

A GRAND MIX



The first digital India Couture Week showcased the skills of master craftspeople and embroiderers that have made Indian bridalwear one of the most coveted in the world, reports **Meher Castelino**



It was an eclectic mix of fashion, films, creativity and techno expertise. The films shot at exotic locales and even underwater or in pools, ranged from 4–10 minutes in length as 12 designers unveiled their bridal couture collections for 2020 at the first digital India Couture Week (ICW) by the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) from September 18 to 23. The colourful range of fabrics and of course the amazing embroidery and embellishments that were presented, once again ensured that the bridalwear business is very much intact. Noticeable for every collection there was—no doubt—that it was the skill of the master craftsmen and embroiderers that has made Indian bridalwear one of the most coveted in the world.



GAURAV GUPTA
Sculpted Perfection

The collection called 'Name is Love' was all about fabrics, colours and embellishments. Opaque and sheer materials vied for attention as organza, tulle, silk and taffeta were moulded and wired to perfection. The glimmer of bugle beads along with crystals, sequins and braiding further enhanced the grandeur of the men's and women's western couture collection. The colour story was deep and lush with emerald, bordeaux fuchsia, black and white, nude, jade, navy, beige, and grey, creating the magic. White embroidered flying horses and ethereal birds on black velvet tuxedos with shawl collars and accessorised with bow ties gave the men's eveningwear that extra 21st century fashionable pizzazz.



SUNEET VARMA
Extremely Embellished

For his collection 'Timeless by Suneet Varma', the designer stayed true to only the indutva or Indianwear category with the lehenga-choli-dupatta set brought centre stage, and the sari given the reverence and respect it deserves. He selected sheer, lucid fabrics like tulle, banarasi, tanchoi silks, jacquards and organza along with heavy lush silk but it was the embellishments that proved to be Varma's strong fashion statement. Colours were in a palette that shone with sunshine yellow, salmon pink, coral and of course, red. Flying birds of paradise, fluttering multi-coloured butterflies, flowers, paisleys, traditional and abstract motifs, played an artistic silver or gold symphony on the ensembles as crystals, sequins and mirror work along with beads shimmered bright. The sheer long-sleeves of the cholis were dappled at times with floral foliage in multi hues. Gleaming chevrons dazzled on umbrella shaped lehengas, along with 3D tonal tiny sequins that encrusted the long maxi skirts.



AMIT AGGARWAL
Underwater Fantasy

Amit Aggarwal's collections have not only always been arrestingly glamorous, but have also ensured that the aesthetics are based on a totally futuristic concept. Using industrial materials, rubber tubes with new age textiles and his signature polymer strips, Aggarwal created a line that was inspired by the ocean, earth and sky. Geometry played a major role for the limited collection in the video totally shot under water. Horizontal, vertical and diagonal strips were the mainstay of the indutva and occasion wears and covered the sheer fabrics in pastel and oceanic hues to match the theme. There was a marked element of weightlessness in the fabrics selected, making the ensembles ideal bridalwear. The very noticeable tactile feel of the creations made them quite surreal at times in appearance, but totally wearable in style and form.



RAHUL MISHRA
Organic and Earthy

Rahul Mishra's collection "The Lotus Pond" offered a visual craft scene on simple shapes. The emphasis was on birds, butterflies, lotus motifs, dragonflies, planktons, aquatic plants, fish and sea life along with diverse psychedelia of the underwater world. The fabrics were crisp cottons for the men's and women's wears along with selections of muga silk, silk dupion, tulle and silk organza. The colourfully embellished lehenga, choli and dupatta sets revealed an earthy story, while 3D embroidery and sequins highlighted simple eveningwear. Menswear revolved around pastel pink sherwanis and bundies with tonal or white embroidery to match the theme of the collection, which was not only organic in choice of textiles, but the hand embellishments also paid tribute to the work of master karigars.



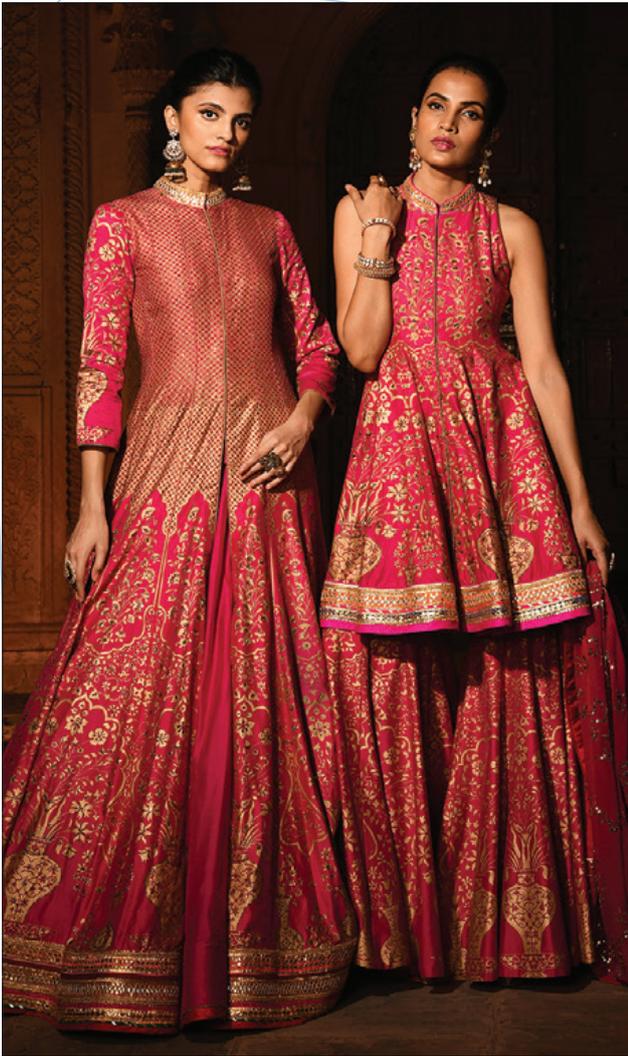
DOLLY J
Feathers and Flounces

Presenting a luxurious feminine bridalwear collection called 'Gulenaar', Dolly J ensured that the gowns and traditional bridalwear were perfectly suitable to the fashion sensibilities of the contemporary buyers. Chikankari played a vital role as an embellishment, along with appliqués and a generous offering of sequins and embroidery. Dolly developed a special luxe silk organza with a jacquard finish that added to the glittering value of the ensembles. The colours started with gentle hues of pale pink, pastel mauve, nude, white, champagne and then soared to the bridal favourite of traditional bright red. The embroidery and at times fluttering feathers caressed the edges of sari borders and were splashed extravagantly on gowns, dupattas and lehengas, and at times totally encrusted the tiny cholis.



JJ VALAYA
Historically Inspired Couture

JJ Valaya unveiled his ode to the Ottoman Empire with the 'Bursa' collection. It was a glorious couture line for men and women who long for heirlooms in the traditional format of saris, lehengas, cholis, dupattas, sherwanis and kurtas with historic touches. The mainstay of the collection was the age-old craft of zardosi, which was intricately used along with stunning prints on the rich silks, and velvets. To add further dazzle to the ensembles, Valaya brought in Swarovski crystals, silk threads, beads, pearls in patterns that recreated the grandeur of the inspiration from the Ottoman era. There was detailing in the form of the Turkish armour, mainly the quills used at that time, along with patterns that featured Turkish flora, fauna, and fruits like pomegranates. Even miniatures known as Taswir and the ornamentation of gold called Tezhip along with the beauty of the Topkapi jewels were used as inspirations for the intricate embroidery. Colours started from deep tones of brown, purple, rust, yellow, turquoise, black and then moved to white and beige.



REYNU TAANDON
Ode to Embroidery

Reynu Taandon's 'Surkh' collection was designed to please the bridal aesthetics of the traditional Indian girl. Aimed at being the perfect attire for all the wedding events, Taandon offered a line of dazzling saris, shararas, ghararas, lehengas, cholis, dupattas, kurtas and kurtis. Colours favoured were the wedding worthy baby pink, fuchsia, fuchsia red, and the impressive sindoor-red formed the mainstay of the creations. Fabrics were the all time favourites like silks and tulle along with handwoven, eco-friendly, chanderi, raw silk and georgette that were encrusted with light zari work, block and foil prints, Swarovski crystals, marori work, gota patti embellishments, patchwork and of course the ever popular zardosi. What brought in an added exotic flavour was the mix of block prints with embroidery, which featured traditional motifs that added to the couture quality of the ensembles.



SHANTANU & NIKHIL
Ceremonial Couture

For their first digital fashion presentation called 'The Resurgence', designers Shantanu & Nikhil brought ceremonial couture for men and women. There was a marked emphasis on embellishments. It was an opulent journey with power dressing coming in the form of heavy metallic influences for gown bodices or as palm bracelets. Goth appliqués and traditional zardosi were brought in a more contemporary form. Metallic gold influences and sheen highlighted the sheer beauty of tulle, velvet, brocades, chiffon, georgette and full-bodied silks. Drapes and folds appeared periodically for the majestic gowns, while for menswear with the 21st century look of asymmetrically draped kurtas, under crisp bundies worked really well. Embroidery appeared on collars, elbows and waists of the kurtas and sherwanis but in a more restrained manner. The colour story moved from silver grey to ink, deep red, wine, maroon, black and royal blue for added drama.



KUNAL RAWAL
Discreet Surface Ornamentation

Kunal Rawal's menswear collection 'Hide and Seek' allowed the audience to admire the various types of intricate and detailed embroidery that the designer favoured. Last season, he brought in the photosensitive line of fabrics that changed colours in the light. This season keeping his favoured french knots in the forefront, Rawal added stylish distinct touches with metallic highlights in gold and oxidised silver, along with resham and extreme bead work for an attention-grabbing look. Colours were masculine in tones, with white, ivory and black gradually moving to baby pink, blue, lemon, peach and then exploding into jewel tones of maroon, brown, khaki and emerald. From practical cottons, the fabrics moved to lush silks and some velvet, to add a stylish twist to menswear. Words like "Traditional" in pale yellow were delicately embroidered to cover the surface of an asymmetric long line bundi. Colour blocking appeared for kurtas and jackets in bold geometric forms to highlight the stylish, but sober nature of the design. Embroidery put an emphasis on geometrics as minute motifs and trio of leaves often embellished much of the menswear.



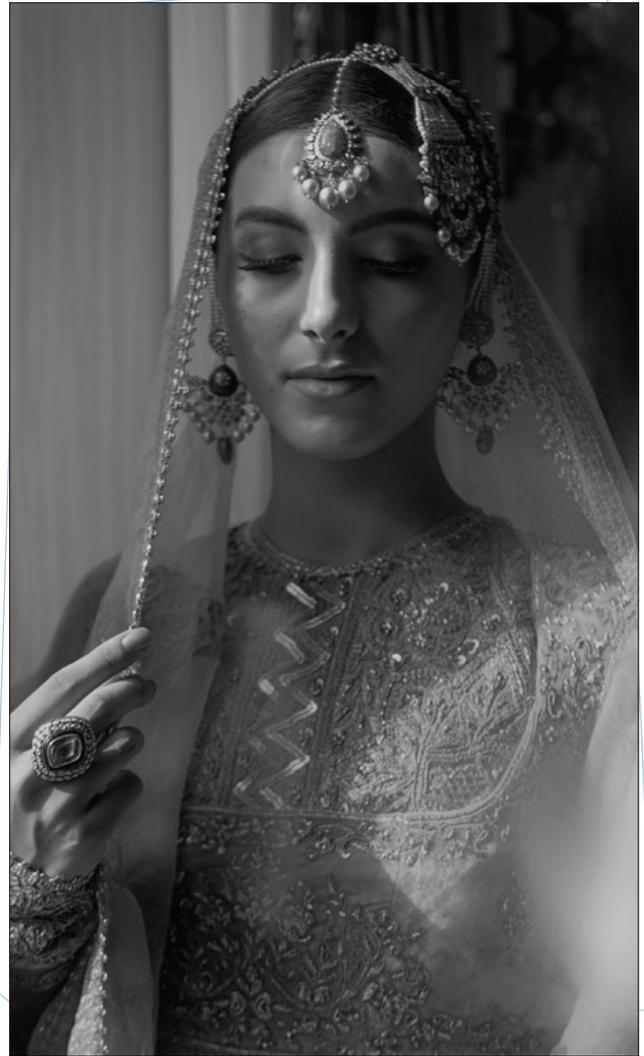
FALGUNI & SHANE PEACOCK
Bridal Fantasy

For their collection 'Marry Me in Jaipur', Falguni Shane Peacock brought the backstage excitement to the foreground with a film called *Spectacle Privé*. It was a glittering display of white, pastel and jewel tones like electric, yellow and post box red, with hints of blush pink, emerald green and gold. The asymmetric layers and the intense tonal embroidery on the lehengas, cholis, dupattas and ball gowns were the cynosure of the ensembles. Feathers, that are a constant in the designing duo's collections, appeared on hemlines, necklines and on layers of the garments. The sheer tulle was encrusted with beads, pearls, and crystal embroidery, while the rich silks for the cholis had beaded strands of pearls that appeared on sleeves, hemlines and backs of the garments. Since the collection was inspired by the Pink City, the architectural beauty of the city's havelis were reflected in the embroidery designs along with an occasional appearance of chevrons and traditional Indian motifs.



ANJU MODI
Traditionally Red

‘Sindoori’ was the name of Anju Modi’s collection that was dedicated to the modern bride who likes to dress up for the most important day in her life, but in a practical and less ostentatious manner. Starting with white mul for the beginning of the wedding ceremonies, Modi added small hints of embroidery on the shoulders but allowed the pristine fabric to do all the fashionable talking. Keeping the colour red in focus and drawing inspiration for the embellishments and silhouettes from her grandmother’s glorious outfits, Modi worked with a variety of pashmina’s kimkhab, chanderis, velvets and banarasi fabrics, which she used with vegetable dyes to highlight the textiles. The multiple dupattas with an assortment of weaves and motifs ensured that Indian textiles are still favoured for bridal trousseaux. Besides the bright red, she also brought in a lavish use of ochrés and greens as well as hints of purple, maroon, white, gold and silver. The gota patti work, along with the traditional Indian motifs and geometrics added to the timeless, wearable, quality of the collection.



MANISH MALHOTRA
Blending Traditions

Manish Malhotra unveiled his ‘Ruhaaniyat’ collection, which was a grand mix of two inspirations—glorious Awadh and grand Punjab. There was a marked old world charm visible in the clothes as the models moved gracefully. To bring the glory of these two regions centrestage for his collections, Malhotra researched in museums and travelled extensively to create the bridalwear look that would appeal to buyers who long for tradition with a contemporary touch. The menswear was created in pure cotton and cotton silks along with mashru, velvet and muslin. The Mughal inspiration was recreated with unconventional archival fabrics. That was in the form of ancient zari woven with gold and silver borders, while the fabrics were hand-basted and hand-quilted. The natural dyes brought forth a colour palette that was regal in nature as pista green, teal, dusky pink, grey and maroon were encrusted with layering and embellishments. The embroidery had a marked influence of the Persian era along with Rajasthani motifs that featured zardosi vintage accents.**FF**