

FASHION RETAIL



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CELEBRATING A CITY AND ITS TRADITION

Varanasi, the city and Banarasi, its textile tradition dominated the show and captivated the audience during the Indian Handloom and Textiles Day this time at the Lakmé Fashion Week Winter/Festive 2015, MEHER CASTELINO reports.

It's not always that an ancient city and its rich textile heritage hold sway over an event that's said to define fashion for the days to come. But that's what happened this time at the Lakmé Fashion Week Winter/Festive 2015 where Varanasi, the city and Banarasi, the heritage dominated. The two words, often interchangeably used, overshadowed all else.

The Week itself commenced with the organisers extending support to the 'Woven Wonders of Varanasi' exhibition curated by designer-politician Shaina NC. The exhibition, held in association with the Ministry of Textiles at Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum on August 21, showcased garments that were fashioned from the handcrafted textiles of Varanasi weavers. The designers were big names: Ritu Kumar, Rohit Bal, Rajesh Pratap Singh, Anita Dongre, Ritu Beri, Gaurav Gupta, Varun Bahl, Anju Modi, Narendra Kumar, Rina Dhaka, Sanjay Garg, Krishna Mehta and Shruti Sancheti.

The exhibition was part of the initiative titled 'Reinvent Banaras' that was announced earlier in the month, and followed up on the nationwide campaign led by Shaina NC seeking to uplift Banarasi handlooms. The campaign included films, demonstrations, talks and panel discussions.

These initiatives culminated in the Indian Handloom and Textiles Day that was observed on day two of the five-day bi-annual event. "The idea was to extend a platform, and put the spotlight back on the weavers, promote their art, and bring the tradition back into mainstream fashion," explained Saket Dhankar, vice president and head (Fashion) with IMG Reliance Ltd, which manages the event.





Day with their gorgeous designs under their label SNNA Banaras Revisited. The pair has over time worked with Varanasi master weavers to create heirlooms and keep the art alive. Their aim is to design traditional textiles that cater to the desires of the younger generation. Their experiments with motifs, colours and placements are said to have given a fresh impetus to the ancient city's weaves. Their collection came across as a treasure trove of 16 sarees with glorious colours and classic patterns, and had the audience in thrall.

So, what role does modernity play in the textile world, and who are the weavers and what is their future? These issues cropped up during a lively and thought-provoking discussion on "Banaras in Indian Fashion." The panel comprised Sanjay Garg, award-winning designer; Alok Kumar, development commissioner Handlooms with the Ministry of Textiles; and Ashoke Chatterjee, former executive director of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

Chatterjee emphasised on the need to protect and promote the age-old Banarasi weaves, but at the same time felt that consumers need to be educated about the greatness of handlooms that will not only facilitate revival but also develop other sectors. Kumar focused on how to win back the trust of consumers who are interested in genuine handlooms. The government's association with fashion weeks would encourage young people and increase demand and opportunities for weavers, he said. Garg saw the need to take a re-look at things, and suggested that "handloom" itself was a brand.

Swati and Sunaina, known to be ardent lovers of woven textiles, kicked off the Indian Handloom and Textiles





Divya Sheth



Hastkala



Gaurang

Paying tribute to the glorious craftsmanship of India, Anita Dongre launched her 'Grassroot' collection. Featuring the weaves of Banaras with ikat, khadi and hand-spun silk, Anita added the beauty of block printing, warli and embroidery to highlight the apparel. The final mirrorwork line moved from smocks and jackets to gowns, floor-length front-open maxis, printed peplum blouses, and sparkling kurtas that matched with orange cropped jackets on indigo, orange and black long lean dresses. Anita's premiere collection of eco-conscious bags displayed the craft of miniature paintings. For the finale, Anita invited 26 master craftswomen from Gujarat to walk the ramp.

Weave revivalist and textile designer, Gaurang Shah showcased his 'Samyukta' collection. Gaurang's labour of love took eight months during which he created the lush fabrics in Surkh red and matched them with timeless embellishments for the



Myoho



Ritu Kumar

while the ethereal white-on-white hand-cut work Jamdani of Varanasi was outstanding. With 50 master craftsmen in her team, Ritu presented a mind-boggling collection of timeless designs that ranged from yarns in silk and metallic to reviving the traditional design motifs. The white-on-white line with gold highlights in transparent or opaque weaves, and the gossamer fabrics were a dream. The saree section was rich and lush in colour and form. The third part was the grand

44-piece elaborate collection of bridal wear with Varanasi weaves. Gaurang unleashed a glittering magical collection of swirling anarkalis, lehengas and ghagras teamed with kurtis and cholis. He also added ijgars, farshis and Jamdani sarees for variety. The Patolas were rich in colour, design and texture, and when teamed with Banarasi saris, the blend was breathtaking. The colour story was restricted to predominantly bridal hues where red and its versions was the mainstay of the collection with mustard, saffron, navy and gold adding to the glamour. Black, white and blue were meant to balance the palette.

Ritu Kumar, India's most prolific and internationally well-known textile revivalist, dazzled with her sensational 'Varanasi Weaves' collection. Ritu's initiative to honour Varanasi weavers was supported by the Ministry of Textiles. Using old nakshas, Ritu recreated superb collections of vintage designs. Bringing back the beauty of motifs like Badami, Kyari, Shikargah and floral butis, Ritu showcased glittering gold and silver royal textiles. The luxurious lehengas, layered garments and exquisite sarees displayed the magnificence of Banaras weaves in peacock hues, red, pink, saffron as well as pretty pastels



Rouka



Banarasi weaves that were once a favourite with the monasteries of the Himalayas. Ritu closed the show with the final line of weaves, which were a part of the CSR programme of her team, where the grand bridal collection of the most ornate lehengas, blouses, corset kurtas, raja coats and panelled skirts dazzled. But the best of the show was kept for the last when the master weavers of Varanasi took a bow on the ramp along with Ritu Kumar.

A display of Varanasi textiles by Rinku Sobti with her collection 'Tassels' brought to centrestage the intricate work of the weavers from the Bajardiya cluster. Just like the tufts of pretty free-hanging threads or cords that embellish fabrics, the tassels added extravagance to the fabulous weaves. It was a symphony of gorgeous fabrics that were unfurled on the runway in two varying

BEYOND VARANASI

Reinventing embroidery: Inspired by the Chinese art and its various forms, Ashdeen Lilaowala's collection 'The Scent of the Orient' was a mix of Parsi Gara embroidery and Chinese inspirations. Working around the blue and white Chinese porcelain flora and fauna designs, the delicately-embroidered sarees were worth beholding. Shades of blue and cream highlighted the luxurious chiffon and crepe, while cobalt, burgundy and slate were a great backdrop for the contrast embellishments.

Mix of textiles and craft: Karishma Shahani Khan, for her Ka-Sha label, presented a collection with multiple inspirations from the past. Working with a unique fabric manipulation with pleats and smocking playing a major role, Karishma worked with stripes and ornamental polkas and layered them cleverly with geometric florals to create 2D and 3D effects. Traditional heritage embroidery in material zari, along with folding and dyeing techniques on silks and cottons added to the richness of the collection. Surface ornamentation highlighted silhouettes that broke away from stereotypes. The focal point of the collection was the gorgeously tasselled scarves that accompanied every entry.

Blends: The 'Maisa' collection dreamt up by Kiran and Meghna for their label Myoho was a layered fashionable tribute to women of strength. Selecting a fabric story that moved effortlessly from tussar to gajji silk in monochromes, the garments were a sharply-cut line. Splashes of deep red appeared at times for the 'Maisa' ensembles, which mean "one with the proud walk". The collection was an unconventional blend of fluid yet wild elements, which were balanced perfectly for the creations, which in turn were cleverly crafted into a variety of silhouettes and shapes.

Textures: Ruchika Sachdeva showcased a new fashion horizon for Indian women who are untamed, yet rooted to their soil. Silhouettes were laid back, and spoke of serenity with a twist of flamboyance and easy chic. Deep tan and metallic rust complimented the organic. Experimental textures were attempted and the results were found in the form of innovative and distinctive patterns.

Inspirations: Divya Sheth created a stir with a culture-rich collection titled 'Kalam Putli'. Drawing inspiration from the age-old tradition of marionettes from Rajasthan, the range of clothing was elegantly ornate as silhouettes of Rajasthani puppets danced merrily on the garments. The famous art form of Kalamkari was elegantly etched across hand-spun, handwoven

Khadi and organic silk, olden Peshwaz and Angias that were contrasted with cotton jersey to give it a present-day look.

Innovative weaves: Swati Vijaivargie fashioned her collection 'Mauj' making the best of waste. The designer was inspired by the distinctive artistry of flat-weaving called Kilim and Dhurrie, and also by the artisans who created them. The collection was mostly inspired by the Mauj Dhurrie type of weaving, which consists of leftover or waste threads. The no-restriction bar of this type of woven fabric gave the creator power over the patterns and colours when woven.

Old world charm: Jaipur-based designers Rahul n Shikha with their brand Vrissa rejuvenated one of the oldest forms of textile designing for their collection 'A-Jharat' (derived from Azrak meaning blue in Arabic). The clothing line 'A-Jharat' was influenced by Azrak designs and the printing technique used to make unique textiles called Bagru-Dabu. This kind of printing also involves the use of all natural dyes extracted from plants, flowers, trees and fruits, therefore making it eco-friendly and pure.

Indigenous style: Priyanka Dagdee's Hastkala label presented 'The Mysterious Beginnings'. She recreated timeless beauty with strong contours and cuts to give a classic appeal to silhouettes in monochrome hues splashed with cranberry. The motifs of skulls and bones breathed life on the easy going loose silhouettes. Rejuvenating Indian aesthetics, Priyanka used tie-n-dye techniques throughout her collection. The garments were made of indigenous fabrics like pure silk and cotton. Handmade techniques and textures gave a perfectly urbanised look to the serene silhouettes.

Indian aesthetics: Revealing experimental touches for his label Rouka, Sreejith Jeevan's 'Write to Me' collection imparted life to the timeless handwritten letters that were used to communicate messages. His collection of fusion-wear conveyed nostalgic sentiments mixed with modernity. His garments were quirky and stylish for the fun, fearless and powerful bride. Stamp motifs, handwritten words and letter quotes had been hand-woven on luxurious fabrics.

Luxuriant: Soumitra Mondal unveiled a collection that was not only rich in Indian culture and heritage but promoted the beauty of handwoven fabrics and craftsmanship that evoked royal luxury. Inspired by the history of Indian textiles and styles, Soumitra's ethereal collection was crafted in the most exquisite fabrics. Khadi appeared in various forms – silk, zari and Jamdani. Paying creative homage to the colour red, Soumitra ensured it was the prime hue in his collection.



Rinku Sobti



Rinku Sobti



Rahul n Shikha

collection. Presenting a beautifully crafted couture collection, Krishna displayed handwoven tanchois, jangla and Jamawar silks. She further added her trademark Shibori, tie-n-dye techniques and then splashed the fabrics with gotta and zari work. Shades of vibrant pink, yellow and soft green came together with pastel tones, while gotta and zardozi added a refreshing touch. 

forms – the Grand and the Subtle. The Grand was a mesmerising line of intricate traditional weaves with a dramatic play of jewel tones, while the Subtle was an avant garde offering of beautiful practical checks and arts that would thrill the modern buyer. The fine silks were expertly hand-woven by master craftsmen turning each piece into a timeless heirloom. For added design elements, Rinku brought in the unconventional macramé and placed elaborate motifs on to the stunning fabrics.

Shruti Sancheti presented an amazing collection called 'Kaashi to Kyoto' for her Pinnacle label. Combining inspirations, Shruti redefined ancient Varanasi weaving with a contemporary touch. Motifs of nature from Kyoto like maple leaves, mushrooms, flower buds, abstract birds and floral laces were woven in exotic silver, gold and rose gold. The colour story was a strong one with azure blue, crimson, sapota, ivory, gold, deep purple and wine that created a grand mélange of hues.

The richness of Banarasi silks was also brought to the stage by Krishna Mehta with her 'The Gold and the Ganges'



Swati Vijavargie