

Sustainable Clothing and Textile Recycling Conference: Post-event note



R-L: Dr. Harleen Sahni, Associate Professor, NIFT; Ruchita Chabbra, Country Programs Manager (India, Pakistan) – The Sourcery; Ashok Chakravarthi, Owner, Palyam Textiles and Ramanuj Mitra, Senior Programme Officer Centre for Responsible Business, during a panel discussion.

The third edition of the Sustainable Clothing and Textile Recycling Conference was held on Wednesday, August 10, 2022 at Residency Towers, Coimbatore. This one-day B2B conference focusing on textile recycling, upcycling, reuse and circular economy in apparel industries was inaugurated by Smt. K. Nalini, Joint Chief Environmental Engineer, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board.

The inaugural lamp was lit by Nalini, along with Savio Rodrigues, Founder & CEO, Kianna Media Ventures, and Venkat Reddy Patil, Founder & CEO, Urdhva Management and Recommerce.

In her speech as the Guest of Honour, **Nalini** said, “I feel this is a strategic conference to bring out the solutions for most of the sustainable development goals like good life for the land, sustainable production and also to bring good sanitation in India and across the world. This topic itself answers many questions related to the sustainable development goals & environmental impacts of the textile waste around the globe and also in India.”

She said that the textile sector is the second largest consumer in the world and also it is the second largest producer of the waste in the world. Recent study says that 80 billion textile products are produced every year around the globe. For cultivating one kg of cotton, one thousand litres of water is needed, and to manufacture one T-shirt two thousand litres of water is needed. Due to the change in lifestyle and fast-moving culture lot of waste is generated by humans.

“Every year, nearly 100 million tonnes of textile waste is generated around the world. Synthetic fibres also do not decompose, so when it is land filled, it creates pollution. Globally 20 per cent of the wastewater generation is from the textile sector. So, it is the need of the hour to think about sustainable clothing and also textile recycling,” Nalini added.

Savio Rodrigues in his speech shared the status of Yamuna river. He said that every year half a million kg of plastics is thrown in ocean as wastage and emphasised on having a pollution free world. He said, “Don’t be an observer – be a preserver”.

Venkat Reddy Patil said, “We are working in various ways on recycling, and we are open for collaboration”.

Prajakta L Verma, IAS, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, addressed the gathering virtually on the topic “**TEXTILE RECYCLING PRACTICES AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY CHALLENGES**”. She said, “Textile industry is very old, but our consumption patterns have changed. We are actually generating about 7,793 kilo tons of waste. Though we are re-using it, most of it does not find place in the supply value chain because of lack of awareness. Most of us are working in the disintegrated, unorganised fashion.

“We have to start thinking very seriously about how we try to bring circular and self-sufficient approach in this industry. The circular approach is a take, make and source model and increase value as much as possible in the root of the system and try to retain the value by using, by reusing, by recycling the waste that is generated. We should incentivise the mechanical and chemical cycling technology.”

Sudhakaran Kalidas, Vice Chairman/Technical Director, Veerapandi Common Effluent Treatment Plant Limited, Tiruppur, gave a highly technical presentation and a talk on the topic “**TEXTILE EFFLUENT MONITORING IN INDIA: MANDATES AND COMPLIANCE**”. He said, “One industry’s waste is other industry’s raw material.” This relates to sustainable practice, circular economy. Our entire country is more of cotton consuming because of our sub-tropical climate. We are major consumers of cotton and that leads to huge consumption of water. Central Pollution Control Board and the State Pollution Control Board have mandated to install wastewater discharge system. Other guidelines are also given for manufacture, storage and import of hazardous chemicals, and hazardous waste management.

“Units following these recycling of wastages should be incentivised and rewarded. The 11 R System can be followed by any industry for sustainable practice. The 11 R’s being Reject, Reduce, Recover, Recycle, Reuse, Recharge, Record/Register, Regroup/Recognise,

Reward/Redeem, Regulate and Research. If we keep on using more water for cotton, we won't have wood. Incentives like free electricity, subsidies for additional stages for nano filtration and other technologies like wind power, solar power, etc are needed so that the units can become sustainability compliant." He suggested that a knitwear board be made for Tiruppur, so that the hub can be represented in a better way.

Sudarsan Rajagopalan, Managing Partner, Splendour Medicare Technologies, Coimbatore addressed the gathering on the topic **"VIABLE SYSTEM MODEL FOR TEXTILE SUSTAINABILITY: INDIA AS A GLOBAL CONTRIBUTOR"**. He shared an interesting success story from a company in Gujarat during his tenure there. "We burn plastics and make a gas, the gas is used to produce steam to evaporate effluents, and during evaporation, phenol is derived. We could strip phenol, recover the water and the solid waste is dispensed to the landfills which is around 3 to 5 per cent of the total waste." That project is still running, he informed.

He said, "Environment is here to kill each system. Those who work to sustain are Darwin's Survival of the Fittest. The climate change is an environmental issue. You never build a theory on your own. Many people have worked on so many segments. Only when you collage together – then a theory forms and thus sustainability is too big. Efficiency comes when you allow decentralisation to take place and centralise objective. So, the only way to predict your future is to create one, leaders cannot be outsourced, and you have to live by an example.

"When we talk about sustainability, there are two components of sustainability. One is organizational structure and other is communication. If you don't have a structural operation, then the system collapses, and if you don't communicate there will be lot of errors – that is you can hear it but can't understand it. We have excess of pollution. 50 per cent dioxin from plastic is created by nature, and the remaining 50 per cent is man-made. Excess of anything is actually poison. We have excessive brains, excessive money and excessive oxygen. Excessive amruth is a poison."

Saikat Mitra, Creative Director, Van Heusen, SVP Design, ABFRL spoke on the topic **"SUSTAINABLE FABRIC FOR ECO FRIENDLY FASHION: A GUIDE"**. He said, "I wish to talk about desirability. Even if you make a great product, eventually the consumer has to buy it and that itself is a big challenge. There is a huge problem in terms of inventory that already we have in the world, and apart from that the price is not going up for a very long time. So, you need to effectively create demand properly and then create a product and maximise the value. The easier part is always to make a demand."

Sustainability is a concept that encompasses both social responsibility and environmentalism, he continued. According to the EPA, sustainability is the ability to achieve continuing economic prosperity while protecting the natural systems of the planet and providing high quality of life for its people. Sustainability requires that natural resources are renewed rather than depleted through the processes of production and consumption.

The first panel discussion on the topic TEXTILE POLICY: A DETAILED OVERVIEW had Vishnu M, Senior Manager Guidance Tamil Nadu, Govt of Tamil Nadu; Dileep Singh Yadav,

Deputy General Manager, State Bank of India, Coimbatore Module; and Venkat Reddy Patil as panellists with Savio Rodrigues as the moderator.

Yadav said, “Textile Industry must have a regulatory body co-coordinating with all government bodies, so banks can extend loans without any hesitation”. Patil felt that “India is 95 per cent traders’ market and only 5 per cent a recycling market. Even though policies are needed, behavioural Changes with people is a must.”

In his turn, Vishnu said “Build the eco system in Tamil Nadu. The government is soon coming with an economic scheme, and it will clear the hurdles.”

The second panel discussion on the topic “INDIAN TEXTILE RECYCLING MARKET: TRENDS, FACTS, FIGURES, GROWTH, EMPLOYMENT, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES” had Anil Chowdary, Managing Director – Greenwaves Environmental Solutions; Renjini Liza Varghese – Senior Journalist & CEO, Writecanvas; and Sudarsan Rajagopalan as panellists, and Ashok Chakravarthi, Owner, Palyam Textiles as the moderator.

According to Chowdary, the recycling market has to be upscale, and products have to be available in urban areas.

Lisa felt that industry players should send their suggestions to the ministry, as it is only then it will be helpful for the policymakers to move towards perfect change.

Rajagopalan wanted the government to give incentives for those who are working in the recycling market. Moderating the discussion, Chakravarthi said, “Re-invention is needed now, and unless we invest our time and speak out the problems to the government jointly, recycling segment will remain stagnant only.”

Vas Shenoy, President – Associazione Sakshi joined virtually from Italy and spoke on the topic **“HOW TEXTILE MANUFACTURERS & ITALIAN DESIGNERS CAN COLLABORATE VIA JOINT INITIATIVES”**. He said, “China is well organised than India, but India has large brand potential. Sustainable production and Fair Trade is present in Western countries. If we manage to get young designers, there will be people to manufacture, and this will be helpful for the future generation wishing to play in the textile industry”.

This was again followed by a panel discussion, on the topic **“INDIAN EFFORTS TO DELIVER A SUSTAINABLE TEXTILE & FASHION INDUSTRY TO THE WORLD”**. Dr. Harleen Sahni, Associate Professor, NIFT; Ruchita Chhabra, Country Programs Manager (India, Pakistan) – The Sourcery; and Ramanuj Mitra, Senior Programme Officer – Centre for Responsible Business were the panellists, while Ashok Chakravarthi, Owner, Palyam Textiles was the moderator.

Labour Laws should be modified for smooth functioning, students should be taught about recycling and its importance, and the government can support sustainable purchase—were the three conclusions that emerged from the panel discussion.

Addressing the gathering virtually, **Piyush Goyal, Minister of Textiles – Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**, said, “Many foreign buyers are insisting that there should be a component of recycled textile in whatever we are exporting from India. Tamil Nadu accounts to a very large proportion of textile output in India and presently one third of India’s output comes from Tamil Nadu. Textile sector has been contributing significantly to job creation as well as expanding the economic output of India. It is helping the process of transformation of India in a significant way. The sector has also attracted significant foreign direct investment, also earning significant foreign exchange for the country.

“Our textile exports last year were at a record of \$44 billion but we are hoping and aspiring for a much larger \$100 billion by 2025. Textile industry is the most important industry for Aatmanirbharbharat given its export, job generation and economic growth potential. Clearly India has significant competitive strength in the field of textiles. The prevailing competitive business environment across the world demands recalibrating existing strategies. As the humanity faces the challenges of climate change, there is a pressing need for sustainable means of production. The use of production and consumption models that prolongs sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products is the need of the hour.”

Using of sustainable textiles in hospitality, tourism, construction, automobile industry, sports goods, home décor, footwear, medical and therapeutic care and other similar areas is increasing, Goyal said. The global textile recycling market today is between 6 and 8 million metric tonnes. That is really 12 per cent to 14 per cent of the total global waste is recycled by the textile sector. However, only 1 per cent to 2 per cent of the clothing materials are recycled into new garments. This recycling industry today is pre-dominant in the US, European Union and China. It is time for India to give a significant push to promote this sector.

“We in India do not properly use a large part of the waste that is generated and sadly it goes to landfills. I like to suggest that we work together for faster development in the areas of textile recycling, upcycling and create sustainable fashion products for a sustainable future. There is also a need to manage the discharge of microplastics as well as chemicals and the associated toxicity in the environment,” Goyal said in his speech.

“Sustainable textiles will create a flourishing ecosystem and help our local communities by increasing the value of local production and the lifecycle of materials. It will also help in reducing the amount of waste and cultivating green consumers. I am happy to see that there are certain manufacturers who have taken sustainability certifications like the Global Organic Textile Standard, The Green Guard and other similar standards. I would like to urge all units in the textile industry to get those sustainability certifications,” he added.

In conclusion, for sustainability, Goyal suggested five pathways for the textile industry.

1. The best utilisation of the natural resources.
2. Increasing the usage of raw materials which are sustainable in the long run.
3. Responsible handling of chemicals in processes like dyeing and coating,
4. Zero Liquid Discharge for reprocessing wastewater, and

5. Adherence to guidelines to eliminate health risk of workers as well as consumers.

“The vision of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Make in India with zero defect and zero effect – effectively will help India to leap in sustainable manufacturing of textiles. I assure you that the Government of India will extend its full support to the textile and apparel industry to bring back the same old dominance of the Indian textile sector,” the minister said.

On the whole, the conference was an eye opener with respect to sustainability and textile recycling, especially about the current standing of the Indian industry, and what it needs to do.
