Bedroom to Bergdorf: Jyotika Jhalani's cashmere journey



Inside a three-storey, unassuming factory in the industrial

paradise. The shop floor is abuzz with around 400 people

bent over skeins of luxurious fabric. **Jyotika Jhalani** sits

shawls are embellished by hand. Thousands of ornate

down among them to demonstrate how delicate cashmere

city of Noida is an incongruously colourful pashmina

Synopsis

Swarovskis are being stuck on blue bespoke shawls with wide evil eye motifs. Over 100 such customised pieces are being readied at breakneck speed for a Greek heiress who is particular that there should be evil eyes in everything she wears. Jhalani, 58, is the founder of **Janavi India**, a Rs 150 crore business, which sends out some of the biggest orders of luxury shawls across the world. Top luxury brands like Chanel, Dior, Emporio Armani, Burberry, Ferragamo and Fendi source cashmere shawls and lines from her. They are also sold at high-end stores like Bergdorf Goodman, Harvey

says. Today, Jhalani has two state-of-the-art factories across 35,000 sq ft in Noida. Her business is growing — from Rs 68 crore retail sales in 2005-10 to Rs 412 crore between 2015 and 2020. Its EBITDA margin in 2020 is 40%. Her products are sold in over 40 countries and 200 multibrand stores. Janavi has taken a small but sizeable bite of the global cashmere market which, according to a report by Grand View Research, was valued at \$2.66 billion in 2018. Actor Sonam Kapoor, who buys from

She dropped out of school at age 15. Her mother's friend Bim Bissell, whose husband John founded FabIndia, suggested that she apply as a receptionist at World Bank's office. Jhalani worked her way up, studying the bank's policy and eventually working in population, health and nutrition. When her shawls saga began, after she got besotted with them after her US trip, Jhalani tied up with a Kathmandu-

these orders," she says. Since then, she has created lace shawls for several brands, including Valentino, as well as her hallmark, the jewelled fur-shawl. In 2003, she partnered with Chanel and Dior to create hand-embroidered stoles. Today, as she strides in her facility in Noida, Jhalani rattles off the names of her employees on the shopfloor as she walks past them.

plush toys is the Mukesh Ambani family. "Janavi India has been like a godsend for us," says a spokesperson of the Ambanis. "For every celebration, we call Jyotika, so we can gift personalised cashmere to our closest friends and family.

want to express — whether we are choosing blankets,

brand."

Her company has also collaborated with non-clothing businesses like the Thai luxury business Lotus Arts De Vivre as well as home decor pioneer Lalique and Daum to sell her products through them. Against all odds, even in the pandemic, the company did an exhibition at the Four Seasons in Geneva in June and managed to secure one of its largest orders.

Away from the bling, there is charity. Ferzana 'Fizzy' Barclay, well-known London socialite, says, "Janavi has given their time and scarves and blankets to a biannual sale in London. Through this, they have raised thousands of pounds for Maggie's Cancer Care, a charity that provides free cancer support and information in centres across the UK and

• 1988: Jyotika Jhalani quits her job at the World Bank office in Delhi • 1988: Brings Italian eyewear brand Luxottica to India • 1993: Opens a franchise of LA-based Barbizon modelling agency in India

- create a collection of embellished cashmere shawls for their brand AJSK
- Drive growth across international markets • Focus on upcoming collaboration with Singapore designer Lisa Von Tang for Singapore/SEA market 2022

• To open first international retail store in 2022 (location

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One of her biggest clients is the Greek heiress. "Throughout the pandemic, we have been receiving orders from her and each order can be worth anywhere between Rs 15 lakh and Rs 40 lakh," says Jhalani. For this particular buyer, accessories brand Judith Leiber is custom-designing Jyotika Jhalani's Delhi-based company makes handmade and machine-made pashmina shawls. The brand has a presence in over 200 multibrand stores in the US, Europe • 1997: Starts selling Kashmiri shawls at exhibitions in the

in a bedroom in Delhi's Sundar Nagar in 1998. she recalls.

franchise of the Los Angeles based modelling agency Barbizon in India. Sometime in 1997, Jhalani decided, on a whim, to start selling shawls. She took off to the US for

Nichols, **Saks Fifth Avenue** and Harrods. It began small — Having quit a job at the World Bank office in Delhi in 1988, Jhalani was dabbling in many things, including opening a

exhibitions in Reno and Squaw Valley, with some shawls she had sourced from Kashmir. Before she knew it, they were all sold out. "I thought to myself, 'Wow! Shawls are easy to sell,"

It was — for her. She got back to her home in Delhi, opened

installed two looms and hired four craftspersons. Her tiny

shawl factory was ready. "Back then, I did everything on my

own — invoicing, designing. It was a one woman show," she

the bedroom of her son who had left for UK to study,

Janavi, says, "It's fabulous how this quiet gem has entered the world market and made a place for itself, from Bergdorf to Saks Fifth Avenue, among the best of labels." But Jhalani didn't just stumble upon shawls one fine day in Delhi. She grew up in Kashmir where she fell in love with

artefacts," she says.

based label to make pashmina shawls. Pashmina is fine cashmere made from the soft undercoat of goats like the Changthangi. "The idea was to create an Indian label that would work for the world. I gradually got 150 workers at a rented place in Jangpura, Delhi. I had no designers. I started knocking on the doors of all the big fashion labels in the world," she says. She managed to secure a meeting with Massimo and Fulvia Ferragamo, son and daughter of fashion icon Salvatore Ferragamo. "They loved what I did. Soon, they

she says. Soon word got around about Janavi.

11. From an order of 200 bandhini skirts, Janavi was

That order led to Jhalani setting up the factories she

In 2008, she opened her first store at DLF Emporio, Delhi. Now, she has six more stores in NCR and Jaipur and plans to set up her first international flagship store by 2022. She has yet to decide on the location. Janavi, which creates handmade and machine-made shawls,

working with all of these designers as well as getting into Harrods," she says.

— defined by embroidery and embellishments. "The compositions are layered with whimsical motifs, colours, glittering beads and quirky feathers," she says. Exports are the biggest chunk of her business, which is driven by US and China markets. While in the US, Janavi sells through retail stores, in China it is through her private label. The price of her shawls goes up to Rs 2,00,000 but the most sought-after range is Rs 35,000-45,000.

The brand has now initiated a capsule collaboration with

Kiera Chaplin, actor and granddaughter of Charlie Chaplin.

The collection, says Jhalani, will draw inspiration from the

1920s or the golden age of Hollywood, with Art Deco designs

Back home, Jhalani is extending her brand to launch new categories. "We have onboarded talent from across the world to scale up and build the world's biggest and most loved luxury cashmere lifestyle brand from India," says Jhalani, setting her sights on being the cashmere queen. Janavi: A Snapshot

• 2003: Partners with Chanel and Dior to create handembroidered stoles • 2008: Opens first store at DLF Emporio in Delhi

• **2012**: Jhalani and Fulvia Ferragamo create a label for

products made by Janavi India for Salvatore Ferragamo

• **2015**: Focus shifts to developing own brand from being a

- **What Next** 2021 • To develop and establish own ecommerce website • Increase sales through more luxury online retailers

granddaughter, for global launch of The Golden Era of

Hollywood collection

yet to be announced)

- Focus on expanding B2C offerings through ecommerce, trunk shows and pop-ups
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her mother's exquisite collection of shahtoosh shawls (made from the fleece of the Tibetan antelope, shahtoosh shawl is

now a banned product). "Kashmir made me appreciate the fine things in life — good carpets, beautiful shawls, lovely were buying our collections. We were not creating for them," Then actor Julia Roberts wore one of their skirts in Ocean's suddenly inundated with an order of 20,000 pieces from Sage Machado in Los Angeles, who had styled for the movie. currently sits out of. "I didn't even know what I was doing and suddenly I had to acquire a new factory to facilitate has diversified into home-care and luxury baby product lines. Among the recent buyers of her baby blankets and Be it an engagement, a wedding or a birth, Janavi knows how to capture the very sentiments of care and consideration we shawls, or travel kits. We cherish this relationship with the While Janavi's buyers list is heady, Jhalani says that for most of the fashion brands, her company designs shawls rather than create a line curated by them. "The highs have been

handbags to match the shawls. online." and West Asia US • 1998: Starts her shawl company Janavi India

partner to 28 luxury brands, including Chanel, Dior, Emporio Armani, Burberry, Ferragamo, Fendi • 2018: Collaborates with Abu Jani & Sandeep Khosla to • 2020: Launches lifestylefocused concept store in Jangpura, Delhi; looking to expand in Mumbai; launches collaboration with Kiera Chaplin, Charlie Chaplin's

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