

The 'do-it-all' mums

Find inspiration in the stories of these mumpreneurs who have reinvented their lives to make the most of motherhood as well as turn their pet passions into successful business ideas...

Words Ramya Srinivasan



PAINTING WITH PASSION

Preeti Raghuvanshi Singh, 39 years, mum to two girls Tanishka, 11, and Taarini, nine, resides in Bengaluru.

What she does: Aakriti – fusion painting on walls, name plates and other knick-knacks.

More on her work at: <https://www.facebook.com/aakritibl>

How Aakriti happened: With just two years age difference between my daughters, I was hesitant to get back to my IT job and started lecturing on techno-managerial subjects in IIPM instead. When my second one approached the playschool age, I wanted to break the monotony and began to pursue art as a hobby. My wall paintings with a mix of Madhubani and Kalamkari style received a lot of appreciation from folks who visited our home. Eventually, people got to know through word of mouth and asked me to do name plates and wall paintings for them. Nowadays, people are experimental and want to try new stuff. Also, they want an exclusivity factor that marks a stamp of their personality. So, I try to understand their individual choices before deciding on what to paint. I never learnt painting formally, so my style is a fusion of many forms and also inspired from Indian mythology.

The juggling routine: I love what I am doing and, more importantly, the way I

am doing it! I start early in the morning around five am and once the kids leave for school, I do my work until two pm. After that, I am a hands-on mum and all the focus is on my children's activities and projects. Again, in the late evenings, I go out to buy things for my own projects and in the nights, when they sleep, I focus on Aakriti again.

The magic mantra: I think women are naturally good at managing time. In my case, I have compartmentalised time in a way that there is no confusion between the two worlds. Clients come to me because I offer exclusivity, so I don't want to overload myself to the extent that I have to outsource some of my work. I am not overly ambitious and take up as much work as I can without compromising the quality of work and my 'mum' time. Yoga also helps me to stay alert and agile.

Advice for other mums: Understand your happiness quotient – ask yourself what really makes you happy. Take up something once you are convinced that it's what you want to do. Also, having smaller milestones and expanding scope gradually makes things easier.

COOKING WITH LOVE

Manjula Venkataraman, 37 years, mum to Mallika, 10, and Raghav, six, resides in Boston, United States.

What she does: Raghavika, a home-based catering service that specialises in South Indian food, sweets and savouries.

More on her work at: <https://www.facebook.com/raghavika>

How Raghavika happened: I was a homemaker before and after my two children, I had been thinking of becoming financially independent. Cooking has always been my passion but I never considered it as a profession at first. During my annual health check-up, my doctor asked me if I can suggest a place to get authentic Indian sweets and savouries in Boston and I decided to help her out by making them for her. During the process, I realised that there are many Indian families here who do not have the time to even prepare fresh meals every day, leave alone the traditional snack varieties. When Raghav was about two years old, I decided to start a catering service. With many working couples in the vicinity, the demand for home-cooked takeout food was there, just waiting to be tapped. In the food business, ultimately it's about the taste and quality of food. Once that became a hit, loads of orders started coming in. I also take party

orders and recently catered to a wedding successfully.

The juggling routine: People wonder how I do it single-handedly, but I guess when you love doing something, everything falls in place. Initially, I used to cook when my son was busy playing or sleeping. Now, since both kids have started going to school, I get time to wrap up my orders before they are back. During Diwali and other festivals, I get large orders. I prepare these in the night when the kids are asleep; it's definitely hard work.

The magic mantra: It's all about having a supportive family. My parents and in-laws are in India, so as a nuclear unit, we need to back each other up consistently. My children understand my routine well and know that my profession is a part of our life now. Also, my husband has been a pillar of strength, helping me with the packing and delivery of orders during busy schedules.

Advice for other mums: There is certainly a thrill to earning and being financially independent, so I think everyone should experience that. Just pick something you are passionate about, so you feel energised instead of exhausted.



GIVING COMFORT

Nina Jhaveri, 44 years, mum to Sanaya, 12, and Vivaan, 10, resides in Mumbai.

What she does: Founder of the Comfeed nursing pillow, Comfyzz maternity pillow and wedge pillow for lower back support.

How Comfeed happened: I worked as a copywriter in advertising, before motherhood happened. When Sanaya was born, I had an excruciating nursing experience, everything that could go wrong in the book did! During my second one, I came across an international design-based nursing pillow. I made a few tweaks to it and it helped me extensively with my nursing troubles. That really got me motivated. I had no business plan initially but by then the desire to be independent was strong. I was convinced that here was a brilliant product and knew this could be a life-altering experience for mothers.

The juggling routine: I don't have any factory or any store, I do it all from home and that helps. I do all the running around when the kids are at school. I adjust my schedule according to the children's.

Initially, I had to run around a lot meeting gynaecologists, giving them a demo of the product. But now the product has caught on significantly and doctors and pre-natal clinics are recommending it to their patients.

The magic mantra: Technology helps quite a bit, WhatsApp has helped me share pictures and discuss the features of the pillow without having to personally visit and demonstrate every single time. Of course, having a great support system in my parents and in-laws helped me, especially when the kids were little.

Advice for other mums: Leverage your support system and learn to delegate – for example, my mum lives in a different part of the city and helps coordinate pickups in the city's other half. Also, believe in what you're doing and just go ahead and do it!



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THE SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Amrutha Joshi Yuvaraj, 33 years, mum to Sidharth, five, and Riddhima, two, resides in Coimbatore.

What she does: BelleArt – customised designer furniture and interiors

More on her work at: <https://www.facebook.com/belleart.in>

How BelleArt happened: When Sidharth was a year old, my husband, who is an architect, and I started a design firm. We offered consultancy on interior design for a few projects. Then, I realised there was a demand for custom-designed furniture and I was eager to start a boutique furniture store.

When my daughter was one, I started BelleArt along with my sister and two friends, who went

to design school with me. We wanted to attempt an Internet-based service but we bought a place in Mumbai after we realised people had lots of questions and needed face-to-face interaction. We invested Rs 1.5 lakh each to showcase a few hand-crafted teak wood model furniture pieces. I work remotely on the designs and also handle the marketing aspects.

The juggling routine: I have a separate office space at home, where I work on my designs. When I was nursing my son, I used to wrap up all the outdoor work within a

couple of hours and get back home. It also helps that I live in a city where the overall radius is not much, so I don't have to spend excessive time on commute. I work on my designs in the afternoons when the children are asleep or later in the night.

The magic mantra: You need to follow rigorous discipline if you're working from home. I sit at my office compulsorily while working. My son knows to ask permission before interrupting me at work. I have also trained myself to get heaps of work done when the kids are asleep. I have an incredible support system, my in-laws and my parents help me out with child care, especially whenever I travel to Mumbai. My husband also has an entrepreneurial spirit and that helps me take risks. When my second one starts school, I hope to open a store here in Coimbatore.

Advice for other mums: Do your work for the right reasons – for me it gives me energy and keeps me away from an idle mind. It's about doing something for yourself and also being a great example for your kids. It's never too late – once you set your mind, just get started on it. Just make sure you've the right kind of support to help you through tough times.



THE MIDNIGHT BAKER

Karen Lobo, 30 years, mum to Aaleya, 1.5 years, resides in Bengaluru.

What she does: Sweet Whisk – Just Plain Good – a one-stop shop for homemade cakes, cupcakes and desserts.

More on her work at: <https://www.facebook.com/Sweet-Whisk-Just-Plain-Good/>

How Sweet Whisk happened: After six years of crunching numbers in a multi-national firm, I took up baking when Aaleya was just six months old. I found it difficult to juggle full-time work and my baby, so I wanted to try something out of home. Having been inspired by shows like Nigella Lawson's, I used to bake for fun, just for myself. I had been thinking about converting it into a business for a while when family and friends' appreciation was a big boost. I started with a few cupcakes and slowly the referrals poured. My Facebook page hit 3000 likes in no time. Now, this little venture has got to a point where my dates get booked well in advance. Sometimes people check with me even if I have not been able to allot dates the first time, that's truly touching.

The juggling routine: I bake in the wee hours of the night! Since my daughter is very young, my day goes into

cooking and taking care of her. I make the toppers when she is asleep during the day but the actual baking starts post 10pm. I am not really much of a 'sleep' person but it does not show since I am passionate about what I'm doing. The sense of accomplishment I get from my business is incomparable.

The magic mantra: I think it boils down to good planning and sorting out a neat schedule. I do not take up more than one or two cakes per day, since I prefer being a hands-on mum. I plan my daily and monthly calendar well, so there is no chaos at home and at work. Also, there is absolutely no compromise on quality and I source only the best ingredients for the cakes.

Advice for other mums: There is no shortcut to success. Whatever you do, get your basics right and be ready to slog. In my business, attention to detail helps in getting the little things perfect. Also, go all out when you are into something. For example, I invested in a good camera and learnt about photography because that helps me market the cakes.

