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# A passage from India

## Love and fashion brought Sushma Kilachand here

By CP

TORONTO -- She used to live in a Maharajah's palace in Mumbai, but fashion designer Sushma Kilachand now calls a modest east-end Toronto house her home and studio.

What compelled her to give up her pampered existence and move halfway around the world to start a new life?

Love. But first, the clothes.

Upstairs in her small studio, Kilachand designs her collection, called Sushk, by teaming Indian embroidery and fabrics - silk, chiffon, linen and georgette in bright shades of pink, orange, purple and turquoise - with western styling to produce a versatile line of tunics, ponchos and Indian suits that she describes as Indo-western.

"Colour symbolizes what India is all about. You can wear these tops with jeans to a brunch or to afternoon tea or with pearls and heels for an evening out," says Kilachand, 29, whose designs are featured in next month's Flare magazine.

Mumbai - with its hip club scene, restaurants, shops and fashion houses including Versace and Armani - is the Paris of the East, says Kilachand.

Since leaving Mumbai two years ago, she's kept in touch with what's happening on the fashion scene through her production team.

Kilachand sketches her designs, scans them into the computer and e-mails them to the 12-member team, who stitch and embroider each piece by hand.

Each outfit is unique and takes approximately 30 hours to complete. The price and quality are higher than in similar mass-produced garments sold at chain stores. Tunics range from \$100 to \$130; ponchos from \$130 to \$160; and churidars, salwar kameez and kurtas with trousers from \$150 to \$220.

The Shopping Channel approached Kilachand to sell her line on-air, but she declined because the quantities they required would have forced her to switch to mass production.

Her wedding and reception two years ago, with 800 guests, took place in her childhood home - a sprawling 55-room, 100-year-old palace that once belonged to Bhupinder Singh - Maharajah of Patiala.

As the ruler of the largest Sikh state during the British colonial era, he was famous for having a gargantuan appetite for women, food, jewelry and sport.

As the only daughter of a wealthy business family that owned sugar cane factories and alcohol distilleries, Kilachand had a fairy-tale upbringing and lived like a princess with 20 live-in servants.

"I was surrounded by beauty, so it was hard not to be inspired," says Kilachand, who began designing her own clothes at 14. After high school in 1998, she studied at the Institute of Fashion Design and Merchandising in Los



**Indian fashion designer Sushma Kilachand, who now lives in Toronto, poses in a wedding outfit with husband Ashish Rjendra.**

Angeles.

She landed a dream job as an assistant buyer at Saks Fifth Avenue in Boston after graduation, but gave it up six months later because she was homesick.

She returned to India and worked with designer Krishna Mehta for two years before launching her own line in 2001.

When Ashish Rajendra, a 29-year-old project manager from Toronto, came to visit India in 2003, Kilachand was already engaged to marry a wealthy industrialist.

Kilachand met Rajendra through her cousin. After three meetings they were smitten with each other. "We just clicked. We knew we were destined to be together," says Kilachand.

She broke off her engagement.

Her mom initially "freaked out" at the news, but in the end was completely supportive. Kilachand married Rajendra three weeks later.