

## AASHNA SHROFF

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## GIRL CODING CAMPS

Hyderabad

Back in high school, Aashna Shroff was one of only two girls studying computer science. Today, she's a Stanford sophomore in computer science with a minor in economics, and the founder of Girl Coding Camps (GCC) — an initiative out of Hyderabad that seeks to fight gender disparity in the world of coding. "When airbags were invented, there were reportedly more deaths in cars than before. It was discovered later that airbags were invented for a man's body, and as a result, women were dying. Had a woman been on board while designing airbag prototypes, this wouldn't have happened. Having a diverse team is beneficial to the product; it is better economics," Shroff says.

GCC came out of Shroff's Stanford experience. The initiative, now a year old, has hosted multiple workshops in five schools across Hyderabad, culminating in a "hackathon", where participants from different schools could participate. A team of Stanford students helped her organise these camps, the first of which was held in her alma mater, CHIREC International School. "There aren't as many girls in coding in the US either, so there were a lot of initiatives on campus to ensure that girls took it up. I wanted to bring that back to India, and encourage young girls to not shy away from the subject."

Keeping that in mind, GCC lays emphasis on introducing their participants to women in technology. "We asked them to name famous men in the world of tech and they had Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Sundar Pichai, Bill Gates, Satya Nadella. When we asked them to name women, they couldn't come up with one. One of our goals is to show them what role women have played in technology, women whose names have been left out or neglected. We would begin our workshops with presentations about them, and keep bringing them up later as well."

The workshops introduced 10th graders to web development, mobile app development, and hands-on thinking in the field of information technology, teaching them how to build and develop their own websites and apps. "Some of them made their websites 'cool', while others made them interactive. For mobile app development, we used a software called the MIT App Inventor, which makes it easy to develop your own Android apps. I think the underlying themes of these workshops were that we made them interactive and fun," Shroff says, recalling how many of the participants were amazed at the fact that they could develop their websites and apps right there at the workshop, instead of working on them for weeks and months on end as they had previously assumed.

Over the next year, Shroff wants to reach out to government schools that don't normally have access to computer science training. Further, she wants to set up GCC clubs in the

schools where they held workshops so that can keep up with their training. "What I love about computer science is that it helps you solve problems. When you are learning how to code, you are also developing a way of thinking, something I don't want young girls to be discouraged from," Shroff says, with the larger vision of bringing more diversity into coding for future generations.

— Payel Majumdar

## VARUN SATYAM

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## PUNRUT

Kochi

Varun Satyam has big plans — he's on to something that, he feels, could potentially alter how education is approached in the country. Indians have been stereotyped internationally for being diligent and hardworking, but that often masks the ingrained flaws our education system — an indispensable part of any functioning society, more so in the developing world — suffers from. The 21-year-old from Kochi, in his final year of engineering, thinks that Punrut could be the answer.

He had always wanted to contribute to the education sector, having identified its impracticality and the many shortcomings in the way it works. "The education sector is very detached from the real world. What we learn is not directly applied to the market." Punrut is a 'knowledge network', one that bridges the gap between faculty and students. "It will be instrumental in connecting a person in any location to anyone across the world," he says. "For instance, if a student fancies a mentor in a prestigious institute in a different country, they could connect through this platform," he says, adding, "the idea is to digitise the whole education base. While most educational institutions are short on resources, infrastructure, and skilled teachers, Punrut will turn the whole system into one big database where a skilled and sought-after mentor can be accessed by students from across the world."

He's developed Punrut in association with the Kochi Startup Village, which has provided the required infrastructure. The product is already 60% ready, and should be rolled out by the first week of March, starting in India before expanding globally. However, we should rewind just a bit.

Punrut in reverse spells Turn Up, which is the name of the venture that Varun founded, which originally began as a service for design of websites as well as mobile and web applications. "When I started TurnUp 10 months ago," says Varun, "we were dealing with only services in terms of designing websites and mobile or web applications. Even though TurnUp initially started as an initiative to build products that could be helpful to society, I had very little idea about the industry — my view was limited because of my ongoing course." It was a place to start, a place to gain valuable experience; and, eventually, Varun, searching for a solution to