Another Story
Reimagining PRIA in 2020

Key Note Speech
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PRIA was my second start-up; a Hindi monthly at IIT (Kanpur) was my first. It did not become sustainable.

I had two ‘Angel Investors’ when PRIA was started. They gave advice, encouragement, and networking support at the start-up. They made no financial investment. We were ‘panj pyaras’ (five persons) when I raised the idea of a ‘new venture’ in 1980. Other four provided some technical advice; one of them gave market linkages for the services PRIA was starting to provide. I invested my small capital, used furniture and family transport to get started.

The market for ‘software’ services PRIA was offering had not yet fully developed then. Most customers were hesitant to ‘buy’ our software. International leverage from two sources gave initial ‘brand’ identity to PRIA. One made an early, and risky, investment for one year, with likely continued resource access if ‘software uptake’ was valued by customers. Another created opportunities for PRIA’s ‘business’ to be publicly endorsed by global brands. New investments came in after five years of ‘success’ in the software delivery and installation to a number of valued clients.

New investors enabled two important developments in the ‘maturing’ of PRIA. A global business centre for its operations was built and furnished with latest technology. And, several new lines of business, building on the brand image, were launched.

Next came strategy for scaling up PRIA’s software business in new national and international markets. New knowledge partnership with a leading global brand was leveraged through some new start-ups and franchising with others. Investing in new start-ups in different niche markets in India was actively supported through mentoring. New entrepreneurs of these start-ups were networked with global knowledge and investment partners.

The next phase of scaling up was undertaken through selection of local providers of new software products. Deep market penetration became cost-effective through active investment in technical and professional capacities of such providers. The vast and active network of these providers made PRIA a district level recognised brand for a strong package of software products.

About ten years ago, global markets for such software products began to shift dramatically. Demographic profile of consumers became more educated and networked through growing penetration of digital technology. Asian economies began to dominate global trade. PRIA began to redesign its software services and products for the new markets.

Three strategic choices were made for re-tooling PRIA’s business at that juncture. First, greater attention to the aspirations of young girls and women required significant design changes in new services of PRIA. It further implied that delivery of such software had to be linked to institutional markets where such customers interact.

Second, given the different profile of young customers in the marketplace, and requirements of using PRIA’s products and services in their mode of consumption, new partnerships were built with colleges and universities as sites for delivery of such software.
Third, the demand for delivery of software in situ, in real time, at the place and time convenient to each customer became very salient. Online delivery of customised software products for customers became an integral part of marketing.

PRIA is now positioned in the market for such software products and services as an innovator and incubator of socially demanded innovations. Its supply chain has now become value chain for operating at global scale, where aggregator platforms of PRIA enable decentralised, client specific delivery of customised software. PRIA is now recognised as a Knowledge Hub for a wide range of software products and services that promote equitable, just and inclusive realisation of SDGs. Its cutting edge socio-technical solutions have made its brand a market leader.

PRIA is a successful, sustainable, global social enterprise contributing software solutions for human well-being and environmental resilience worldwide.

Two factors have enabled PRIA to become sustainable and respected software social enterprise--certain recent measures by regulators for improving ‘ease of doing business’, and consistent use of effective commercial approaches by PRIA in business planning and execution.

I am a ‘serial’ entrepreneur. I have been taking risks to incubate new start-ups globally. I have invested in nearly 200 such start-ups over the last four decades. My success rate would be about 75% overall. The greatest risk I took as an entrepreneur was in PRIA as a start-up at the start of my career.

I am pleased with the emerging eco-system of new opportunities for software products and services so that PRIA will continue to maintain its pioneering contributions.

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