



A Stitch in Time

Natasha Tyagi Sachdeva's Taaka merges handloom textiles with supple needlework to create garments that have a distinct, almost humane identity. **Bindu Gopal Rao** explores.

The heritage of Indian crafts and handlooms is so huge that it serves as an inexhaustible source of inspiration. This is precisely what Taaka Clothing, a conscious clothing brand, draws on. Natasha Tyagi Sachdeva, founder and creative head of the label, was majorly exposed to the fashion industry, wherein she learnt everything from designing value buys to formulating different price points that catered to a variety of consumers within India and overseas. Working with the best in the Indian retail industry empowered her to make decisions that could lead to enormous changes within the organisations, just by the power of good design. She talks to us about the genesis of Taaka Clothing, the call for sustainability, and more in this exclusive conversation.

All images: @Taaka Clothing



WHEN AND WHY DID YOU ESTABLISH TAAKA CLOTHING?

While the industry was learning to grasp the knowledge of delivering cheaper products with the same resources year after year, it was clear that this cycle would break due to the unsustainability of the model. Competition that leads to intense cutbacks in costings by increase in production and methods that are bound to generate greater waste is like a ticking bomb for the economy and environment. I was aware of the diminishing quality of life being led by workers in garment factories across the globe. So in 2017, Taaka was born to serve as a solution. Careful planning of our first collections and budgeting, along with firming up the policies of our work environment took us close to 10 months to develop fully. We have been open and operational via our own online store since September 2018.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WORK WITH NEEDLEWORK AND HANDLOOMS AS A COMBINATION?

Coming from the textile design background, I have dreamt of khadi to become a fabric of choice for every human's basic needs, and not just a luxury. The fabric is still quite misunderstood within India to be starchy and of old style. Recent interventions by the Ministry of Textiles

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and fashion weeks that host and dedicate entire days to Indian textiles have greatly revived the fashion circuit. As a designer, I felt it to be my responsibility to choose khadi or handloom fabrics made by Indian weavers, whilst paying them their due.

This led me to meet the team of WomenWeave, a registered charitable trust in Maheshwar that has supported and developed the role of women in handloom-weaving since 2002. Their work in providing ethically produced, 100 per cent certified khadi, and other handloom fabrics forms the heart of Taaka. In the age of machine embroideries, digital prints, and zero human intervention, the concept of juxtaposing needlework on our khadi did not only seem appealing but also worked as a means to support





a wider pool of craftsmen. By involving more humans than machines, we can revive the faith of the Indian artisan in the fashion industry, teach and involve their future generations in the same craft, and thereby help to increase its longevity. At Taaka, all our embroidery is done by pure human effort; no machine is used in the making of these pieces of art on textiles.

WHAT IS YOUR DESIGN PHILOSOPHY?

Our design philosophy is to make clean clothing that brings about the beauty of even a single stitch that is put in place. The fabric is rich and combined with simple lines and clean cuts, enhancing the beauty of the textile all the more. Our silhouettes are timeless, and we want each piece of Taaka to be treated as an heirloom.

WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

India—for centuries, India has been a melting pot of many cultures and its artisanal produce has flourished over time. My travels across the world have further sensitised me to the need for us to showcase our strengths and be proud of it. Our international friends, whom I have seen value Indian craft, have been an important part of my learning and understanding of Indian textiles and the fact that we need to bring back the glory of India first to India. From our thread to packaging, every detail of Taaka is made in India.

YOUR COLLECTIONS HAVE RATHER UNUSUAL NAMES. WHY IS THAT SO?

Our clothes are a lot more than a means to cover and protect the body. Our work speaks of the richness of the land, invoking the feeling of being one with nature. One Clover and a Bee, our first collection, is inspired from poetess Emily Dickinson, who writes about how we may not need too much to build on our dreams, supporting our concept of reducing the burden on nature by curbing overconsumption. Similarly, our festive range KARI honours *kaarigars* (craftsmen) of the world, not just in textiles but in any painstaking art that requires to be continuously created by hand.

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT THE MINDFUL MEASURES THAT ARE EMPLOYED AT TAAKA CLOTHING.

Our non-toxic production cycles include minimum machine-intervention, making our carbon footprint lower with every improved process. Our waste-management resources include the usage of textile waste that is reproduced as upcycled products such as bags, baskets, books, key rings, etc. We are constantly empowering our workforce through knowledge about business and transparency in methodology. We focus on consuming 100 per cent, easily biodegradable materials—from packaging to reducing multiple

sizes by innovative design, and also cutting down on surplus or broken sizes that lead to unsold inventory.

WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THE SLOW FASHION MOVEMENT?

It is endearing to see the world talk about fashion and its need to slow down. The informed millennials are already changing the way they buy clothes. Young students and working professionals are now reading up about brand philosophies and choosing to buy products that are more crafts-based. The simplest way to beat the current problem is to be conscious of our consumption and create less waste year after year. Be it food, water, clothing, housing, and more, we must learn to lead a simpler life.

WHAT IS YOUR PREDICTION FOR STYLES THAT WILL DOMINATE IN 2020?

The most dominant style will be that of the person who wears clothing that is inspiring. What is in trend will be defined by a brand's environmental footprint rather than the length of the clothing or silhouette. Earthy colours, either naturally dyed or mimicking natural dyes, will be a prominent feature of 2020's colour palette.

WHAT MAKES YOUR CLOTHES DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS?

The soul of the brand lies in the needlework. The little flowers and bees that are formed using one kind stitch at a time collectively speak for all our expert artisans, who have crafted every motif from scratch. The process behind every embroidery of Taaka involves age-old traditional

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process of stretching and fixing the fabric on a wooden frame to secure it. The design is then transferred on to the fabric by punching small holes to make perforations. This then undergoes many processes before it can be printed and embroidered on.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

At Taaka, we believe in a steady growth plan that is in sync with the environment. Our future plans involve retailing at select stores across India and abroad. We also intend to spread the message of the goodness of handmade through our products. ■

