



COVID-19

We Spoke to Haresh Mirpuri of Aranyani on How to Rebuild in the Post COVID Economy

 By Charlie Katz - August 12, 2020



I had the pleasure of interviewing Haresh Mirpuri.

Haresh Mirpuri is the Founder and Creative Director of Aranyani, the luxury Indian handbag company. He began his career in the manufacturing industry in Indonesia and worked in numerous positions throughout Southeast Asia. In 1996 Haresh founded a spinning mill and soon became the most renowned producer of open-end yarn in all of Asia. After 20 years working in manufacturing and mastering textiles, Haresh launched Aranyani to revitalize and redefine the luxury industry in India, as well as to spread Indian artistry and the message of sustainability to the world. Aranyani is the only luxury goods company in the world that owns and operates its own atelier and also trains, educates, and houses all staff members their families. Mirpuri received his MBA in 1993 from the Sri Satya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in Anantapur, India.

Thank you so much for your time! I know that you are a very busy person. Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

I was born in Indonesia but spent most of my education and working life in India. I was raised in an institution that practiced and taught the Vedic way of life. After receiving my MBA, I worked briefly in Japan and South Korea. I joined my father’s garment manufacturing business in 1993, started a spinning mill in India in 1995, and in 2002 I set up a dying plant. During that period, I also trained in Belgium for weaving technology and in Italy for printing. So as you can see, I have had multi-country and multi-cultural training and education.

While I worked in mass manufacturing, I was continually perturbed by the impact that large factories were having on our environment. I was working with top American brands that were ordering massive amounts of goods which they were forced to sell at deep discounts. This cycle of waste didn’t make sense to me. I decided that I wanted to do something different. At the same time I was seeing how many luxury brands were exploiting the Indian Craftsmen, who were working on their designer brands.

These observations inspired me to create a luxury brand from India that would respect the skills of the artisans while giving the world the opportunity to own an exquisite luxury product which will have a positive impact on the world.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lessons or ‘take aways’ you learned from that?

I was keen to do work by hand and came up with this idea of hand-painted bags. I felt that I was selling an art using a bag as the medium. I think that worked in an extremely limited way. I did not understand a woman’s reason for selecting a bag. It took me almost a year to understand that. I realized that I had to listen to the needs of the consumer.

Is there a particular book that you read, or podcast you listened to, that really helped you in your career? Can you explain?

I am an avid reader of magazines, news and books about our industry. But the biggest benefit has come from meeting people. I would sit and spend a day or two with cotton farmers, meet dye experts, machinery suppliers and agents, meet buyers, and even talk to customers of my buyers when I was in manufacturing. I have spent days and days going to stores of brands that we produced for and talking to customers who enter their stores. Meeting people has been the best part of my education.

Extensive research suggests that “purpose driven business” are much more successful in many areas. When you started your company what was your vision, your purpose?

My goal is to present to the world the two renowned aspects of India: (1) The Vedic values that form an integral part of our culture and business and, (2) The great craftsmanship of the people of India. My vision is to integrate these two aspects into Aranyani — by creating some of the world’s most exquisite handbags.

Do you have a “number one principle” that guides you through the ups and downs of running a business?

Truthfulness and Integrity are the two principles that run deep throughout our business ecosystem.

Thank you for all that. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected nearly every aspect of our lives today. For the benefit of empowering our readers, can you share with our readers a few of the personal and family related challenges you faced during this crisis? Can you share what you've done to address those challenges?

The Covid-19 pandemic has poised challenges that we have never ever seen before. However we did not layoff any of our employees during the pandemic. We used the time to upgrade their skills while they were at home. Giving them training makes them look forward to working again and helps stave off negative emotions. We also now provide them with health insurance for them, their parents, their spouses and their children. We worked on a system together with the team that ensures our artisans earn up to USD 1000 per month. We made sure everyone received their salaries on time. We regularly monitor their health and provide everyone with vitamins to keep their immunity boosted. We are also creating a fund that will help them support their children's education. With a complete stop in business in the last few months, it has been challenging to keep this going. But with complete belief in the good we are doing, we will be able to sustain.

Can you share a few of the biggest work-related challenges you are facing during this pandemic? Can you share what you've done to address those challenges?

On the manufacturing side we cannot run the atelier the same way as before. However, our team devised an intelligent manufacturing system that allows a few people to come in, do their work, and then allows the next team to work. This is quite a novel way to work, keeping in mind all the safety regulations with regard to Covid-19. We also looked at all possible areas to reduce any waste so that we spend money on only what is important. With limited sales and so much uncertainty, we have been careful not to indulge in any unnecessary expenses. And we made sure that we pay our suppliers on time in order to keep the supply chain flowing. Every bit counts during a time like this.

What I think is extremely important is our dedication to keeping the team motivated at all times. We monitor their moods, their health, and also celebrate birthdays and milestones every month to keep spirits up and to keep people connected.

Many people have become anxious from the dramatic jolts of the news cycle. The fears related to the coronavirus pandemic have understandably heightened a sense of uncertainty, fear, and loneliness. What are a few ideas that you have used to offer support to your family and loved ones who were feeling anxious? Can you explain?

I believe that the Vedic teachings have a lot to tell us. I would love to share a few here:

Do your best at all times. Concentrate on your performance at all times and not on the outcome. This is what we mean when we say 'Live in the Exquisite'.

Keep little but keep the best.

Success is defined by the evolution of your mind and not by the accumulation of materials.

Yoga and mediation are two wonderful ways that helps us overcome anxiety and fear. Our family has been practicing these for the past three generations.

Obviously we can't know for certain what the Post-Covid economy will look like. But we can of course try our best to be prepared. We can reasonably assume that the Post-Covid economy will be a trying time for many people across the globe. Yet at the same time the Post-Covid growth can be a time of opportunity. Can you share a few of the opportunities that you anticipate in the Post-Covid economy?

I believe that Post-Covid will offer many opportunities. It will make people look for more purpose-driven brands. I think it will prompt millennials to evaluate their need for a brand beyond merely the name, but for the values the brand stands for. Also, I think we will continue to see the growth of more artisanal/personalized products rather than the standardized "cookie cutter" products that the world has been getting used to over the past twenty years.

How do you think the COVID pandemic might permanently change the way we behave, act or live?

I believe that consumers will be more careful about what they are spending their money on. They will spend it on what makes the most positive impact for every dollar that they spend.

Considering the potential challenges and opportunities in the Post-Covid economy, what do you personally plan to do to rebuild or to grow your business in the Post-Covid Economy?

The Aranyani business did not need Covid-19 simply because without it, we knew that we did not want to have a business with a huge inventory and mass templated products. We personalize our products. Our business has a zero waste policy and has a positive impact on the lives of all our stakeholders. Our biggest challenge as a new brand is to reach out and make the people aware of us. We hope that magazines such as yours take notice of the wonderful things that we are doing and will help us reach our audience.

Similarly, what would you encourage others to do?

I would always call on the fashion fraternity to first and foremost avoid any waste that our industry dumps into the environment. I also would encourage everyone to avoid monetary waste and focus on creating products that will build the supply chain. This industry is growing at a great cost to many others. Instead, we should compete on skills and technical ability rather than low-cost production. Fashion is an art form and art is the language of our civilization. We should be conscious about what language we wish to speak in our civilization.

Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

In Vedas it is said "Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitaha" which means "Righteousness protects the righteous". I have always believed in this. It can create monetary loss momentarily, but it always brings a greater respect and love from the people. Having people's love and respect is more important than wealth. I have followed this principle throughout my career and it has always guided me to success and happiness.

How can our readers further follow your work?

A lot of my belief and value system is translated and communicated through Aranyani. The newly launched website www.aranyani.com and our instagram and facebook handles @aranyanilifestyle share our thought processes with the world.
