

# Brand India is their business

Two first-generation women entrepreneurs find it pays to showcase India

Venkatesan Vembu, Hong Kong

For a successful entrepreneurial idea to be born, it needs an enabling environment that encourages the calculated risk-taker to slip the surly bonds of safety and go in hot pursuit of the Big Idea. For Jyoti Ramesh and Anita Garg, that Big Idea — of making a business out of promoting Brand India — fell in place in the fertile entrepreneurial breeding ground of Hong Kong, the world city at the doorstep of the world's fastest growing dragon economy.

After fairly successful careers in several world cities, except for time-outs to step onto the mommy track, Jyoti and Anita met in Hong Kong's "tandoori towers", the upmarket high-rises populated by South Asian investment bankers and software professionals. "We were both at a stage where we wanted to take the entrepreneurial plunge," recalls Jyoti. "There's something about Hong Kong that makes it very business-friendly."

After some frenetic ideation, they realised there was an untapped market in showcasing in this part of the world everything that's good about India — from classical art to Bollywood to the super-normal economic growth of recent years that's grabbed investor interest the world over. And thus was born the Jade Group ([www.jadegroup.hk.com](http://www.jadegroup.hk.com)), an event management company committed to showcasing diverse Indian cultural traditions, and investment opportunities in India, for audiences in the East.

Jyoti and Anita decided early on that they would make Indian classical culture and art forms accessible to non-Indian audiences as well. In a city where audiences savour the best of world art — indicatively, Andrew Lloyd Webber's production *The Phantom of the Opera* is currently running



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to packed houses — this decision meant taking the road less travelled. "A lot of people felt we couldn't sell Indian classical traditions to non-Indians, but we proved them wrong," says Anita.

Their first major professional assignment came when the Sri Shakti Academy, the first Indian professional classical dance organisation in Hong Kong, staged *Panchabhoota*, a classical dance performance with different dance traditions and elements of yoga.

"We organised everything from the venue to marketing, logistics, and the media," says Anita. The show, in 2003, was a resounding success. Over the next few years, Jyoti and Anita or-

ganised several shows by professional artists from India, including Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, Hema Malini and her daughters Esha and Ahana.

Many of them were shows they conceived from begin to end for their clients, typically financial institutions, which want to organise premier events for their private banking customers. They also helped with some aspects of organising the Shah Rukh Khan show, a sell-out, where there was a bidding war even for tickets priced at HK\$5,000.

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