

professions, through the data available to us. In doing so, we have categorized women for this issue into various professional fields.

- Entrepreneurs
- Business Leaders
- Academia
- Community and Public Service
- Engineering & Technology
- Creative Artists

Each of the women featured is the definitive BITSian Woman in the fullest sense: a shining beacon of the BITSian spirit as well as the modern day woman.

We thank all the BITSians who have helped us in compiling this list.

Entrepreneurs

Experts and surveys conducted in recent times reveal that the lack of role models is the No. 1 factor discouraging women from pursuing MBAs and taking up roles as business leaders. But if you take a look at the illustrious list of BITS alumnae that we have been able to identify, you will find that not only has BITS left you with a fine education and memorable life experiences, it has also left you with an inspiring legacy to follow. This article profiles the achievements and experiences of BITSian women entrepreneurs from around the world, in fields as diverse as Consultancy, IT, Education and Manufacturing and batches as far apart as the mid 60s to early 90s.

Female entrepreneurship is expanding around the world. The Global Monitoring Report 2005 on Women and Entrepreneurship (www.gemconsortium.org) estimates that more than one-

third of all people involved in entrepreneurial activity are women. The growth of the IT-ITES industry in recent times has resulted in the narrowing of the gender divide, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship. From mom stores and traditional businesses, today's women are beginning to make their mark in the ranks of high tech entrepreneurs.



Punita Pandey

Much has been written about **Punita Pandey** (1980-84, EEE), CEO and Founder, netCustomer, a leading provider of enterprise software support and services. Her company has customized its innovative services for clients like PeopleSoft, J. D. Edwards products, Sony, Dell, Qualcomm and IBM. In fact, netCustomer's success is taught as a case study at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University and at several leading universities around the world. But there's more to be said, and learned from.

She started off like most of us. The daughter of retired

educationists says she owes her current status to her education and her family. "I was good at math and science in school. My father encouraged me to pursue engineering schools and recommended BITS. That was my entry ticket into the field of technology. After that there was no turning back. I pursued a career in IT and software development and later, after my MBA, I started refining my business skills with a career in management consulting and marketing. A culmination of all these experiences led me to found netCustomer," smiles Pandey.

And today she's an icon in the Silicon Valley. For Punita, starting her own business has been a most rewarding experience. "The creation process is so exhilarating - to conceive something, assemble a team, execute, and offer your customers something which is valuable for them, your company, and all the individuals involved.

There have been lots of ups and downs, but I have never been more satisfied", she says.



Vandana Malaiya

Another inspiring example from the very same batch and discipline is that of **Vandana Malaiya**. She began what was to be a remarkable career at DCM Data Products in Delhi in hardware R&D. A few years down the line, she left behind stints in the US and Verifone, Bangalore and co-founded a software services firm, EximSoft Technologies Pvt. Ltd., in the product engineering space based out of Bangalore. Her clients were primarily from Japan, the U.S. and Europe. In October 2004, her company merged with Trianz Consulting a Silicon Valley based management consulting firm. Currently, she is Director at Trianz.

Vandana juggles traveling, photography, painting, gardening and cooking for hobbies. Whew! All this of course apart from spending time with her son, playing an important role on the Software Process Improvement Network and promoting entrepreneurship among women particularly in IT and BT through the TiE Women Bangalore chapter. “Perseverance is the key to success”, she maintains.

We asked her what it was like to be a woman entrepreneur; “Personally I do not give much weightage to gender biases of the people working with me. I guard against taking any privileges specifically designed for women. I make sure that people do not nurture pre-conceived notions about what women can do and cannot do, will do and will not do.” She goes on to say, “As women, we will always have to create a good work-life balance. However, if you choose to give more importance to one over the other based on the phase in your

life do so without guilt and without losing sight of your professional and personal goals.” Different strokes for different folks? You bet!

Then there’s **Sangeeta Patni** from the ’81 batch, also a *EEEite* – a woman with several firsts to her credit: she was the first woman in the management team at Eicher Motors, an automobile company, and the first woman engineer at Rajasthan State Mines and Minerals, Udaipur, a mining company! This trailblazer went on and co-founded Extensio Software Inc. which builds and sells information delivery solutions to enterprises all over the world. She currently wears two hats for Extensio -as Vice President, Engineering and Country Head. Sangeeta leads the engineering center based out of Nagpur and has been successful in building a core middleware solution that has been reviewed positively by analysts such as IDC and Gartner, and has collaborated with companies such as IBM and webMethods. For her achievements, Sangeeta was featured by *Network Computer* magazine in November 2002 on its cover as one of the four top successful CIO-turned-entrepreneurs.

Sangeeta loves to dance, read and write and teach her an eight-



Gayathri Viswanathan

year old daughter, Nidhi.

The youngest entrepreneur in our list is **Gayathri**



Anuradha (Anu) Parthasarathy

Viswanathan. Gayathri graduated from BITS in 1995 with a degree in Chemical engineering. In 2002, she co-founded a company called Maarga Systems, a software company focused on the Lotus Notes technology which has today grown to a 25 strong organization. Gayathri specifically looks into the entire delivery organization.

Her career path follows a sequence that many of us women can relate to. Gayathri joined IBM from BITS and rose up the ranks from being a programmer to becoming a project lead. She then moved to the US where she consulted briefly with Lotus Corporation after which she worked with PriceWaterhouseCoopers as a Senior Consultant. When she moved back to India from the US, Gayathri started Maarga.

Gayathri had always wanted to climb the corporate ladder and be a top executive by the time she was 30. But today, she is far happier facing the challenges of entrepreneurship. However, she

boldly adds that she is not afraid to limit the growth of her business so that she can retain the time to do her other activities.



Chandralekha Bhaskar

Senior to Gayathri by more than two decades is **Chandralekha Bhaskar** whose story is truly ground-breaking. Chandralekha joined BITS in 1966 to pursue Electronics engineering and forty years down the line, she is Director of Bhaskar Energy Private Limited, a 150 Crore group manufacturing generating sets.

Prior to her current role, Chandralekha headed the Marketing Divisions of leading OEMs of Kirloskar Cummins of their times and gathered experience in Gensets for over two decades. In 1988, she set up an assembly plant at Noida and has been the OEA of Cummins, Kirloskar Oil Engines and Leyland since then. Chandralekha's hobbies include reading, traveling and theatre and she also has worked in the area of girl child development. She encourages as well as cautions us with her message for the BITSian woman, "You have great opportunities and challenges ahead."

In the early 1990s **Anuradha (Anu) Parthasarathy**, MMS Batch of 1983, founded and built Nexus Search Consultants which is the No.1 Search Firm for the technology sector in Bangalore. Her clients at Nexus included technology giants such as Autodesk, Cadence, Compaq, CA, 3COM, Cisco, Epson, HP, IBM, Sanyo, SUN and Siemens, as also startups such as Aspect, Aztec, Entevo, IDEA, Silicon Automation, Sierra and Talisma. Prior to founding Nexus, Anu was the Head of Marketing for Wipro's International Operations Division. In 2000 Anu co-founded *e4e* in the US, a company that provides business processes and engineering outsourcing services through its portfolio companies. She didn't stop there; today she is the Founder and CEO of Global Executive Talent, a senior executive search firm that identifies leadership talent for US-based companies going offshore and Asia-based companies making forays into the US market. Three role models in one great gal!



Anita Sakuru

Anita's story of success is very powerful. **Anita Sakuru**, from the '87 batch, is the founder, CEO and Chairman of Kenpeople. Just before starting

Kenpeople, she was selected for the Executive MBA at Kellogg. She joined when she was 32 after having two kids and when her second child was just 3 months old. At the same time she was running a \$25M business unit and commuted to Chicago from Boston every alternate weekend. In between the program, her family moved to India and she commuted from India. The pressure of being a role model for her children and her never say die spirit kept her going!

She has clear advice for budding women entrepreneurs. She warns, "If you are a



Chandni Sahgal

perfectionist- forget it. Prioritize and that's very, very important." Anita stresses the importance of building a support group. "Your family will be the most important support factor for you. Take help from parents, in-laws, network with friends and people from the same college and schools. Find them and build newer bonds", she says.

And finally, a lady with a most exciting profile – **Chandni Sahgal!** We've all watched the music and madness of MTV, but little did we know that the person behind the launch of MTV India was none other than

Business Leaders

a BITSian! Yes, Chandni was the Country Head of MTV India, and was instrumental in launching it in India. She has also worked with Prithvi Nandy Communications as the CEO and was a key driver in establishing the company. She led a complete turnaround of Times FM, Cyanamid India, Novartis and Eicher Motors and has been instrumental in establishing the operations of Cyanamid, Novartis and Eicher Motors in various markets. Chandni, an MMS graduate from the 1981 batch, is today the founder and Managing Proprietor of D'Essence Consulting, a Management Consulting, Business Advisory and Talent Management Consulting Boutique firm. Chandni, who believes that learning is a continuous process, was awarded the prestigious Graduate Gordon Fisher Fellowship at the University of Toronto in 1993-94. But she didn't stop there. She landed at the London School of Economics in 2001 for the Leadership Program.

Anita Balasubramanian is an entrepreneur of a different kind –she has started two NGOs. We have profiled her in the section on Community Leaders.

Rashmi Datt, author of 'Managing your Boss' runs Dialog, a Learning Services delivery consultancy. And there is **Neetu Khilnani** ('87, MMS) who started a web services firm called NetResult Co. in Mumbai, before moving to the US. Each of these women has broken stereotypes and stand testament to the amazing opportunities that lie before us. Go girl!

Perhaps the greatest testimony to a well-rounded education program is the multifaceted leaders it is able to nurture and supply to the world. In that respect, the Integrated Program at BITS certainly seems to have well justified its intent. As we thread together the achievements of several of our women alumni under the Corporate Leadership head, we tread paths set ablaze with outstanding work, be it in Information Technology, Quality Assurance or Marketing; glass ceilings lie shattered by the way side as new horizons are scaled, and repeatedly, we are awed and overwhelmed by some awesome grit and determination on display.

The first time I recall contemplating the definition of a leader was in a test in the Principles of Management course (popularly termed PoM), where we were asked to write an essay on "Are leaders born or made?" I don't quite know the answer to that one yet, but I definitely believe being a leader in today's corporate jungle places huge demands – you need to lead by example, be a team



**Srividhya Rajesh,
Fund Manager,
Sundaram Mutual
Fund**

player, make quick, sensible decisions and zoom past a stream of success milestones. These women have done it all – be it **Akhila Krishnakumar** ('89) who is today CEO of SCT Software Solutions India Pvt. Ltd. while chairing the AMCHAM Bangalore chapter or, **Renu Muralidharan** ('77) who holds dual roles as Corporate Quality Head and Delivery Head with Datamatics Ltd., Mumbai. Taking the world of finance by storm are **Srividhya Rajesh** ('90, MMS) and **Yashodhara Mishra**. While the former is a leading Fund Manager of the country managing Mutual Funds at Sundaram, Yashodhara supervises IPAC Singapore's operations as Vice President.

While the characteristic corporate leader of the present is probably backed by a Masters in Business Administration or an equivalent, another remarkable feature about these women is that many have made a successful transition from the technical to the managerial side, sans the extra degree. Steering the technical side at CSLTECH is **Mitra Priya**, currently Director, with more than 13 years in the Software Industry and a rich body of work behind her, at various companies.

Prachi Garg is another shining example. This spirited kid, from the Class of 1986, EEE, is now Deputy General Manager at VSNL. Having established her credentials in R&D, she has ascended the managerial ladder and is known for her sheer command in the field and unique insights on several issues.

The list is endless. It captures the spirit **Sheena Verma** imbibed into a venture she started along with her husband, built and nurtured through an