

## WARP AND WEFT: Amit Jain

Amit Jain, B.S. '95, knows the warp and weft of a strong fabric. He also knows success. His company, Shingora Textiles Limited, is India's largest brand, manufacturer, and exporter of shawls and scarves. Though his story began and continues in the industrial center of Ludhiana, in north-west India, Human Environmental Sciences contributed some the weft threads in his life's rich fabric.

As a teenager, Jain dreamt of leaving India to study. He applied to schools in the United Kingdom, but the cost was out of his reach. A friend who was studying at the University of Kentucky suggested UK. Since HES offered a degree in merchandising, apparel, and textiles, now in the Department of Retailing and Tourism Management, Jain agreed to have the friend look into it for him.

It was arranged. If Jain could pay for his first semester and keep his grades up, the Office for International Students promised to see what they could do to help him finish his bachelor's degree.

"My mother literally sold her gold bangles to buy my airline tickets and my first semester fees," he said.

Arriving in Lexington on the first day of orientation, Jain landed in a world utterly foreign to the one he knew.

He loved it.

"I think that's what made me who I am today. Sometimes I wish that our kids (Jain and his wife have a son and daughter) could get that kind of exposure to getting thrown into the deep end of the ocean and fending for themselves. And I was lucky I was in a place like this that was very friendly. I didn't feel like an outsider."

The late Karen Ketch, Jain's advisor, made his transition easier. She helped him select the right courses and tailored his college requirements to prepare him for a successful career after graduation.

"That first semester was tough. It was hard to get used to the pace and the way it worked here," he said.

Jain started to get the hang of it during his second semester, and because his grades were good, he received a scholarship to continue his education.

Adding to the depth of his education, he was able to take a variety of courses, such as merchandising, color theory, history of theater design, and art history. In the textile labs, he learned about setting up the product.

"This is the most amazing thing, and this is why I want my kids to study in the U.S.—the flexibility one has in terms of picking courses that you really like. These things have helped me a lot."

After graduation and an eight-month internship with The J. Peterman Company, where he set up a quality control program, Jain returned to Ludhiana to help his mother with the business she had started 10 years before.



"When I joined the company, it was a very small business. It was hand looms, like a micro-business," he said. "My mother and I built it up to where it is today."

In 20 years, Shingora has gone from 20 employees to 900. Jain said it took a lot of hard work and faith in himself.

"At every point, somebody is going to come and tell you, this is never going to work. When we imported the first Italian and German machines to make this product, everyone said, 'It's stupid, because nobody's ever used these machines for these products; it's not going to work, it's going to fail.' Those machines cost us more than all the fortune we had in the family, so it was a big risk," he said.

It was a risk that paid off.

Today, Jain is a member of Retailing and Tourism Management's advisory board.

"His presence on the board is much needed, since his view is an international one," said Kimberly Miller-Spillman, associate professor in Retailing and Tourism Management. "Plus, his life story mirrors many RTM students who are struggling to pay their way through a degree at UK."

To Jain, it's a way of helping the department that meant so much to him.

"One needs to give back; that's the other thing I learned at UK," he said.

Along those lines, he and his wife have set up a foundation in India for the education of young girls. Currently, they have 55 girls in a program that takes care of all their educational needs.

One day, some of those girls might end up studying in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. That would please Jain greatly.

—Carol Lea Spence