

Radha Rajakrishnan: Weaving Success in Apparel Biz

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Situated right in the middle of Anna Nagar's residential sector in Chennai, Amrita Custom Elegance, an exclusive boutique is run by gracious Radha Rajakrishnan. As she smiles, an instant rapport is established. It's hard not to warm up to her, and it was truly an astonishing fact that she is the mother of two grown up children settled abroad.

Radha's boutique is not just an ordinary one that anyone would casually walk into, to while away their time. She specialises entirely in bridal attire and garments for special occasions. She is a very talented person who has dabbled in a variety of endeavours before she decided to start this boutique. Initially she had been anchoring for Doordarshan's national programme of dance. From 1989- 1992, she worked for a travel agency. From 1992, for a long stint of 12 years, she was with Singapore Airlines, and finally she decided to call it a day and venture out on her own, much to the dismay of her family and friends.

In the year 2002, along with a friend, she started this unique boutique and continued very successfully until 2007, when she had to take a break for personal reasons. Beginning of 2009 saw her back in action and she took up the reins of this business on her own and there has been no looking back from day one.

'I help design bridal attire right from choosing the colours that suit each client. I take time off to do shopping for material of their choice by accompanying them on their shopping sprees. I have my own tailoring unit adjoining this boutique with a team of three excellent tailors and five embroidery experts,-'dimples Radha as she elaborates.

She retains samples of her work to exhibit to her prospective clients. Exquisitely embroidered cholis, designer wear, and custom made attire are all on display. Radha procures her material from Gujarat and Benares, and locally from Nallis in T Nagar

Her cholis and ghagras are a virtual feast to the eyes, a beautiful and amazing blend of textiles- Kalamkari, Madhubani, Benares crepes, georgette, appliqué work in rich colours and hues. “I am truly happy to have an expert master tailor who is capable of translating my designs to beautiful apparels par excellence’- says Radha.” I love mixing and matching Kalamkari and appliqué work I have plans of exporting my custom made apparel in due course. I want to concentrate more on the embroidery work. Within two years, I visualise and aspire to increase my work force to 25” confidently asserts Radha.

The boutique exhibits a wide range of zardosi work with stones, Kalamkari tree of life appliqué with thread work (ari), Chettinad saris with Kalamkari work, to be paired off with Phulkari cholis. Radha works on base colours in earthy tones that are totally worked on in blues and greens, shocking pinks and oranges, transforming them into amazing pieces of art.

Her expertise and service does not end with just designing bridal attire or special occasion apparel. Her long stint with Singapore airlines has stood her in good stead and has paved way for her to venture into personal grooming sessions too. Radha is a frequent invitee at Standard Chartered bank at Haddows road and at their Padur branch to give talks on personal grooming and good dress sense to their staff. She educates them on the entire gamut of grooming, right from choosing the right shades and attire to suit their complexion and physique. She has recently been invited to give grooming sessions at Anna Adarsh College at Chennai. For her customers at the boutique, she gives free one on one grooming sessions, and tips like when to bring the focus on to the neckline etc..

Apart from her exclusive and ever mushrooming clientele at Chennai, friends from abroad send their measurements and specifications on which she works on to provide them custom made elegant designer apparel, and couriers back to them. Since these friends cannot make alterations if needed from there, she makes leeway for it by adding additional lines to enable them to make necessary alterations if required.. From ten to six thirty, six days a week, Radha is at the boutique. She finds time for working women who can't make it during day time and with prior appointment stays back late to attend to them.

She even specialises in choosing the appropriate accessories for each apparel she designs, be it bridal wear or otherwise. “As a corporate responsibility, I would like to provide more employment to single women who are either divorced or widowed”- Radha quips.

“I want to get into work – wear, custom made clothing for work and for evenings. Women in

India over 40 and above do not have a wide range of westernised evening wear to choose from. I plan to get into designing them, an exclusive range with subtle and stylish embellishments with sequin work or a hint of embroidery which is not too flamboyant.”

Radha’s creativity does not stop with these. “I even have plans to get into designing ceramic bead jewellery. I even plan to open a separate outlet exclusively for accessories. Silver and ceramic beads strung together are really dramatic, mixed and matched with different pendants. I have already started doing this for close friends”.

For each bride she works with, initially she spends more than two hours getting to know their interests, tastes, specifications. She makes sure to work within their budgets as specified by each customer. Radha has had her fair share of tough customers but she brushes them off sportively stating that it has all been great learning experiences. The bare minimum for a bridal attire is 15000 which is not at all expensive since each piece is truly a masterpiece in itself.

She had so far not resorted to any form of advertising since news about her apparel have spread by word of mouth bringing her more customers than she could possibly handle. “Andhraites and north Indians love to splurge on their bridal trousseau and they leave it to me to put together the entire wardrobe. Malayalis are a little more conservative” dimples Radha. Creativity spills out of every pore in her and it is a pleasure to spend time with such a warm hearted soul. We wish her every success in all her endeavour and as we walk out into the twilight, the beautiful colours, textures and designs of her garments linger long in our memories – a virtual treat to the eyes.