

ROLE MODEL

'I climbed, slipped and climbed again'

A successful entrepreneur and author of a bestseller, PINAKI GHOSH tasted success at the age of 17 but feels he has come little less than half the way

BY SHUBHDARSHANI MITRA

THIRTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD PINAKI GHOSH is a successful businessman and a writer known for his bestseller *Nostradamus — The True Story* published when he was 17. He does not have a formal degree in business administration but acquired knowledge from his experiences. Based in Kolkata, Pinaki runs a business of providing writers to those who need them. His site *writer4me.com* is presently the number one 'ghostwriter hire' site by popularity (according to *Alexa.com*'s latest rankings). His company has worked for several celebrities in the US, Europe and India, including prominent Bollywood stars. They are also into a 10-movie screenplay deal for a British production house. His father is a Bengali writer who has written 19 bestsellers. In an interview to *Management Compass*, Pinaki shares his journey till date.

Describe yourself as a school student. Were you always very enterprising and what were your interest areas?

I went to an Irish Christian missionary school. I was a good student, but not the nerd, bookworm type. I

started a magazine (as the editor) when I was in standard VIII (I was 14 at that time). The main contributors were my classmates. It was fairly good. It had comics and even short stories from established writers. Those days (I am talking about 1988) magazines published by the school were not so much in vogue. This magazine continued for four years. I had great interest in comics. Tintin was my favourite. I came up with a series named 'Birdman' for my magazine. I did the writing and drawing part of it. I pursued this from the age of 14 to 18.

When did it dawn upon you that you would like to pursue writing? What was your first experience as a writer?

A number of factors added to my pursuing writing for a living. My father is a professional bestseller Bengali writer. I was in many ways inspired by his profession. My house was always filled with books. There were 4,000+ books in my house and I read most of them. I was publishing a magazine in school for four years; my subject was also English. All these factors con-



tributed to my shaping up as a writer.

You gave a bestseller at the age of 17 and have authored quite a few books. How did you take your first baby steps?

My first book released when I was just 17 (still in school). It turned out to be a bestseller. That was the turning point of my life. In those days there was much propaganda about a French astrologer named *Nostradamus*, who had made 1,000 predictions, many of which were claimed (by the media) to have come true. I became curious to find

out what did this man actually write (since all we were getting to hear were much altered versions of his prophecies). When I went through his books, I was taken aback to find out that none of his prophecies point to anything that actually happened in this modern world. I wrote a book to break the myth of Nostradamus, exposing the misleading propaganda of the media. *Nostradamus — The True Story* was my first bestseller. Later my publisher (Dey's Publishing — one of the top five publishing houses of Eastern India) encouraged me to come up with a new book every year.

How hard was the climb up the ladder?

It wasn't absolutely smooth. Creative pursuits are never smooth. Traditional business is smoother. I climbed, slipped and climbed again.

You are running your own digital media, one of the growing media groups of the US, UK, and India. Were there any initial glitches in terms of skills required for successful handling of the job? How far have you come?

My organisation *Writer4me.com* is based on knowledge outsourcing, which is a growing trend in India. When I started my writer-hire site in 2005, we faced some challenges in the international market — Indian organisations were looked at skeptically; we had to work at rock bottom prices. Today, in 2007-08 India is shining and we have a much better status. We are doing business holding our heads high (Indian organisations are highly trusted nowadays in the international market). Similar American organisations are facing the crisis of extinction (for the price difference) and are very unhappy with organisations like ours. I suppose I have come little less than half the way. I am looking forward to an early retirement — by the age of 40.

What kind of books do you like to read? Which is/are your favourite author/s and book/s?

I have two very different likings —

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self-help/business, and novels. Normally I read self-help books; but when I am relaxing, I am normally reading a novel. I have great love for thrillers. My favourite authors are Satyajit Ray and Ruskin Bond. *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps* by Allan & Barbara Pease and *Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown are my favourite books.

Is ghostwriting quite prevalent these days?

Today's world is changing at the speed of lightning. In the last 15 years, we had more inventions that we had in 2,000 years prior to that. In the next five years we will have more inventions than we had in the last 15 years. As a result, trades and professions are short-lasting nowadays. BPOs that boomed in India in the beginning of this decade are facing stiff competition from countries like the Philippines. But ghostwriting is a trade that has lasted for a few centuries. Ghostwriters evolved from speechwriters. I expect it to stay for a long time. Movie screenplays are being outsourced to India. We have bagged a 10-screenplay contract from a British producer. We are eyeing the American film industry. I am expecting several Hollywood movie screenplays to be outsourced to India this year to organisations like ours. These are good deals — \$400,000 (about 1.6 crore rupees) for a story and screenplay.

You claim to be the pioneer in the creation of regional greeting cards. At what age did you conceptualise the idea and what was the experience?

I launched the world's first Bengali language greeting cards in the year 2,000, which were very successful. The first lot of 80,000 New Year

cards flew off the racks in seven days flat. I was 26 then. I used to give greeting cards hand-designed by me to my girlfriend (who later became my wife) Shonali. Every card had some new concept. Later it struck my mind why there are no greeting cards in people's mother tongue. People express their feelings best in their mother tongue. When I went ahead with the concept of the world's first regional language greeting cards, 80 per cent people warned me — greeting cards can only be in English. My main supporter was my wife and my distributor, Kirit Kothari (Aakash greeting cards). When it was launched, it was much like releasing a movie about which most people were skeptical. Thankfully the majority were proven wrong. Not only did my brand see success, it started a trend of regional language cards. Both Archies and Expressions greeting cards (ITC) wanted to acquire my brand *Swapner Karkhana*.

You have also worked with BBC and National Geographic Channel, and have ventured into movie direction apart from being part of the publishing world. What is the secret behind your versatility?

It could be because my father is versatile. He is a bestseller popular Bengali writer, a filmmaker, a good cartoonist. He is also a good public speaker; which I am not. I closely observed him while growing up.

Anything you would like to share with the readers? Any school incident which helped you to shape your career?

My message to all young aspiring entrepreneurs and executives is that India is a great country. It is going to be the second most powerful nation (after China) by 2040. Entrepreneurs from abroad are coming to invest in India. Whatever you do, do it in your country. Contribute towards your country. If you are studying abroad, come back to India and make a career here. India is powerful and India needs you.

As I said before, my first bestseller at 17 was the turning point of my life. ■