



Photographs by Sumukh Bharadwaj

The sari saga

Ramya Srinivasan discovers a treasure trove at Bengaluru's Vimor, a store that revives the prints and patterns of vintage handloom textiles

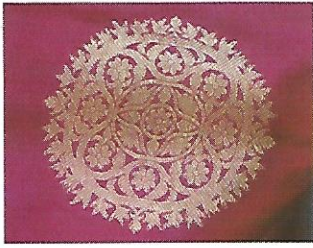
In a quaint room in the heart of Bengaluru, an incredible burst of hues welcomes you into a rich world of textiles; saris and apparel of myriad varieties and textures find pride of place on the shelves. We are at Vimor ('pure' in Indonesian), a classic boutique in Victoria Layout that breathes new life into ancient temple saris and specialises in designer Indian handlooms. "We create replicas of the unique designs and bright shades from saris that belonged to the older generation. Our aim is to preserve the rich textile heritage of the country," says Pavithra Muddaya,

57, who runs Vimor. "We work in close collaboration with the weavers who toil tirelessly in the background."

legacy The tradition began when Muddaya's mother, known as the grand old lady of Indian handloom, the late Chimy Nanjappa, set up Vimor in 1974 in the guestroom of her modest home—where the store is housed even today. Beginning her career at the Cauvery Handicrafts Emporium in Bengaluru as its first manager, her close association with Pupul Jayakar, cultural activist and Indian textile industry virtuoso, gave her the opportunity to travel

across the globe presenting and selling Indian handlooms. She also worked with an elite clientele that included prominent leaders such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Indira Gandhi.

At Vimor, Nanjappa and Muddaya worked on ancient temple saris and reconstructed them, apart from designing and selling them. "These auctioned antique pieces were clothes of temple deities; so they had to be cleaned of their oil, steel and iron marks. In some cases, my mother and I had to redesign the saris. We made alterations and did customised work



Vimor has revived different styles and textures of saris from various regions including Benaras, Raidurga, Ramdurga, Bagalkot, Adikegini, Chettinad and Anekal. All-time favourites remain Puja saris. The replicas are then made into silk, cotton or a hybrid of both. **Prices:** Cotton saris range between ₹ 900 and ₹ 2,000; silk saris range between ₹ 3,500 and ₹ 50,000

Have an heirloom sari and want to preserve or recreate it? Email vimorsarees@gmail.com or visit the store at No 49 (28 new), 3rd Cross, Victoria Layout, Bengaluru - 560047

such as embroidery and painting," recalls Muddaya. "Our goal was simple: we wanted to make the sari pretty and wearable for our clients."

As the mother-daughter duo worked on the design replicas, the weavers created the final product. "We mentored and handheld our weavers," she adds. "During mum's time, her appreciation and acknowledgement of a good product meant everything to the weavers. She would say that if the sari is not good, she wouldn't even take it for free. The weavers never wanted to hear her negative comments, ever. So, they worked hard with a sense of pride."

In the process, the weavers have also built a family legacy. "They have grown over the years and passed on their heritage to their children. We are only happy to mentor the next generation."

Now, Muddaya's daughter Vipra and son Arup are active participants of the business, bringing in their own fresh ideas. "The next generation resisted getting into this for a while," she shares. "But having grown up peering into apparel cabinets, their aesthetics are strong. They are incredibly creative and it was a natural choice for them to be engaged with Vimor. I let them pick my brains for a while, but now they have a say in the colour and design of each piece. Their business acumen is quite strong too."

At the recently held Rajasthan Fashion Week, while Vipra designed the accessories, Arup showcased his novel line of funky *lungi* with dashing colours and patterns. His collection of unisex *lungi* and sarongs received a fantastic response from the motley young crowd and sold out in no time.

Continuing the revivalist tradition, Vimor now focuses on family heirloom saris. "Grandchildren who aspire to retain the link with the previous generation come to us with their grandmother's sari. We use the design elements from the original and recreate newer pieces

that can be worn by the younger generation. We also honour the person who owned the sari by naming it after her," shares Muddaya. "As a concept, we love doing this because it gives us an opportunity to be a part of the customer's emotional journey."

Today, Vimor's clients include Sonia and Priyanka Gandhi, among other celebrities such as Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das. In an age of brand building and digital marketing, Vimor has always been rather subtle with minimal efforts to advertise or promote, choosing not to label their 'designer' wear. Their products are modestly priced, affordable to the common man. "People have always wondered about our unconventional choice to not label our products," says Vipra. "But customers have always come to us through word of mouth. Even though our weavers have earned a name for themselves, they still like to work with us because of the special bond we share. My grandmother always used to tell us not to be avaricious."

Indeed, it appears Nanjappa's textile legacy will be carried forward with pride by the women of the family. Walk into Vimor today and you're likely to see a fourth generation member—Vidushi, Muddaya's two year-old granddaughter—welcome you with a smile and earnestly describe how "pretty" a sari on display is.

