

# Fashion means business

Sangeetha Devi Dundoo



Abhilasha Bahl, Meenu Ahlawat, Pallavi Saxena and Shyam Beriwal are among the eight fashion designers to have joined the 2012 batch of Indian School of Business, Hyderabad. Photo: Mohammed Yousuf

Not content with being up-to-date with fashion, a group of designers is eager to sharpen its business acumen.

They are masters in their craft, can analyse the warp and weft of fabrics, have an inside knowledge of garment manufacturing, marketing, merchandising and will tell you how you score on the fashion meter. Abhilasha Bahl, Pallavi Saxena, Meenu Ahlawat, Shyam Beriwal and Vikram Naik are among the eight fashion designers in the class of 2012 at the Indian School of Business. A few former NIFTians have been part of the previous batches at the B-school but this is the first time that the school has eight of them.

We meet them on a drizzling afternoon at the sprawling atrium of ISB to know what made the NIFTians join a B-school. Abhilasha realised she needed to learn the basics of business when the fashion industry was hit by recession in 2008. “I realised it's not enough to just be good at your work. You cannot survive without knowing how external factors can affect your business,” she says. Agreeing with her view, Pallavi Saxena says, “There has been an increase in net income

and people are more aware of fashion. When you understand business, you know how viable your ideas can be.”

Meenu Ahlawat feels in the fashion industry, too, everything boils down to numbers. “After 10 classes of finance, we can read business reports of our companies. All of us have ideas but business knowledge will help translate those ideas into success.”

Shyam Beriwal draws a parallel between engineers and fashion fraternity. “No one wonders why engineers join B-schools. Business knowledge is a prerequisite for the fashion sector too,” he points out. Vikram Naik felt drawn to studying business as he realised that his role shifted from being a designer to that of a guide to designers and product licensing. “When I worked with media houses like Time Warner, I was more involved with the business aspects, approving designs made by the vendors. I saw marketing as an obvious progression,” he says.

If prêt wear is about numbers and couture spells luxury, the NIFTians feel the business edge will help address issues concerning both prêt and couture. “The basic business principles remain the same for both sectors,” says Pallavi. Meenu feels it's all the more important since “the segment is niche and you should know how to get the right customers.”

Having spent two months in Hyderabad already, the group is awed by the growing retail and fashion sector. They observe that Hyderabad has deep pockets and the concentration of designer boutiques and international brands indicates the willingness to spend on luxury products. “Forget brands; look how the city has taken to Harley Davidsons and Jaguars,” exclaims Meenu.

Coming from Delhi and Bangalore, they rate Hyderabad as conservative in comparison with Delhi and Mumbai, which are more open to experimenting in fashion. “More city-centric fashion events will help build fashion consciousness. It's good that fashion weeks are being held in Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad and more such events need to be held in tier 3 cities as well,” adds Shyam. Vikram feels Hyderabad has potential for growth with designers like Anand Kabra becoming a name to reckon with nationally.

The experience at ISB, so far, has helped them learn from peers. “We are open to new things. Be it retail sector, manufacturing or entrepreneurship, we are at the right place to network,” says Abhilasha.

### **Eye for design**

**Abhilasha Bahl:** This former NIFTian, Bangalore, has eight years of experience in garment retail industry and has worked with ITC and Arvind Brands.

**Meenu Ahlawat:** She holds a bachelor degree from NIFT, Gandhinagar, Gujarat and has three years of experience in menswear and womenswear buying and merchandising at Tommy Hilfiger.

**Pallavi Saxena:** A former NIFTian from Delhi, she has three years experience as manager, planning, outlets and licensee business at Tommy Hilfiger.

**Shyam Beriwal:** A NIFTian from Bangalore has worked with Reliance in retailing, fashion and apparel division and then joined Tesco in its apparel division.

**Vikram Naik:** A NIFTian from Mumbai, has worked in apparel design for four years, followed by three years as a creative consultant for product licensing divisions for Star India Ltd and Time Warner (India).