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CUT TO FIT

Her store has been visited by A-Listers such as Goldie Hawn and Bob Dylan. BEHROZE SINGH, Director, of the all-women staffed 'Cottons' shares her success story

>> SAVIA RAJAGOPAL

Did you have a background in fashion before you joined the garment retail industry?

I graduated from St. Xavier's college, Mumbai and met my husband there who is a Rajput from Jaipur. I completed post-graduation from Government Law College but got married soon after and left for Jaipur. I have absolutely no technical background in fashion designing or any related field. I was looking for something to do and so joined the family-owned garment business, 'Anokhi' and worked with my mother-in-law. I developed their retail business across India.

What was your learning experience like?

I wasn't really handling design but I completely took care of buying and thereby developed a business sense. I also learnt how to apply for a license, the income tax and sales tax procedures and how to tackle all sorts of people. It was truly a learning experience as I got to know the finer nuances of running a business.

So, what prompted you to start out a venture of your own?

After 10 years of working in the family, I decided I had to do something individually. I started with children's clothes, but after a year I realised it was a very limited market. I was inundated with requests for adult clothing in similar fabric and finally set up the first outlet of 'Cottons' in Jaipur in 1999.

What are the various aspects of your work? Are you a hands-on boss?

I am involved with everything! From start to finish. I handle the accounts, finance, staff – hiring and firing, the salaries and it's an entirely women team. They are efficient and have a definite eye for detail. I have 25 women working for me, 40 tailors working for the company and another 40 outside. I have a separate unit of 100-150 women who do the handwork.

What are the challenges you've faced as a businesswoman?

Initially when I needed money, nobody gave me a loan. I went to the bank and they asked me to mortgage some property against the money. When you're working with karigars and suppliers, all payments have to be paid on time or they won't come to work with you. Finances were a challenge because I wanted to make sure that I didn't overspend in my project.

How did you get involved with NGOs?

There is always some leftover fabric which would be wasted otherwise. So, we decided to make small bags and giveaways. Rajmata Gayatri Devi runs a school for poor children and I work with those girls. The work is spread out in the village.

How have you managed to balance home and work simultaneously?

My husband has been very supportive. He doesn't interfere at all with my business. I am quite active in Jaipur otherwise; I am on the board of directors for Rajmata's school. I give full credit to my upbringing in Mumbai. I give complete attention to detail, be it in my personal or professional life.

