



# Looms of Legacy

Having turned 45 last year, Vimor Handloom Foundation is driven by art, culture, and handloom enthusiasts. **Bindu Gopal Rao** chronicles the enterprise's journey.

Established in 1974 by mother-daughter duo Chimy Nanjappa and Pavithra Muddaya, Vimor is involved in research, design, and conservation of handlooms and weaving traditions across India. As a charitable foundation, Vimor also works in close collaboration with weavers to enhance their artistic capacity and empower them as entrepreneurs as integral parts of the industry. In fact, it recently launched the Museum of Living Textiles in an attempt to showcase ancient, forgotten weaves and work as a platform for sari enthusiasts to connect with weavers. In a bid to take Karnataka and the country back to its days of handloom glory, Vimor is spreading awareness about not just preserving the handloom, but



also about the economic support that the sector needs. Pavithra Muddaya, managing trustee, Vimor Handloom Foundation, tells us more in this exclusive conversation.

**CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF VIMOR?**

My mother used to work with Cauvery Emporium as its first-ever manager in the late '50s, which exposed us to the world of handlooms. Since the beginning, my mother has encouraged many, not just in India, but also abroad, to support handlooms. After my father's passing-away, my mother and I involved ourselves in the one thing that we knew—saris and handlooms. We had many friends who helped us at the time. In 1974, we set up Vimor. We started with selling temple saris that were supplied to us by businessman Premraj Bhandari. When they started dwindling in number, we started recreating these; we began working extensively with weavers with an intention to revive traditional designs and weaving patterns. On our journey, we were supported by personalities such as Pupul Jayakar, an activist and writer who was passionate about India's arts and crafts, and social reformer Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Over these 45 years, we have had the privilege of working with master weavers and watching the next generations of weavers enter the industry. I must remember at this point one of the most memorable projects we have worked on—conceptualising, designing, and reworking our own pieces for the birth centenary of Indira Gandhi. It is something that all of us at Vimor will cherish, always.

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**WHAT IS THE DESIGN PHILOSOPHY OF THE BRAND?**

We have always believed in the power of design. Vimor has created many beautiful designs that have gone into production with large numbers over the years. Our saris have impacted not just weavers but also businessmen, designers, and enthusiasts, who have all gained a lot from our work processes. Design is one tool that will push conservation, revival, and empowerment, and improve livelihoods. Our idea is to not complicate it to the extent that the weaver loses interest in creating but to simplify motifs and weaving patterns to enable even the least motivated of the communities to take up work. If a design stays in production over a long period of time, I personally think that to be a success.



## BRAND PROFILE

“VIMOR’S ENTIRE JOURNEY IS BASED ON THE CONSERVATION AND REVIVAL OF THE HANDLOOM.”

### CAN YOU TALK A BIT ABOUT THE COLLECTIONS AT VIMOR?

Other than Indira Gandhi’s centenary collection and the one showcased at Rajasthan Heritage Week, we have not worked on any of our own designs as a collection. Some of the iconic saris, however, that Vimor has recreated are the pooja sari and the broad-bordered Chettinad sari. The pooja sari is technically an ikat weave but when we started researching and finding weavers to work with, we found out that no one in Karnataka weaved ikat. It was then that we decided to retain

the existing design, using threadwork to make it look like ikat. Inspiration comes in different forms and we work towards reviving designs, not in the form of collections but as purely pieces that interest us.

### WHAT IS THE PACE OF PRODUCTION LIKE AT VIMOR?

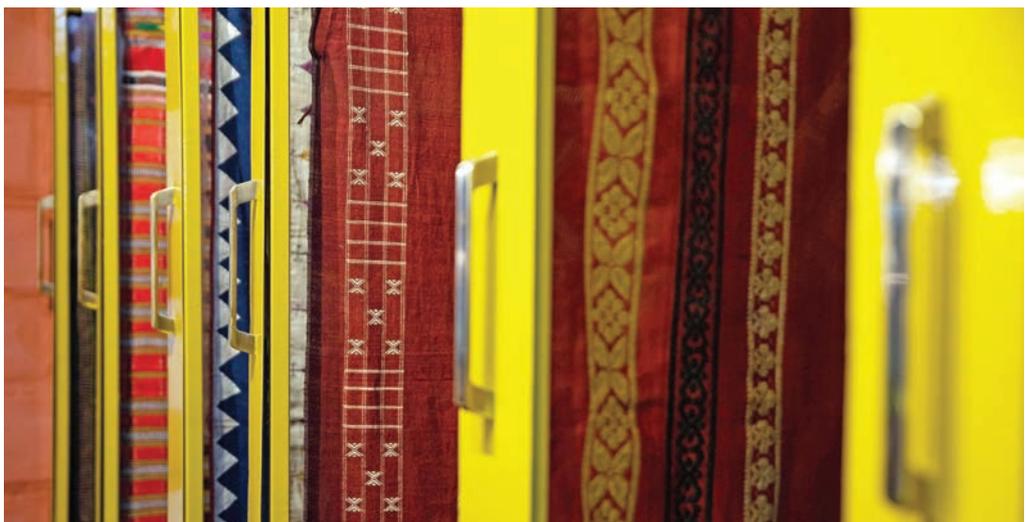
Every year, we work on at least 20–30 designs, either original or revived. This includes grandmothers’ saris and heirloom saris, among many others.

### HOW IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WEAVERS?

One of our main criteria is to view weaving through the lens of enhancing livelihoods of weavers. In this respect, we work with anyone who is willing to upskill. Weaving is an art. It needs a connection of the heart, mind, and hand. Taking this art to a stable position where it can benefit the weaver is the goal. We first study the design, after which we look for a weaver, whose skills can match the design. Changes are then made to suit the needs of the weaver. We do not bind our weavers. While working with them on designs we teach them new techniques and also allow them to use their creative freedom. This provides both parties with a freehand to work without interference.

### CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR CONSERVATIONAL EFFORTS?

Vimor’s entire journey is based on the conservation and revival of the handloom. Starting from weaving patterns, techniques, and traditional designs, our whole body of work is divided into revival and renewal. Under revival, we look at recreating designs that are as close to the original as possible. Under renewal, we look at





fusing our creativity with traditional weaves. Most of our conservation happens through design. One of our major works in conservation has been the mapping of Molakalmuru weaves. During my research, I saw a direct correlation between the migration of the weaving communities and the spread of the weave. A large chunk of our conservation efforts is through the revival of grandmothers' saris. While recreating household heirlooms, we get an insight into the design and weaving traditions, which we can later provide our weavers with.

**HOW DO YOU LOOK BACK AT YOUR JOURNEY?**

We are ecstatic about Vimor Handloom Foundation having turned 45 last year. We had no idea that our work would come this far. Over these years, our relationship with our weavers has strengthened and today, they are family. Being able to undertake textile preservation along with empowering weaving communities has made Vimor's struggle worthwhile. To celebrate this, we had organised a five-day handloom event to discuss and exchange ideas on bringing weaving and weavers into the limelight.

**TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT VIMOR'S NEWLY LAUNCHED MUSEUM.**

Vimor's Museum of Living Textiles was opened in July this year. The museum has been created as a space to enable dialogue on the conservation of textiles and handlooms. Spread across 1,300 square feet, it houses handlooms that have been sourced and donated, while some of them have even been created by us. Every piece of handloom has a story to tell—about people, cultures, traditions, trade, and many other socioeconomic aspects. We understood this

through a series of research, documentation, and interaction. Yet, there are several gaps when it comes to drawing a complete timeline of these pieces. The Museum of Living Textiles is open to interacting with anyone who is able to add to what we know about these timeless exhibits.

**WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACE IN THIS FIELD AND HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THEM?**

Thankfully, till date, we have not faced any major challenge. One that I could point out is that we have found it difficult to find weavers to carry out skilled work. Sometimes, it is the smaller things that we have lost in terms of techniques. More than individual challenges, we are concentrating on the larger challenge that the handloom industry is facing—unemployment, market-driven designs, lack of support and mentorship, and the preference for power looms. These are the reasons why handloomed goods are yet not being enthusiastically picked up. Through our processes and design intervention, we have been able to impact many areas positively. If a small enterprise like us can do it, then anybody can.

**WHAT ARE THE FUTURE PLANS FOR VIMOR?**

Through Vimor, we would like to conduct weaving and other programmes—related to weaving—at the Museum of Living Textiles. We are also coming up with a project, in which we will be working with weavers affected by the floods in North Karnataka. We are also involved in documentaries that speak about the state of affairs in the weaving and handloom industry of India. In addition, my book on the Molakalmuru weaves of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh is in its final stages, and will be launched soon. ■

