THE FUTURE OF OUR PAST: CURVING A MINDFUL FUTURE THROUGH INDIGENOUS FASHION PRACTICES

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Abstract

Culture is a vital influencer in fashion. In retrospect, the sociocultural shifts have explicated that native clothing lost its encounter to zeitgeists. Industrialisation and digital exposure made the fashion industry trend-driven towards fast fashion. The industry adopted the quick-demand supply chain to satisfy its impatient consumers—fashion became immediate and universal. It lost its heterogeneous cultural uniqueness, thus blurring identities. Yet, with its quest for distinctiveness over the past decade, the fashion landscape shifted from global to local.

Traditional cultural expressions found their voice through many brands that reclaimed craft coalition. The pandemic slowed down the world, crushing economies across the fashion industry. Many fast fashion brands embraced an early departure, while slow start-ups took social media by storm.

The Indigenous Fashion Arts Festival in Toronto in June 2022 witnessed a change in high fashion. The preference shifted towards recycling, homegrown and traditional. Many entrepreneurs represented the potential of indigenous techniques while capitalising on this mindful departure from glutenous consumption. Sunny Fitzgerald, a writer on sustainability, feels "To innovate, we often look ahead. But sometimes, the best way forward is found in traditional knowledge." The paper moves on from the global to the local scenario.

This research was inspired during several design-led explorations between 2017 to 2022 with artisanal communities of West Bengal. This study tries to find answers to the following questions, using exploratory and descriptive research design techniques:

1. Can product diversification revive indigenous practices?
2. Does such divergence take away authenticity?
3. Can indigenous traditions direct the fashion industry toward a mindful future?

The primary data is based on observation, field notes, focus group discussion (with the artisan community), and interviews with designers using unstructured, open-ended questions.

The study evaluates the case of five indigenous brands from India: Joy Mitra, Deshaj, Sepia Stories, 145 East, and Swadesh. Each brand has its niche and community-minded approach. The study evaluates the potential of these brands to become the trendsetters of mindful fashion practices in India. It further tries to understand if fashion is doing justice to the traditional processes and the importance of the '3Cs' rule of consent, credit, and compensation in securing the future of our past. The secondary data for the background study is from journals and studies of other scholars in similar areas.

Discussion with focus groups establishes the need for developing, maintaining, and sustaining co-creative reactions with the indigenous makers. To support native fashion, brands should discourage cultural appropriations. The historical lack of inclusion requires rethinking to embrace diverse ethnic voices in fashion. The artisanal story and the laborious process remain obscure to the consumers. Therefore, the crude, subdued finish and high price became unacceptable to users exposed to cheaper, machine-made perfections. The study finds that while the brands have established an interconnectedness with ethnic communities through unique business models, their representation requires inclusion and fair compensation. To secure the future of our past, we must understand and adopt indigenous fashion that consumers can continue to wear over time and pass on with pride.

Introduction

Fashion has always been a way to understand one's cultural identity. It helped preserve cultural knowledge, which needs collective awareness and adoption to remain unique. Our clothes have been a non-verbal communication of this distinctiveness. Further, the sociocultural shifts, in retrospect, have clarified that native clothing lost its encounter with zeitgeists. Fashion has been trend-driven for decades, instigated by seasonal offerings on the runway by designers worldwide. Industrialisation and digital exposure made the fashion industry inclined towards fast fashion.

The industry adopted the quick-demand supply chain to satisfy its impatient consumers—fashion became immediate and universal. It lost its heterogeneous cultural uniqueness, thus blurring identities. Established brands triggered impulsive buying through vigorous media promotion to their benefit. Yet, with its quest for distinctiveness, the fashion landscape shifted from global to local over the past decade.

Traditional cultural expressions found their voice through many brands that reclaimed craft coalitions. The pandemic slowed down the world, crushing economies across the fashion industry. Many fast fashion brands embraced an early departure, while slow start-ups took social media by storm. The research looks at the global fashion environment and its mindful inclusion of local culture and handmade processes and moves onto the local scene. This paper aims to look at five Indian fashion brands that include indigenous voices to understand their unique method of representing traditional forms for greater acceptance.

The study evaluates the potential of these brands to become the trendsetters of mindful fashion practices in India. It further tries to understand if fashion is doing justice to the traditional processes and the importance of the 3Cs rule of consent, credit, and compensation in securing the future of our past.

Literature Review

From Local to Global- Blurring Identities

The fashion environment underwent a drastic change with industrialisation and globalisation. Twenty-first century fashion evolved into a 'universal style' that overlooked ethnic influences. This shift was influenced by many factors, which included the following ones.

- **Fast fashion: A homogenous global calling**

Fashion affordability that once belonged to the classes soon percolated to the masses as producing clothes through machines was no longer laborious and time-consuming, thus making them cheaper. With globalisation and production moving to eastern Asia around the 1950s, fast fashion was not only being produced at a breakneck speed, but the number of collections offered annually increased as against the traditional Spring-Summer and Autumn-Winter collections (UKEssays, 2018). The industry adopted the quick-demand supply chain to satisfy its impatient consumers—fashion became immediate and universal.

Digitisation of the fashion industry in the twentieth century pushed it a notch higher, making clothes available at the click of a mouse globally. The fashion lost its heterogeneous cultural uniqueness, thus blurring identities. The impact was disturbing enough for the mindful designers to pause and rethink their offerings. According to Kini Zamora (a Native Hawaiian and Filipino designer), fast fashion (clothing produced quickly in mass quantities in response to trends and often low in quality and not meant to last) creates unnecessary waste. A simple mindset shift—for consumers and creators—could steer the industry in a healthier direction (Fitzgerald, 2022).

- **Sociocultural influence**

The structure of the fashion industry has diversified between fashion eras and between cities, regions, and nations (Breward and Gilbert, 2006; Rantisi, 2004). The culture of Europe and, later, North America had a significant influence on global fashion. Major socio-political events influenced cultural shifts resonating in fashion. Oriental fashion, despite its strong identity, adopted European fast fashion eventually. It is not surprising to see more women wearing a tailored suit at work in Japan than their traditional kimonos. One may argue and blame it on the empowerment of women, which made them adopt the comfortable and easy-going fashion being offered by the occidental culture.

World War II, for example, brought about a notable change in sociocultural dictates that affected fashion. When women took up factory jobs to support their homes, elaborate handmade clothes and hairstyles gave way to shorter versions that resembled men's wear, thus blurring identities. Eyewitness to it is the iconic J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It' incentive

poster to inspire women to join wartime jobs during World War II which indicated a shift in fashion and cultural forwardness.

The denim overall and red dotted bandana invited ‘comfort’ over ‘decorativeness’ in women’s clothing. Likewise, when the United States joined World War II in 1942, DuPont diverted its silk and nylon production towards making parachutes and bomber tires instead of stockings. The supply of nylon stockings was limited, forcing women to tint their bare legs to resemble stockings, as going bare was considered indecent. With time, women gave up wearing stockings, reducing it to a choice or a trend to follow, thus indicating how fashion liberated itself from society’s prescriptions as the role of women changed (Kratz, 2014).

- **Colonial impact on indigenous fashion**

In India, historically, a traditional saree, which is six yards of draped fabric, about 45 to 48 inches in width, was worn on a bare body. Numerous paintings, sculptures, and historical documents have shown Indian women going bare-chested. British rule significantly changed native clothing by including a blouse and an underskirt (petticoat) with the saree. Indian women today still wear a saree over a blouse or even a crop top and an underskirt below. It is interesting to note that the saree was draped in various forms across India’s diverse cultures. Some were specific to certain tribes and became their identity. With globalisation and a homogeneous approach towards culture, contemporary Indian women drape sarees in the pleated Parsi style, irrespective of their cultural roots. The regional Bengali, Gujarati, or Maharashtrian style is no longer the everyday style in India.

Therefore, to understand the fashion environment, one must understand the cultural and social movements as “fashion is not an isolated factor of clothing or accessories, but it is connected to our life in every aspect in among them the culture is the most significant” (UKEssays, 2018). The immediate local culture reflected an identity of its own to fashion which has evolved to an identical look across the globe. On one side of this new fashion environment, we find European and American designers invading new market segments in Third World countries, including India. On the other side, we see the youth going crazy to flaunt global fashion trends popularised by social media influencers and celebrities.

In this context, native cultural identities are getting indistinct. The future of indigenous processes and ethnic fashion is endangered until the youth learn to appreciate the native offerings. The future of ethnic voices belongs to them.

Methodology

This research was inspired during several design-led explorations with artisanal communities of West Bengal from 2017 to 2022. This study tries to find answers to the following questions using exploratory and descriptive research design techniques:

1. Can product diversification revive indigenous practices?
2. Does such divergence take away authenticity?
3. Can indigenous traditions direct the fashion industry toward a mindful future?

The primary data is based on observation, field notes, focus group discussion (with the artisan community), and interviews with designers using unstructured, open-ended questions. The study evaluates the case of five indigenous brands from India: Joy Mitra, Deshaj, Sepia Stories, 145 East, and Swadesh. Each brand has its niche and community-minded approach. The study evaluates the potential of these brands to become the trendsetters of mindful fashion practices in India. It further tries to understand if fashion is doing justice to the traditional processes and the importance of the '3Cs' rule of consent, credit, and compensation in securing the future of our past. The secondary data for the background study is from journals and studies of other scholars in similar areas. Discussion with focus groups, designers and artisans establish the need for developing, maintaining, and sustaining co-creative reactions with the indigenous makers.

Findings and Analysis

From Global to Local- Creating Indigenous Identities

Sunny Fitzgerald (2022), a writer on sustainability, feels "To innovate, we often look ahead. But sometimes, the best way forward is found in traditional knowledge." Indigenous design is rooted in sustainability and local culture. Traditional cultural expressions found their voice through many brands that reclaimed craft coalitions. The pandemic slowed down the world, crushing economies across the fashion industry. Many fast fashion brands embraced an early departure, while slow start-ups took social media by storm. The pandemic made the fashion world pause for a cause, making mindful designers rethink what to offer next. The quest for distinctiveness was reborn, pushing fashion from global to local.

A culmination of the same was witnessed in the Indigenous Fashion Arts (I.F.A.) Festival in Toronto in June 2022, which had a circular runway to symbolise back to the roots cycle in fashion. According to Sage Paul, Founder of I.F.A., "Indigenous fashion is in a constant state of evolution and exploration rooted in culture…" (Allaire, 2022). This year, the preference shifted towards recycling, homegrown and traditional. Many entrepreneurs represented the potential of indigenous techniques while capitalising on this sharp departure from glutenous consumption. In addition to high fashion shows, the festival featured a full roster of panel discussions around the importance of indigenous voices in fashion and had an indigenous goods bazaar for consumers to indulge in. Among an array of brands, Mobilise, Emme Studio, Evan Ducharme, Section 35, Maru Creations, Curtis Oland, and Lesley Hampton stood out and had a special mention in Vogue by Christian Allaire (2022).

While countering the existing fashion narratives and adopting local art forms, fashion brands implement distinctive pathways. One such is to create a "complex system of meanings and visual languages" and develop "unique aesthetic qualities" (LivingArt, 2022) to activate fashion towards the #vocalforlocal movement. Another approach exemplifies fast fashion brands like H&M collaborating with native designers like Sabyasachi Mukherjee from India. In his interview with ELLE, Sabyasachi explains this collaboration was "to create a bridge between my world and the international audience by staying true to who I am and keeping my authenticity alive."

This collection becomes symbolic of a more inclusive fashion industry, where designers from India and countries like ours move into the global fray (Carreon, 2021). It is interesting to note how he tries to reach a global consumer with Indian aesthetics redefined for greater acceptability in terms of fabric, silhouette, and colour story, which is not essentially indigenous. Such liberties raise the pertinent question: Does such divergence take away authenticity?

The contagious call for indigenous inclusion caught on to the Indian fashion environment. During the craft interventions, as part of my project that instigated this research, I found designers more inclusive of local artisans and weavers. Product diversification was crucial to the revival of Indian embroidery like *Kantha*. These running stitches, alongside other embroidery stitches, were traditionally used to decorate quilts. The *Kantha* artisans of Nanoor, a distinguished village known for its hand embroidery in West Bengal, divulged their increasing involvement in co-creative business models with brands and designers. Tajkira Begum, a master artisan, felt proud of collaborating with Biswa Bangla, an artisanal inclusive brand initiated by the Government of West Bengal. She is particularly keen on learning new representations of the needlecraft of *Kantha* into contemporary products designed by the brand alongside the traditional quilts, sarees, and stoles they made. Tajkira Begum does not object to the alteration of the traditional form as long as it generates income for the women artisans working under her leadership. During a brainstorming session with them, it was disheartening to find that there are a handful of elderly artisans who are skilled in making the authentic *Sujani* (bedspread). In contrast, others diverted to crude mass productions.

The study included critical voices who shared their ethos and experiences. Five slow fashion brands were studied through personal interviews across India. The aim was to understand if they are future-ready to celebrate the indigenous heritage and be inclusive of the makers.

1) Joy Mitra

Joy Mitra has a classy line of ethnic evening wear and bridal finery based out of New Delhi. During a conversation, Joy was proud to reveal his association with the *Ajrakh* prints for over 20 years. It is a traditional, labour-intensive printing technique that originates in Bhuj. Joy works with the master artisans of Bhuj and personally travels there to source his fabric. The major limitation of this printing technique is its colour story. As the colours come from natural sources, only a few options are available. Joy realised that his clients might buy one piece of garment in each of the traditional colours, but beyond that, they would not, even if the silhouette or print were different. The conventional patterns have a dull look and are appreciated by the middle-aged to elderly arty consumers. Moreover, the process demands hardy fabrics like cotton and silks like Tussar, Modal, and Gaji. *Ajrakh* is not viable on soft, flimsy fabrics like georgette or chiffon.

Figure 1. Ajrakh Digital printed saree (left) and a traditional Ajrakh handprinted saree (right) by Joy Mitra

The limitations made Joy take an approach with the two-fold benefit of penetrating a new (youth) market segment and offering loyal customers a new range. Joy introduced a digital version of *Ajrakh* (Figure 1 left), which on the surface, appears unethical. Joy explains that by digitising *Ajrakh*, they are not killing the art form but giving it a new lease of life. The digital form in an added range of colours targeted towards a young demographic is helping them develop a taste for traditional *Ajrakh* (Figure 1 right). It diverts them towards a mindful selection of the conventional form of the craft, thus increasing its popularity among Gen Z. Joy ensures that the traditional visual grammar of *Ajrakh* is still the same even in his digital versions.

The brand sources original textiles from handloom clusters and uses French Knot, Mirror Work, and *Zardosi* in the traditional form as surface embellishment for the clothes. Joy feels that fashion trends should not drive conscious and responsible fashion brands like his. He believes in fashioning signature styles that reflect and support indigenous processes that help the natives become part of the exuberant fashion legacy. He is inclusive of this action and reaction and concluded his interview with the words, “Thoughts should not be a fad for designers. They should always think of long-term heirloom pieces that customers will be proud to pass on to the next generation.”

2) Deshaj

It is a homegrown slow fashion brand crafted with love by native hands and proud to promote its human connection. Deshaj is an offspring of a social enterprise called Art Illuminates Mankind (A.I.M.). The uniqueness of this brand is the amalgamation of traditional processes with contemporary sensibilities. The visual narrative is a fallout of the creation of designers commissioned for capsule collections from Kolkata. They co-create their collections with tribal women from Birbhum. The brand supports a holistic indigenous ecosystem where artisans are trained in hand skills that they traditionally did not practise. They are trained in local embroidery styles like the *Kantha* Stitch and printing processes traditionally belonging to Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Figure 2. Tribal women have been trained in hand kills by Deshaj.

Such diverse inclusion naturally raises the question if the brand is doing justice to traditional methods by defying the geographical indication associated with each of them. Sonali Chakraborty, the co-founder, feels it helped to generate employment among the local tribal women who were not skilled in any art form and were below the poverty line. They train these women in indigenous processes, which are easy to learn (Figure 2). For example, *Kantha,* which involves the running stitch in various forms; Block Print which is easy to execute and *Batik,* a traditional wax resist method of printing and dying. Deshaj has its café-cum-store in Kolkata and Moram. The operational plan of this brand opens the discussion around the justice being done to these forms, as they are not made by the traditional clusters where they originate, even though they support indigenous people.

3) Sepia Stories

Sepia Stories is a thoughtful, conscious, intentional, and holistic brand that practices slow fashion and advocates going local for its production, based out of Goa. The brand is rethinking its relationship to clothes while fostering a movement towards a change that impacts the ecological fashion equilibrium (Sepia Stories, n.d.). In the interview, the man behind the brand Praful Makwana mentions that the brand's ethos is to create effortless styles keeping

sustainability at the core; therefore, the brand communicates with several crafts clusters pan India to source their products. Praful is very mindful about curating the products he designs, and some of the products are sourced from clusters that follow a co-creation model. Handcrafted artisanal products that represent a conscious India are the philosophy behind them. The merchandise, therefore, has a very muted look. Most of them are organic yet stylish and relive the spirit of today's conscious youth.

Figure 3. *Kantha* embroidered tote from Astitva (left) and a traditional *Ikkat* Dhoti Pant and Kurta Co-ord set by Sepia Stories (right)

Praful inspires men to adopt traditional ensembles by regularly creating reels on 'How to drape the Indian *Dhoti'* (an unstitched lower garment for Indian men) in various contemporary styles on his Instagram page. This draped garment lost its place in the modern Indian men's wardrobe and was only worn during weddings by particular communities. He is trying to revive the art of draping it effortlessly to become a more acceptable part of ethnic fashion for the youth. During the conversation with Praful, it was evident that the brand tries to bridge the gap between the indigenous process in its raw form and the finish that the niche segment aspires to. The brand uses *Jamdani* and *Ikkat* fabrics (Figure 3 left). Hand block printing, *Kantha* embroidery, and Gujrati needlework are significant parts of surface embellishment. Organic dye is used to create an exciting surface on these fabrics. The silhouettes are lazy and effortless, often giving the owner the allowance to grow in and within.

Sepia Stories often fuses more than one indigenous practice in a garment. An *Ikkat* dress might have highlights of *Kantha* embroidery. The idea here is to add mindful creativeness to introduce both forms together without deviating from the process.

As Praful makes its conscious change, "one garment at a time," he opens his horizon to collaboration with other indigenous brands who practice similar ethos. Sepia Stories has two stores in India and sells primarily through its website, where other brands like Eco-curry, Elements, Art Route, White Light, Hues, Soul House, Astitva (Figure 3 right), Needle, among others can also be found. The brand believes in creating a fashion ecosystem with a vast array of indigenous fashion available from all corners of the country for a very chic and contemporary client.

4) 145 East

Established in 2015, 145 East is a sustainable fashion collective based out of Kolkata and New York. The brand was born out of the creative vision of a group of enthusiasts who wanted to embrace their homegrown aesthetics while helping the weavers overcome financial difficulties from the *Gamcha* (indigenous handwoven cotton bath towel in colourful checks) weaving cluster of West Bengal. The brand started by raising funds for a non-government organisation (NGO)to support two *Gamcha* weavers. Later the creative group aimed to create a sustainable solution for these weavers by creating attractive garments from the humble indigenous *Gamcha.* The brand was formally introduced in 2016 in the second edition of the India Story—a most sought-after fashion exposition in Kolkata. The idea was to revive and regenerate traditional fashion sensibilities into the mainstream by doing it around the classic red and white *Gamcha* while converting it into youth-centric sensibilities for quicker acceptance. The brand combines other Indian fabrics with the checked colourful *Gamcha* to offer an array of stylish coordinates. Their unique idea transformed the traditional bath towels into a fashion ensemble. The brand opines that "Upcycling is the future; it's our answer to revivalism" (Roy, 2019); such liberty is essential for sustaining the cluster, as machine-made towels now replace *Gamchas.*

5) Swadesh

To establish a robust and sustainable artisan ecosystem pan India, Reliance Retail launched 'Swadesh'—a dedicated artisan-only store format in April 2022. It is an extension of its 'Handmade in India' programme. According to Isha Ambani, Director of Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd., "The future of Indian arts and crafts is poised at an exciting stage" (Bureau, 2022). The brand's purpose of presenting authentic native arts, handicrafts, and handlooms to the world through sensibly curated products representing the rich legacy of India's heritage and its talented craftspeople. It stands on a unique ecosystem for reviving languishing crafts and enhancing the skills of the indigenous communities through design and skill development training and capacity-building workshops. By partnering with various government bodies, the venture will confirm sustainable livelihoods for artisan communities.

During the interview, Harsh Dutta, the Senior Manager of Design Menswear, explained how Swadesh is inclusive and uses indigenous crafts and handloom for a niche clientele. "We have a central team at Bengaluru and local teams who connect us to the best artisans across various clusters. Sometimes we also connect to artisan communities through NGOs and other bodies in clusters that are difficult to access as a retail brand." Harsh feels Swadesh is inclusive and tries to use crafts processes in their traditional glory. The end products are contemporary in

taste. Swadesh divides its apparel into ceremonial, contemporary, and classic. Based on the category, craft forms are chosen to maximise using them as unaltered as possible.

Treating Indigenous Communities Ethically

Each brand discussed above has its niche and community-minded approach. The brand stories and experiences of artisans working with similar brands raise questions about how fairly the fashion industry treats these communities. Are these brands taking the liberty of cultural appropriation as well? Monica believes that "Cultural Appropriation and copying have been a part of the fashion industry, on a commercial and profit-driven scale, since the industrial revolution" (Bota-Moisin and Deshmukh, 2020).

The conversation around ethical conduct finds a dichotomy of opinions. Designer Joy Mitra feels his digital *Ajrakh* prints are a path to explore more colours and penetrate the young market segment. In contrast, Aziz Junaz, an *Ajrakh* artisan, finds such practices non-inclusive. Junaz adds that while artisans use the traditional method of hand printing at his unit in Bhuj, he provides his clients with various colours achieved through non-organic dyes. He feels this practice is a better alternative to digital printing as it supports the cluster's economy. Recently, the fashion and cultural custodians heavily criticised the collaboration between Sabyasachi Mukherjee and H&M. The coalition developed ensembles showing traditional Indian *Sanagenari* motifs that H&M developed outside the conventional cluster, using screen printing methods unmindfully replacing the hand blocks. The practice deprived the ethnic artisans of work and usurped their recognition. It is, therefore, essential to ensure that "the supply chain that goes into making Indigenous fashion must be community-focused and supportive of goals for cultural resurgence" (InFocus, 2020).

Questions of cultural re-appropriation may also arise when fashion brands create exclusive designs that combine more than one indigenous form. Can they be liable for re-appropriation if they develop each craft in their original cluster and provide economic support to the traditional practitioners? Harsh Dutta from Swadesh mentions that hand-spun and handwoven khadi and silk are often used as a base for *Chikankari* embroidery by them. Similarly, handwoven raw silks are used for *Ajrakh* print, a deviation from the usual practice. But they are not made by depriving the rightful owners of these processes. Harsh also finds a fusion to be more "knock-off proof" than using one craft method for a single ensemble. But to take crafts up a notch, higher value additions are encouraged. "Ari and sequins are added for ceremonial *Chikakari* pieces to make them look richer," adds Harsh. He feels it may not be considered adulteration but improvisation to make the craft form suitable for a niche clientele. 145 East echoes similar vibes when they transform bathing towels into fashion ensembles supporting traditional weavers.

Besides the issues around being ethical and inclusive, indigenous brands face pricing issues. The Indian consumer is used to fast fashion at throw-away prices and export rejects are available in plenty as many international fashion brands outsource from India. The higher costs and characteristic imperfections of handmade techniques are difficult for consumers to accept. The same problem is faced while exporting handmade merchandise, which passes through vigorous quality checks. Sepia Stories feels the main challenge is to educate the customers

towards accepting the imperfection which is part of handcrafted fashion. The Indian consumer, according to Praful, wants the best at a competitive price which becomes an issue for slow fashion brands. It is evident that handmade processes have a long production time and involve labour-intensive techniques and raw materials, which are more expensive than artificial materials, eventually increasing their price. Indigenous brands, therefore, need help to justify their cost to the consumers who are used to power loom-made perfect pieces of fashion. Praful feels that a balance can be struck between the limitations of the handmade and the requirement of the contemporary Indian client.

To protect native voices and to prevent cultural appropriation, the Cultural Intellectual Property Rights Initiative (CIPRI) proposed a simple '3Cs Rule', developed by Monica Boța-Moisin, a cultural intellectual property lawyer, in 2017. Though there has been a lack of a harmonised legal framework to protect our traditional artistic expressions through handicraft and handloom, the 3Cs Rule provides some respite and stands for Consent, Credit, and Compensation. CIPRI promotes it "as a tool for developing, maintaining and sustaining collaborative relationships with Indigenous people and local communities" (Boța-Moisin & Deshmukh, 2020). The universal concept of 3Cs can be used in all jurisdictions. Consent should be taken by stakeholders of the fashion industry before using any native art form and given by the communities who are the custodians of it.

Figure 4. Being inclusive is one of the ethos of Deshaj

As copyright protection does not extend to Traditional Cultural Expressions, giving the makers their due credit becomes essential. Many brands, like Deshaj, are including artisans' stories with their products (Figure 4). Deshaj has used the tribal artisans as models for their fashion shoots to be more inclusive. The Usttad Project undertaken by NIFT includes stories of the stakeholders and makers on the official website. The third aspect of compensation becomes hard to justify, as compensating for art forms and deciding a price for traditional cultural expressions is difficult.

The rule suggests various compensation mechanisms, not limited to direct financial compensation. The owners can allow a third party to exploit the art form commercially if justly compensated (Boța-Moisin and Deshmukh, 2020).

Conclusion

The uniformity in fast fashion that usually followed the trends gave rise to boredom, especially during the pandemic. With China being shut to the production of fast fashion, economies crashing, and the population prioritising health over fashion, the world turned a new leaf. The unexpected slowdown made the consumers watchful of their purchase patterns. The impulsive buyer became conscious and wanted to be responsible and give back something to the earth. As a result, the fashion ecosphere, which was already changing, saw more indigenous approaches by brands to survive the pandemic. The quest for distinctiveness was reborn; the fashion landscape shifted from global to local. Traditional cultural expressions found their voice through many brands that reclaimed craft coalition. Hit hard by the pandemic, some fast fashion brands embraced an early departure, while slow responsible start-ups took social media by storm.

Rachel Cernansky (2021) opines, “Fashion’s shifting landscape, prompted by consumer calls for change and increased visibility for emerging brands, can potentially foster opportunities for Indigenous artists.” Taking it from there, brands in India are taking this opportunity to earn respect from conscious consumers by being inclusive. But they are far from being trendsetters in indigenous fashion and need to rethink their connection with the ethnic communities. To support native fashion, these brands should discourage cultural appropriations and turn away from cheaper alternatives to original craft forms. The artisanal stories and the laborious process remain obscure to the consumers. Therefore, the crude, subdued finish and high price became unacceptable to users exposed to cheaper, machine-made perfections. The study finds that while the brands have established an interconnectedness with ethnic communities through unique business models, their representation requires inclusion and fair compensation. The historical lack of inclusion requires rethinking to embrace diverse ethnic voices in fashion and promote the makers and merchandise.

The blog Latin Spirit (2022) states, “This new era reconnects us to Mother Earth by celebrating ancestral heritage through traditional handmade techniques and natural materials sourcing.” International designer brands like Ralph Lauren, Tory Burch, Carolina Herrera, and Salt are moving towards Craft Coalition (Cernansky, 2021). Indian designers can consider similar collaborations encouraging ethical sourcing as the country is a treasure house of handcrafted resources and ethnic inspiration. The fashion community can wisely use diverse hand processes to create unique indigenous offerings exclusive to India and position themselves better globally. The practice should ensure profits are shared impartially to help communities and crafts survive. The ‘free for everyone’ insight often leads to unequal treatment of ethnic custodians and must be eliminated as a practice. Consumers must look at the human connection to appreciate the traditional slow processes and be prepared to pay the price. We need a long-term

solution and a check on fashion practices by following the 3Cs rule developed by Monica Boța-Moisin.

In India, the indigenous traditions, part of a diverse unorganised sector operated by skilled yet illiterate natives, are at their nascent stage to direct the fashion industry towards a mindful future. However the scope and enthusiasm among young designers and new-generation artisans seem hopeful. To secure the future of our past, we must appreciate and adopt indigenous fashion practices that defy time, pass on with pride, and have benefit-sharing provisions toward a mindful tomorrow.

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