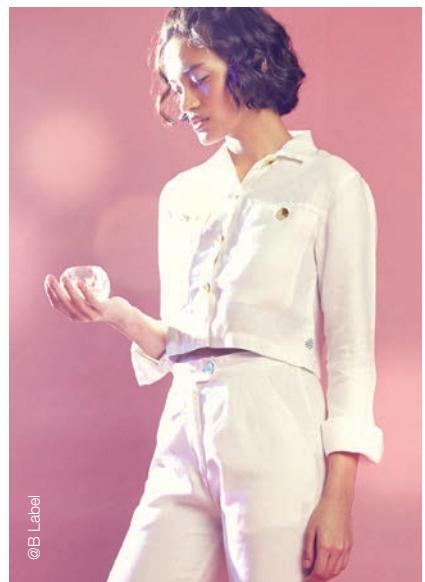


FEATURE

A Conscious Celebration

Organic clothing is making a sure and steady mark on the entire apparel spectrum. **Bindu Gopal Rao** chronicles.

While sustainable fashion may have become the 'it' thing to be embraced by designers and fashion enthusiasts, there is no denying that making the world of fashion a kinder place to live in has turned into the need of the hour. Organic clothing, a branch of sustainable fashion, is that which is grown sans pesticides, herbicides or any chemicals, employing the use of natural fertilizers. It is usually certified by an agency; a garment can be called organic only if it constitutes a minimum of 70 per cent certified organic fibres. While organic cotton is the most common of all natural fibres, bamboo, hemp, ramie, and Tencel—among many others—have also caught the attention of the global industry.

THE ADVANTAGE

Today's times see more and more designers and labels taking to organic fibres and fabrics that, in turn, bring them closer to eco-fashion. Anand Saraf, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Verse, says, "Organic fabrics are grown using methods and materials that have a low impact on the environment." Chirag Tekchandaney, Co-founder and Director, B Label, avers, "The acceptance of organic fabrics is significantly catching pace in India. We are seeing hemp being used more and more; and there is also a rise in the use of bamboo fibres. Also, higher-quality organic cotton, known as



Supima cotton, has gained popularity in recent years. Equally, there has been a rise in the awareness about the impact our clothing choices have on the planet, and how our current ways of consumption are not at all sustainable, now and in the long run.”

THE EARTH CONNECT

Even though natural fabrics are centuries-old, the interest and conviction with which they are being pursued is relatively new. Anjali Sharma, Founder and Designer, Bacca Clothing India, says, “The focus has shifted from mass production to conscious business and production. The main reason why organic fabrics are taking centre stage is because they pose the least damage to our environment and ecosystem. These fabrics are naturally non-allergic, softer, and have a safer texture for all skin types, besides being stronger and more durable.” In India, there is an urgent need for a shift towards cotton that is both ecologically and financially sustainable. Organic fibres are the emerging narrative that can bring sustainable and regenerative practices, which indicate moving away from the current mainstream, negligent approaches to making and consuming fashion. Aditya Jain, Founder and CEO, YAJY, says, “Organic fabrics are becoming increasingly popular by means of recycling and upcycling to craft apparel lines. With their high environmental benefits, they have an integral role to play in the overall agricultural movement. These products exclude usage of harmful chemicals, thereby ensuring minimum damage to the environment.”

Vikash Pacheriwal, Co-Founder, Raisin, adds, “Organically grown cotton and muslin are



HIGHER-QUALITY ORGANIC COTTON, KNOWN AS SUPIMA COTTON, HAS GAINED POPULARITY IN RECENT YEARS.

being adopted by a range of brands to craft sustainable, responsible clothing. Fish scales and scraps of fabrics, which minimise wastage, are also being used to generate all sorts of products ranging from dresses and scarves to bags. Although khadi has been around since long, it has recently been garnering a lot of eyeballs, having been revived in various forms, one of them being khadi denim.”

THE COST FACTOR

From spinning the yarn to weaving it into a fabric, the process of crafting organic materials is a time-consuming one. Organic fabrics are usually hand-dyed with natural components and pigments, which require extra care and effort. It is no wonder then that organic textiles as well



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as finished garments are priced higher than their inorganic counterparts. Mansi Gupta, Co-founder and CEO, Tjori, says, "The quality of an efficiently grown crop with organic land certification, extra care after natural fertilisation, and curation, all ask for extra toil and trouble and hence the higher price bracket. Those from the apparel industry are coming up with solutions to the problems of environmental damage and if this comes with a slightly higher price, I believe that it is justified."

Poonam Naik, Founder, Peekaboo, says, "Although organic and natural clothing is expensive than conventional clothing, the price gap will start to shrink as the market size of natural clothing grows and the economies of scale improve. The benefits far outweigh the high price. Organic fabric contains a minimum of 70 per cent organic fibres, and all dyes and treatments have to meet stringent criteria such as being free of formaldehyde and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) throughout the entire organic textiles supply chain. This means that the end-product is soft, breathable, and free of hazardous chemicals."



@Raisin

Arpit Srivastava, who heads Lenzing Group's Marketing and Branding in South Asia, adds, "While Tencel fibres do come with a higher price range as compared to general fibres, they offer premium features such as durability, colour-retention, and smooth feel. Our EcoVero fabric is as competitive as regular viscose, making it a perfect bid for the Indian market."

SURPASSING HURDLES

The biggest challenge with organic fabrics is with regards to its market share, which is majorly concentrated in metropolitan cities. Elodie Le Derf, Co-founder and Head Designer, Born, a luxury baby and kids' wear label, says, "The challenges in organic-wear are multiple, especially for small brands and start-ups. It starts with suppliers because for them, to be profitable and make the best use of their machines requires a certain minimum number of quantities, which small brands cannot always match up to. Another issue is that much of what we see in the market today is fake organic cotton, and it is practically



"MUSLIN IS ANOTHER GENTLE FABRIC KNOWN FOR ITS SUPPLE BEHAVIOUR AND COOLING BENEFITS."

inherent shine, while pineapple leaves can be processed and transformed into mesh-like leather. The consciousness when it comes to organic fashion has not only challenged stereotypes but has also paved the way for unconventional style statements. Kashmira Sudrik, Owner and Founder of Kashmira's Boutique, says, "To pick an example, linen was extensively used in men's clothing earlier. It made its debut in the closets of women in the form of dresses and today, linen saris are a rage. This is how fabrics evolve into successful trends. Muslin is another gentle fabric known for its supple behaviour and cooling benefits; not to forget khadi, the beloved fabric of India." Given the increasing demand for organic fabrics, brands and designers have been constantly incorporating them in their collections.

Steven Jhangiani, CEO and Founder, Kurtees, says, "I think we will begin to see organic fabrics being used more in daily-wear garments. They are now becoming more visible to eye of both established luxury as well as smaller indie labels. I think we will see many more brands making the switch to organic fashion in the near future. I believe if you give customers a choice, they will choose correctly."

Organic fabrics are gaining a lot of popularity among the masses due to their many benefits. Not only clothes made out of organic fabrics suit the skin and are supremely comfortable but they also look elegant, with a sophisticated simplicity to them. In all, organic fashion is here to stay, factoring in the people, planet, as well as profit. ■

impossible to have clarity on the entire chain of production. In this case, it is best to work with companies that are Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)-certified, and there are quite some of these in India." The transition period for a conventional field to be transformed into an organic one deters farmers from becoming organic in practice. Padma Kapoor, Director, Link Clothing India Pvt. Ltd, says, "Organic seeds are not available easily, which plays into the difficulty in its distribution. There is limited supply of this variety as not many farmers undertake organic methods to grow cotton. Consumer awareness regarding organic clothing, too, is not yet widespread, which results in poor sales."

CONTEMPORARY CUES

Recycling and upcycling are two of the biggest practices in sustainable fashion. There is also a rise in brands trying and experimenting with newer organic fabrics such as those made from eucalyptus trees. Similarly, banana fibres are a great vegan alternative to silk because of their

