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"DECOLONIZING FASHION IS WORK IN P R O G R E S S : INDIA STORY"

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Abstract

The changing configurations have disrupted the socio-economic-political dimensions, compelling us to mitigate moral and ethical challenges and identifying new directions for fashion in the Indian subcontinent. These changes are evident in the sartorial choices and lifestyle of the people and the emerging industry practices. This paper concentrates on the fashion industry and aims to understand the new directions for the three core areas of the fashion industry for sustainable futures: education production and women. This paper aims to understand the decolonized approach for fashion education as this provides the conceptual and technical foundation for creating the valuable human resource and thought leaders for the future of fashion. The merits of adopting circular design and production and how it will contribute towards sustainable future of the fashion industry. This exploratory paper is based on a review of the literature, observations and case studies to understand the impact fashion education and circular-production on transnational feminism are discussed to elaborate on the new directions for each. Woman is at the core of all human pursuits, whether her role as a homemaker, a mother, a care giver and as principal human resource for the garment and fashion industry. Identifying the decolonized practice to find meaningful and dignified livelihoods in Indian fashion industry.

Introduction:

The evolving world order has disrupted the socio-economic-political dimensions, compelling us to mitigate moral and ethical challenges that we face in this ever-changing world. As The Greek Philosopher Heraclitus "Change is the only constant in life", so it is in the fashions people adopt. The need to decipher the changing configurations is more now than ever and this will facilitate in identifying new directions for fashion in the Indian subcontinent. This region has undergone some deep impacting socio-economic-political upheaval; in form of changing monarchies over several centuries yet a very flourishing economy, the colonial rule

of more than hundred years from nineteenth to early twentieth century with severe exploitation. Industrialization in post- independence India from 1947 to 1980, the economic liberalization from the 1990's and globalization at the turn of the Millennium. These changes are evident in the sartorial choices and lifestyle of the people and the emerging industry practices in all domains. This paper concentrates on the fashion industry and aims to understand the new directions for the three core areas of the fashion industry for sustainable futures: education, production, and women.

This paper aims to understand the decolonized approach for fashion education as this provides the conceptual and technical foundation for creating the valuable human resource and thought leaders for the future of fashion. The merits of adopting circular design and production and how it will contribute towards sustainable future of the fashion industry. The future which will be conducive to ethical ecological, humancentric and economic sustainability. This exploratory paper is based on a review of the literature, observations, and case studies to understand the impact of fashion education, circular production on transnational feminism are discussed to elaborate on the new directions for each. Woman is at the core of all human pursuits, whether her role as a homemaker, a mother, a care giver and as principal human resource for the garment and fashion industry. Identifying the decolonized practice to encourage more women to find meaningful and dignified livelihoods through the case study of women working in garment factories.

I Fashion Education

The impact of colonization is evident in the courtrooms, convocation dress and formal ceremonies in many universities. Despite several decades after political independence from the colonizers, the colonial practices continue to persist in following the education system designed to cater to the services required to empower the colonial rule and economic supremacy. All the traditional knowledge was discredited, mutilated, and not acknowledged by the western world to establish their own supremacy. It is very pertinent to acknowledge that inclusivity is integral for homogenous fashion system which includes multi-racial global population with very unique; skin and hair colors, body dimension shapes and sizes, sartorial legacies, cultural practices, gender, lifestyle choices and fashion expression. Therefore, looking westward for seeking higher education and acknowledgement for scholastic pursuits, without understanding the local fashion system prevails; negatively impacting the process of decolonization of fashion. Education programs cannot depend on imported readymade study material, there is great need to contextualize the narrative and adjust the lens through which fashion education magnifies the future opportunities in fashion industry.

Ben Barry, Dean of Fashion at the Parsons School of design write in the Business of fashion article, "For the next generation, fashion school is the birthplace of their world views and practices and the gateway in the fashion industry. Certainly not all fashion professionals get a degree in the discipline, but for many who do, fashion school is where they develop the thinking, skills and networks that will guide their future careers and shape our industry. However, the current state of fashion education prevents inclusivity in our industry. How we teach fashion reinforces a

narrow set of worldviews and skills that remain rooted in the continuing legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and European colonization- upholding a white supremacist, gender binarist, ableist and fatphobic approach to fashion. Even more, how we teach fashion influences who sees themselves as fashion students and who becomes the future creators and decision makers in our industry.”

The contextual referencing and understanding is very pertinent in all social sciences, arts and humanities; more so in subject like design which involves anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, art and craft practices which are integral to cultural sustainability. The evolution of technological innovation and good practices embedded in traditional craft techniques need to synergize for creating environmental and economic sustainability. The education systems emphasizing on ethnographic research need to be developed with a focus on Indian conditions and yet adopting best global practices.

Semaan-Vernon “Design is far bigger than the desirable objects it produces: design is the system in which these objects are created. It is a discipline that provides the tools to look at a situation from both a macro level (zooming out and looking at the big picture) as well as a micro level (being able to zoom in and address micro-interactions along the way). To redesign the fashion industry, one must be able to address the sociopolitical and environmental context, as well as the culture around this system and the interactions between various players and the public. To redesign an entire industry, we need to tackle the fundamental building blocks of the system: the mindset and priorities of the designers within the system.”

Embracing a Glocal (Global-Local) approach towards Identifying challenges and opportunities to create indispensable human resource for a robust decolonized fashion system. Expanding the narrative of fashion history and challenging misrepresentation within the fashion system. Decolonizing fashion education process in the globalized world will help in creating a stronger and unique fashions into the fashion industry of the future.

Tracing colonial routes



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II Circular and slow production in India

The Indian subcontinent has a myriad culture interwoven in its rich heritage over the centuries. There is a very interesting mix of diverse cultures, yet the shared underpinnings of unique regional craft traditions, have been a very strong cornerstone to the rural economy despite the colonial influences, industrialization, and globalization. Frugal practices using local skills and resources to create exquisite hand-crafted products to enrich lives. Over a period, some crafts have found connoisseurs beyond the local community and in few cases overseas as well example, pashmina, ajrakh, zardozi etcetra. Some craft forms have been accepted in the traditional form and many required design interventions to suit the contemporary lifestyle in the specific markets. The transition from homemade clothes to tailor made ones depends on skill sets of the family and the disposable income to buy clothes. As the disposable incomes increased, women had better opportunities for pursuing education, seeking some forms of employment, access to some form of recreation, more time for leisure etcetra. Therefore, the crafts that were practiced as leisure pursuits declined (unless monetised), and hence the need to commission and buy handcrafted products like shawls, clothes etc. for everyday life as well as for trousseau and festivals.

With the passage of time, industrialization and consumerism led to urban migration and adoption of fashion in the sartorial expression. Slowly the fashion influences on the rural dressing style too are visible. Glimpses of the urban lifestyle brought an awareness about requirement of hand-crafted clothes and textiles to suit urban needs. The handcrafted textiles and clothes require a long process right from farming/cultivating the fibre, processing the fibre into yarns, yarns into woven textiles, dyeing and printing to add colour. All these processes require several pairs of hands from the local artisan community. All the family members of the craftsperson are involved in doing some crucial task towards the creation of the hand-crafted textiles. Embellishment by embroidery artisans who paint motifs with the needle and thread also skilled folk-art forms with such vibrant motif and iconography are hand-painted on textiles.

The *swadeshi* (produced in homeland) movement was intrinsic to the non-violent freedom struggle of India against the colonial British Empire in the 1940's and one of the most significant process towards decolonizing fashion. The emerging scenario in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic 2020, indicates that the fashion industry will bounce back sooner if we focus on reviving local businesses and buying hand made products. The neo-colonial MNC's which run fast fashion brands are exploiting the same geographical areas which have been exploited by the colonial powers in the past.

The slow fashion process is conducive towards decolonizing fashion and creating mindful and responsible fashion system based on local resources, traditional costume and textile heritage. There are many brands and labels who have been working towards slow fashion , but their percentage compared to the fast fashion brands is very small, when bigger fast fashion brands embrace circular and slow fashion practices the wheel will begin to turn in a positive and ethical direction.

There need to be many fashion revolutions and brands need to be held answerable for questions regarding “ Who made my clothes/ textile” , where they paid fair wages, and their health and safety considerations, authentic designs etcetra.

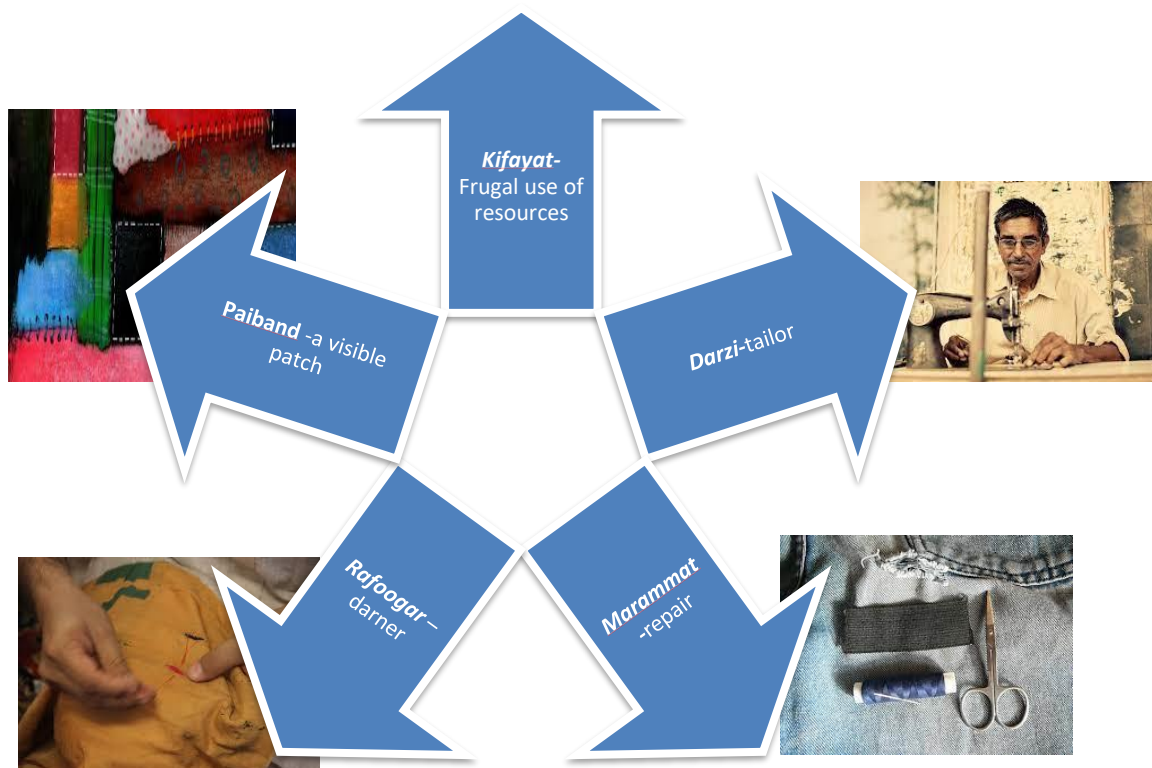
Case study of slow fashion label by the author, “ **Vaibbhavi P** is an eponymous designer label based on slow fashion philosophy. The designer explores the rich heritage of Indian textile treasures and translates them to contemporary fusion fashion lines for everyday smart looks. The artisanal luxury and minimalism are the aesthetic directions in the designs. The most important aspect for the label in the design development process is the development of hand-woven fabric with the indigenous resources of the various craft cluster we co-create with to provide sustainable livelihoods and endeavour circular design practices at each level. Cultural and craft sustenance without displacing Indian crafts persons and sustainable livelihoods in the native villages (Women weave, Gudi Mudi, Maheshwar ,MP) , Malkha ,Telangana, West Bengal. Ensuring safe working environment and fair wages which helps support a dignified living. No child labour is involved and proper medical facilities are available for the people and their families. For working mothers ensuring creche facility for young children and flexible working hours.

Every piece of fabric is precious, as numerous hours of painstaking process are involved in making fabrics, further upcycled to create beautiful textures of the weave and stitch. Adopting Earth friendly processes, mindful and frugal use of resources, water, soil, air , energy. Supporting organic cotton farming, exploring new eco friendly regenerated man-made fibers in forthcoming collections with weaving clusters. Switching to renewable resources and effluent treatment, to reduce the carbon footprint. Communication with the consumers about eco-friendly washing solutions, herbal and home washing. Dry cleaning involves use of harmful chemicals, therefore reduce dry cleaning for eco sustainability.

Vaibbhavi P woman is mindful and free-spirited individualist. These women depict their own style and mood of the moment through their clothes. They value the process involved in hand spun, hand woven, and meticulously stitched garments with fine design detailing and take good care of the clothes, and often repeat them by styling differently. They provide proper care and styling instructions to the clients, who pause for fashion. The clothes are second skin and the label help one express responsibly and make a difference each day, in handmade clothes.

Frugal use of resources -**Kifayat** the larger philosophy of ancient wisdom led to making of clothes one needed, the pocket-friendly, tailor-made customization by the neighbourhood **Darzi**-tailor. When these well made clothes needed repair-**Marammat** the services of the expert **Rafoogar** -darners who darn to perfection are employed and sometimes needing a **paiband** -a visible patch to mend also adding value to the aesthetic and overall appeal of the clothes and increased their longevity. The act of visible mending is also practiced in other Asian culture like the **Shashiko** mending originating from Japan . The practice of making quilts, Godadis, chaddars, etc by upcycling old saris, dhotis, sheets with decorative stitches example Kantha in West Bengal , Sujani in Bihar etcetera. Thus increasing the product lifecycle and reducing the volume of textiles ending up in landfills.

KDMRP Product life cycle diagram:



Acknowledgment of traditional best practices like *kifayat*-frugality, *rafoo*- repair, mend, reuse etcetra will also endorse the decolonized fashion process, and prove to be essential equalizer for mitigating the challenges of consumerism promoted by fast fashion.

The growth of fast fashion and resultant faster consumption and production of cheap clothes is not only detrimental to ecology due to alarming volume of clothes ending-up in landfill and oceans and resultant high carbon footprint; but inhuman working conditions and exploitation for the people involved in making the fast fashion products in crowded cities. This all needs to change, and slower ways of creating mindful and lasting fashion needs to be adopted. Responsible academics with emphasis on earth friendly processes, sustaining livelihoods without displacing them from rural areas and creating stronger circular economy is the way forward. Slow fashion addresses pertinent concerns and is aligned to accelerate the process to achieve the United Nations sustainable development goals SDG. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) define the world we want to create. They apply to all nations and aim to ensure that no one is left behind. The world is interconnected in the industry 4.0, it is up to the United Nations and all its partners and supporters to ensure that everyone has access to the SDGs and their inclusive message. It is pertinent for fashion and textile industry 4.0 to identify strategies to preserve, dynamically integrate the craft based slow fashion business and practices. Co-creation with the skilled crafts persons in every corner of India will result in mindful fashion which add value for the maker, the wearer, and the Earth. The traditional slow way of life in rural India is mindful in resource utilization, maintaining ecological balance, minimal wastage, conserving cultural legacy, sustaining livelihoods; lends fitting foundation for slow fashion.

III TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM IN THE FAST FASHION INDUSTRY

Fast fashion is a feminist issue; millions of women work long hours in garment factories across South Asia and India, for minimal wages, in uncomfortable and often dangerous conditions, making “fast fashion” clothing for consumption of people in developed nations. Women’s work has never been recognized adequately, while many women engage in pursuit of earning livelihoods, they are often underpaid. Most of the fashion industry still operates within the colonized frameworks and evolved new capitalistic structures. Large fashion houses function like colonisers by creating wealth, taking resources, exploiting cultures, people, knowledge, and communities on various levels for their own unfair gains. There are opportunities to operate within an inclusive, respectful, conscious approach however it will take the dismantling of the colonizer structure for the whole ecosystem to thrive. Colonial exploitation continues even after political freedom, and the same countries continue to suffer due the fast fashion industry. Leading to exploitation and low wages for women workers. Understand the transition of women from unemployment to unsafe and exploitative employment that has penetrated the fast fashion workforce.

Wang (2013) examines methodological practices in comparative rhetoric over the past three decades and suggests that the field conceive new perspectives to engage with transnational spaces, hybrid identities, and subjectivities grounded in differences related to gender, race, class, and culture. Drawing on insights from postcolonial and transnational feminist studies, the author explores the implications of contemporary theories for comparative work and develops an approach that links the cultural specificities of non-western rhetoric’s with larger geopolitical forces and networks. Through an analysis of early-twentieth-century Chinese women’s discourse on *nüquanzhuyi* (feminism), she argues that a geopolitical approach focusing on how rather than what we read would help practitioners rethink history, identity, and the nature of theoretical investigation in the field and set the stage for more nuanced and sophisticated studies of non-Western rhetorics in the twenty-first century.....Motherhood and Work-Life Balance- Despite responsibility of earning livelihood and all the household chores women have to strike a work-life balance by contributing and coping with physiological changes during pregnancy, childcare and ensuring that all is taken care of.

In India ,**60 to 80% of the workers are women** in the garment sector with millions of them employed in informal, unorganised or home-based units. Garment factories in India cluster around a few destination cities like Delhi/NCR, Bengaluru, Tirupur, Chennai, Mumbai etc

A sizable proportion of women working in those factories are migrants from other source locations predominantly rural parts of Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh. These women are often mostly from poor families and with low levels of education. Many of them come from marginalized and socially excluded groups in India, officially labelled as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes who have historically faced stigma and discrimination. Invariably, they find themselves overrepresented in low-wage jobs with poor working conditions, with hardly any career prospects and, at times, even gender-based violence.



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There is a collective responsibility of government and NGO organizations' policy and support to improve the working conditions and sustainable livelihoods. Post-pandemic strategy to address transnational feminism in fast fashion industry. Gendering the Covid-19 Pandemic which indicates a rise in domestic violence against women, loss of employment, workplace abuse, working without childcare support, their socio- economic growth has been interrupted and the emancipation has been reversed significantly due to the pandemic.

The time to assess the changing configurations and new directions in Indian Fashion has been long due. Collaboration with multi disciplinary experts from varied domains to explore possibilities to overcome challenges faced due to climate change and human right violations. The new directions for the three core areas of the fashion industry for sustainable futures: education, production and women will define the new world order. Drawing from many inter disciplinary academic domains such as social sciences & arts, science and technology and derive predictions for future directions, based on socio-economic-political dimensions and moral and ethical challenges in changing world on a day to day basis, to keep pace with the focused efforts and progress strongly towards decolonizing Indian fashion.

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