



JANAK BHAT

## Makeover magic

**VARSHA BHAWNANI**

**Career shift: Private equity to garment export and wardrobe consultancy**

**A**rmed with a management degree from the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, Varsha Bhawnani could have been yet another white-collar executive rushing from one boardroom meeting to another raking in a seven-figure salary. But, thanks to the entrepreneurial streak in her, she called it quits after a three-year-long stint in the corporate world. Varsha, 28, is a much-sought-after image and wardrobe consultant now. From accounting and corporate banking to private equity, she tried her hand at everything before finally deciding to go on her own. "I like to do things in my own way. But I wanted to be very sure of what I was doing and, therefore, worked in three regular 10-hour jobs. But, I soon realised that I am not made for working under anybody," she says.

Food and clothes were always her areas of interest. But when it came to business, Varsha zeroed in on clothes. "I was reading a lot about exports. I, therefore, decided to jump into garment exports," she says. She

started Vinegar Exports with five machines and seven employees in 2005. Today, she has clients in the US, Russia, Dominican Republic and Spain.

From getting credit to dealing with people, nothing came easy to her. "It's difficult to be a woman in the industry. You need to have a tough exterior. My suppliers would not trust me with cheques and insist on cash in the beginning," she says. Once she was refused delivery of a Russia-bound shipment which was slated to leave the next day. "They refused to take my cheque and insisted on cash payment. I did not have so much cash and had to borrow from somebody. It was quite ridiculous. But, things have changed as people have started trusting me," she says. Today, she owns 25 machines and has another 100 on contract. The annual turnover is estimated to be over Rs 5 crore.

With an urge to do more, Varsha threw her hat into retail clothing under the name Vinegar. How did consulting come to her? "It's very simple. Everybody wants to look good. Take the case of your salon. When you go there, you want your hairdresser to give you the best look," she says. "I wanted to incorporate the same in my clothing line. This led to image and wardrobe consulting." ■