

# Metamorphosis: Bachelor of Science to Scientific Manager

- **Sudeshna Ghoshal**

**S**ujata came home dumbstruck, and sat down her head buried in her hands. Mrs Ghosh was equally stricken. For eighteen years she had ensured her girl gets the best education. So she hadn't thought twice to enroll her for both Brilliants and the local tutor. "But not qualifying for PMT.... even your cousin Ishani made it last year"

For a girl who had been taught to harbour the hope of pursuing medicine from the tender age of 8, it seemed like the world had come to an end....for her mother who wanted every unfulfilled dream come true through her daughter, it was a social failure.

It was at this time that I actually got to know Sujata much more. She had been a year my junior in Carmel School and I knew her as much as one would know about a junior who shares the same school bus and never came second in her class which my mother would often perkily remind me. She was also the best debator the school had. I was by that time already in my final year BSc. with Chemistry as an honours subject in Presidency College and many unsuccessful engineering and medical aspirants would come to me seeking advise.

"You must introspect and find out what you like doing Sujata.....where do you want to be and how do you want to see yourself 5 years from now'-.I echoed my mother's words that had been ingrained in me since childhood. I knew she was being counseled to take up the

study of various life sciences-Zoology/ Botany as her parents believed that would be a good precursor for taking the Premedical Test again.

It was during that time that I along with Sujata probed our professors a lot to help decide on career options for BSc. students. Most of them wanted us to be their clones. For example Prof. Ragini Mathew kept telling us about completing graduation and post graduation and then taking the College Service Commission test for college recruitments.

Prof. Sen a PhD from TIFR also gave us some time in his busy schedule of setting up an independent research wing in the Life Sciences department. Respected as he was he kept us aghast by his reports on the challenges in the field of Biochemistry and Biotechnology. He used to tell us about TIFR, CCMB and JNU and why IISC had one of the best grants for research. It was clear that GATE was where career paths started. Prof Sen would also lament about how the grants in India are often much poorer compared to US universities and the problems he was facing with UGC for setting up his Lab.I remember him so vividly charging my imagination with long white coats and lab smelling of iodine. Eventually in 1994 I took Prof Sen's advice and left India to pursue MS in Biochemistry in University of Wisconsin That was also the last of Sujata that I had seen. The day before I left, she hurriedly came to tell me that her mother was not speaking with her because



she had decided not to take the PMT test. I was a little aghast by the decision because anyway that is why she had opted for BSc. in the first place.

Anyway, let me tell you something extremely important that I forgot to tell you. During these chat sessions that we had, Sujata would often have a dreamy look in her eyes as if all this meant very little to her. I saw her becoming more active in all college forums and she had absolutely blossomed as a debater.

Almost 11 years later, yesterday I happened to meet her by chance on a flight from Calcutta to Mumbai. I barely recognised her, she stood tall, head held high on her shoulders, a steady walk and most importantly a twinkle in her eye. It took us both 2 minutes before we actually recognised each other.

After catching on for a minute on our marriage, our spouses and our little bundles of joy, we were ready to know about what each one was doing.

"I am a Product Manager at Johnson and Johnson" she said. "I head all the OTC brands."

"Oh!" I said – a Business degree after Zoology? How did this transition happen?

"But Nima I wanted to be in the corporate world, I wanted to do something effective and the university science program was not application based at all. And remember Uncle Khiru, Director with GE worldwide? He told me that if I was keen on pursuing a full-fledged career in the corporate sector, I needed to back myself with a postgraduate qualification."

"Tell me some more... I am all ears"

"Master's in Business Administration, is a professional qualification that could be pursued after any basic qualification. The MBA programme aims to provide graduates of various disciplines an

integrated knowledge of the essential aspects of management, its basic disciplines, quantitative approaches and techniques, and their applications to business problems. The programme offers a stimulating environment to develop qualities of leadership, confidence and communication skills, which are necessary for a successful career in management. An MBA (Masters in Business Administration) is a professional qualification for those who want to develop their business skills and understand more about the commercial world around them. It is also designed to teach you management skills and improve your practical application of a variety of managing techniques."

"But in India I hear now there are so many schools ...how did you decide where to go to?"

"It was important however that I pursue MBA from a reputed institute for it to actually make a difference. This time around I worked hard to crack CAT, the management entrance test for the best B schools in India, IIM's. I finally got a seat in IIM Calcutta.

The course not only broadened the career options available to me, it also gave an opportunity for quicker advancement in my organisation. I was picked up as a management trainee, for a year I worked in different departments of the organisation orienting me to take the position of Product executive at the end of the year. Soon I moved on to Assistant Product Manager and finally today I am the product manager. Professionals like CA's, Doctor's, Lawyer's also find MBA to be an effective career booster. Another advantage of pursuing an MBA was the contacts I made in the institute, which go on to help even today. I could look forward to them for advice in career and personal decisions.

I also happened to meet my

husband at the institute." She added with a wink.

"But do you get a sense of purpose in all that you do?" I asked

"Sure, Product Management involves the delivery of the basic product, pricing, distribution, advertising & promotion, research, packaging. Brand Management refers to positioning a product or a service with a consistent image of quality and value for money to ensure the development of a recurring preference by the consumer. Most often a single person carries out the product and brand manager's role. In huge set ups like HLL, P&G, Colgate there is a product manager who is assisted by brand manager.

Virtually all consumer goods companies use this system of organization. Product or Brand management jobs are found in consumer packaged goods companies, including food; drugs and cosmetics; soaps, cleansers and allied products, soft drinks, tobacco, paper and liquor. A number of industrial goods companies have also adopted the brand/product management system."

"But on reflection don't you find your basic qualification was an utter waste?" I retorted

"Not at all Nima...what do we learn in a graduation class after all. Undoubtedly it honed up my basic skills like logical reasoning and analytical thought. A good graduation only prepares your skill sets for business education. And if one wants something more synergistic with Life sciences one could look at evolving fields like FORESTRY MANAGEMENT, RURAL MANAGEMENT, AGRI BUSINESS MANAGEMENT etc." she continued.

"As a forest management professional, your core job will be managing forest resources in such a way that they are not depleted. You

will also plan wildlife reserves, roads leading to interesting spots, recreation points, lakes, etc. You will supervise the crew conducting these assignments and maintain progress records. All NGOs, Consulting firms and even IT companies looking for domain knowledge recruit students having a degree in Forest Management "

"What about the rural and agri business management" I asked

"Rural management involves managing all functional areas of management - general management, marketing, finance, systems, project implementation, purchase, human resource development, in all segments of rural based enterprises.

Rural managers devise the most efficient methods of accomplishing work in the rural sector, evolving operating procedures and analysing operational problems. They study inadequacies of existing structures, organise information database and prepare recommendations for implementing new systems or for bringing about changes in existing methods for streamlining operating



procedures in all related sectors. NDDDB, HLL, Marico recruit people from here to manage plantations".

"Where can we pursue a degree in rural management, Sujata?"

"Institute of Rural Management, Anand in Gujarat and Xaviers Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar are reputed Institutes offering a program in Rural Management."

"But Agri-business!!!" My state of surprise was evident.

Sujata reiterated, "Agriculture has always been the mainstay of our economy. In recent years, state of the art farming methodology, genetically improved seeds and cross breed varieties for high yield have greatly improved agricultural activities in our country. In order to gain a footing in the highly competitive global market and to make major gains in the export market, there is an increasing demand for professionally qualified people in this sector. Agro-industry is a large and growing sector that requires farm products for further commercial use. The food processing industry sells raw or processed farm products, and requires a range of professionals. Other vast areas requiring specialized agricultural knowledge are those of the production of machinery and equipment for use in farming, and production, and areas of agri-business which include farm banking and credit, insurance, farm management, land appraisals and so on, as also marketing of chemicals and fertilizers for farm use, and the manufacture of fibre and forest produce."

"And where can one pursue Agri Business Management"?, I asked

"IIM - Ahmedabad, India's best Management Institute offers a post graduate program in Agri Business Management"

Sujata's story was intriguing. As we exchanged cards, email ids and bid adieus, my mother's voice rang loud in my ears - **"You must introspect and find out what you like doing, where do you want to be and how do you want to see yourself 5 years from now"**

And it is never too late to pull up your socks and get your act together." ■

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## Trivia

The Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society has found in a sample survey that almost half the American population is connected on the Internet - 42% at home, and 10-15% at work. Whites and educated people are more likely to be connected, African-Americans and Hispanics less so. Bengalis, incidentally, are highly connected; many send e-mails in Bengali written in the Roman script.

A study conducted by the Audience Research Bureau of Doordarshan found that rural India television ownership was related to the affluence of the State.

A majority of TV owners held salaried jobs, owned land or were in business and trade.

Agricultural workers who account for 50 per cent of the rural population owned only 15 per cent of rural TV sets.

There are an estimated 22 million television sets in rural India and the total TV homes in India stand at 55 million.

Over 40 per cent of the rural populace have access to TV at home in the northern states of Punjab Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Eastern states like West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar report a penetration of lesser than 15 per cent.

The moderate penetration segment (17 to 23 per cent) included states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Assam.