

Novel innovator

Before you could think another teenager has written a chic-lit romance novel, **Poonam Sharma**, an MBA student at the Wharton School, will gladly tell you she is on the verge of the big 30s.

But Poonam, whose first novel *Girl Most Likely To* is published this month by a small press, will also tell you she has written two business books, and the first, *The Harvard Entrepreneur Club Guide to Starting Your Own Business*, was published over seven years ago by Wiley, a major company. She apparently does not work in a box, hence the novel.

If she took many years to come out with her first novel after writing her business book, she seems to have good reasons for doing so.

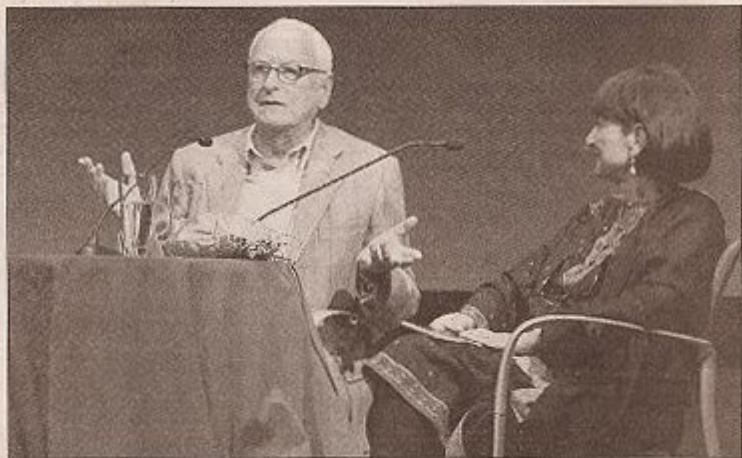
For, New York-born Sharma, who wrote her first book while at Harvard, has also worked on a nonprofit start-up venture. She has spent a year wandering around the world alone, she says, "often under a pseudonym, and living through all kinds of adventures I would not trade for anything."

Her novel revolves around New York investment banker Vina Chopra whose sexist wit and mastery of Yiddish accent could make her a tough cookie, but not when it comes to choosing a life partner.

Her own attempts at finding a life mate don't work out; her parents, efforts to fix her up with someone she might really like fizzle too. Vina's life becomes even more complicated when she is involved in an office scandal. On a hot afternoon and amidst an unexpected black out, Vina starts to look within herself as never before.

Can Vina put aside the expectations of her parents and friends to become a girl who could find happiness by herself?

By the end of the novel, Vina might find some solutions, but not all her problems are going to vanish. Otherwise, Sharma would not be writing a sequel, which she hopes to be published next year.



Ivory on India

The death of Ismail Merchant in May 2005 made one thing clear for director **James Ivory** — that he would not make another film in India.

"I don't feel I know India anymore," Ivory, 79, said last week. He was in conversation with actress **Madhur Jaffrey** at New York City's Rubin Museum of Art.

"Without Ismail I couldn't do it," Ivory added. "He made everything work out. He was the producer and India was his country."

Ivory first visited India in the early 1960s to direct his short film *The Delhi Way*. He then directed six features — *The Householder* (1963), *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965), *The Guru* (1969), *Bombay Talkies* (1970), *Hullabaloo Over Georgie And Bonnie's Pictures* (1978), *Heat And Dust* (1983). The Merchant-Ivory team returned to India for a few more films, including *In Custody* (1993) and *Cotton Mary* (1999), both directed by Merchant.

When Ivory visited India to direct *The Delhi Way*, his first experience was that of joy. But then his equipment and film was held up by the Indian customs department. "That's when the irritation began," Ivory said. But he added that India remained a part of his life for a long time.

The Merchant-Ivory team often ran into trouble in India — from the shortage of money while they were shooting *Heat and Dust* and **Shashi Kapoor** came to the rescue of the team by putting up his own money; to the protest against the *sati* scene in *The Deceivers*; and the Anglo-Indian protest against the portrayal of the lead character in *Cotton Mary*.

The Rubin Museum conversation followed the American premiere of French filmmaker **Catherine Berge's** documentary *Three Holy Rivers* — an exploration of the collaboration between Ivory, Merchant and their long-time friend and scriptwriter **Ruth Praver Jhabvala**. Berge had earlier directed *Gaach*, based on the life of Bengali actor **Soumitra Chatterjee**.

