



WEAVES IN ACTION

The Sustainable Fashion Day at the Lakmé Fashion Week this time saw six designers enthralling the audience with their dazzling innovations. **Meher Castelino** presents a first-hand account of the weaves that seek to provide an impetus to the local economies in the Northeast.



IMG Reliance is collaborating with the United Nations to create an amazing informative dialogue/show on the Northeast. Northeast designers will be supported by the British Council's global Crafting Futures programme, also in association with IMG Reliance and Fashion Revolution. The collaboration with the UN aims to boost the local economy of the Northeast.

Every season, the IMG Reliance Sustainable Fashion Day at Lakmé Fashion Week has been the most awaited, with the presentation of the glamorous textiles and crafts of India. At LFW Summer/Resort 2018, Northeast designers presented by IMG Reliance at the Northeast Mojo event enthralled the audience at the opening show of Sustainable Fashion Day. Six designers, a craft society and an installation unveiled the beauty and grandeur of fashion from Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Assam, Nagaland and Tripura as each state showcased its stunning traditional fabrics and crafts.

Jaspreet Chandok, vice-president and fashion head, IMG Reliance, said, "We are glad that we have developed a platform to engage key stakeholders and work towards building the economy of the Northeast. To create a call to action for structuring collaboration models between the Northeast and industry has greatly excited all of us. We are happy to initiate these meaningful dialogues and interventions, and to highlight the real and solid actions taken by industry leaders, as well as build conviction on the need to invest in the long-term sustainable development of the Northeast."



RICHANA KHUMANTHEM, MANIPUR



JENJUM GADI, NAGALAND



DANIEL SYIEM, MEGHALAYA

Assam's fabulous textiles

The Sanskar label by Sonam Dubal has brought fashion with a Buddhist heritage to the forefront for 15 years. Working with recycled vintage fabrics, ikat, indigenous silk like eri and wool, Sonam's collections have been loved by Indians and international buyers. His Majuli collection of six gorgeous garments was an admirable installation that displayed the textiles of Assam. Majuli, a large island on the Brahmaputra, has been a cultural cradle of Assamese civilisation for the past 500 years.

The main industries of Assam are agriculture and handloom. Weaving here is exquisite and intricate using a variety of colours and textures of cotton and silk especially eri and muga. Taking inspiration from the dances and the weaves of this incredibly blessed region, Sonam worked on a cultural canvas incorporating Assamese traditional and contemporary textiles and infused them with ikats and prints and hand embroideries creating Indo-Asian shapes that have a global appeal.

This exquisite collection captured the essence and ethos of the Assamese tapestry. Majuli

represented the magical flow of the Brahmaputra, and its abundant nature was represented through colour, pattern and style. Amalgamating craft textiles into contemporary dresses, capes and embroidered jackets, this collection created a harmony in autumn tones of browns and rusts against plainer styles in textures of black in eri and cotton weaves. Assam has always played an important role from the beginning of Sonam's foray into fashion when he first discovered eri silk.

The contemporary dresses, silk wraps, capes and embroidered jackets in winter shades of black, cream, red, brown, grey and beige were embellished with dori and woodwork. The eri and muga as well as cotton weaves with hints of ikat and Assamese gamcha were turned into layered creations that merged perfectly into a single outfit or could be worn as separates.

Meghalaya's intricate fabrics

It was Daniel Syiem's third showing at LFW Summer/Resort 2018 (after Summer/Resort 2013 and Winter/Festive 2013), and the collection called ShaKiLum was a veritable

feast for the eyes. Daniel focused on ryndia (heritage fabric handwoven by weavers of Meghalaya), and presented an arresting line of garments.

Focusing on the handwoven organic fabrics from the RiBhoi district, Daniel created a striking look. Colours reflected the beauty of Meghalaya as turmeric, green, brown, and pale red were embellished with bamboo, wood and pinecones. The looks were interesting with loose tunics, baggy salwars for men along with pleated pants, cowl cropped tops, baggy bundies and poncho/sleeved covers.

For women, the draped tops, jumpsuits and neat, asymmetric, pleated, dress made an impact. The layered silhouettes reflected the beauty of traditional Meghalaya costumes. Quadruple collars were dramatically eye-catching, while slashed covers over slim tunics presented an almost puritan image. Tucks, drop shoulders and curved hemlines added to the garment construction technique, while spiked wooden necklaces completed the impact. The layering was imaginative, turning the multiple garments into a complete elegant story.



SONAM DUBAL, ASSAM



DANIEL SYIEM, MEGHALAYA

ACTION GOES NORTHEAST

Lakmé Fashion Week's Action Northeast is an initiative for the growth of craft and a sustainable fashion economy of the Northeast, writes **Meher Castelino**

Northeast designers are now supported by the British Council's global Crafting Futures programme in association with IMG Reliance and Fashion Revolution. This is meant to encourage the sustainable fashion dialogue in the Northeast in collaboration with the United Nations in India.

The organisers hosted an action-oriented dialogue on the Northeast during Lakmé Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2018. The dialogue opened the Sustainable Fashion Day, followed by a curated show, which featured six sustainable fashion designers from six of the eight Northeast states.

The aim of the collaboration with the UN was to boost the local sustainable economy of the Northeast. It was an attempt to showcase the exciting potential of the region to mainstream stakeholders, including brands and designers. The lens of fashion presented an unparalleled opportunity to highlight the mutual benefits of doing business in the Northeast. At the show, the six featured designers tapped into an evocative tradition of weaves to propel a movement towards creating supply chain frameworks that can provide sustainable livelihoods for artisans and bridge the gap between the Northeast and industry stakeholders.

The Northeast's handloom sector is hindered by difficult terrain, which delays the supply of yarn to weavers. Loinlooms, which produce cloth of a narrow width, are still popular, limiting the utility

of the cloth. Yet, the Northeast has the highest concentration of handlooms in the country. The UN in India, IMG Reliance and GoCoop announced the launch of the Action Plan on Northeast India Report, a first-of-its-kind attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities in the region for the fashion and lifestyle industry.

The report will assess the current and future demand for handloom products from the Northeast and, most significantly, recommend a strategy for developing supply chains and marketing channels for handloom organisations and artisans. Its goal is to be a repository of not

only the challenges faced by the sector in the Northeast, but also for sustainable solutions to these challenges. It also aims to provide a framework for policy interventions by government. The partners will engage different stakeholders, from government to industry and handloom workers, to devise and test pilot-based interventions by mainstream industry players.

Call to action

Gautam Vazirani, fashion curator (sustainability) at IMG Reliance/LFW, moderated the seminar.

A video message from textiles minister, Smriti Irani, congratulated LFW for taking the initiative in



DANIEL SYIEM, MEGHALAYA

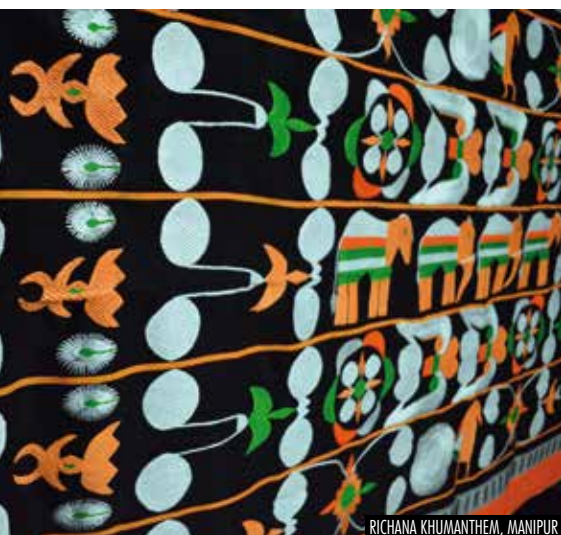


RICHANA KHUMANTHEM, MANIPUR

Manipur's organic offering

Richana Khumanthem's label Khumanthem was started in 2014 and told a fascinating story of motifs and textiles. Showing the amazing craft of Manipur's women artisans, each garment was handwoven and hand-embroidered. Every Khumanthem piece had handwoven and hand embroidery, which is the only form of embroidery that is practiced at Khumanthem. The strength of this label lies in local artisans, and the womenfolk of Manipur in particular, to whom the indigenous craftsmanship was handed down through generations.

Using Wankhei Phee handloom textiles, which are from white cotton created by the Meiteis on a shuttle loom, Richana displayed the striking stoles with floral birds and gold motifs and turned them into dresses, tunics and skirts. The colours were pretty with white, nude, camel, khaki, black, taupe and beige in the forefront. Layering played a major role in the garments as the luxurious pure cottons came alive on the ramp. Opening with an ivory jumpsuit and stole, the show moved to lungi and bareback kurta, soft trench-coat, layered-sleeved coat over a roomy checked dress and a tunic with slim skirt. The bell-sleeved tunic along with the kaftan inspired loose blouse was an eye-catcher.



RICHANA KHUMANTHEM, MANIPUR



ARATRIK DEV VARMAN, TRIPURA

Tripura's textile beauties

Aratrik Dev Varman from Tripura is a textile and fashion designer from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad whose label Tilla was launched in 2011 in Ahmedabad. Aratrik has been creating waves in the fashion world. Focusing on riahs, which are narrow Tripuri, breast cloths woven in a single strip on loins looms by women from 19 tribes. The collection was an innovative study of textiles.

Weaving in Tripura is a women's activity, and Rieng, Jamatia, Tripuri, Chakma, Mogh are prominent tribes who weave the traditional Tripuri outfit of simple rectangular wraps with distinct set of motifs and colours. Creating womenswear and home textiles, Aratrik used fine sheer fabrics like chanderi, khadi and mulmul 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 was stunning in colour and form as glamour came on the ramp.

From will-power gowns, drop waist engineered dress, slim white shift dress, black/white striped kaftan, off-shouldered jumpsuit and brown-tiered maxi, the show ended with a glamorous red-hot crinkled maxi. This collection looked at riahs (narrow breast cloths) and pasras (wrap skirts) worn by women of the Reang, Noatia and Jamatia communities, and drew references for colour and proportion for a line of easy, flowing resort wear.

Many of the pieces started with a simple rectangular drape, much like the garments themselves, which have been interpreted in Tilla's signature light fabrics and textures. Fabrics woven on the loin loom, which is also called a backstrap loom, are special because of their very narrow width. These strips or panels are then hand-joined to form larger surfaces for lower garments and shawls by a distinct abutted seam. The idea for this collection was to stay true to the sensibility that is evident in these graphic, strong pieces, while reinterpreting them to create contemporary, feminine clothing.

promoting Indian crafts and textiles. She explained the core of the workshop—from discussing the economic and ecological protection of raw materials, sustainable development, international fashion opportunities and women's empowerment through art and craftsmanship.

Several champions doing transformational work in sustainability were part of the informative and interesting dialogue that was led by Yuri Afanasiev, resident coordinator, United Nations in India.

Afanasiev said on the occasion: "At the United Nations, we see the Northeast as not only an abundant source of natural resources, but also a powerhouse of economic opportunity. The LFW is a great showcase for the rich cultural heritage of this remarkable region. We are proud to support creative young designers from the Northeast, and hopeful that this dialogue will provide a framework

for sustainable production and consumption practices that promote livelihoods through creation of modern and stable supply chains.

"Just like the Sustainable Development Goals, fashion is about disrupting the *status quo*. The link between fashion and sustainability is so clearly illustrated in the Northeast, a region that seamlessly stitches together the power of tradition with the avant-garde. The UN is proud to partner with LFW to celebrate the many ground-breaking achievements and rich cultural heritage of this region in the twin realms of fashion and sustainable growth. Through the *Action Plan on Northeast India Report*, we hope to make a significant attempt to develop partnerships to accelerate and maximise the great potential of the Northeast."

The six designers who were part of the Northeast Mojo show laid bare their own visions. Sonam Dubal talked about the craft of the region and how important it is for the people, besides his

experience on working to keep fashion sustainable. Aratrik Dev Varman elaborated on working with intrinsic textiles, and why it is important to give back to the region. Karma Sonam mentioned her Kuzu brand and how nettle fibre can be used for textiles and other products. Richana Khumanthem emphasised on the work done in the handloom sector, and added that the art of weaving did not sustain weavers. She said one must make handloom-weaving part of the social structure and wanted her brand Khumanthem to be one with a soul. Daniel Syiem revealed his experience with ryndia, also known as ahimsa silk, and dreamt of taking India to the world.

Orsola De Castro, founder and creative director of Fashion Revolution in UK, a global movement that works towards a more sustainable and environment-friendly fashion industry, campaigned for



KUZU Karma Sonam with the showstopper, Baichung Bhutia, presenting her Kuzu collection at Lakme Fashion Week Summer Resort 2018

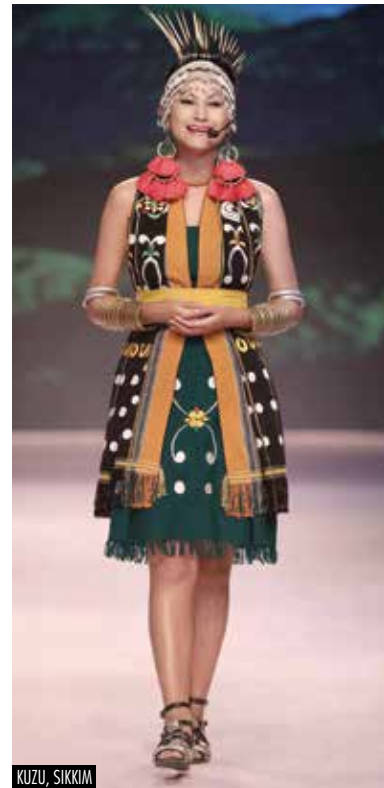
Sikkim's Lepcha weaves

The Kuzu brand founded by Karma Sonam presented the Lepcha weaving technique, which is the oldest such form in Sikkim. Using 100 per cent natural fibres like nettle, organic cotton, yak wool and merino wool, which were combined with the traditional weaving methods of Sikkim, the garments were inspired by the Bhutia and Lepcha communities of Sikkim.

The lovely rough weaves on card and loomlooms were showcased in shades of beige, taupe, nude, blush pink, ochre, green and turquoise that offered striking silhouettes from the mountainous paradise, but in a contemporary mode. For menswear there were wrap pants, worn with wide-lapel, cropped, jackets, and giant external pockets for trousers with a layered coat. Womenswear was stylish with kimono style blouse, cropped pants, tasselled sleeveless cover, a romper with blouse and lots of layering with jackets, blouses, pants, tunics and waistcoats.



KUZU, SIKKIM



KUZU, SIKKIM



JENJUM GADI WITH EXOTIC ECHO SOCIETY NAGALAND

Nagaland's loomloom wares

Designer Jenjum Gadi is no stranger to LFW. He was one of the stars of Fall/Winter 2008 GenNext show and created a buzz on the catwalk. For LFW Summer/Resort 2018, Jenjum returned after a decade with the Exotic Echo Society Nagaland started in 2008 by Sonnie Kath, and one that has 200 members and 90 weavers.

Creating the backstrap weaving method called loomloom from Nagaland, which is in cotton with natural dyes, Jenjum displayed a grand unisex look inspired by nature, tribal patterns and weaves. The creations exuded a marked organic feel with abundant texturing, fringes and weaves.

Stylish tunics and feminine skirts with surface embellishments, vertical striped coat with fluid pants and a striped fringed cover was ideal summer wear. Menswear too was as detailed with tassels for coats, while a knee-length hoodie, frayed edged shirt and coat with a giant collar and floppy waistcoat were stylish elegant offerings.



From L-R Helen Silvester, Aratrik Dev Varman, Orsola De Castro, and Jaspreet Chandok at LFW SR 18

a systemic reform with a special focus on the need for transparency in the supply chain. She spoke about the launch of a special initiative focused on the Northeast in collaboration with the British Council and IMG Reliance. Fashion Revolution is present in over 100 countries.

Osama Manzar, founder of Digital Empowerment Foundation, which aims to eradicate information poverty from India and the global South using digital tools, spoke about a digital cluster development programme focused on the Northeast in the coming year. He emphasised that fashion was not about looking good but about sustainability. Siva Devi Reddy, founder of Gocoop, India's first online global marketplace which enables handloom cooperatives and artisans to connect directly with consumers, spoke about Gocoop's plans to spur development of handloom clusters in the Northeast. He informed that the handloom and handicraft industry was the second largest in India after agriculture, and that to connect artisans with better markets was important.

Helen Silvester, director (West India) at British Council, was looking forward to bring UK and Indian designers together in a sustainable practice. Sonnie Kath, founder of Exotic Echo Society in Nagaland represented Northeast artisans who showcased their textiles in collaboration with fashion designer Jenjum Gadi. She highlighted the issues with the different schemes offered.

Among other initiatives of the collaboration, British designer Bethany Williams and Indian designer Aratrik Dev Varman of the label Tilla will together explore new fashion systems and approaches with female textile artisans in the Northeast. The aim is to grow their livelihoods and economic opportunities through responding to a creative brief set by Fashion Revolution. Works in progress will be presented at the August 2018 Lakmé Fashion Week, and the final work will be exhibited at the February 2019 Lakmé Fashion Week prior to appearing in Fashion Revolution's biannual fanzine.

The work will showcase female textile artisans and demonstrate how design innovation can promote

a fairer, more inclusive fashion industry. The creative brief toolkit will be publicly available for schools, allowing young activists, designers, students and practitioners to experiment with new design-based interventions to create innovation themselves.

Alan Gemmell, director (India), British Council, remarked, "We are delighted to continue our partnership with LFW and IMG Reliance, and to work together to support the development of a sustainable fashion industry in India. The year 2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the British Council in India. We've been inspired every day of the last 70 years by India's young people, its artists and by the design traditions of communities across the country. Through our partnership with IMG Reliance and Fashion Revolution, we're particularly pleased to support women from the Northeast—part of our continued focus on working with artists, young people and teachers from that part of India." **FF**