

Poonam Soni

She's India's most treasured, niche jewellery designer. A sparkling combination of a seasoned gemsmith and an astute entrepreneur who has won international acclaim. And is the only individual in her line of work who has been able to power her eye for detail with an intricate understanding of carat cut techniques. Poonam Soni speaks of the making of her priceless affair...

I got married early, at 18

Even my mother got married when she was 17. I believe that it was a boon as I too had my kids during the initial years of my marriage. Today, both my daughters are settled in their own areas of interest and I can devote a lot more time to my work without feeling guilty about neglecting them. My eldest Kriti, is also a jewellery designer, and has just had a baby. My youngest Esha is pursuing her chosen career in designing accessories like bags and belts.

My work sustains me

I think it's better if husband and wife have separate careers. It helps preserve individuality and prevents ego clashes and friction owing to interference. My husband has his own enterprise. We are different individuals who share a superb level of friendship. Most people find it tough to believe that as a woman, I am heading a corporate set up without my husband's help.

I have always been ambitious

And I make no bones about it. I started designing jewellery as a hobby, from home, when my kids were small, so that I could strike a balance between my work and family. I never had time for myself. Earlier on, I used to schedule clients' appointments in the afternoon when my kids were through with lunch after returning from school. It was crazy, at times, but I did it on my own. I am my own support system. My in-laws and parents are based in New Delhi. It worked out well as therefore there was never any interference

A focused approach has been my mainstay

I think what helped me establish myself was my focused approach. I always dream big and I knew I wanted to own my own signature line, cater to high end customers and go international. Whereas several jewellers offered me a counter in their showrooms, I knew this was not what I wanted. I worked out the mechanics at the inception: started my own casting unit and accounts department. It was to be an exclusive, professionally run set up, not a home grown business.

Luckily, finances were not an issue

I started out with Rs 2 lakhs and slowly built up on that. The financial struggle, by the grace of God, has never been there. I have never had to take loans from family, friends or banks.

The business growth was phenomenal

My clients swelled in numbers solely through word of mouth recommendation. It became dangerous at one point in time as everyone knew that there was this woman who kept a large amount of precious jewellery at home. I was concerned for the safety of my kids. That's when I shifted to my own showroom.

My biggest drawback was zero knowledge of the backend

I took it upon myself to understand the technical know-how, to quip myself with the full knowledge of the business I was heading. Gem appreciation is what I learnt at the diamond exporter's set up.

Today there is an undeniable sense of fulfillment

With clients like Donald Trump, Harrods, Vasundhara Raje Scindia...Offices in New York and Paris. The frustration and the constant zeal to beat any competition is what's gone now. Exclusivity is what I wanted, and what I've achieved.

My biggest mistake has been to trust people implicitly

In business, I lost out on Harrods earlier on in my career. I had floated my Egyptian and Greek line of jewellery, 15 years ago, and a person called Colin approached me, claiming to be a representative of Harrods. Subsequently, I also got a call from Harrods. I made the mistake of attributing it to him, and accompanied him to the Harrods office. He was a hoax. I axed my opportunity to showcase my line at Harrods, with my own hands. In personal life, there was a dear friend who let me down badly. And continued to pulverise me emotionally. And I let her.

Arrogance cost me dearly

Tasting success right at the start was heady. I became very arrogant. And developed a superiority complex. I thought I had arrived, I knew it all. My craftsmen begun cheating me in terms of the gold purity and gem quality. And it was humiliating when my clients reverted saying that the jewellery I had sold them was not worth the quality. That made me land on earth and take a long hard look at myself. I made the effort to learn the nitty gritty of the trade

Humility came with a financial crisis

Three years ago my husband went through a bad financial patch. There were creditors at our doors, accountants all over. It was an emotionally trying period. We pulled through, but I realized that I was not above all. And also realized that the higher one flies, the greater is the fall

My marriage went through a turbulent period

During this same time, there was a lot of tension and stress that afflicted my relationship with my husband. That's when I took to meditation and indulged in a lot of introspection. It really helped. Today, I respect what God has given me. He has given me talent for a

reason, to help out others. I do charity, that I don't want to discuss, and am also working towards the betterment of our proficient craftsmen who are being sidelined in favour of technically sound machines for designing jewellery. They are our biggest heritage.

I am emotionally dependant on my sister in law

We are as thick as thieves and confide in each other deeply. I'd give my life for her, and vice versa.

Life's taught me many lessons

To be humble is the biggest. And to refrain from trusting people implicitly.

I couldn't take criticism earlier

I was so full of myself. Today I study criticism and make changes in my work accordingly. Also, I am no longer judgemental. And this change in my attitude has effectively cut out 80% of the backbiting that used to be directed at me. I count that as one of my achievements.

My most treasured possession is a black heart

No, it's not a precious stone. When was abroad on work once, and missing my kids terribly, on my return both my little daughters were at the airport to receive me. They stood, holding a black paper heart on which was written "For the best Mom in the world. We want you, always." I couldn't stop crying. I still have it and it means the world to me.

My future plans

I want to enjoy my grandchild. I plan to take time out to only design a limited collection every year. I am also opening up my second store in Bandra next month. Here I will be offering customized jewellery and showcasing limited edition pieces.

(AS TOLD TO SHILPI MADAN)