

## [Aparna Bhatnagar, Founder - Green and Good Store](#)

Friday, 11 June 2010 23:41

YourStory Team

Entrepreneurs - Green Entrepreneurs

**Responsible consumerism, Green Entrepreneurship and More**



Saving the environment while bringing sustainable development, social empowerment, economic inclusion and preservation of traditional knowledge, seems like a pretty tall order especially in India. Aparna Bhatnagar is a young entrepreneur who has taken on this challenge and she has performed admirably well so far. She told us more saying “FuturEyez India” doing business as “Green and Good Store” is a social enterprise with the vision to “Enable a

Happier, Healthier future for all”

Yourstory spoke to Aparna to learn more about her work and her concepts in detail

### **What is “The Green and Good store” and what are its core products?**

[The Green and Good store](#) is an online retail store that sells products which bring about positive environmental and social change in the world. Every product sold at the store supports at least one pillar of sustainable development and thus promotes environmental sustainability, social empowerment, economic inclusion and preservation of traditional knowledge.

The store has partnered with over 15 rural artisans, NGOs and socially and environmentally responsible organizations in the 8 months since its inception. Most products are fair wage certified; craft mark or have relevant certifications such as GOTS for organic cotton. The range includes Organic Cotton apparel for men, women, kids; bags and wallets made from Jute, Cotton, and cruelty free leather, Stoles and Dupattas including Ahimsa Silk, Tree free Hand made paper stationery and traditional handicrafts. Store’s long term goal is to be the place where you can get socially and environmentally responsible alternatives to everyday products at affordable price.

### **Can you elaborate on the ethos of Responsible consumerism behind the Green and Good store?**

The thought behind the store is to leverage the power of consumerism for social, economic and environmental change. We believe that as customers, we are capable of exercising enormous power for the betterment of our world. Every time you

handout your valuable money to the shopkeeper you are agreeing to everything that went into making it happen. Responsible consumerism is all about asking what went into it? Did it exploit the environment; were people paid fair wages, were their working conditions safe, did it threaten traditional rural livelihoods and traditional knowledge of communities?

Responsible consumerism is a win-win solution for everyone. Firstly, when you provide money in return for a responsible product, such as one made by members of an NGO, the NGOs get the much needed cash for their development programmes. You provide liquidity for the provisioning of services that make our society a happier place. Secondly, you encourage the development of a market for such products, which makes their production economically viable. So effectively you encourage people to manufacture products made from recycled paper, recycled plastic, take up organic farming, you provide economic incentive for artisans to continue making traditional handicrafts and pass on their tradition, knowledge, methods and culture to the next generation, you help sustain rural livelihoods which prevents people from migrating to cities in desperation. Lastly, the biggest benefit you reap is that you also choose a healthier lifestyle for yourself and your families as many of these products are healthier for you and our environment.

### **How does your work plan to make a difference to the world?**

There are lots of things - about our business that help us make a difference to the world, beginning with our reason for coming into existence - to promote sustainable development through responsible consumerism

We believe that for development to be truly sustainable it has to take into account all four aspects of sustainability namely environmental, social, economic and cultural as all the four are interlinked. Therefore our focus is not on promoting only green or eco friendly products but also products that create a healthy society and economy while protecting the traditional knowledge of communities. It may be impossible for every product to be sustainable on all four counts but it is possible to have an overall lifestyle that is. Thus our store showcases products that support different aspects of sustainable development and not just one .

We also want to make our business as sustainable as possible. We have made a beginning and will keep continuously working in this direction.

- We use biodegradable material (including plastic) for packaging
- Our tags are larger than usual so that they can be used as a book mark before being thrown away.
- We will be looking at greening the whole supply chain as business grows
- Being an online store our energy consumption is very low as we don't consume energy for lighting or air-conditioning
- We have our site hosted on a certified green webhost.
- We provide customers with detailed information on the product, its attributes, impact, producer so that they can make a more informed choice

### **How does the business model work and how is it monetized?**

A customer orders online and pays via the payment gateway by his / her credit /debit card, net banking or PayPal. We get the order door delivered to the customer's address. All the products are checked for quality at our Delhi office before being shipped out to the customer.

We put in a lot of effort while choosing our partners. Their work should lead to positive change for the society or the environment. Ideology of the organization or the entrepreneur, their vision should be in line with ours. The product should provide a sustainable alternative to an existing need. The quality of product by the NGO or the artisan should be consistently satisfactory. The impact of our intervention on the organization and its beneficiaries should be meaningful.

We also work with artisans who are engaged in making handicrafts that are threatened or not able to access market directly. We work with individuals and organizations irrespective of their size – big small, location –cities/villages, as long as they can convince us of the good work being done by them and the quality.

We are also launching Corporate Gifting solutions very soon - We believe that corporations today are key stakeholders in sustainable development and that their involvement and support is critical if we have to overcome social and environmental challenges facing us. Corporate actions have a much larger impact as they are visible to a large number of people. Sustainable Corporate gifts can be a great way to demonstrate commitment towards social and environmental responsibility by a company to its vendors, employees, customers and shareholders. We are putting together a whole product range suitable for corporate gifting and use in conference/ business events. These products will be eco-friendly and generate sustainable livelihoods for rural artisans, disadvantaged groups and people with disabilities.

### **What is the end goal for the green and good store?**

Our goal is to offer a wide range of products that help people live a more socially and environmentally responsible lives. We plan to bring many more products that tell a green and good story. The store too will grow with more interesting features such as wish lists, and ability to donate reward points etc.

### **Why did you choose entrepreneurship over all the other career choices out there?**

Although there is job security and money that comes with a 9-5 job, but the scope, direction and your rate of growth is limited by what the company has space for. I felt there was so much more that I wanted to do and apply myself to several different things, which a 9-5 job does not provide.

The freedom that comes with of being an entrepreneur is the most beautiful one. You may not be earning big bucks and of course you take the risk of doing it all wrong but, the satisfaction and pleasure of creating something new beats everything

else. It's almost addictive, you work 24x7 and yet you can't get enough of what you are doing.

### **How did this store come about? What made you start this venture?**

After post graduation from DSE in 2000, I joined Seva Mandir, an NGO working in the field of Rural Development. Seva Mandir experience made it clear to me that my long term career interest was in the field of development. Studying at IIM-A convinced me of the need for self sustaining organizations that could support their own growth, especially when the goal was to bring about social and environmental change. During my work with companies such as Citibank and Dun and Bradstreet, I realized that many employees like me wanted to contribute to the society and environment but found it difficult to take time out from work and family pressures. Since most of us were generally short on time, volunteering regularly with NGOs was difficult. The need was to find a way of making an impact with actions that we took as part of everyday life, and this is just where responsible consumerism fitted in. Responsible consumerism is about choosing products that support positive change in the society, it is about a lifestyle where everything that you owned has benefited the world in some way or the other and not exploited it. However, there was little information on what such products were, their impact and where you could find them. A few products that were available were available only in a few select stores and often at exorbitant prices. Therefore, in mid 2008 I decided to quit corporate career to create a place that made it possible for people to make an impact, socially and environmentally, as part of everyday life. Thus was born [www.greenandgoodstore.com](http://www.greenandgoodstore.com), the thought behind the store was simple – to leverage the power of consumerism for social, economic and environmental change.

### **What are the challenges you have faced and what pointers can you give to others in similar positions?**

There is growing concern people have for environment. Almost everybody will agree that they would like to be more responsible environmentally. I feel that for a vast majority of us the concern ends at turning off unnecessary lights and making changes where they suit us. The biggest challenge for us is to get people to think beyond that. There are larger implications of our consumption choices as all products employ human and material resources for production. Impacting the way people consume will have an impact on how things are produced.

A lot of positive impact can be achieved for a country like India, with almost 70% of our population and 75% of our poor living in villages -. Wouldn't it be great if we created a sustainable source of income for people right there? By supporting artisans and rural producers we not only prevent them from leaving their traditional skills, migrating to urban slums and doing unskilled work, but also preserve the local ecosystems as most of the traditional crafts are environment friendly and are looked after by local communities who have a direct stake in its upkeep.

By buying fairwage products we ensure that people are not exploited, children are not employed. By purchasing organically produced products we restore soil fertility, reduce ground water pollution and get a healthier product. To actually get people to

consider, buy and use these products often enough to have a substantial impact and be part of their life the biggest challenge we face. This is not easy for us or for our customers as it involves changing a lot of things, including buying habits.

Although responsible consumerism means that you just replace what you usually buy with a smarter alternative and not necessarily spend more! For example organic cotton t-shirts on our store are priced at par with non organic cotton t-shirt of similar quality. The big challenge that every green or social business faces is to make people realize that when they buy a responsible product the slight premium that they might be paying is probably the right price for a product.

Products that pollute are cheaper because the cost of pollution and damage is not transferred to the customer but get borne by communities and it is mostly the poor who are eventually affected by this. If the product price factored in all those externalities, the price would be much higher. Also, most of us don't take into account the price we pay for greater pollution, health problems or social problems due to increasing migration to cities. Everything is linked and we will pay for it in one way or the other. The way we are addressing this is by communicating our philosophy to people, giving them as much information as possible. We do this through our website, our blogs and our Facebook and twitter pages. Very soon we will be starting a newsletter that will be focused on responsible consumerism.

### **What is the one business - mistake that you wish you could take back?**

One of our big mistakes was that during one of our campaigns we overestimated demand for a particular product and built up a very large inventory which we could not liquidate. For a startup blocked funds is one of the worst things that can happen, especially when you know that the money tied up in those goods could have been put to better use. But we learnt a lot from this experience and were lucky that it was early on. The big lesson was that public concern for a cause does not mean that people will also buy our products even if they support the cause. Now we are more careful and do a better assessment before blocking our capital.

### **Who has helped you on your entrepreneurial journey with FuturEyez India ?**

Our store is just 6 months old and we are making steady progress. This has been possible because of the superbly committed team that we have. Although I took the lead and started the store, everyone else in the team has worked equally hard at making the store happen. Vinay Choletti (my husband and classmate from IIM-A) was my partner right from conceptualizing the store. He brings knowledge of sales and financial planning. Piyush Verma (also an entrepreneur himself) maintains our web presence and brings expertise in an area very critical to us – the web technology. Krishna Soujanya (classmate from IIM-A) brought in expertise from her retailing experience with leading retailing companies, Pallav Bhatnagar helps us with our communications, Mrs. Sushila Krishnan with 25 years of corporate experience behind her has helped us in Business Development, my father Dr. M.S.Bhatnagar, who served the Indian Defence Forces for 34 years, helps us manage our business operations at Jaipur and Alok Pradhan (class mate from IIM-A) helps us with various ideas and inputs. Another person who has helped me in a very significant and profound way is Prof. Anil Gupta from IIM-A. I have been very fortunate to be his

student. His guidance, encouragement and support have given me a lot of inspiration and strength to realize my dreams.

**How has business been so far? What progress have you made?**

Traffic to our site has grown very well over the last few months. Many people have liked and appreciated the concept of our store. We started international delivery last month and have recently fulfilled orders to Australia and Canada; our customers have appreciated the quality of our products and the service. We have been receiving queries from customers in UK and USA too, and are positive of increasing international sales significantly as concepts such as responsible consumerism and fair trade are already popular there.

For Holi we promoted eco-friendly and natural colors made by intellectually disabled youth from the Avacayam Cooperative at the Society for Child development. We received excellent response for the colours with many people choosing to send them as gifts to their loved ones in other parts of the country. Students and faculty from one of the premier management institutes supported this cause by celebrating Holi with these colours

**Which areas do you think Indian Green entrepreneurship - needs support /help with?**

Data. While there is plenty of data available on Green trends for US and EU markets, there is either very little of it which is India specific and where it is available it is quite expensive. Therefore easy access to industry data, reports, studies especially for emerging fields such as Green or social business in the Indian market is not there. This means that green/social entrepreneurs need to work with lot more assumptions and interpretations drawn from international markets making the risks higher.

**Do you have any projects in the pipeline?**

We are also launching Corporate Gifting solutions very soon - We believe that corporations today are key stakeholders in sustainable development and that their involvement and support is critical if we have to overcome social and environmental challenges facing us. Corporate actions have a much larger impact as they are visible to a large number of people. Sustainable Corporate gifts can be a great way to demonstrate commitment towards social and environmental responsibility by a company to its vendors, employees, customers and shareholders. We are putting together a whole product range suitable for corporate gifting and use in conference/business events. These products will be eco-friendly and generate sustainable livelihoods for rural artisans, disadvantaged groups and people with disabilities.

**What makes you prefer entrepreneurship to a regular job?**

Having invested all savings in a new concept is scary sometimes but having tasted entrepreneurship, it's now impossible to think of going back to a regular job. Also, this is a social enterprise thus money was neither the driving factor for starting this venture nor for sticking with it. I believe in what I am doing and I am prepared to put in whatever it takes.

As an entrepreneur you are able to stretch yourself in every direction. Learning is exponential and the satisfaction from creating something new is beyond compare. It is a lot of struggle, lot of confusion, lot of sorting out but when you see the progress you make every day it gives you faith in your own ability to go on and do more.

**What would you advise to entrepreneurs whose dreams are as challenging as yours?**

For those who have a dream but are waiting for the right moment to jump in I would pass on what Professor Anil Gupta advised me... “Trust your instincts and follow your inner voice” ..There will never be a perfect time and there will always be reasons for not doing it now. The best time is now. From my experience, two things a budding entrepreneur should never be without are Perseverance and Patience.

We thank Aparna for her time and insightful answers to our questions. Aparna’s social and Green Crusade with “FuturEyez India” bears a lot of solid potential and we at Yourstory wish her success with every green step she takes.