

The Crafting of India

The Lakmé Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2019 held from January 31 to February 3 in Mumbai explored the challenges posed by circularity, showcased initiatives in upcycling, and emphasised on the significance of craft, culture and heritage in today's fashion industry, reports **Meher Castelino**



India is usually promoted through its fabrics, and one of the most popular forms of taking the story to the public and the people who matter is through fashion shows. The Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) and Lakmé Fashion Week (LFW) have been doing this for several seasons, which have given the many weavers and clusters in India a major boost.



SEERAT VIRDI



POOJA MONGA



KRITI TULA



KANIKA AHUJA

The Challenge of Circularity

The Circular Design Challenge (CDC) was created at LFW in collaboration with the UN Environment as a part of R|Elan's 'Fashion for Earth' initiative. It was the country's first award for circularity in fashion promoting sustainability across the value chain, and inspiring innovation and offering solutions to reduce the environmental impact of the fashion and textiles industry in the country. It was visualised as a platform for young fashion/accessory designers to showcase their creativity by using materials from diverse sources of waste—including plastic—to promote circularity. From over 900 registrations and 30 different cities of India, the eight finalists unveiled their collections before a 6-member jury that included Atul Bagai (India country head, UN Environment), Mickey Boardman (editorial director and columnist for *Paper* magazine, New York City), Rahul Mishra (fashion and textiles designer) among others.

There were eight finalists in all:

- ▶ **Seerat Virdi**, 27, from Ludhiana, is the creative director and founder of fashion brand Miesu. Her collection for CDC

was a modern take on phulkari embroidery of Punjab. All patterns used sustainable techniques, such as zero-waste pattern-cutting and upcycling discarded fabric waste for embroideries.

- ▶ **Pooja Monga**, 37, from Mumbai is the founder of Saltpetre—Minimal x Sustainable x Work Wear, a sustainable fashion workwear brand for women. All Saltpetre products are produced using scientifically validated sustainable processes. The brand also tracks the environmental footprint of products from cradle to grave.
- ▶ **Kriti Tula**, 30, from Delhi, is the creative director and co-owner of Doodlage, an upcycling fashion brand. Doodlage works with defected, end-of-the-line fabrics, post-cutting waste and post-stitching waste to create limited-edition collections.
- ▶ **Kanika Ahuja**, 28, from New Delhi, is the founder of Lifaffa, an upcycling fashion and accessory brand. Her collection was made from recycled fabric from discarded polythene bags collected from landfills. Lifaffa is collaborating with Akseer, a group of low-income Afghan refugee women in Delhi for her collection.

- ▶ **Bhaavya Goenka**, 24, from Jaipur, is the founder of Iro Iro. All her products were made using pre-consumer waste fabric, which was handwoven into a new fabric. Her designs involved upcycling through handlooms and mechanised embroidery.
- ▶ **Aiman Sabri**, 33, from New Delhi, launched her sustainable fashion label called Pozruh. Her designs were inspired by the subcultures from around the world through shared passion of creativity, fashion and the environment.
- ▶ **Aman Singh**, 28, from New Delhi, is the founder of Bareek, a menswear brand and a social enterprise that works with sustainable materials and artisans in India. His concept for CDC has taken an inspiration from beaches and architecture of Goa, repurposing waste plastic with artisanal techniques.
- ▶ **Poornima Pande**, 33, and **Stefano Funari**, 50, from Mumbai are part of I Was A Sari, an eco-ethical lifestyle fashion brand that won ₹20 lakh and an opportunity to present a collection at LFW Winter/Festive 2019. Poornima has a degree in apparel manufacturing from NIFT and Stefano has studied at the Universita Bocconi in Italy. An underprivileged community of women in Mumbai made the products with the upcycled pre-loved saris. Their designs utilised existing resources in terms of fabrics and materials and reinvented them into unique pieces. The winning collection comprised recycling of plastic tarpaulin into a raincoat, bag and umbrella, a 3D appliqué garment, bags and shoes as well as a menswear creation, long t-shirt with a funky logo and carrybag.

Jury member Bagai said, "It is evident that circularity in fashion has unprecedented benefits not just for the industry, but also for the environment. Circular fashion can and should be mainstreamed to drastically reduce the fashion and textile industry's environmental footprint. The fabulous collections displayed here have bolstered our view that initiatives like CDC is providing the enormous opportunities for budding concept creators, fashion designers and the entire textile value chain to exhibit their innovative ideas and designs with a focus on circularity and sustainability. We are confident that our various initiatives will help transform the entire Indian textiles value chain to become a global leader in embedding circularity in business strategy and operations."



BHAAVYA GOENKA



AIMAN SABRI



AMAN SINGH



POORNIMA PANDE

Upcycling Tencel

Upcycling of fabrics is in, and Tencel along with Fashion Revolution worked with three talented designers from different parts of India who presented upcycled creations at the event. Each designer worked with 500 panels and created an amazing line of ensembles.

- ▶ **Rossebelle, Chennai:** Started in 2016, the Rossebelle brand purchased old, remaining fabrics from companies and designers and reused them by turning them into stylish garments. The Tencel collection called 'Enduring Nineteenth' was inspired by the 19th century style, when clothes featured dramatic silhouettes, oversized sleeves and skirts with intricate ornamentation.
- ▶ **Door of Maai, Kolkata:** Sustainability is a cause close to Pooja Gupta's brand Door of Maai (DOM). The label believes in responsible design—Wear Ethnical Wear DOM. Each collection revolved around environment-friendly fabrics—GOTS certified, organic cotton or khadi. From the Tencel collection, DOM visualised a line inspired by the Victorian era. The tonal white-on-white and beige-on-beige lace work was prominent throughout the garments.
- ▶ **Doodlage, Delhi:** Kriti Tula's Doodlage label has been at the forefront of the sustainability movement for many years now. Re-designing, re-constructing and re-cycling good, second-hand clothing is the brand's forte. The Tencel collection was inspired by the evolution of the flower girl. Hence, it was a feminine, dainty and relaxed line with silhouettes that spelt comfort for the summer heat. Little floral hand-embroidery masked some of the irregularities cleverly in the fabric, while panels were turned into bags.



Crafting Amazement

Three amazing designers brought to centrestage the beauty of design, traditions, craft and textiles from various regions of India.

Jyoti Reddy's work in textiles has been pathbreaking for a designer, producer and marketer of her Ereena brand that offers Eri silk fabrics, saris, accessories and home furnishing. Her 20 years have been spent in experimenting with artisanal craftspersons. Taking Eri to international markets, Jyoti has worked with textile technologists with whom she started Eri yarn factories in Guwahati in 2007.

The 'Bhoomi Bhoomi' collection was a fashion feast of saris, blouses, pants, tunics, dresses, skirts, shirts and jackets, that will suit the requirements of every fastidious dresser.

Ereena produces exclusive silk that has never been seen before, and provides employment to many. With a factory in Assam, as also many outlets, Jyoti has worked with a silk group of 80 master weavers in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Assam and created amazing designs using traditional weaves like ikat, jamdaani and jacquard, along with natural dye block-printing.

On the other hand, Usha Devi Balakrishnan's lifelong passion was textiles and handlooms, which resulted in 2016 as Anka, which endeavours to revive and sustain weavers of Balramapuram. Usha Devi has 35-year public service experience as regional director of the Kudumbashree Project—a government initiative that helped communities living below the poverty line become self-sufficient. The story from the Kingdom of Travancore bloomed in cotton and kasavu for the collection, along with a tribute to the weavers of Balramapuram where each creation was woven in pure cotton and zari.

The Anaam label has been known for its sustainable aspects during the collections presented in the past. The label has fashionably combined craft, art, roots, modernity and this season, brought bandhani to centrestage, and has been created by Rangсутra. Combining the bandhani craft with mirror work, the collection was a colourful artsy, fantasy of style and craft.



The Northeast of Sustainability

Launched at LFW, the Action Plan on North East India Report (APONIR) was aimed to strengthen the livelihoods of artisans by providing them with development support and market linkages. The achievements and interventions of the project, made in marginalised handloom clusters in Assam for areas such as Barkhetri (Nalbari) and Rampur (Kamrup), towards sustainable production and development, were presented in association with implementation partner GoCoop. Anita Dongre's Grassroot label and Raymond, in collaboration with Antar Agni, had eri and muga textiles hand-woven by artisans in these clusters which were then turned into garments.

Dongre's Grassroot label's line was an initiative for the Sustainable Development of the Northeast project. The label has been inspired by "Fashion with a Purpose" and for this collection too, she chose hand-spun fabrics from small clusters in Rampur. Fabrics woven from eri, muga and matka fibres were the base for the eye-catching ensembles, which were highlighted with block printing and embroidery. Dongre brought her distinct designing skills to the forefront with a mix of indutvas or ethnicwear in a delicate combo of ivory and gold.

In the other initiative, Antar Agni's design sensibilities came to centre stage when the collection by Ujjawal Dubey, in association with Raymond, unveiled the capsule line that took the Sustainable Development of the Northeast on to a higher fashion level. The programme's aim is to strengthen the livelihoods of artisans of the region and provide more opportunities.

The 'Story Re-spun – Raymond', is a pledge by Raymond to help rejuvenate traditional Indian craft by collaborating with artisans and designers to create products that are relevant and compelling for consumers of today. As a part of this initiative, over the last two years, design and technical teams from Raymond have worked extensively with khadi and handloom clusters across the country to give the fabric a whole new face and form, while keeping its soul intact.

The collection called 'Balance' was created from the beautiful fabrics woven by artisans of Assam. Fibres like cotton, eri, tussar and muga silk were beautifully turned into luxurious fabrics, dappled with classic Indian motifs, which, at times glittered with zari work.



ANITA DONGRE GRASSROOT



ANTAR AGNI WITH RAYMOND



A Unique Fashion Experience

A unique collaboration that marked the event was one between Péro, one of India's high-end sustainable fashion labels and Bhuttico, a Kullu-based wool weavers cooperative for a special showcase of 'Grown in Australia, Made in India' handmade merino wool textiles and fashion that signify the importance of craft, culture and heritage in today's fashion industry.

The Woolmark Company partnered with Péro and Bhuttico for the unique #FarmToFashion collection, at LFW Summer/Resort 2019. The Woolmark Company is a subsidiary of Australian Wool Innovation, a not-for-profit enterprise that conducts research, development and marketing along the worldwide supply chain for Australian wool. This show unveiled the journey of merino wool from Australia to the 'Made in India' looms and on to the runway.

When Bhuttico was first formed as a cooperative society in 1944,

it consisted of 12 weavers from the Bhutti village, who had come together to nurture their craft and sustain their livelihood. Today, Bhuttico is among the biggest names in the handwoven shawl industry and has several national awards to its credit, with over 600 weavers and master weavers using traditional techniques to create stunning shawls, stoles, suiting fabrics and more. Bhuttico is an authorised user of Woolmark's merino wool. It works on ethical practices as every weaver holds a book record of the amount of fabric they have made. Bhuttico is one of the oldest cooperative weaving societies in India, which in turn has a long-standing relation of over 50 years with Australian merino wool.

Marking the first collaboration for the trio, the collection comprised handwoven and handmade luxury garments that used Australian merino wool and highlighted India's iconic hand-weaving tradition.

The collaboration was a part of the 'Grown in Australia, Made in India' initiative and showcased handmade merino wool textiles in Péro's signature style.

Aneeth Arora, a textiles graduate from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad and a fashion graduate from National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) had launched the Péro label in 2009. Moving into the picturesque town of Kullu in Himachal Pradesh, Péro was inspired by the work of the artisans and this helped to visualise the revival of traditional geometric patterns of pattu in monochrome colours in shades of blue, khaki and off-white.

In addition, the fabric tapes developed by Péro with the Bhuttico weavers also featured the geometric designs inspired by the pattu patterns. The merino wool was the apt choice for the Péro label since the wool has a strong natural renewable and biodegradable aspect.



Crafting India's Future

The British Council's global 'Crafting Futures' India programme, in collaboration with IMG Reliance and Fashion Revolution, brought the show to the country. Fashion Revolution is an organisation that celebrates fashion as a positive influence, while also scrutinising industry practices and raising awareness of the most pressing issues facing the fashion industry.

The collaboration was between British designer Bethany Williams and Indian designer Aratrik Dev Varman of the label Tilla, who explored new fashion systems and approached female textile artisans in the Northeast region. The aim was to grow their livelihoods and economic opportunities by responding to a creative brief set by Fashion Revolution.

Helen Sylvester, director, British Council (India-West), said, "The Crafting Futures programme supports economic, social and cultural development among craft producing communities in seven countries. With our partners IMG Reliance/LFW and Fashion

Revolution, we brought Crafting Futures to India last year for the first time. We invited Williams and Dev Varman to undertake a residency amongst female artisanal textile producers in Tripura through the film of the residency that we commissioned from Storybom Films. Through the integration of fabrics and designs from Tripura into today's show and exhibition, the extraordinary talent of the textile producers of Tripura has reached national and international stage."

Jaspreet Chandok, vice-president and head of fashion at IMG Reliance said, "We are happy to partner with British Council for the Crafting Futures programme and we look forward to grow this as a larger conversation in the future."

During the LFW Summer/Resort 2018, Dev Varman for the Northeast Mojo Show presented his label Tilla, started in 2011 in Ahmedabad and focused on the 'rishia' or the narrow Tripuri breast clothes. Women from the prominent 19 tribes of Tripura wove these in a single strip on loolooms. Creating womenswear and home textiles, Dev





BETHANY WILLIAMS

Varman used fine sheer fabrics like chanderi, khadi and mul-mul, with kantha and rogan block printed dots or patchwork. The woven strips and panels were hand-joined for skirts and shawls. The traditional weaves were converted to create contemporary, feminine clothing that were stunning in colour and form.

This season, Dev Varman presented the Tripura Collection, which was a result of the Crafting Futures programme from April 2018 to early 2019 and this time too, he worked with the textiles of Tripura. He brought into focus again the risha woven on loolooms by tribal women across the state and investigated the history of this craft, while mapping the context in which it is now practised.

Dev Varman focused on black, red, white, ochré and then combined the strips with chanderi, khadi and handwoven silk for resortwear separates that would move effortlessly from day to eveningwear. Tilla's Summer/Resort 2019 collection used Tencel for the risha, replacing acrylic and all the weavers loved weaving with the material because of its strength and

lustre. The aim of the collection was to publicise the textiles, as well as help the women earn a livelihood and therefore present a fashionable line of ready-to-wear garments.

In addition to the fashion presentation on the ramp, Dev Varman also had an exhibition in two parts, 'The People' and 'The Court', consisting of photographs and textiles that recorded the last decades of the risha being worn as it was in the palace and villages of Tripura, on two parallel but different timelines. The textiles consisted of 34 traditionally woven rishas. A study of these textiles was undertaken in an effort to revive the weaving of some of these designs, which have been catalogued, along with a glossary of motifs and technical notes. The catalogue will be of interest to anyone working with Tripuri textiles and culture.

The collection of Bethany Williams focused on connecting communities of women and their craft. The San Patrignano community, in Italy, developed the Tripuri fabrics, more specifically those from the Reang community and textiles from waste.

When completing the crafting futures residency in Tripura, Williams discovered that each community provides a very self-sustaining model of living, especially in the woven cloth process, with maker, seller and buyer being part of a village eco-system that was interdependent. Through the residency, Williams believed that any change or intervention within the community needed to be considered as a holistic approach, as she did not want to damage this beautiful way of life.

The woven cloth of each tribe depicted and provided a lot of unwritten tribal history. Therefore, Williams did not want to change any of the designs of the fabrics, but only showcased this tribal history and patterns. The denim elements within the collection were sourced from Chris Carney Collections, a recycling and sorting facility. The denim is unpicked before being reconstituted and hand-printed into new garments. Williams displayed her experiments with the fabrics of Tripura in the form of five menswear garments. The fabrics for these were created by the Hrangkhwal, Reang, Rupini and Debbarma communities.

When Artisans Speak

A dazzling show was held at the UNESCO World Heritage site—the Elephanta Caves near Mumbai—in January 2019 that was titled ‘Artisan Speak’. The event showcased the GI textiles of India, through a confluence of fashion, music and dance. The Union minister for textiles, Smriti Zubin Irani, secretary textiles, Raghvendra Singh and other officials from the ministry were present on the occasion. Former Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar was present, on behalf of Arvind True Blue Limited.

Addressing the gathering, Irani said: “I am grateful to industry captains for stepping up to this initiative under the aegis of the ministry of textiles. The textiles secretary has been speaking about the need to explore synergy between our culture and textiles. We are now standing at a site where 2,000 years ago, people built something without the aid of modern technology, something that depicts pure

passion and love for craft. I am grateful to Sachin Tendulkar for partnering with weavers and textiles legacy of our country, as he begins a new chapter. Instead of profiting alone, he has chosen to share the profit with the community that has built the craft legacy of our country.”

The textiles companies that signed agreements with the office of the development commissioner (handlooms), ministry of textiles, on the occasion were:

- ▶ Arvind True Blue Limited (Kulin Lalbhai, executive director);
- ▶ Raymond Ltd (Gaurav Mahajan, president — group apparels);
- ▶ Welspun India Limited (Anil Channa, executive director — operations);
- ▶ Titan Co Ltd (Ajoy Chawla, senior vice-president);
- ▶ Reliance Retail Limited (Akhilesh Prasad, president and chief executive)

Under the agreements, the weavers service centres (WSCs) under the office of DC (handlooms)





Sanjay Rastogi (Development commissioner-Handlooms), Sachin Tendulkar, Smiriti Zubin Irani (Union textiles minister), Kulin Lalbhai (Executive Director-Arvind Ltd.), Raghvendra Singh (Secretary, Ministry of Textiles) and others.

From Japan to India

The name Soumitra Mondal and his brand Marg are well-known, having presented his fabulous khadi collections for several seasons in the established designers category. There was an exciting fashion presentation in the form of the label 'Bunon' that was launched at Vlas Blomme in Meguro, Tokyo, Japan, by Soumitra in 2018, in consultation with Japanese designer Satoshi Ishii. The label was launched in India when a line of exquisite garments was unveiled for Indian fashion lovers. Some 350 master weavers from Bardhaman, Murshidabad and Nadia in West Bengal creatively wove the line in khadi and silk handlooms.



will enable textile firms to directly source their requirements from handloom clusters, as per defined quality, cost and time constraints. This will also result in better price realisation and improved market understanding for weavers. The historic occasion will mark a new beginning of major commitments by the private sector towards the development of India's handlooms.

The grand fashion show presented by designers and artisans featured Rahul Mishra with chikankari, Payal Khandwala with banarasi brocades, master weaver Shantilal Bhangade with paithani, Gaurang Shah with kanchipuram silks, Ushadevi Balakrishnan with Balaramapuram saris through Anka, Karishma Shahani Khan with kota doria/ chanderi, Meera Muzaffar Ali with chikankari, Padmaja with maheshwari, Rajib Debnath with jamdani saris, and David Abraham and Rakesh Thakore with hand-block prints on handloom cotton.**FF**