate from Delhi University has also started Sirius, a marketing and trading company that aims to bring international luxury brands into this country.

Everyone insists that their firms are second to none and run on professional lines. Kamayani says she has attempted to bring in the same level of professionalism that exists in Apollo Tyres. "Today, the spa is professionally managed with designated CEO, and other staff. I am only a force behind it," she says.

She insists the proof of the pudding lies in the fact that people haven't quit the company even though there are plenty of jobs to be had. "In two years I have not lost any staff and that speaks volumes," she says. Kamayani also says she's trying to provide the same benefits like provident fund that are often not on offer in this sector.

For Sangeeta, being on the job means constantly updating her skills to be able to communicate with the children at the school. "It's demanding," she says. Sangeeta a regular at crafts workshops along with her colleagues. In the future, Sangeeta has plans to open an old-age home.

Perhaps it's not surprising that most of the wives follow 'flexi-time' timings in their business avatars. And some have only begun working after their children have grown up. Deepika's daughter, Urvi 19, is studying design management in London and her 17-year-old son is studying mechanical engineering in Boston. Sangeeta's son is already working with his father and her daughter is studying in Delhi University.

But many of the younger wives are juggling young children and their career dreams. Divya has two young children and shuttles between her garment studio in Greater Kailash and home in Vasant Vihar where she has her candle-making unit. "I define my hours keeping in mind my children's needs," she says.

Do their in-laws stand in their way? On the contrary, they also seem to be moving with the times and encouraging their daughters-in-law to get out and about. In fact, supportive in-laws are frequently the answer to child-minding problems. Says Shefali:

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Shabnam Singhal handles marketing for her husband's company and is also hoping to become a player in the luxury game

"Most of the time my in-laws are taking care of my son." Deepika says it was her in-laws who gave her the support to go out and work. "It was possible all because of them. They encouraged me to work," she says.

Sheetal says her day is well-split up between herself, her children and her husband. "I work only 11am to 2 pm every day. I divide between myself, my two children and my husband. Two to seven is for my children. I pick them up from school and don't even socialise during this time. I swim with them everyday. Then, from 7.30pm onward is for my husband and other business obligations with my husband."

Married two years ago, Mandira places Dhruv above everything else. "He comes first and I make it a point to be home by six every day," she says. And once home, it means switching off completely from work including her mobile. And, that's a luxury they can all afford. ◆

Photographs by Jagan Negi and Rupinder Sharma