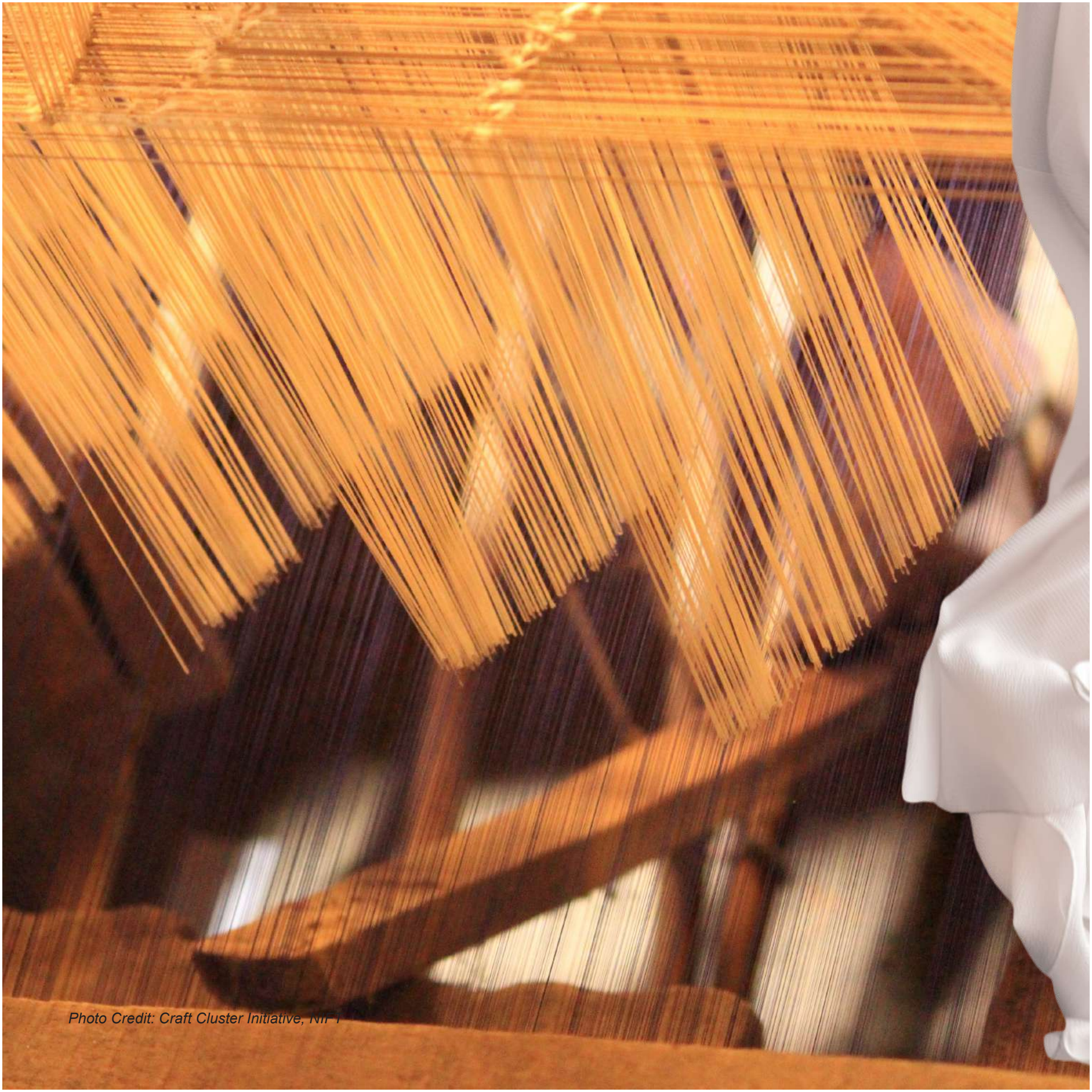
अनन्त

Sustainability and Circularity in Indian Handlooms

Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT



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Sustainability and Circularity in Indian Handlooms

Development Commissioner (Handlooms)

Published by
Office of the Development Commissioner Handlooms
Ministry of Textiles, Government of India

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सत्यमेव जयते

MESSAGE

I am delighted to learn about the book titled 'Anant: Sustainability and Circularity in Indian Handlooms' that endeavours to promote sustainability in the realm of Indian handlooms.

Handlooms are not only a symbol of our glorious cultural heritage but also a vital source of livelihood for lakhs of people, especially women in rural areas who contribute significantly to our nation's economy. The Government of India has initiated several schemes for the Handloom and Handicrafts sector to promote the branding of these high-quality products. This industry greatly benefits from the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modij's vision of Vocal for Local' and 'Local goes Global.'

The comprehensive coverage of sustainable practices portrayed in the book, including organic fiber farming, natural dyeing, traditional hand-weaving, recycling, and upcycling textiles, reflects a deep commitment to environmental and cultural preservation while showcasing the best practices of weavers and designers in the Indian handloom industry. Moreover, the emphasis on the social impact of handloom weaving, particularly in empowering artisan communities and encouraging positive environmental practices, resonates deeply with the Government of India's commitment to sustainable development. The book's focus on the diverse traditions of Indian handlooms and their relevance today is commendable.

I hope that the book will resonate with a global audience and inspire consumers, industry leaders, and policymakers to take note of our indigenous practices, leading the way towards circularity and sustainability in the fashion industry. Once again, congratulations on the publication of this important work, and I look forward to its positive impact on the Indian handloom industry and beyond.

PIYUSH GOYAL

Minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs,
Food and Public Distribution and Textiles
Government of India

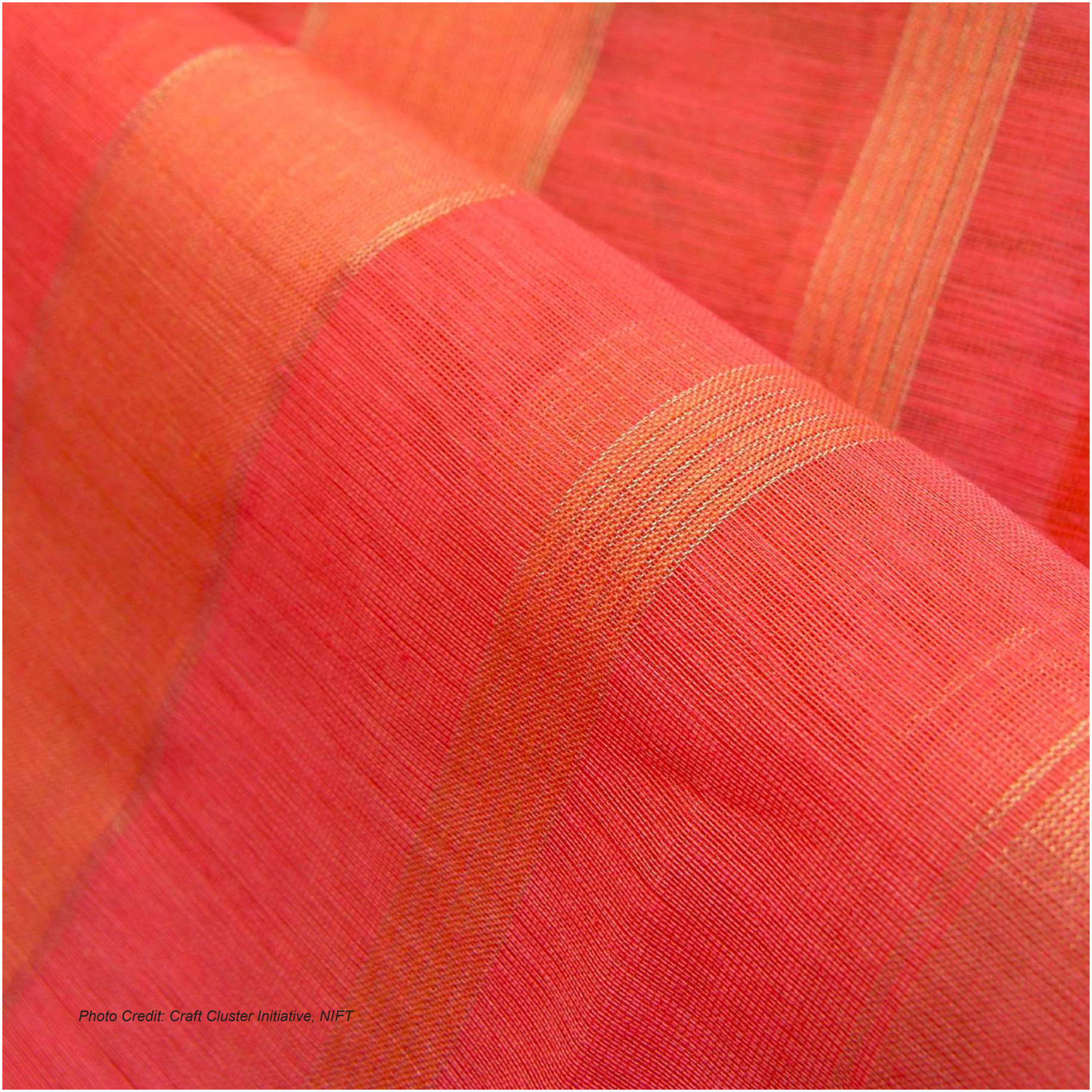


Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT

सत्यमेव जयते

MESSAGE

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Development Commissioner Handlooms and the National Institute of Fashion Technology for bringing out a captivating book titled 'Anant: Sustainability and Circularity in Indian Handlooms' that beautifully captures the essence of Indian handlooms and their sustainable character.

The book celebrates the vibrant and intricate Indian handlooms and their significant role in sustainable fashion and mindful consumption. The visual narrative is a delight for readers, showcasing the various sustainable facets of handmade textiles, from the seed to the finished product.

I am confident that the book will promote appreciation for the rich Indian textiles and encourage people to value 'handmade' and embrace sustainable living. The Indian handloom industry has the potential to drive positive change in the world and become a global pathfinder in sustainability. The book substantially contributes to this vision.

Darshana Jardosh

DARSHANA JARDOSH

Minister of State for Railways and Textiles
Government of India

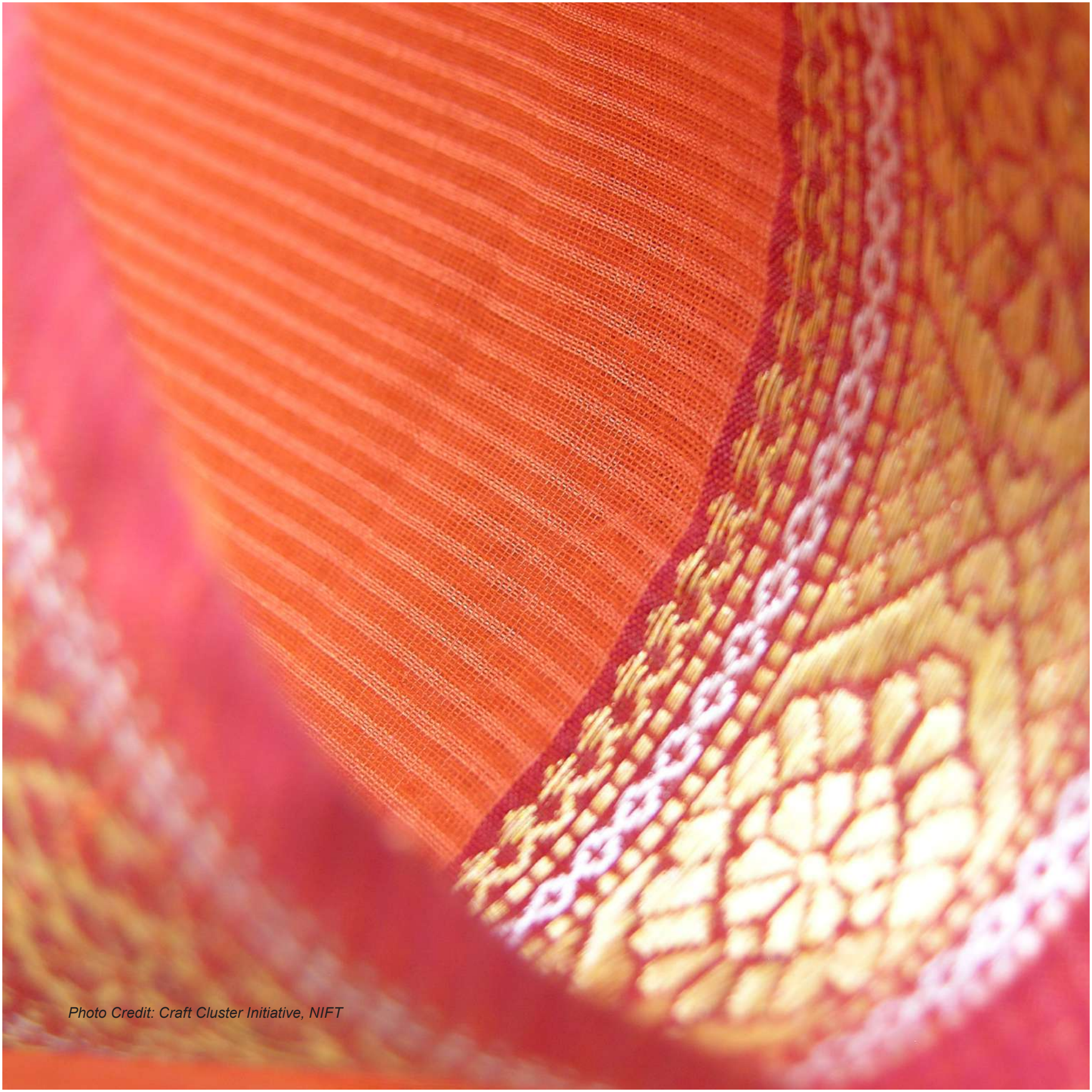


Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT

सत्यमेव जयते

MESSAGE

'Anant: Sustainability and Circularity in Indian Handlooms' is a novel attempt to bring together the traditional as well as contemporary practices related to sustainability within the diverse spectrum of Indian handlooms. It celebrates the inherent relationship between age-old textile techniques and sustainability and presents the way forward towards adopting circularity and embracing mindful consumption.

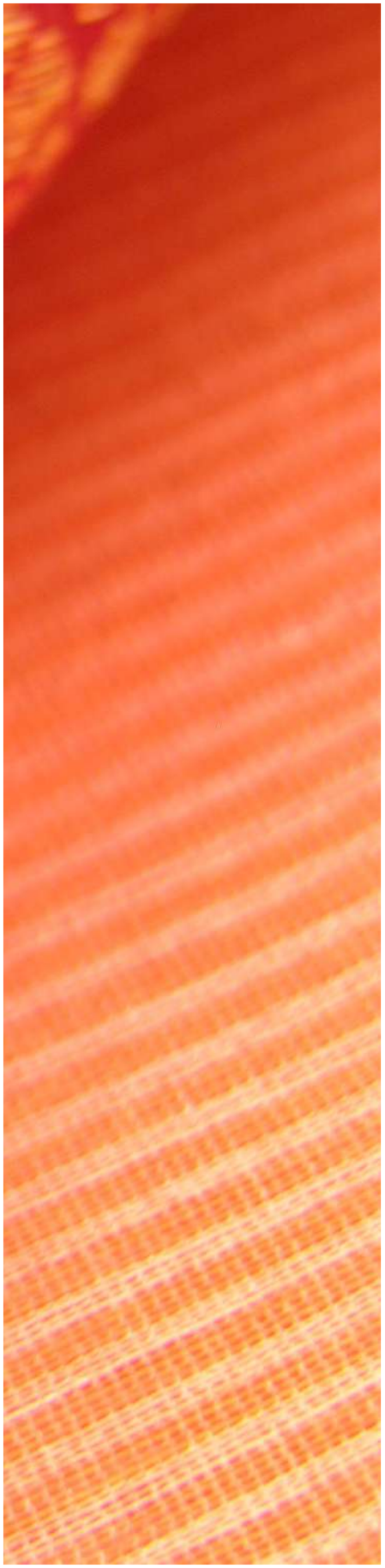
In the context of global challenges and increasing environmental concern, this book makes a significant contribution, highlighting the nature of indigenous eco-friendly materials, hand-held tools and equipment for weaving intricately pattemed fabrics, offering a sustainable choice for the wearer. Indian handlooms resonate with slow fashion and help in supporting artisan communities and promoting ethical methods of production.

I am sure this book will help in showcasing India's rich textile legacy which is rooted in responsible and environment-conscious textile production, from farm to finished product. The Indian handloom industry truly promotes sustainable development and acts as a driver for circular economy.

Rachna

RACHNA SHAH, IAS
Secretary
Ministry of Textiles, Government of India

Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT



सत्यमेव जयते

MESSAGE

I am immensely gratified to present a one-of-a-kind book that throws light on the nation's exquisite handloom heritage with focus on sustainable practices in the sections. The handloom sector stands strong representing the three pillars of sustainability: people, planet and profit, by empowering artisans, safeguarding the ecological balance and contributing to the country's economy.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to National Institute of Fashion Technology for their efforts to conceptualise the book that encapsulates various aspects of sustainability ingrained in handwoven textiles, a beautiful saga that continues today and will steer the future for a better living.

I hope the readers will appreciate the tireless efforts of the artisans to create beautiful handcrafted textiles and become ambassadors of 'Make In India' for a sustainable future.

DR. M. BEENA, IAS
Development Commissioner (Handlooms)
Ministry of Textiles, Government of India

Photo Credit: Ka-Sha, Karishma Shahani Khan

Foreword

Indian handloom textiles have played a pivotal role in empowering artisan communities with positive environmental implications. Highlighting the inherently sustainable aspects of handloom weaving practices, their timeless appeal, and the diversity of weaves, patterns, and designs, the book 'Anant: Sustainability and Circularity in Indian Handlooms' celebrates the Indian handloom traditions and its growing importance in the world of fashion as a beacon of sustainable and mindful consumption.

The book is envisaged to be a visual treat that captures the sustainable practices integral to Indian handlooms, from farming organic fibres, a variety of indigenous sustainable materials, natural dyeing to traditional hand-spinning and hand-weaving, diversity in weaves, cultural significance and deep-rooted practices of recycling and upcycling textiles. The publication amalgamates striking imagery to showcase the best practices of weavers and designers in the Indian handloom industry.

The book begins with an overview of Indian handlooms, highlighting the rich and diverse traditions, bringing forth its relevance as a sustainable and ethical practice, respecting the environment and the maker by playing a crucial role in empowering artisan communities and creating a positive social impact.

The second chapter delves into the variety of sustainable natural fibres sourced from different regions of India including the organically grown fibres, to further reduce environmental impact. This is followed by a chapter on natural dyeing, practiced by India since ancient times. The book highlights the resurgence of interest in natural dyes among artisans and designers, reflecting a growing eco-consciousness and manifold opportunities to extract colours from plant and floral as well as agro waste. The fourth chapter illustrates the simple tools and equipment used in handloom weaving in different regions of India, exemplifying that every step of the handloom process is sustainable with least energy consumption, lower carbon footprints, and a means to support livelihoods of local communities. The subsequent chapter showcases the rich design vocabulary and the cultural significance of typical motifs used in different forms in regional handlooms, shaping a distinct identity to each textile of India. Chapter six explores the traditional recycling and upcycling practices and demonstrates the growing trend of repurposing textile waste by way of handcrafted techniques by weavers and designers, giving impetus to the cause of sustainability. The book concludes with the revival of sustainable practices in Indian handlooms, and government's support to uplift the sector and promote the rich legacy across the globe.

'Anant: Sustainability and Circularity in Indian Handlooms' attempts to capture the rich heritage of Indian handlooms, a way forward to circularity and sustainable development in the fashion industry. A visually rich compilation, the book endeavours to create awareness about the sustainable nature of handloom textiles of India, and preserve the timeless traditions of India.

Contents

Photo Credit: Anavila, Anavila Misra

सार

essence

Overview of Indian Textiles

India has a rich and diverse tradition in textiles, perhaps the oldest in the world. India's textiles are known for their skilful manipulation of the warp and weft on the loom, intricate designs, and unique textures, showcasing the artistic excellence of our weavers and craftsmen. Despite repeated and persistent invasions, migrations, and political upheavals, the textile craft in India not only survived but also underwent a synthesis that further enriched its heritage. Various factors, including the cults of the inhabitants, water and mineral sources, the topographical variations, and the diverse flora and fauna, all contributed to the emergence of a distinct textile heritage.

India's handwoven textiles indeed have a rich and ancient history that has played a crucial role in shaping the country's identity both domestically and abroad.

Its history traces back to the Indus Valley civilisation and the Vedas, where references to spinning and weaving of different fibres such as cotton and wool are found, respectively. Indian textile is embellished, enhanced, decorated, and given its character through various modes and techniques, with weaving being the most significant. As India evolved and experienced cultural influences, new materials and techniques were introduced. As a result, various regions of India developed distinctive weaving styles and designs reflecting the cultural, social, and economic diversity of the subcontinent.

Drawing from the narrative aspects of the life of a Santhal woman, this collection of handwoven linen saris is inspired, styled, and modelled by the Santhal women. The colours and weaves are natural, rustic, and monochromatic.

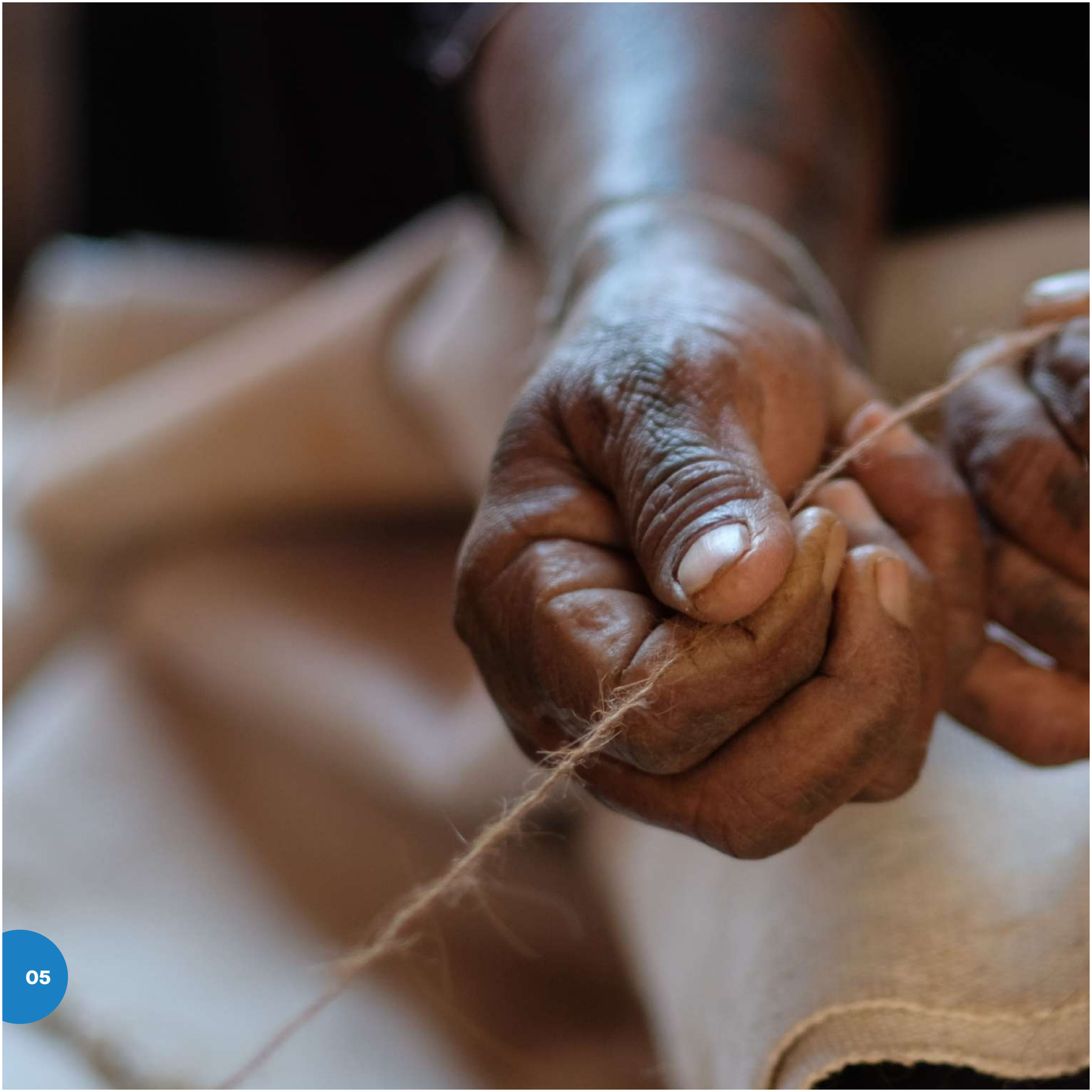
Photo Credit: Anavila, Anavila Misra

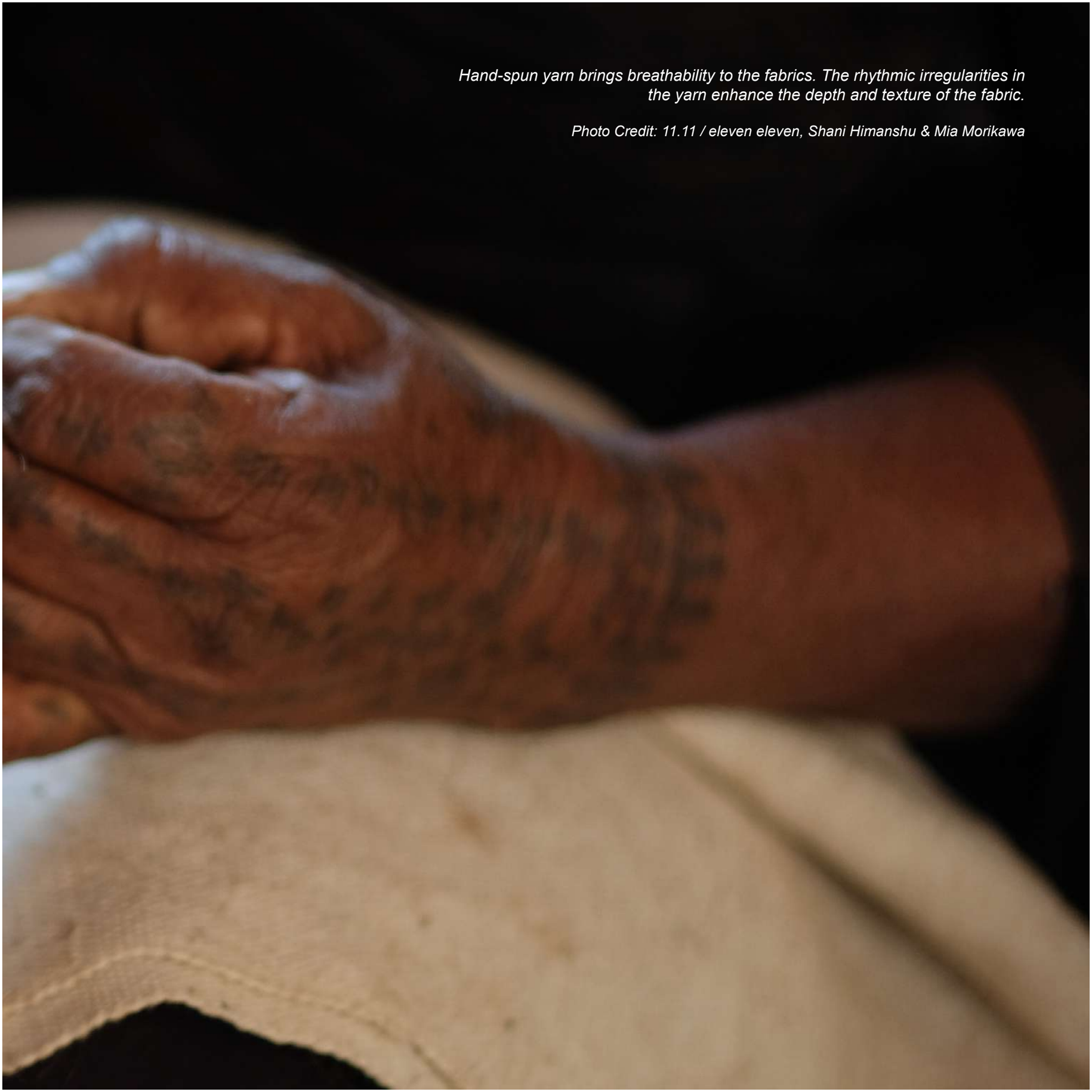
A woman spinning wool in Napasar, Bikaner district, Rajasthan

Photo Credit:
Centre of Excellence for Khadi

The woven fabric has always been of great importance as an expression of the wealth, status, and cultural traditions of people and nations alike. They are thus an essential decoration not only for the adornment of the body but also for the home, whether a simple mud hut, a house, or a palace. Certain woven textiles hold significance, reserved exclusively for royalty or religious leaders, symbolising their privileged position within society. It is also an extremely personal form of expression, acting as an extension of the wearer's personality and conveying a number of signals that are part of the non-verbal vocabulary of people. The dress of a person designates his status and identifies him with a group, thus giving him a sense of belonging. Moreover, these fabrics are often perceived as offering protection to the wearer against negative forces, ingraining a sense of security in them.

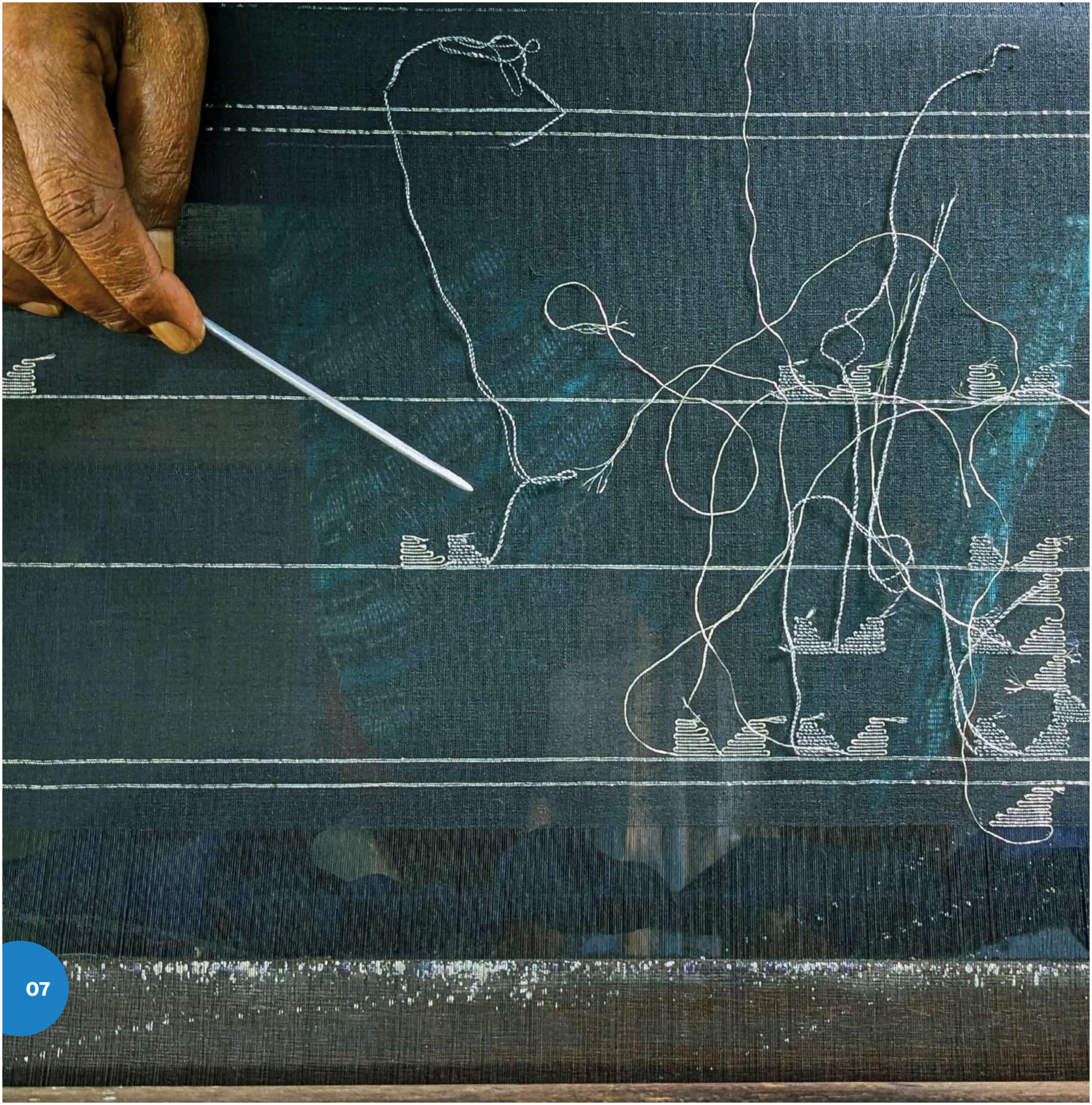
Handloom weaving in India is not just about creating an array of striking and gorgeous cloth materials; it is a sustainable and ethical practice that respects the environment and the craftsmen involved. The Indian handlooms are inherently sustainable in terms of the tools and materials used as well as the techniques practiced.





Hand-spun yarn brings breathability to the fabrics. The rhythmic irregularities in the yarn enhance the depth and texture of the fabric.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

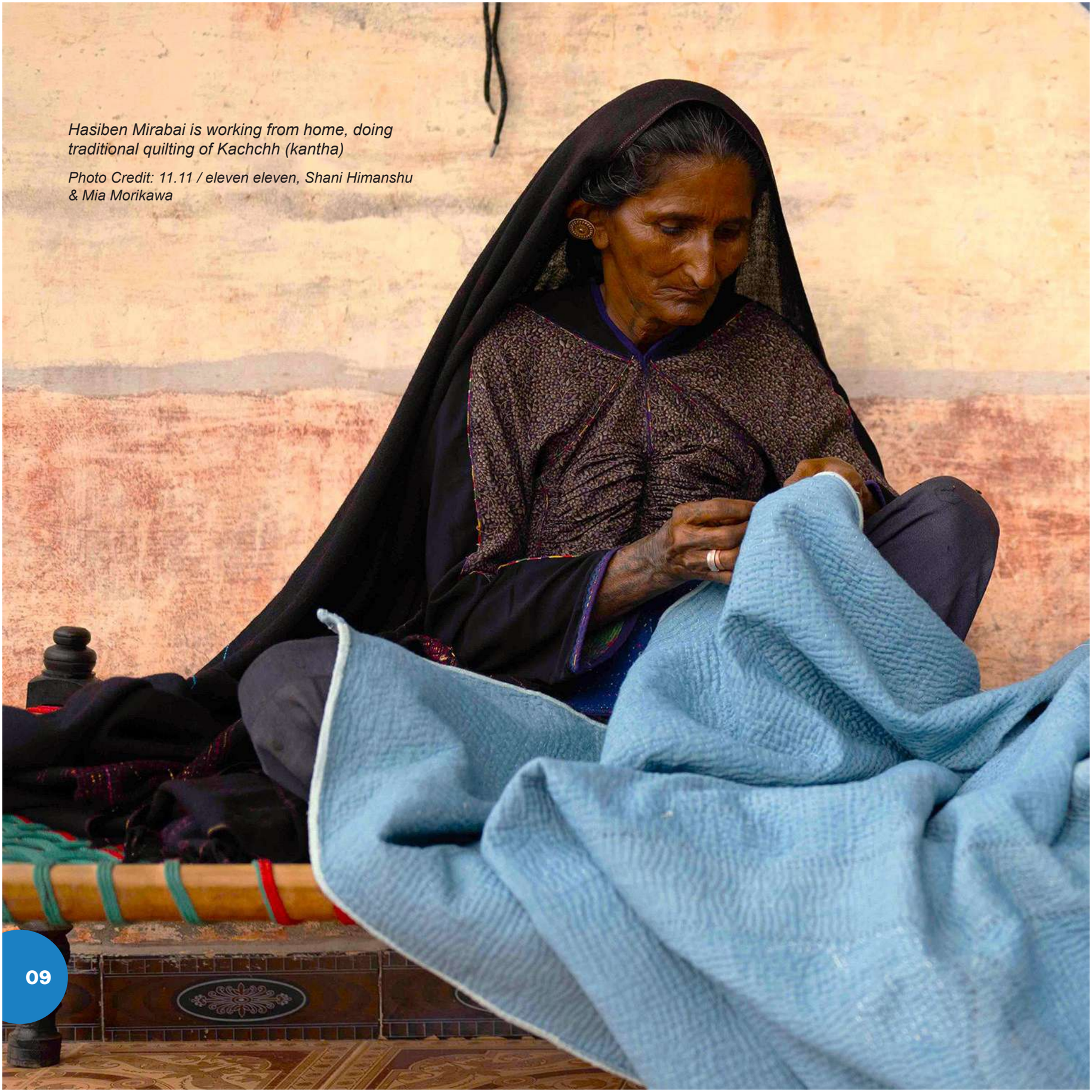


In fact, the hallmark of India's manufacturing technique lies in the complexity of various looms, the use of natural fibres and dyes, and a general indifference to labour-saving devices. Flexibility of production, seamless transfer of knowledge and skill in weaving, which is passed through the generations in communities, and a certain possessiveness amongst the weavers families to keep their traditional practices alive are our biggest strengths. Indian handlooms also play a crucial role in empowering the artisan communities by providing them with a means of livelihood, ensuring their economic stability and upliftment, and creating a positive social impact. Furthermore, aggressive steps taken by the government in India to integrate circularity principles in the handloom sector value chain with a vision to reuse, recycle, and reduce waste will further reduce their environmental impact, thereby creating a more sustainable future for the industry and the country at large.

Today, Indian handwoven textiles continue to garner global acclaim for their unrivalled craftsmanship, intricate designs, and the preservation of age-old traditions. No one can resist the splendour of India's timeless fabrics, whose craftsmen have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to assimilate and absorb newer ideas, keeping handloom textile art alive and continuously evolving.

Gautam da from Katwa is weaving Karomi's exquisite 'Reef Dress', adorned with silver zari – Handwoven beauty capturing the vibrant coral life.

Photo Credit: Karomi, Sarita Ganeriwala



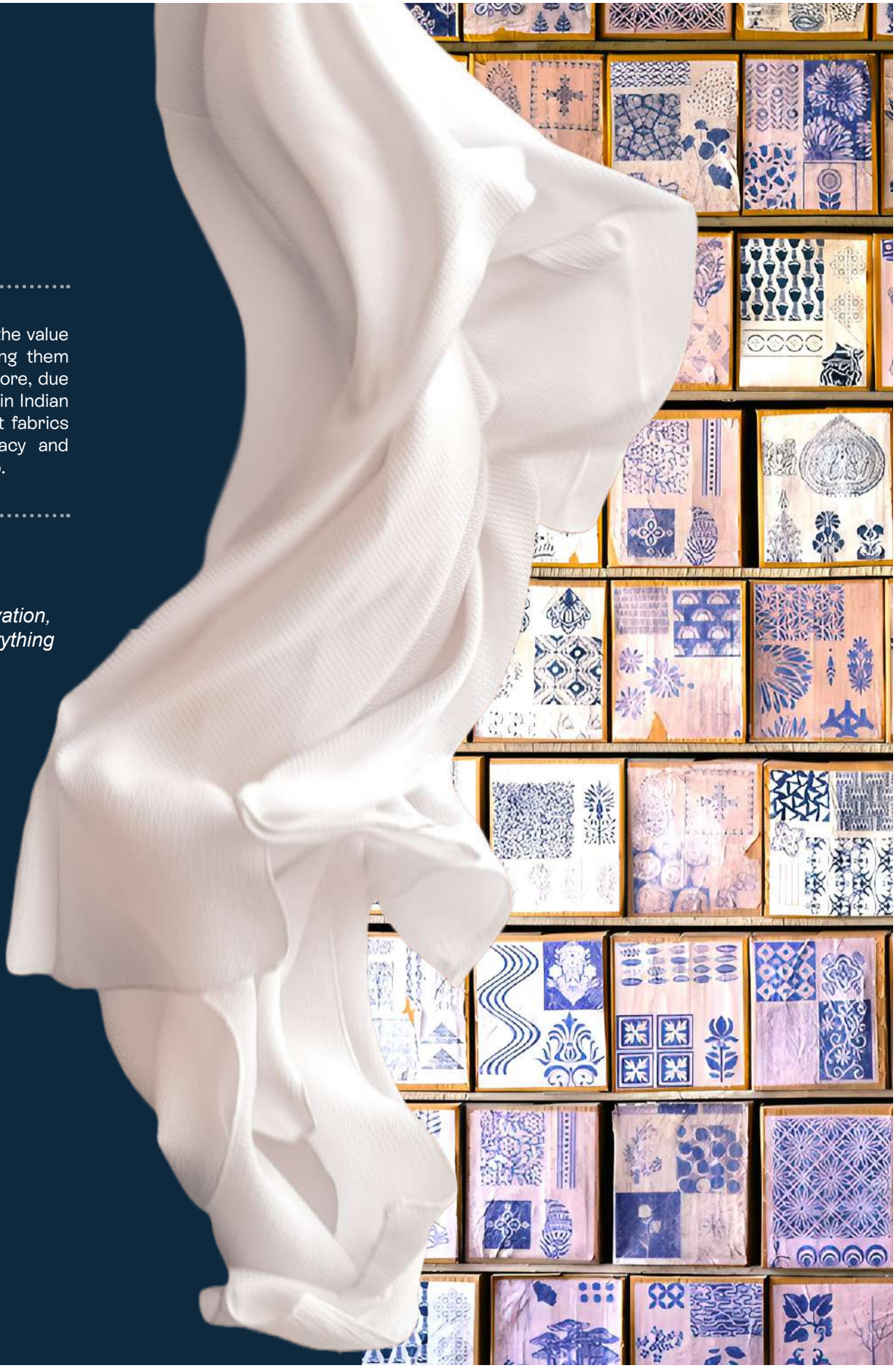
Hasiben Mirabai is working from home, doing traditional quilting of Kachchh (kantha)

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Even the designers have recognised the value of these unique fabrics, incorporating them into contemporary designs. Furthermore, due to the sustainable practices inherent in Indian handloom weaving, these are not just fabrics but bearers of a rich cultural legacy and symbols of responsible craftsmanship.

Rooted in Indian ethos, the brand Anavila constantly strives for innovation, originality, and mindfulness in everything it creates.

Photo Credit: Anavila, Anavila Misra



The consistent efforts of the Government of India, through WSCs and IIHTs, to skill the traditional weaver and his next generation; design institutions like NIFT, NID, IICD, and many others, have played an important role in keeping handloom weavers and craftsmen engaged in experimentation.

Our designers have the unique advantage of having skilled, knowledgeable weavers and craftsmen who are eager to adapt and evolve as per the requirements of the design. In fact, that is the most important impact that traditional handloom and handicraft practices are alive as living traditions and living cultures in our country.

The brand 11.11 focuses on preserving and repurposing leftover fabrics. Reclaiming leftover materials, giving them new life, and creatively using them in new ways has created a market for kantha and patchwork of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

संपन्न

abundance

Sustainable Materials

The tradition of handloom weaving in India is ancient. It holds immense cultural significance as it embodies the heritage, traditions, and artistic expressions of diverse communities. Different regions of the country are renowned for their unique textures and weaving techniques. Even within individual states, there are distinctions in materials and designs in different areas. Handloom textiles utilise a wide variety of natural, environmentally favourable raw materials, most of which are grown in the country, making each region's textile very distinct from another. The abundant diversity of raw materials not only makes each product unique but also establishes a connection between nature and the producer, thereby ensuring minimal environmental impact.

A number of handlooms in India are engaged in weaving with natural fibers. These fibres are primarily sourced from plant stems and leaves, plant seed hairs, animal coats, and silkworm cocoons. Cotton, silk, wool, flax, jute, hemp and coir are the most popular raw materials for handloom weaving.

India has a rich history of cultivating various varieties of cotton and silk, dating back to ancient civilisations. Examples include muslin and hand-spun khadi, each with its own unique texture. Organic cotton, another sustainable fashion alternative, is cultivated without the use of environmentally harmful chemicals, complies with international standards, and is extensively used in the handloom industry. Kala cotton, native to the Kachchh region of Gujarat, and brown cotton, local to Karnataka, are some of the popular indigenous varieties.

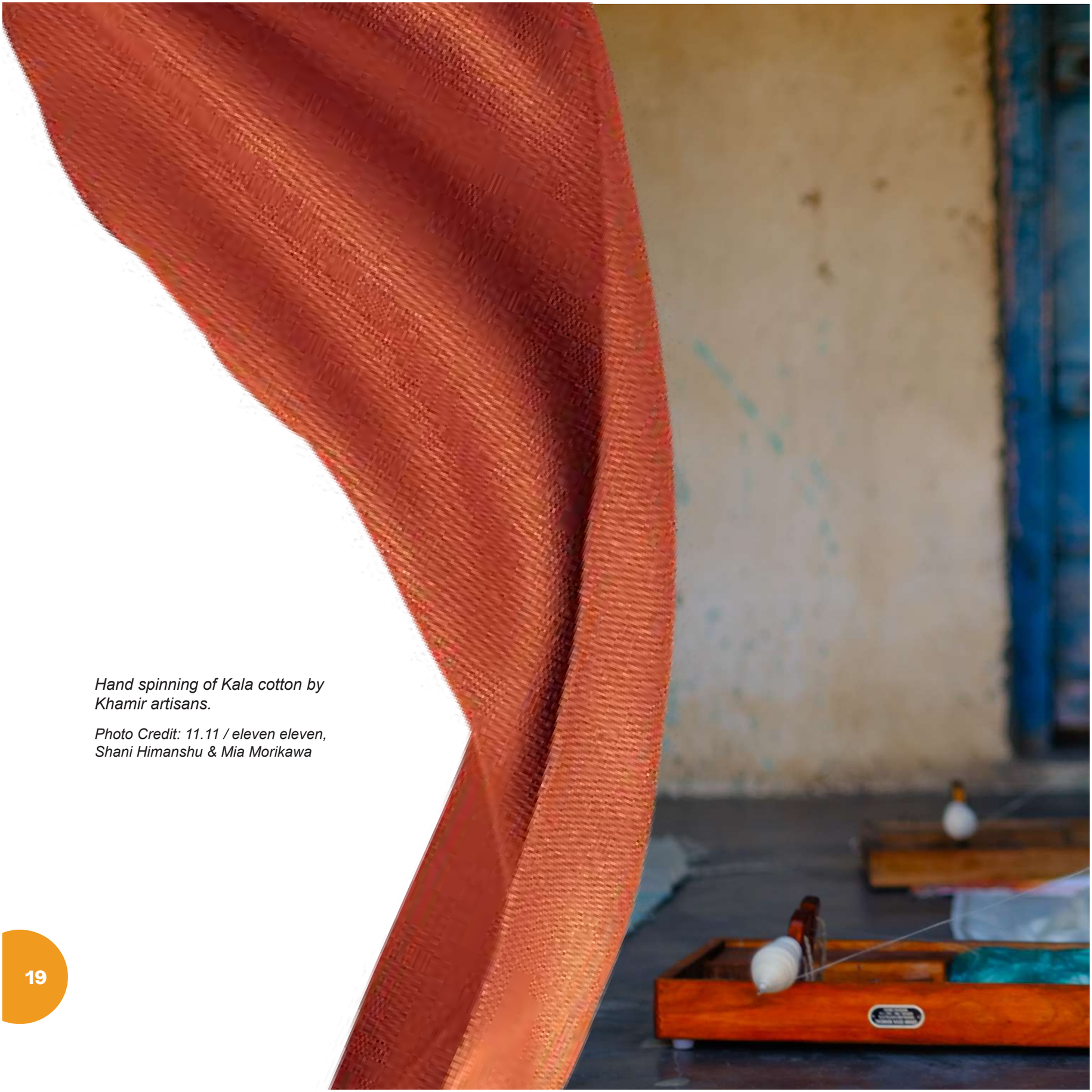
Rabari women are performing the ginning process of Kala cotton by hand.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Kala cotton is one of the staples of 11.11's fibre portfolio and is used extensively in all its collections.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Silk is also produced in India in significant quantities. Four main varieties of silks are Mulberry, Tussar, Muga and Eri. These are known in different regions by different names such as Mysore silk, Bhagalpuri Tussar, Assamese Muga, and Endi, Matka, Noil, etc. The demand for Ahimsa silk, a non-violent method of breeding and harvesting silk, is steadily growing among people who are vegans and animal lovers. Traditionally, Indian clothing was predominantly made from cotton and silk, as these fibres were natural and helped maintain body temperature due to their cooling effect.



Hand spinning of Kala cotton by Khamir artisans.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

The production and use of wool are more prevalent in North India than in South India, owing to the harsh winters that it experiences. Kullu shawls, caps, mufflers, chaddar, blankets, hand gloves, and high-quality Pashmina shawls of Kashmir are some of the finest handloom products woven in the North, showcasing the region's expertise in woollen textiles.

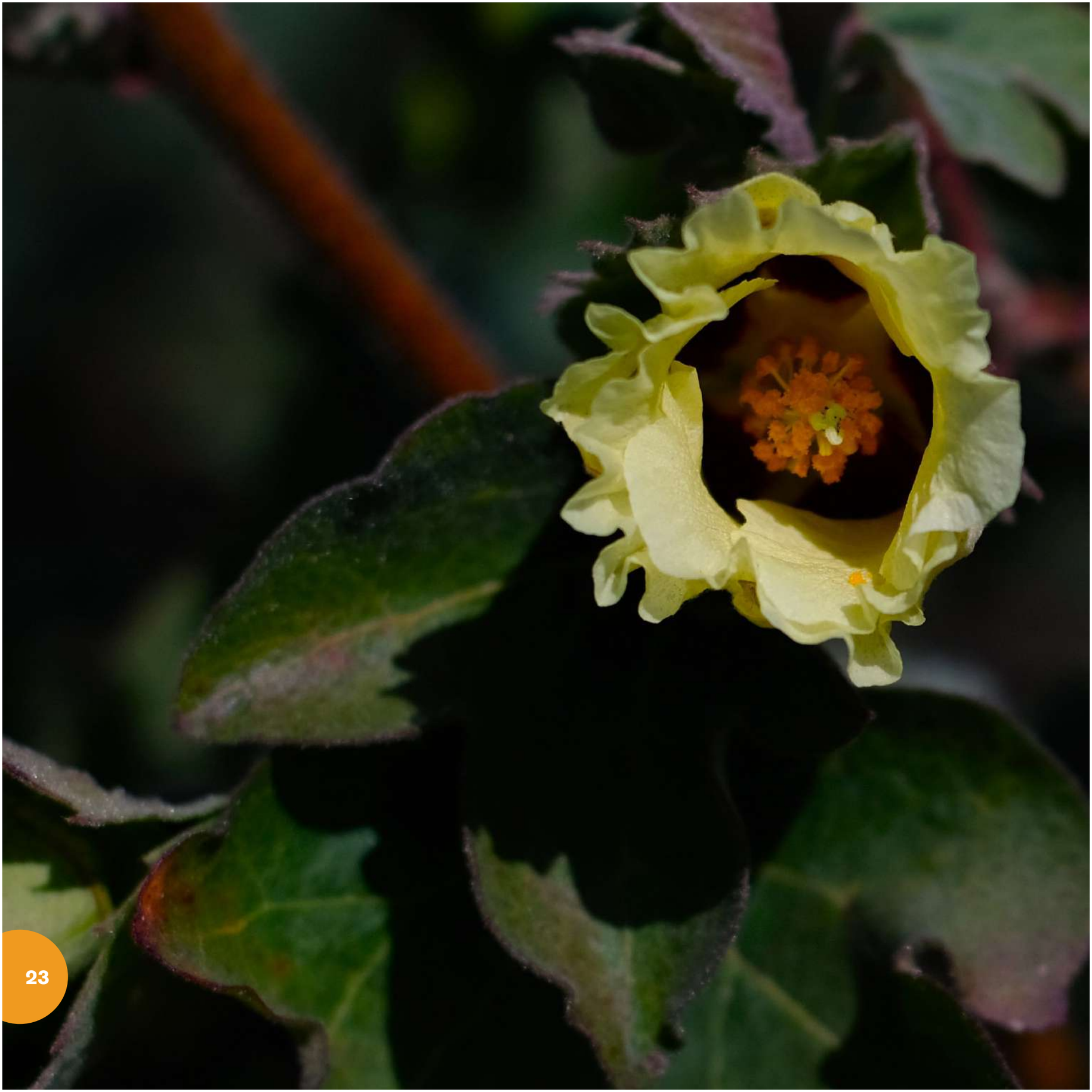
Over the past few years, with the 'go-green' and 'organic' consciousness making a huge impact on people in India, there has been a rise in the use of natural fibres. Consequently, a huge range of fibres obtained from different plant sources have been added to the list. These include banana, nettle, palm, korai grass, and pineapple leaf fibre, to name a few.

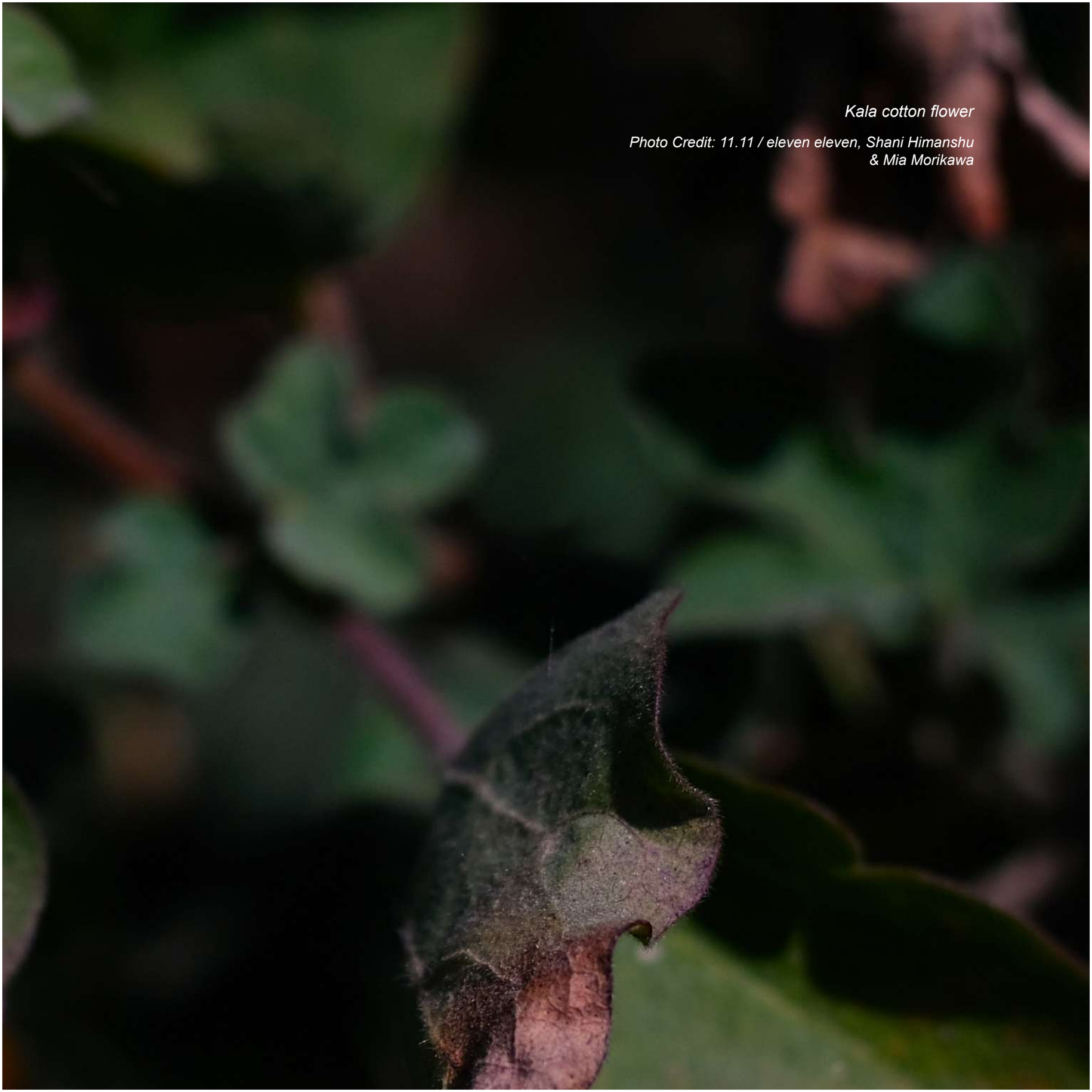
Lampshade woven in local grass called Bans, a product by the brand Basant that prioritises the use of organic materials in their creations.

Photo Credit: Basant, Jodhpur

Natural fibres, being biodegradable, non-carcinogenic, and renewable, reduce ecological footprints, thereby making handlooms emerge as a shining beacon of sustainable fashion. To ensure the availability of high-quality fibres, farming techniques such as multiple cropping, inoculating the soil with azotobacter bacteria, intercropping, and canal retting are being employed. The rise of numerous eco-conscious fashion brands committed to being 100% organic and using natural fibres reflects shifting consumer preferences towards more eco-friendly and ethical alternatives.

Another eco-friendly material that is increasingly finding its place in the handloom industry is recycled polyester, mainly made by recycling PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) plastic bottles. Often termed rPET, the fibre boasts exceptional versatility. It has been used for handloom clothing items, making it an appealing option for environmentally conscious consumers, marking a shift from a linear economy towards a more sustainable circular economy model that enables textiles to re-enter the product life cycle instead of being discarded, thus forming a closed loop that conserves resources and reduces environmental impact.





Kala cotton flower

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

With the rising popularity of eco consciousness amongst consumers, genuinely sustainable and ethical fashion is no longer an exception but the norm. Several brands have been offering eco-friendly clothing at reasonable rates, making shopping for sustainable fashion a personal choice for individuals. Handloom textiles, in particular, are an eco-conscious alternative to machine-made and mass-manufactured fast fashion products.

These handloom textiles have played a significant role in helping the nation achieve the aims of one of the Sustainable Development Goals, 'Responsible Consumption and Production.' As we embrace the heritage of handloom weaving, it is vital to also continue to support and celebrate the artisans and designers who are working with environmentally responsible fibres. Their efforts not only preserve traditional craftsmanship but also pave the way for a healthier and more sustainable society.

Kala cotton pods

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Banana fibre incorporated in handwoven saris.

Photo Credit: C. Sekar, Anakaputhur Natural Fibres Weaving Cluster

सृष्टि
nature

Natural Dyeing

Drying naturally dyed indigo fabric (left) & Preparing cotton hanks for dyeing (above).

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Throughout history, man has dyed his textiles using various locally available materials. Natural textile dyeing practices in India are as old as the art of textile making itself. Its roots trace back to prehistoric times, when the first fibre dyes were already used after the last ice age, around 1000 BC. They consisted of fugitive stains derived from berries, blossoms, barks, and roots. As time progressed, more sophisticated dyes were developed. Utilising various parts of dye-yielding plants and insects, the country excelled in producing textiles with a wide array of colours ranging from blue to red and yellow. The bounty of nature combined with the skill of the dyers resulted in the production of vast quantities of painted, printed, and dyed textiles in the country for both local use and trade. In ancient times, India was unrivalled for the brilliant and permanent dyeing of cotton, one of the most challenging fibres to dye, thus showcasing the mastery of natural dyeing techniques.

Indigo, often referred to as the 'King of Natural Dyes', is perhaps one of the oldest natural dye used by man. In addition to indigo, various other natural dyes are cultivated in different parts of India. These include madder for shades of red and turmeric for yellow, while henna is used to impart an orange tint to wool and silk. Catechu imparts a brown and black colour to cotton, wool, and silk. Another popular material in Indian dyeing is harda, known as myrobalan, which is used as a mordant for both pre-treating the yarn for the absorption of dyes and to produce yellow colouring matter. Lac, among the animal dyes, is considered the most ancient in India and yields scarlet and crimson shades.

Natural dyes, with their strong historical legacy, have played a significant role in promoting traditional Indian textiles globally. Indeed, Indian craftsmen have been renowned for their traditional dyeing procedures, with each region having its own unique approach and preferences. The Panika community of weaver-dyers in Kotpad, Odisha, uses traditional aal to produce gamchas, waistcloths, and saris. In Uttaranchal, Bhotiya people use the local plant material to dye their woollen clothes for their own use and for trade in Tibetan markets. On the Andhra coast, the legendary pinkish red of the kalamkaris is produced by the plant hedyotis umbellatum, locally known as chayaveru. In Ilkal, in Karnataka, before the advent of chemical colours, the cotton was indigo dyed for the body, and the border and pallu were dyed with 'piste ka phul' for red to produce the traditional Ilkal sari. Rajasthan has a rich tradition of using natural dyes in textile dyeing and printing in the textile sector. Clusters like Sanganer, Bagru, Barmer, Jodhpur, and Akola are renowned for producing beautifully dyed and printed products using vegetable and natural mineral-based dyestuffs.

For over 8 years, the brand 11.11 has been working with 100% natural indigo with various dyers.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

The hand painting unit at 11.11 uses 100% natural pigments and processes. Learning and developing the technique from the traditional practice of Kalamkari painting, fabrics are turned into canvases of creative expression.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

However, with the introduction of synthetic dyes in the middle of the nineteenth century, the decline in the use of natural dyes started. Synthetic dyes rose in popularity owing to their colourfastness, brighter hues, and affordable pricing. As a result, the use of natural dyes became limited to only a few craft-driven pockets across the Indian subcontinent. The fabric printing traditions of Kachchh in Gujarat with plant dyes almost became extinct, having changed over to chemical colours. Bandhani, the tie-dyed fabric of Gujarat, which was dyed using vegetable dyes until the mid-twentieth century, is now mostly done with chemicals. In Rajasthan, dyeing with plant materials survives only with few printer families. But due to the increased awareness about the lethal effects of synthetic dyes, a paradigm shift is seen amongst today's green-minded generation towards nature-friendly dyeing techniques. Multiple plants and agricultural by-products are gaining popularity for dyeing textiles due to their potential for sustainability and environmental friendliness. Floral waste from temples, religious ceremonies, weddings, and plant waste from agriculture and vegetable vendors is efficiently recycled and utilised for the dyeing of fabrics, besides their applications in various other industries. Rose and marigold flowers, guava leaves, walnut shell and pomegranate rind, and natural mordants like alum, aloe vera, and tea are being used to promote a more sustainable approach to colour textiles for fashion.

Traditional indigo dyeing at Colours of Nature, the dyeing partner of 11.11 is committed to the revival and preservation of the indigenous knowledge of natural dyeing.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

At 11.11, the flexibility of using the hand to create art allows a fluid play of forms and patterns that wrap the garment, enriching the piece from all directions.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

To encourage and revive local natural dyeing practices, the entrepreneurs are leveraging the traditional craft of dyeing with advanced technological interventions. Blending technology with traditional methodologies to create products that are colour-fast and offer a wider colour spectrum is their focus. Also, 'being eco-friendly' is the buzzword in the present scenario of fashion, due to which natural dyes have witnessed an incremental demand amongst independent fashion labels. This resurgence of interest in natural dyes reflect a growing consciousness about the environmental impact of industrial processes, providing opportunities for the continued legacy. Many designers and craftsmen are trying to make natural dyed products a mainstream commodity by incorporating them into their production cycle, thereby promoting natural fashion and, at the same time, convincing people to accept the impermanent nature of the product. Although it remains small artisanal range, specifically created for a niche segment, every drop counts.

Hand painting space at 11.11 workshop

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Photo Credit: Punarjeevana, Hemalatha Jain

सक्षम

proficient

Traditional Techniques and Sustainability

In today's fast-paced world, where mass production and fleeting fashion trends often take centre stage, Indian handlooms not only command global attention but also remain deeply rooted in the country's culture and ethos. Indian handloom textiles, a combination of artistry, innovation, sustainability, and positive environmental impact, are known for their collective commitment to managing with minimal resources, thus standing out as a beacon of sustainability. Handloom weaving embodies a harmonious relationship between craftsmanship and nature. Each handwoven fabric is unique as it carries energy and bears the mark of the individuality of the weaver, narrating a distinctive story, thus intertwining tradition and sustainability. Despite India being a significant producer of fast fashion for the western world, many of its traditional practices still persist, embracing a more sustainable approach to clothing and textiles. Every step of the handloom process is sustainable, from fibre choice, dyeing, and weaving to post loom processes. It's important because it promotes the sustainable use of natural resources, eco-friendly practices, minimises waste generation, reduces energy consumption, lowers carbon emissions, preserves cultural heritage, and supports local communities, thus providing countless benefits.

Nuapatna, ikat cluster (left) & Karomi's 'Coral' and 'Reef' saris, handwoven in jamdani with silver zari, epitomise sustainability (right)

Photo Credit: Paiwand, Ashita Singhal (image left) & Karomi, Sarita Ganeriwala (image right)

For centuries, handloom textiles have been woven using traditional techniques and natural fibres like wool, cotton, silk, linen, or jute, which have a markedly lower environmental impact compared to their synthetic counterparts. The inherent sustainability of natural fibres lies in their renewability and biodegradability. Artisans predominantly opt for locally sourced and organic materials, thus reducing the need for resource-intensive farming practices and minimising transportation-related emissions.

Even today handwoven textiles in India are made using hand-spun yarn, where fibres are spun into yarn on a spinning wheel called a charkha, and the fabric is known as khadi. Devised and embraced by Mahatma Gandhi, the charkha became a symbol of self-sufficiency and independence, carrying profound connotations of dignity of labour, equality, and unity. A portable version called the peti-charkha, became popular as it could be carried easily. With new inventions, modified versions of the charkha came in that could spin much faster without having an impact on the environment.

Peti charkha

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Karomi's 'Crest' stole, a Bengal masterpiece, mirrors ocean tranquility with intricate weft patterns. Crafted by skilled jamdani weavers, it embraces imperfections for uniquely stunning, sustainable elegance.

Photo Credit: Karomi, Sarita Ganeriwala

In India, the looms used for weaving fabric, the specific raw materials, and the designs vary based on the region's location, climate, and cultural factors. Each region's handlooms are unique, employing age-old techniques, equipment, patterns, textures, and colours that are passed down from generation to generation. Vertical loom, pit loom, and frame loom are the predominant hand looms being utilised, even until now by handloom weavers. The handloom weaving process consists of various pre-loom, on-loom, and post-loom techniques that must be performed in order to produce the desired textile.

Each region has its own unique weaving techniques and motifs, which are reflected in the textiles produced. Kanjeevaram silk saris from Tamil Nadu, Banarasi brocades from Varanasi, Paithani of Maharashtra, Kunbi saris of Goa, Muga silk of Assam, ikats from Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, Kullu shawls of Himachal Pradesh, Pashmina and Kani shawls from Kashmir, the famous Mysore silk of Karnataka, the luxurious Chanderis and Maheshwaris of Madhya Pradesh, and several more are celebrated examples of the rich handloom traditions in India that are a living testament to the nation's deeply rooted cultural heritage.

Photo Credit: Lahé Looms, Jahnabi Phookan

The concept of sustainability encompasses social responsibility, ensuring the well-being of people and livelihoods, as well as environmental responsibility, ensuring the well-being of the planet. Handloom weaving serves both. Handlooms have a direct connection to the culture and people of each community they come from. The motifs, patterns, and techniques are passed down in families from one generation to the next, acting as a source of income and sustenance for craftsmen belonging to numerous indigenous communities, particularly in rural areas, thereby significantly contributing to their economic empowerment. This empowerment is not just financial; it also instils a sense of pride, resilience, and cultural continuity. Weaving with a handloom is a highly energy-efficient process, as no electricity is needed to operate it. While some mechanical instruments have been introduced to enhance productivity, weavers have maintained sustainable processes over the years in most parts of India. This reduces the carbon footprint associated with mechanized processes. Handloom weaving is thus a labour of love as much as it's a source of livelihood.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

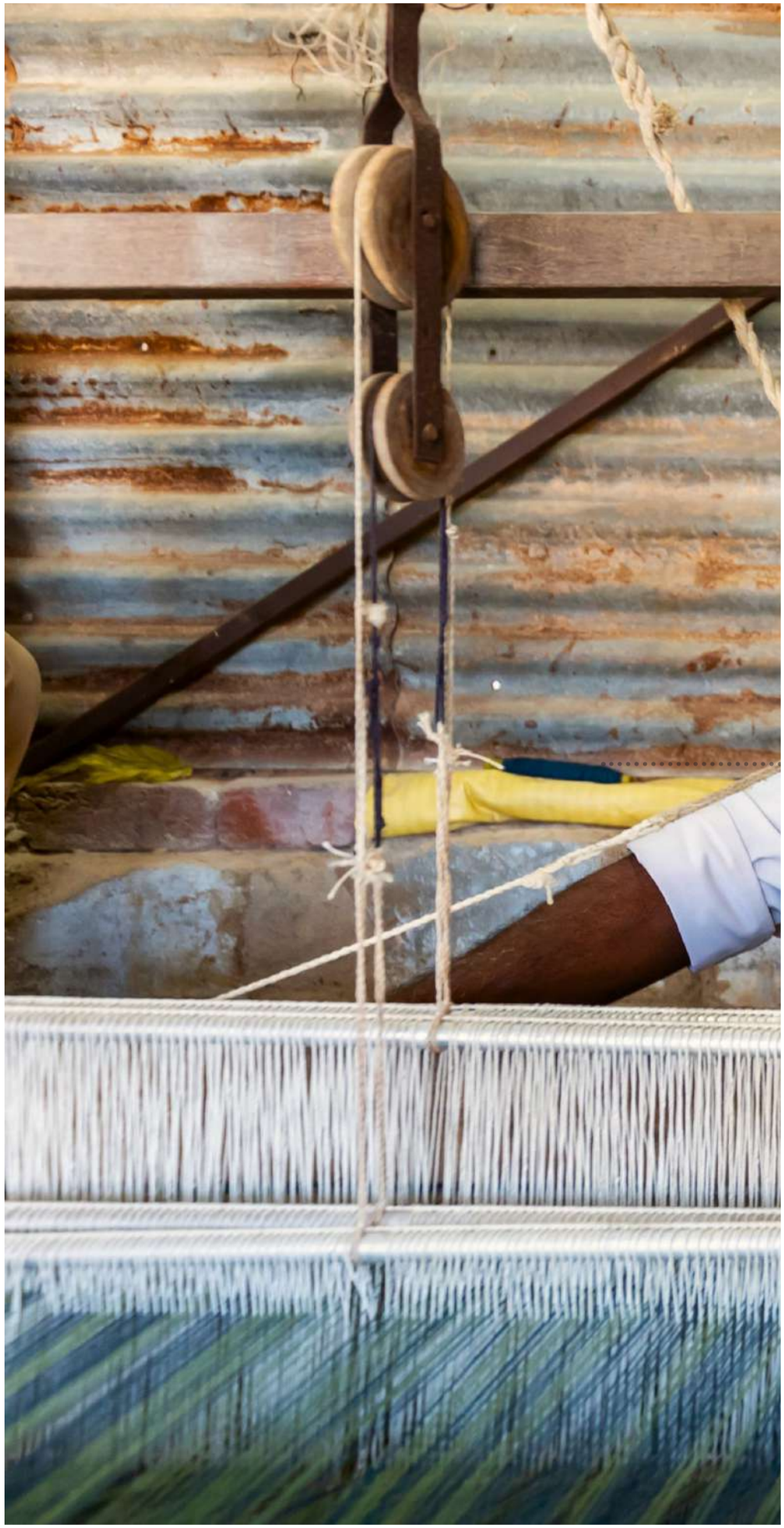
In handloom weaving, the emphasis is on a zero-waste approach. Meticulous planning and precise calculation of the required raw materials, such as yarn, dyes, etc., minimise waste generation. Fast fashion leads to overconsumption and waste. Handlooms, on the other hand, embody the principles of slow fashion, advocating for mindful consumption and durability, thus encouraging a more sustainable and ethical fashion ecosystem. Unlike mass production, handloom weaving focuses on quality, durability, and timeless designs, ensuring its longevity, which significantly addresses the challenges posed by the current throwaway culture.

The reason for the sustenance of the traditional hand spinning, weaving or colour practices in India is that traditions are ingrained in our culture. Hand spinning is again gaining momentum as it has been proved that it is a meditative process and brings relief from anxiety and helps one to increase focus. Handloom fabric is more breathable and is still a preferred choice of fabric amongst older generation and for young conscious consumers who are aware of sustainable practices.

Artisan is working on a queen-size quilt. Reclaimed fabric scrapes are patched and appliqued together and quilted using simple running stitches.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Handloom weaving is a sustainable and timeless tradition that contributes to a more eco-conscious and responsible future. With a growing demand for ethical and sustainable products, innovative collaborations between designers and handloom weavers are likely to gain more recognition. As part of sustainable lifestyle choices, more and more consumers are choosing products made from handwoven textiles and supporting ethical brands. Weaving handlooms is thus not just a craft that bridges the past and present but is an empowering way to lead to a more conscious and compassionate fashion landscape.



Tangalia weaving, a rare craft, has been a part of the brand's collections for the past two years.

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

सुकृत

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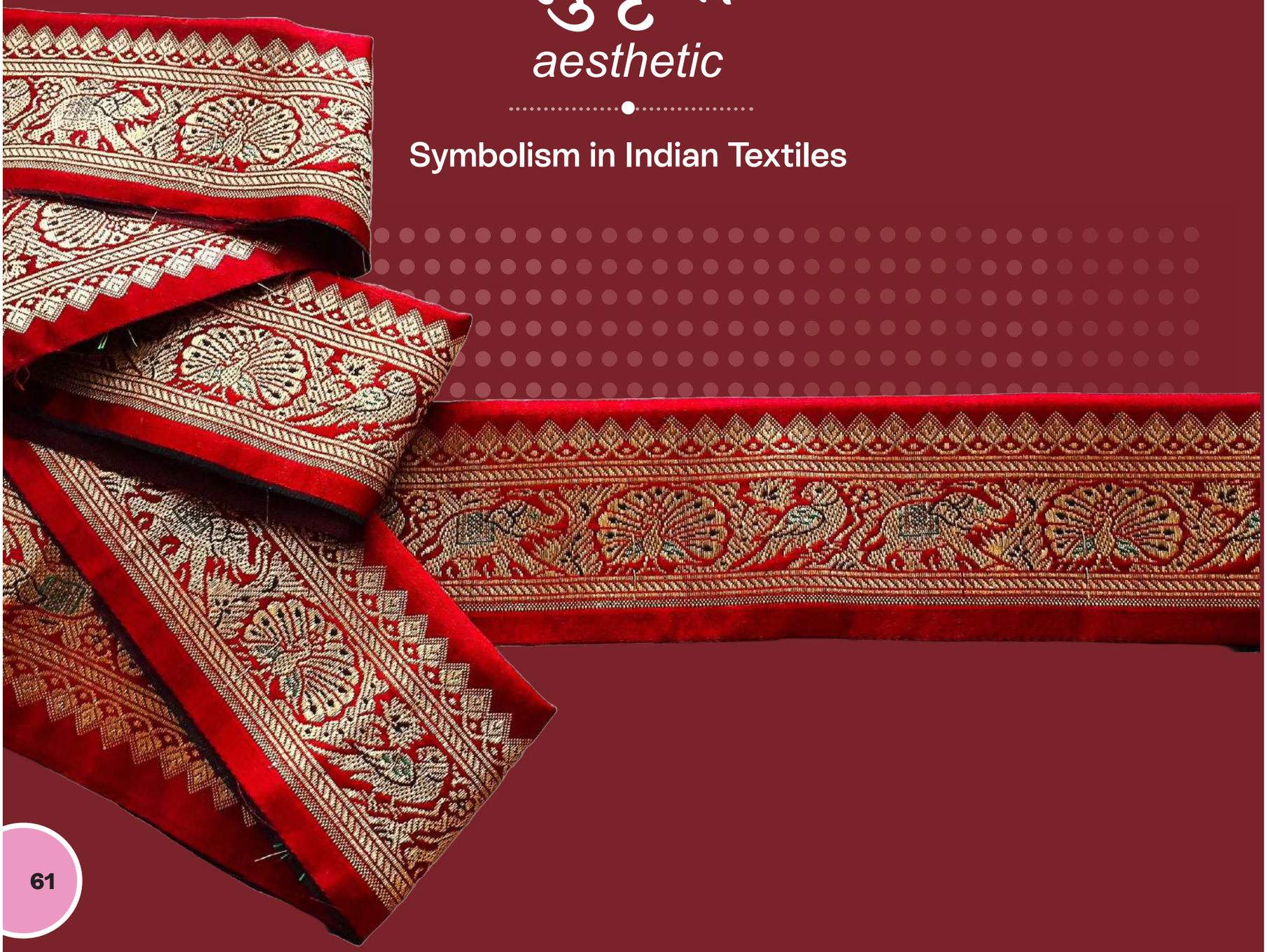
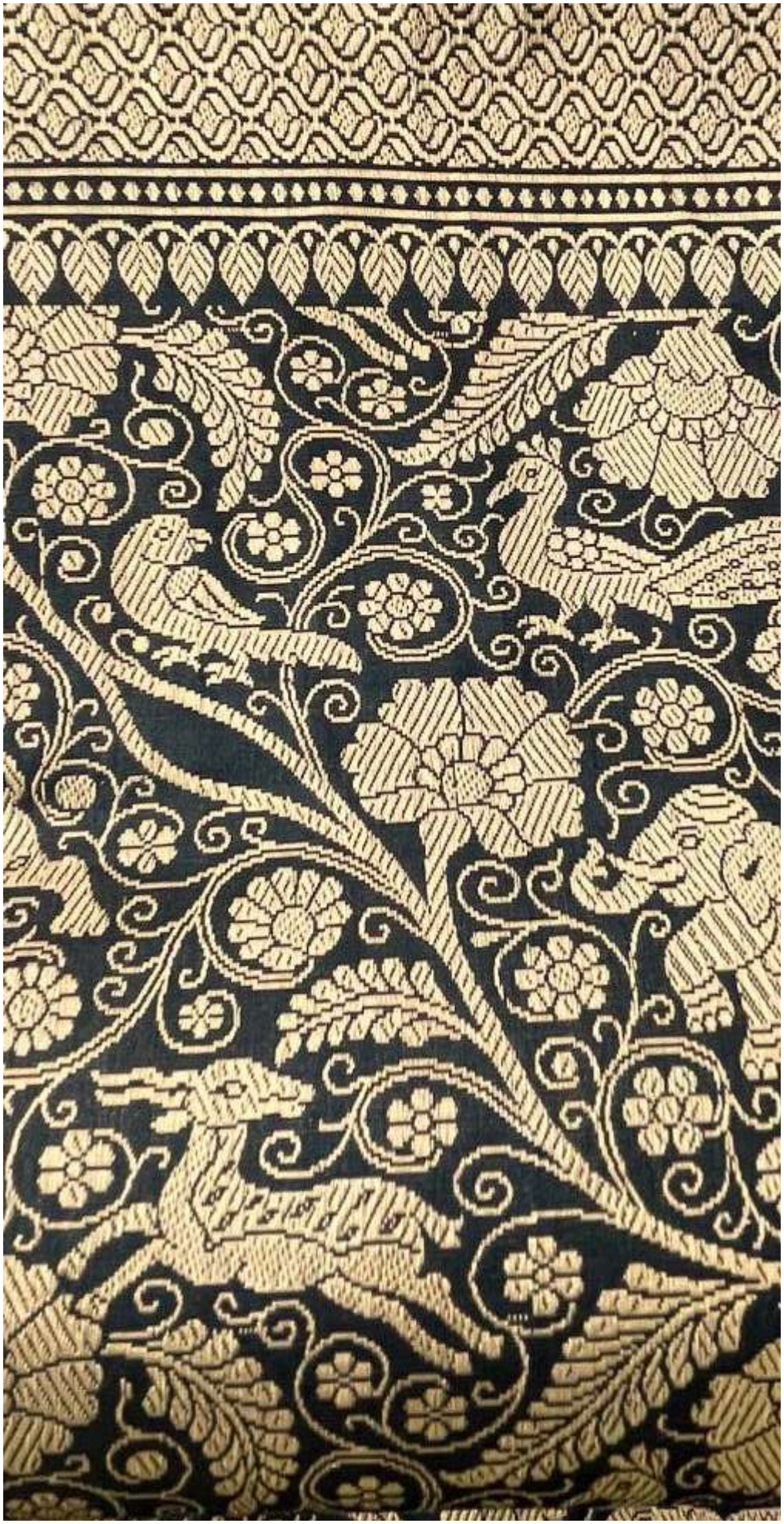
Symbolism in Indian Textiles

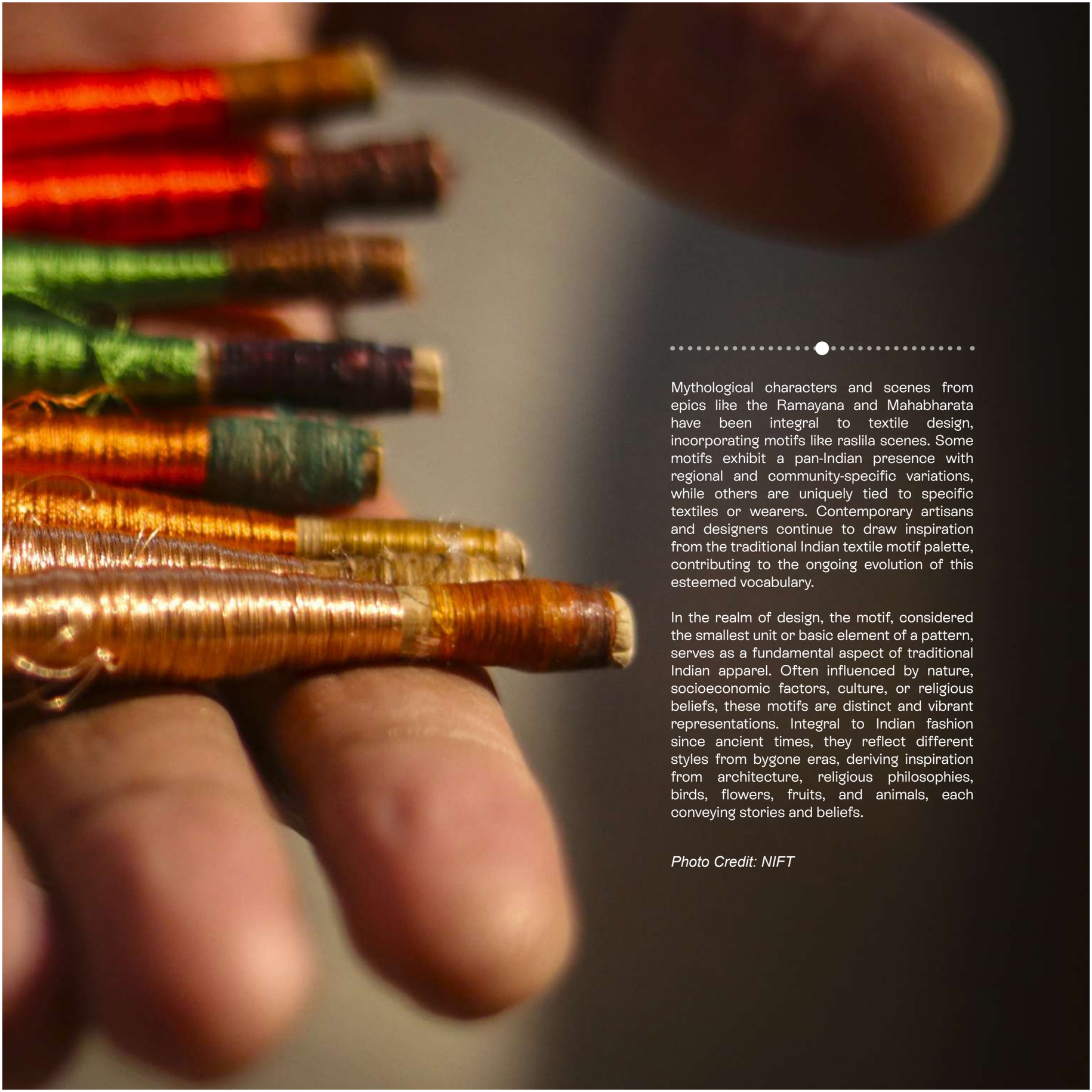


Over the course of centuries, Indian artisans have created a diverse array of textiles featuring intricate motifs, employing various textile techniques and fabrics. These traditional motifs are deeply rooted in religious beliefs, cultural influences, environmental factors, daily activities, architectural elements, and historical contexts. Influenced by nature, legends, beliefs, and individual creativity, these motifs span a wide spectrum of expressions, encompassing religious, auspicious, decorative, and creative themes. Symbolic motifs such as lotus, conch shells, fish, elephant, and horse, which represent Hindu philosophy, are believed to bring good luck, health, and prosperity. They are typically worn on ceremonial occasions. These motifs serve as poetic expressions, reflecting imaginations towards life, devotion, and character.

Weavers draw inspiration from their surroundings, evident in motifs like fish and flowing streams in Odisha weaving, parrots in Gujarat, chinar trees in Kashmir, rudraksha beads in South Indian saris, and court scenes, boats, and steam engines in Bengal weaving. Women derive inspiration from common vegetables, such as mircha bagh, kakri bagh, and dhaniya bagh, used in the embroidery of phulkari. Rituals, customs, and scenes from daily life, including weddings, household activities, dandiya, rangoli, and alpana designs, serve as enduring inspirations for artisans. In South India, traditional motifs are derived from temple architecture and sculpture, featuring gopurams, chariots, bells, and row triangles on sari borders.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre





Mythological characters and scenes from epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata have been integral to textile design, incorporating motifs like raslila scenes. Some motifs exhibit a pan-Indian presence with regional and community-specific variations, while others are uniquely tied to specific textiles or wearers. Contemporary artisans and designers continue to draw inspiration from the traditional Indian textile motif palette, contributing to the ongoing evolution of this esteemed vocabulary.

In the realm of design, the motif, considered the smallest unit or basic element of a pattern, serves as a fundamental aspect of traditional Indian apparel. Often influenced by nature, socioeconomic factors, culture, or religious beliefs, these motifs are distinct and vibrant representations. Integral to Indian fashion since ancient times, they reflect different styles from bygone eras, deriving inspiration from architecture, religious philosophies, birds, flowers, fruits, and animals, each conveying stories and beliefs.

Photo Credit: NIFT

Lotus motif or Kamal (The flower of wisdom)

The lotus holds significant symbolism within Hindu religious and cultural contexts, representing purity, peace, and cosmic harmony. In mandala iconography, the lotus serves as a central motif, embodying the essence of the universe. In Hindu mythology, the eight-petaled lotus emerges from the naval of Lord Vishnu, symbolising his role as the protector, with Brahma, the creator, seated atop it. Each petal of the lotus represents elements of the universe, including earth, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect, and ego, emanating from a central sun. The depiction of its petals, or dalas, represents the multiplicity of the universe. There are various forms of lotus motifs, like the five-petalled, eight-petalled astadal padma to the hundred-petalled satadal. Furthermore, the lotus holds significance in the depiction of deities such as Lord Krishna, whose feet are likened to lotus flowers, and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, often referred to as Padma or Kamala, signifying prosperity and material abundance. In artistic representations, Lakshmi is commonly depicted seated on the lotus flower.

Overall, the motif of the lotus in Indian culture reflects deep-rooted beliefs and traditions, serving as a visual representation of spiritual and material abundance and embodying the cultural richness and diversity of the region.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Conch Shell

Shankha is a Sanskrit word used to denote a sleek and smooth conch shell. It is believed that if the shankha is blown with skill, it can scare away evil spirits and is described as a killer of germs and enemies. The conch, or shankh, has remained an integral part of Hindu socio-religious philosophy since the mythological past. It symbolises the cosmic space, of which the attribute is sabda, or sound. Moreover, it symbolises a shape, or rupa, and rhythm, which date back to its expression of spirituality in the Vedas. It is strongly believed that the shankha was shaped by the holy waters showered from heaven. Thus, it is regarded as a divine jewel always held by Lord Vishnu in his right hand. The shankha is part of Hindu aesthetics as a permanent motif in the stone carvings and canvases made by sculptors and artists of ancient days. The conch also symbolises 'nada brahma' - the voice of Brahma.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Elephant

A symbol of strength with gentleness, might, majesty, great memory, intelligence, and royalty. In centuries past, a tamed elephant was the pride of the royal stables and armies; it was elaborately decorated and carried temple idols during festivals, as well as rulers during festivities, hunts, and war. It is a widely used motif in Indian textiles.

An elephant is a sign of wealth, power, and influence, denoting royalty, inner strength, and nobility. Lord Ganesha, also depicted through the elephant, is worshipped by Hindus ardently as an obstacle remover, a wish fulfiller, and a blesser.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Parrot

Symbolising passion and courtship, a motif of a parrot is commonly found in artwork telling the story of Lord Krishna and his lover, Radha, a tale well recited in Hindu epics and sagas. The presence of parrots in gardens also depicts fruits on the trees; hence, it symbolises prosperity and abundance. Generally found on textiles from Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, the bird also represents lovers' associations and is often used in various traditional weaves in India.

Patolu of Gujarat uses a combination of dynamic geometrical grid patterns and intricate stylised motifs. The entire vocabulary of patolu forms is derived from the square or rectangular unit. A set system of motifs and colours is assigned to the various traditional patolu sari types. In earlier times, these different types were used by a specific community or social group for a specific purpose. These unique combinations used the parrot motif extensively and called it the popat. Nari popat kunjar bhat and popat kunjar bhat were some of the combinations that used the parrot along with other motifs inspired by nature.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Peacock

A joy to behold, the peacock is a symbol of beauty, love, and courtship. A vehicle of the goddess Saraswati, it finds mention in the Rigveda and the Atharvaveda. Artisans render the bird in an array of expressions, such as two peacocks facing each other, two peacocks with their backs to each other and sharing a train, peacocks with their trains folded and trailing behind, and peacocks with their trains spectacularly fanned out. In Odisha patola, the peacock motif is very popular. Found in paintings from the Indus Valley civilisation, Buddhist sculptures, artefacts from the Gupta period, and Mughal miniatures, peacock-inspired designs have been found in art from different ages.

The peacock was also painted on Indus Valley burial pots dating back to the third millennium B.C., and its depiction in tribal art indicated origins that may predate Indus Valley. Peacocks were found in Mauryan Buddhist sculpture, Gupta-period artefacts, Mughal miniatures, and in present-day wall paintings and textiles. Although it is hard to say if it had the same symbolism in every age, the peacock was found in the arts of most post-Indus cultures, indicating that it remained a potent symbol.
The paithani sari, named after the Paithan town in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra, is characterised by an intricately woven border and palla in an oblique square design with parrot and peacock motifs. The traditional 'bangadi mor paithani' used to have peacock motifs along with parrots, flowering vines, lotuses, and muniya motifs in the border.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Rudraksha

Rudraksha beads hold both spiritual significance and purported therapeutic properties. The term ‘rudraksha’ is derived from two Sanskrit words, ‘rudra’ (referring to Lord Shiva) and ‘aksha’ (meaning eyes), symbolising ‘Shiva’s eye’. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva engaged in intense meditation (tapasya) for a thousand years to combat evil in the world. Upon opening his eyes, he witnessed widespread suffering, and a tear from his eye fell to the ground, giving rise to the rudraksha tree. This association with Lord Shiva imbues the seeds with great auspiciousness, believed to harbour Shiva’s creative energy and bestow similar powers upon the wearer.

Rudraksha beads are revered for their ascetic allure, symbolising both peace and power. They are incorporated into designs in various ways, particularly in woven textiles. The central part of the rudraksha fruit, surrounded by its petals, is likened to a rudraksha bead. Saris featuring rudraksha is most often woven in Southern India, and most specifically in Sambalpuri, Kancheepuram, Gadwal and Molakalmuru saris. These designs not only accentuate the aesthetic appeal of the saris but also evoke spiritual and cultural significance deeply rooted in Hindu mythology and tradition.

Photo Credit: Weavers’ Service Centre

Gandabarunda
(The double-headed eagle)

The name is derived from a mythical creature in Indian scripture: the Gandabarunda, a two-headed bird that represents wisdom and prosperity. It is considered a form of Lord Vishnu, formed to fight the Sharabha. Due to its significance, this design used to be the insignia of the royal family of Mysore and appeared on saris, furnishings, and other objects in their palace.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

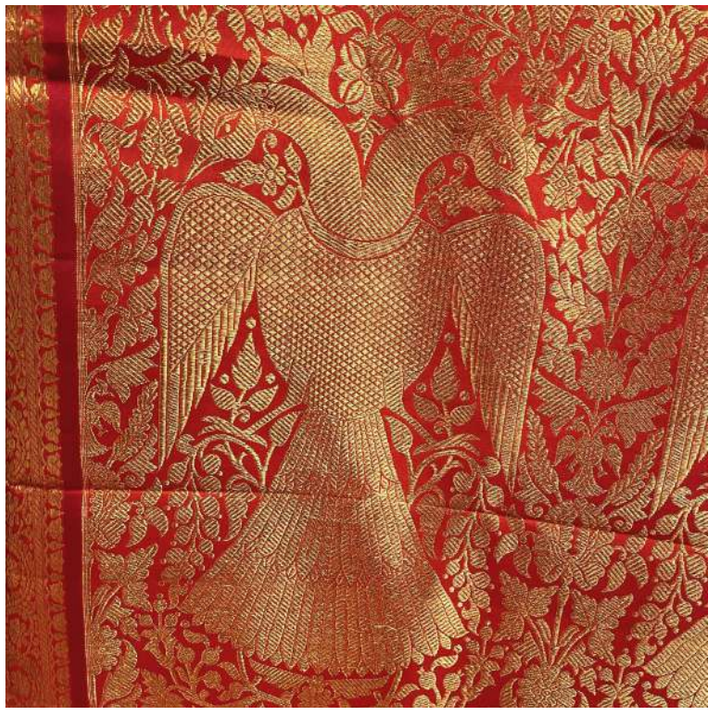


Photo Credit: Prof. Dr. Sudha Dhingra

Human Figures

Women's figures can be seen across a variety of Indian textiles. The 'nari kunjar popat bhat' sari not only carries the symbolism of celebration and happiness, but it is also believed to have the power of blessings to ward off evil and protect the wearer from any misfortune.

The female figures can also be seen in the gollabhama saris or the Siddipet gollabhama made in Siddipet, Telangana, India. They get their name from the inlaid weave of the gollabhama, or the 'milkmaid' motif on their pallus and borders.

Typically, gollabhama, kolatam, and bathukamma motifs are used as designs in the sari weaves, with the milkmaid motif being the most popular. It is generally woven in cotton. It is registered under geographical indication (GI).

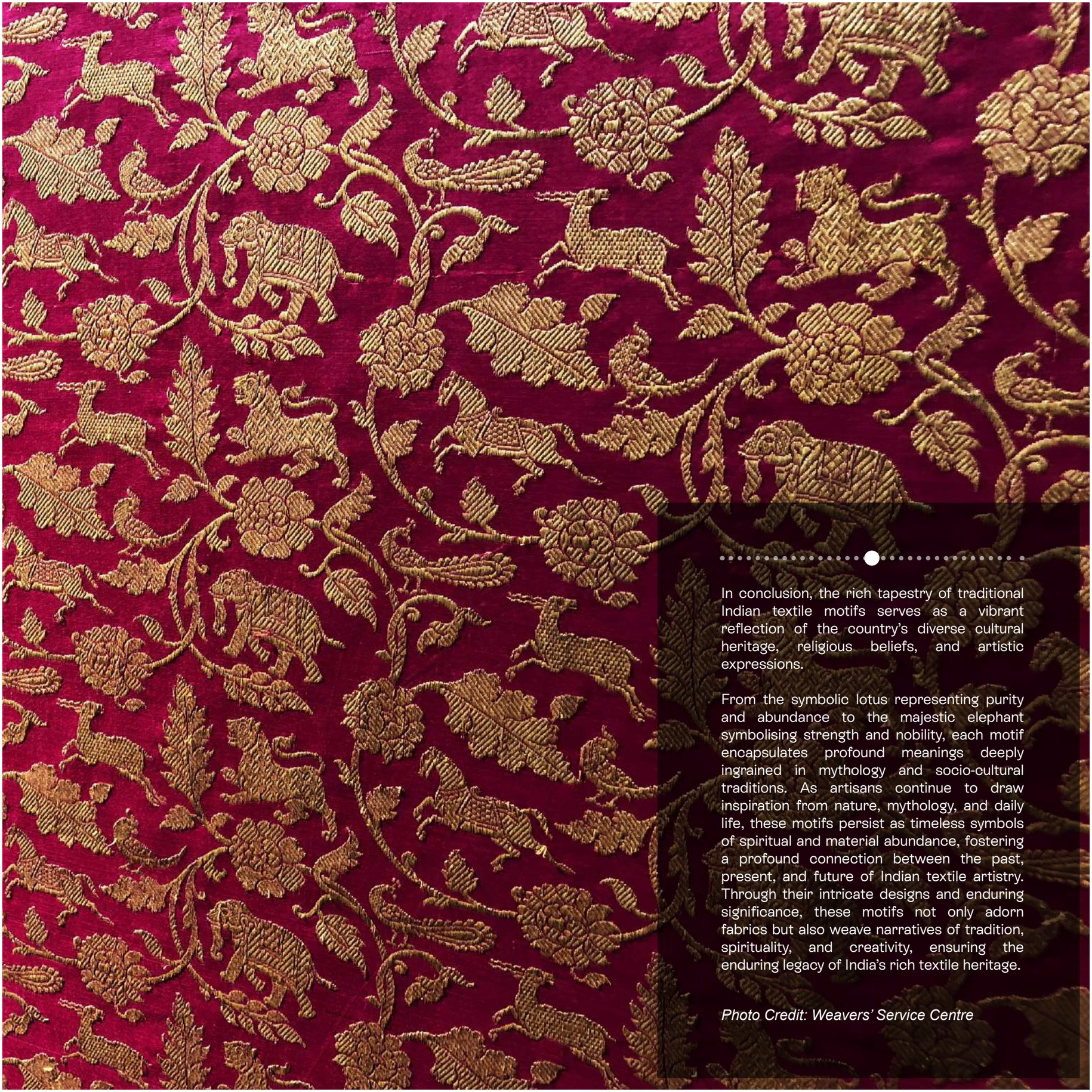
Kotpad textiles of Odisha also show human figures, specially tribals doing various activities such as hunting, cultivating etc.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Serpent

In Odisha ikat textiles, colloquially referred to as 'bandhas', the recurrent motif of the serpent holds significance, symbolising the perpetual cycle of time and immortality. This motif is integrated within the fabric's fluid and lyrical forms, juxtaposed against linear brocade bands that traverse the sari's borders, end panels, and, sporadically, the central field. This interplay between sinuous patterns and plain or brocade embellishments contributes to the distinctive identity of Odisha's bandhas.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre



In conclusion, the rich tapestry of traditional Indian textile motifs serves as a vibrant reflection of the country's diverse cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and artistic expressions.

From the symbolic lotus representing purity and abundance to the majestic elephant symbolising strength and nobility, each motif encapsulates profound meanings deeply ingrained in mythology and socio-cultural traditions. As artisans continue to draw inspiration from nature, mythology, and daily life, these motifs persist as timeless symbols of spiritual and material abundance, fostering a profound connection between the past, present, and future of Indian textile artistry. Through their intricate designs and enduring significance, these motifs not only adorn fabrics but also weave narratives of tradition, spirituality, and creativity, ensuring the enduring legacy of India's rich textile heritage.

Photo Credit: Weavers' Service Centre

Photo Credit: Asha Gautam, Asha Gupta & Gautam Gupta

सृजन

creation

Circularity through Recycling and Upcycling

In today's time, the fashion and textile industry is gearing towards the adoption of sustainable practices to safeguard the environment, support responsible and conscious consumption, and follow ethical practices. The sustainability concepts of circular fashion, upcycling, and recycling are gaining importance in the world of fashion. Interestingly, in India, practices of reuse, recycle and repurpose have been ingrained in its traditions and culture since ancient times. A variety of traditional textile crafts practiced in India are based on the ideology of sustainable development. One of the finest examples is the age-old embroidered 'kantha' quilt produced by the rural women of West Bengal. The traditional technique involved layering discarded old white saris, followed by embroidery with tiny running stitches using the thread drawn out from the coloured borders of the sari itself, resulting in a beautiful upcycled quilt.

The growing awareness about the environmental impact and generation of huge amounts of waste has led the Indian fashion industry to rethink design and incorporate sustainable practices. Considering the centuries' old textile recycling practices followed at household level, in the craft sector, and also by small-scale industries, India has the potential to be the vanguard in embracing sustainability across the globe.

Photo Credit: Ka-Sha, Karishma Shahani Khan

Reusing and repurposing have always been integral parts of an Indian household in an endeavour to increase the longevity of the product. From using old garments as a suitable alternative to cleaning cloth to transforming old saris into contemporary clothing, nothing is disposed of easily. Besides these practices at an individual level, there are many examples of recycling and upcycling followed in the craft sector. In Jammu, artisans develop beautiful embroidered rugs called 'Gabbas' from old woollen felt blankets. Similarly, Rajasthan and Gujarat are known for their handmade quilts, 'Ralli' and 'Gudari', using multiple fabric scraps held together with running stitches.

Another striking example of the utilisation of textile waste is Chindi dhurries, which are primarily produced in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. These floor coverings are handwoven on a pit loom using spun cotton in the warp and colourful fabric scraps converted into strips as weft. Handlooms and handicrafts are intrinsically sustainable owing to their handmade nature, low carbon footprint, and ability to sustain livelihoods. Repurposing textile waste by way of handcrafted techniques further gives impetus to the cause of sustainability. The exquisiteness of an upcycled, handcrafted product lies in its unique character, considering the variety of waste materials utilised to create a one-of-a-kind piece.

Handwoven upcycled fabric made from discarded sari waste

Photo Credit: Paiwand, Ashita Singhal

At an industrial level, Panipat in Haryana is the hub for textile recycling, where large quantities of second-hand clothing are sorted, shredded into fibrous state, and respun to produce shoddy yarn, and further made into a range of home furnishing products. Besides low-cost blankets, products like rugs, cushions, table linen, and upholstered chairs and poufs are popular.

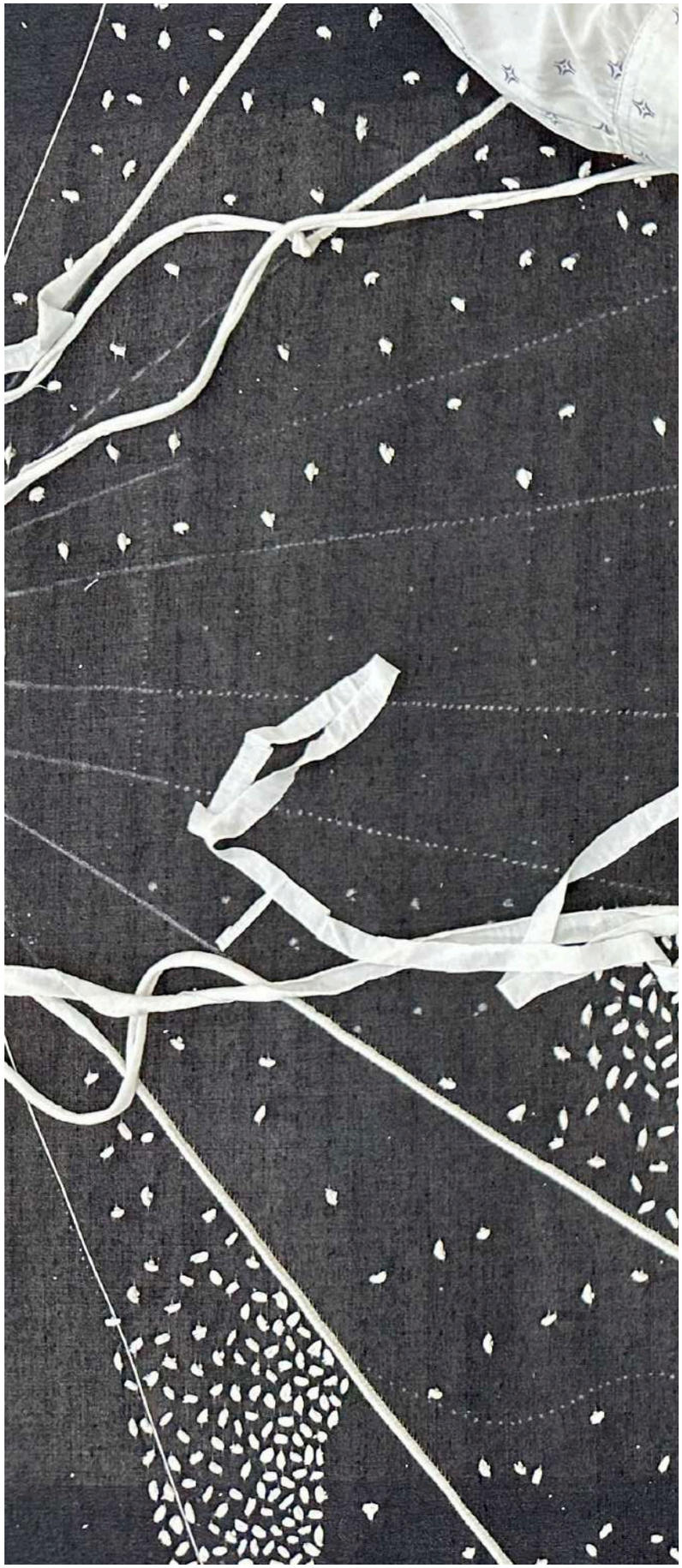
Drawing inspiration from traditional recycling and upcycling techniques, artisans and the new generation of designers are actively involved in adopting circularity in their practices. The focus is on integrating a closed-loop system based on the 3Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle, which has gradually evolved to the 6Rs by including redesign, remanufacture, and regenerate. There are many examples that elucidate the growing importance of circular fashion. One comes across emerging brands that are innovatively transforming pre-consumer and post-consumer waste into trendy apparel, accessories, and home furnishings, or renovating pre-loved precious saris into chic clothing styles. Designers and weavers are also co-creating unusual handwoven upcycled textiles by including waste as raw material, similar to the concept of Chindi durries. There are also a few conscious designers who are incorporating zero-waste design to avoid fabric wastage and reduce materials. Another rising trend of second-hand clothing market will further contribute to a sustainable future.

Post-production remnants used to create 3-D flowers for embroidery and tassels

Photo Credit: Ka-Sha, Karishma Shahani Khan

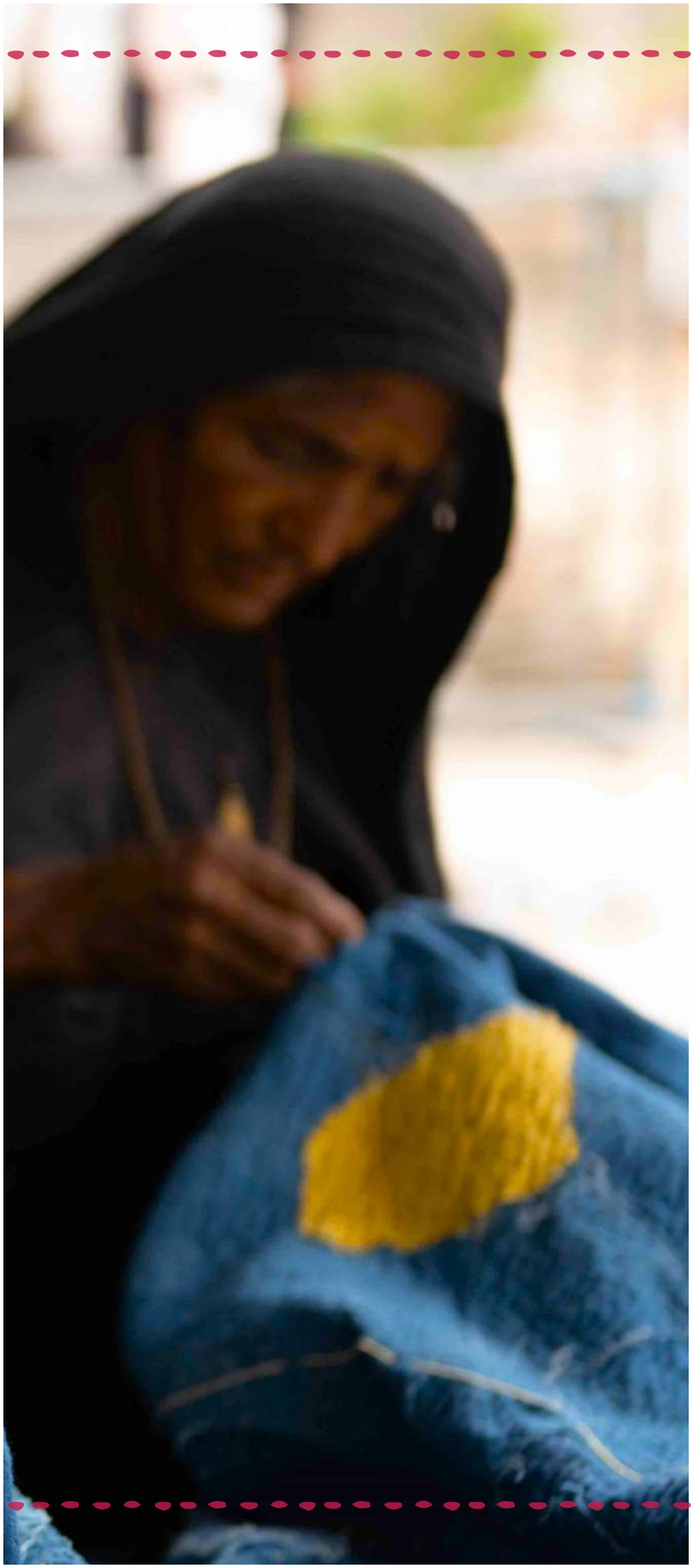
It is interesting to note the efforts of weavers from the different handloom pockets of India who are consciously utilising plastic waste to weave products on their looms. The process entails the collection of different plastic waste, washing, drying, cutting into strips to convert into yarn, and interlace on the loom to develop creative products such as bags, mats, wall arts, coasters, and runners.

The Indian textile industry is gradually adopting circularity, though challenges like technological upgradation for efficient large-scale textile recycling, greenwashing, a lack of consumer awareness, and a limited understanding of sustainability certifications need to be addressed. On the other hand, India, as a nation with a legacy of handcrafted sustainable techniques, traditional recycling and upcycling practices, skilled weavers and artisans, and a brigade of conscious young designers, holds a promising future for achieving sustainable goals.



Hand embriodery with cotton knit waste

Photo Credit: Paiwand, Ashita Singhal



Rabari women doing kantha

Photo Credit: 11.11 / eleven eleven, Shani Himanshu & Mia Morikawa

संरक्षण
protection

The Role of Government and Community in Sustaining India's Handlooms

The handloom sector in India is already experiencing a renaissance. It has been gaining its position thanks to the ever-increasing demand from the market, the efforts made by the government, and the increased appreciation for handwoven textiles shown by the younger generation. Handloom weaving has become one of the potential segments for achieving sustainable development. The global trend towards sustainable and ethical fashion has created new avenues for handloom weavers to thrive. With a diverse spread in style, practice, and scale throughout the country, this ancient industry has robust employment potential, thus acting as a source of livelihood for many artisans, weavers, and designers residing in different regions. The strength of handloom products lies in the fact that they believe in continuous innovation of designs, patterns, colours, and technology while at the same time keeping their heritage elements intact, thus perfectly aligning with the values of environmental conservation and fair trade.

Photo Credit:
Paces Crafts Pvt. Ltd. (left) &
Ka-Sha, Karishma Shahani Khan
(right)

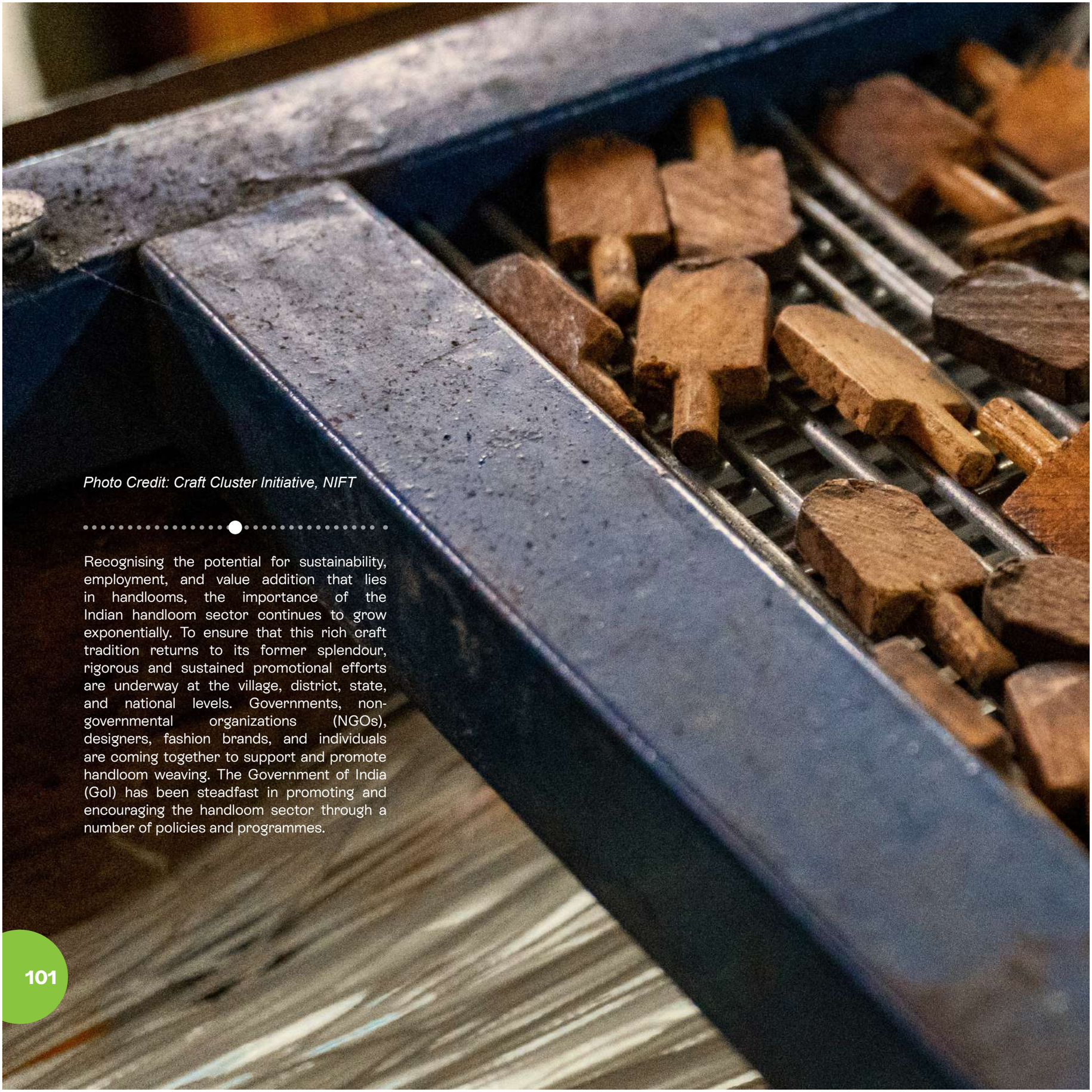


Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT

Recognising the potential for sustainability, employment, and value addition that lies in handlooms, the importance of the Indian handloom sector continues to grow exponentially. To ensure that this rich craft tradition returns to its former splendour, rigorous and sustained promotional efforts are underway at the village, district, state, and national levels. Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), designers, fashion brands, and individuals are coming together to support and promote handloom weaving. The Government of India (GoI) has been steadfast in promoting and encouraging the handloom sector through a number of policies and programmes.

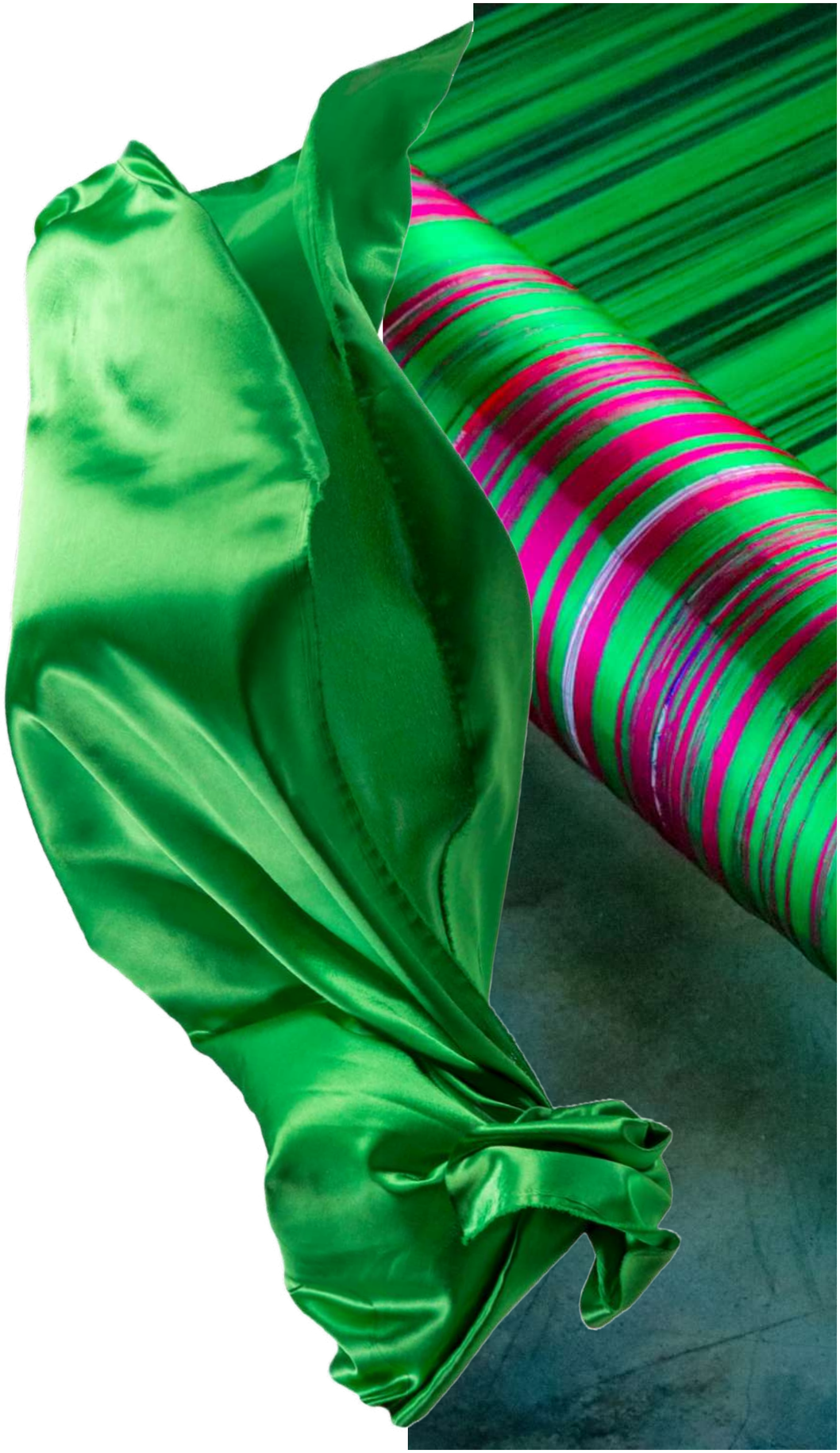
The National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) scheme supports weavers with raw materials, design inputs, technology up-gradation, marketing support through exhibitions, creating permanent infrastructure in the form of urban haats, marketing complexes, etc. NHDP follows a need-based approach for integrated and holistic development of handlooms and the welfare of handloom weavers with the following components:

1. Cluster Development Programme (CDP) to focus on the development of weavers' groups as a visible entity so that the groups become self-sustainable. The quantum of assistance for each cluster would be need-based. The maximum permissible GoI financial assistance is up to Rs. 2.00 crore per cluster.

2. Handloom Marketing Assistance provides marketing opportunities to handloom workers, with a special focus on uncovered and talented weavers.

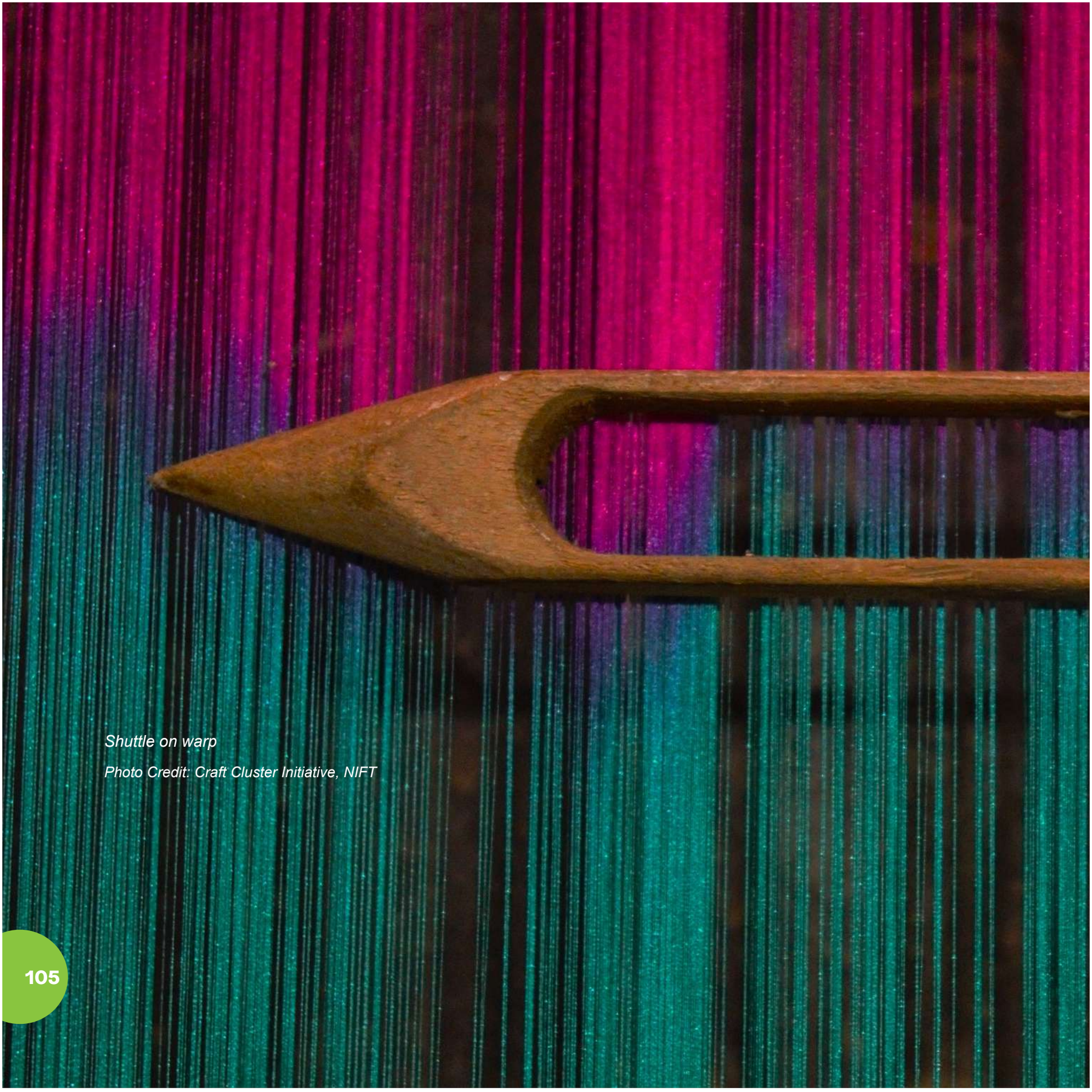
3. Infrastructure and Special Projects, including Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology (IIHT) related projects for product development/diversification, improving the productivity and quality of handloom products, value addition of handloom products, marketing, etc., to meet the challenges of the dynamic market.

4. Mega Handloom Clusters in various parts of the country are taken up for their holistic development, drawing comprehensive development plans. Each Mega Handloom Cluster covers at least 10,000 handlooms, with a GoI contribution of up to Rs. 30.00 crore per mega cluster. The nature and level of assistance to each mega cluster is need-based.



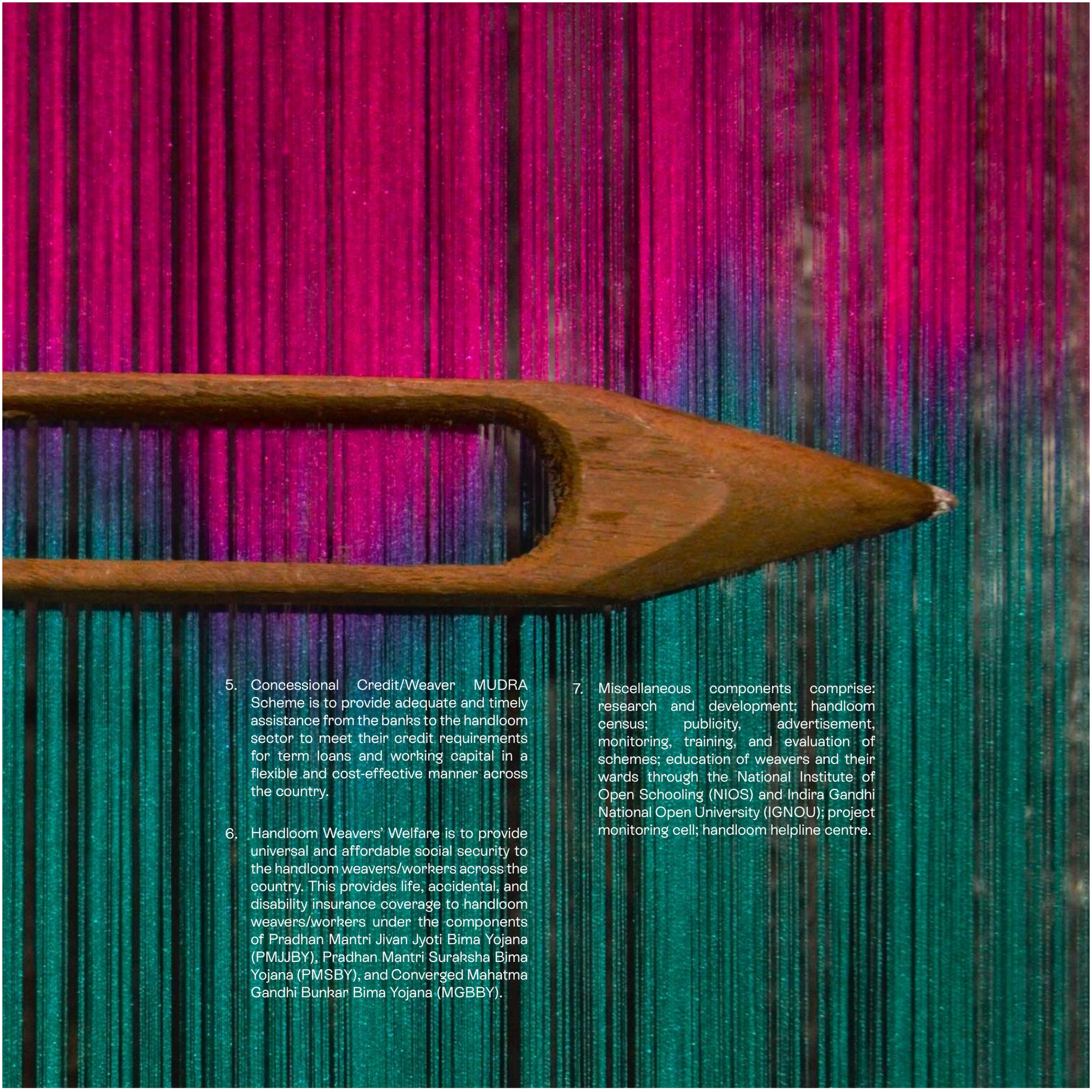
Threads on the warp

Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT



Shuttle on warp

Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT



5. Concessional Credit/Weaver MUDRA Scheme is to provide adequate and timely assistance from the banks to the handloom sector to meet their credit requirements for term loans and working capital in a flexible and cost-effective manner across the country.

6. Handloom Weavers' Welfare is to provide universal and affordable social security to the handloom weavers/workers across the country. This provides life, accidental, and disability insurance coverage to handloom weavers/workers under the components of Pradhan Mantri Jivan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), and Converged Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana (MGBBY).

7. Miscellaneous components comprise: research and development; handloom census; publicity, advertisement, monitoring, training, and evaluation of schemes; education of weavers and their wards through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU); project monitoring cell; handloom helpline centre.

Handwoven Banarasi saris

Photo Credit: Sanjay Garg, Raw Mango

Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT

Initiatives like 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India', 'Brand India', 'Swadeshi Products', 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', and 'Vocal for Local' have further given impetus to the position of the handloom weavers by creating more opportunities in the economy.

Another significant stride in sustaining Indian handlooms is the development of the Repository of Indian Textiles and Crafts, 'vastrashilpakosh.in', an earnest endeavour by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. Launched on National Handloom Day 2023 by the esteemed Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the repository has been created to collect, organise, digitally reserve, aggregate, and disseminate interrelated information on Indian traditional textiles and crafts globally, thus playing a transformative role in preserving and promoting traditional Indian textiles and crafts.

Besides government support, the ever-increasing importance of holistic growth in the Indian handloom sector has been directly affected by many social and lifestyle-influencing parameters. Consumers are increasingly drawn to unique, environmentally-friendly products that resonate with their commitment to nature conservation. From everyday comfort wear to smart casuals, consumers demand handwoven fabrics with a contemporary twist on patterns and designs. This has led many textile designers/weavers to innovate with weaves and improvise on technique and design, thus reviving some of the rare and dying weaves of the country. This seeks to further empower artisan communities by preserving their cultural heritage, providing sustainable sources of income, and fostering the creation of livelihoods that are environmentally and economically viable.

Handloom weaving serves as a tangible link to our cultural heritage, connecting us to our past. Through strategic investment in this revered craft and supporting the artisans, the invaluable knowledge and craftsmanship can be preserved, ensuring that the knowledge and skills passed down through generations are not lost forever.

Photo Credit: Raw Mango, Sanjay Garg (left) & Centre of Excellence for Khadi (right)

Development Commissioner (Handlooms)

Office of Development Commissioner Handlooms

The Development Commissioner for Handlooms, under the Ministry of Textiles, aims to develop a strong, competitive, and vibrant handloom sector to provide sustainable employment to handloom weavers, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged sections of Indian society, and to ensure inclusive growth of the sector. Assisted by 29 Weavers' Service Centres (WSCs) nationwide, the Development Commissioner's office plays a crucial role in skill enhancement, capacity building, and technological interventions for the handloom weavers. The office oversees the Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985, through its Enforcement Wing with regional offices in Chennai and Ahmedabad. The National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) operates under the chairmanship of the Development Commissioner to support handloom production through procurement, distribution, and marketing.

National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT)

Set up in 1986, the National Institute of Fashion Technology is the pioneering institute of fashion education in the country and has been the vanguard in providing professional human resources to the textile and apparel industries. It was made a statutory institute in 2006 by an Act of the Indian Parliament with the President of India as 'Visitor' and has full-fledged campuses all across the country. Over the years, NIFT has also been working as a knowledge service provider to the industry and government in the areas of design development, uplifting of handlooms and handicrafts, customised training programmes, IT solutions, and development of fashion forecasts, to name a few.

Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT

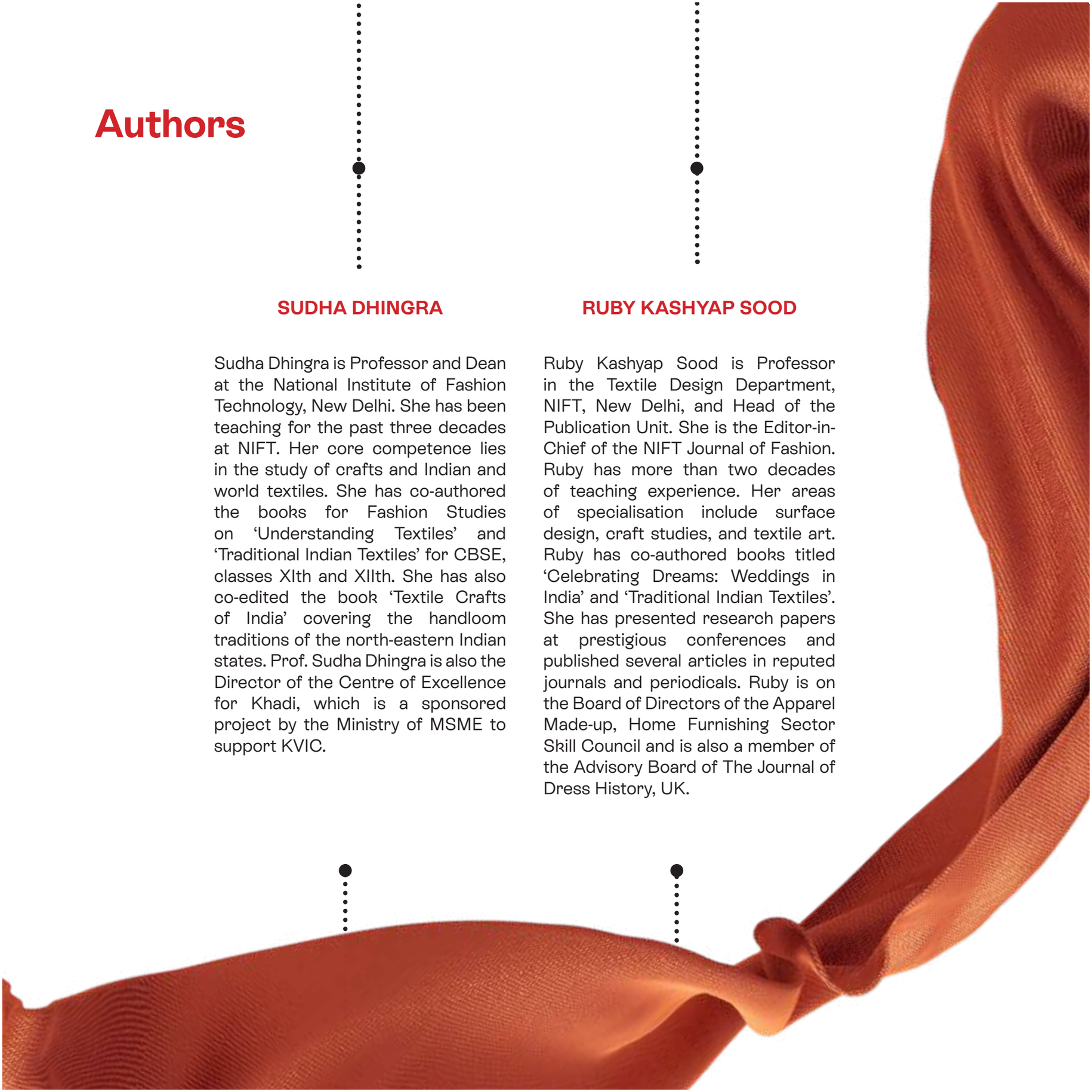
Authors

SUDHA DHINGRA

Sudha Dhingra is Professor and Dean at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi. She has been teaching for the past three decades at NIFT. Her core competence lies in the study of crafts and Indian and world textiles. She has co-authored the books for Fashion Studies on 'Understanding Textiles' and 'Traditional Indian Textiles' for CBSE, classes XIth and XIIth. She has also co-edited the book 'Textile Crafts of India' covering the handloom traditions of the north-eastern Indian states. Prof. Sudha Dhingra is also the Director of the Centre of Excellence for Khadi, which is a sponsored project by the Ministry of MSME to support KVIC.

RUBY KASHYAP SOOD

Ruby Kashyap Sood is Professor in the Textile Design Department, NIFT, New Delhi, and Head of the Publication Unit. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the NIFT Journal of Fashion. Ruby has more than two decades of teaching experience. Her areas of specialisation include surface design, craft studies, and textile art. Ruby has co-authored books titled 'Celebrating Dreams: Weddings in India' and 'Traditional Indian Textiles'. She has presented research papers at prestigious conferences and published several articles in reputed journals and periodicals. Ruby is on the Board of Directors of the Apparel Made-up, Home Furnishing Sector Skill Council and is also a member of the Advisory Board of The Journal of Dress History, UK.



DIMPLE BAHL

Dr Dimple Bahl is a practising graphic designer and a visual brand strategist. Her pathbreaking efforts at exploring the interdisciplinary nature of graphic design have led to a PhD specialising in grid structures in ancient Indian manuscripts, a book co-authored with Ms. Jaya Jaitly that delves into possibilities of Indian craft providing inspiration for a uniquely Indian design language, and a pivotal role in giving a unique design vocabulary to the beautification of Shilpa Deergha of India's new parliament, commissioned by Dastkari Haat Samiti. Her focus on creating and forging new paths in creating responsible, unique design has also recently resulted in Kala manthan, a one-of-a-kind experiment where design students and master craftsmen work together to create what can only be described a contemporary yet timeless set of designs and templates.

SAREEKAH AGARWAAL

Sareekah Agarwaal is the Content Team Lead for the national knowledge portal named 'The Repository: Indian Textiles and Crafts (RTC)' for the Ministry of Textiles. She is an Indian textile archivist, curator, research scholar, and textile professional who started her career with a consulting firm specialising in technical textiles. Over time, she has made significant contributions to the textile field, holding positions such as Senior Consultant at IGNOU and Assistant Professor in the Department of Fabric and Apparel Science at Lady Irwin College. Known for her passion for traditional Indian textiles, she curated the exhibition 'aaina' at the India International Centre, authored and published a catalogue, presented papers at various national and international conferences, authored book chapters, and has some MOOCs to her credit.

Contributors

ANAVILA MISRA

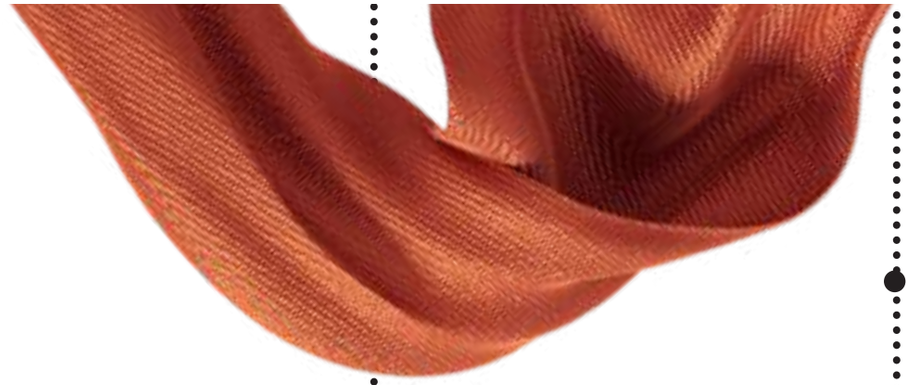
With an honours degree in management, a post-graduation from NIFT, and a decade of work experience in the industry, Anavila Misra's core belief of 'being one with the environment' forms the foundation of all her creations. As a brand, Anavila has boldly ventured into a road less travelled by being a linen loyalist. It took her several months to develop her first handwoven linen saris with inimitable fluidity, giving Indian fashion a completely new product category. In the past few years, the designer has continued to explore cultural sustainability across the country, working with the dabu block printers of Bagru, the applique artisans of Dumka, and the jamdani weavers of Shantipur.

ASHA GUPTA AND GAUTAM GUPTA

Asha Gautam's unwavering commitment to ethical fashion is intricately interwoven into the fabric of the brand, placing a special emphasis on Indian handloom, textile reengineering, and other artisanal crafts. Possessing a distinctive fashion sense and a discerning eye for style, Asha, the founder, started her passionate journey of heirloom saris in 1998, which gained momentum when her son, Gautam, joined her in 2003. Together, in the past 20 years, they embarked on journeys to over 15 clusters, spanning from Lohta, Cholapur, and Ramnagar near Varanasi to Pochampally in Telangana and from Yeola and Paithan in Maharashtra to Bhuj and Limbdi in Gujarat, among many others. Collaborating with artisans, they co-create intricate weaves for their designs, even enhancing the weavers' creations to provide them with relevant funds for sustenance.

ASHITA SINGHAL

Ashita Singhal is a weaver, designer, and social entrepreneur. She believes in working with limited resources and local materials. In 2018, Ashita founded Paiwand, an upcycling textile studio located in Delhi, NCR, dedicated to transforming fashion waste into purposeful textiles and handcrafted products. Pioneering the use of waste as a primary material, the studio employs various handcrafted techniques, including weaving and embroidery, to breathe new life into discarded elements. Via her design studio Paiwand, Ashita challenges the conventional norms of textile design while focusing on the importance of craft and the need for sustainability.



BASANT, JODHPUR

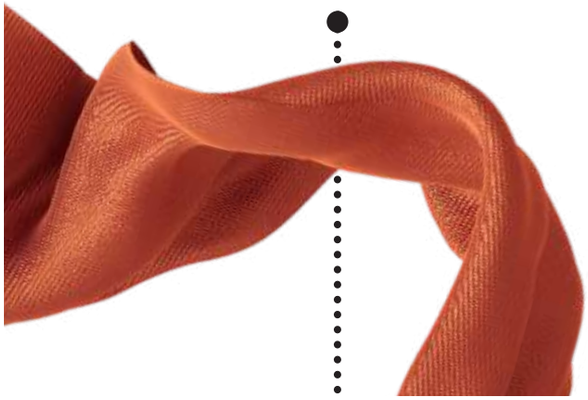
Basant is a furniture, lighting, and home décor brand based in Jodhpur that prioritises the use of organic and recycled textiles in their products. The label works towards incorporating sustainable materials like natural-dyed organic cotton corduroy and hemp fabrics for accent furniture and lighting. Their passion for Indian heritage finds its expression in the use of authentic handwoven fabrics that are made from locally sourced wool, hemp, cotton, and linen and are meticulously curated to grace their furniture and lighting pieces. The brand constantly seeks out new and extraordinary materials to weave into their creations, which include fabrics made of banana, organic cotton, bamboo, lotus, orange peel, and soya, to name a few.

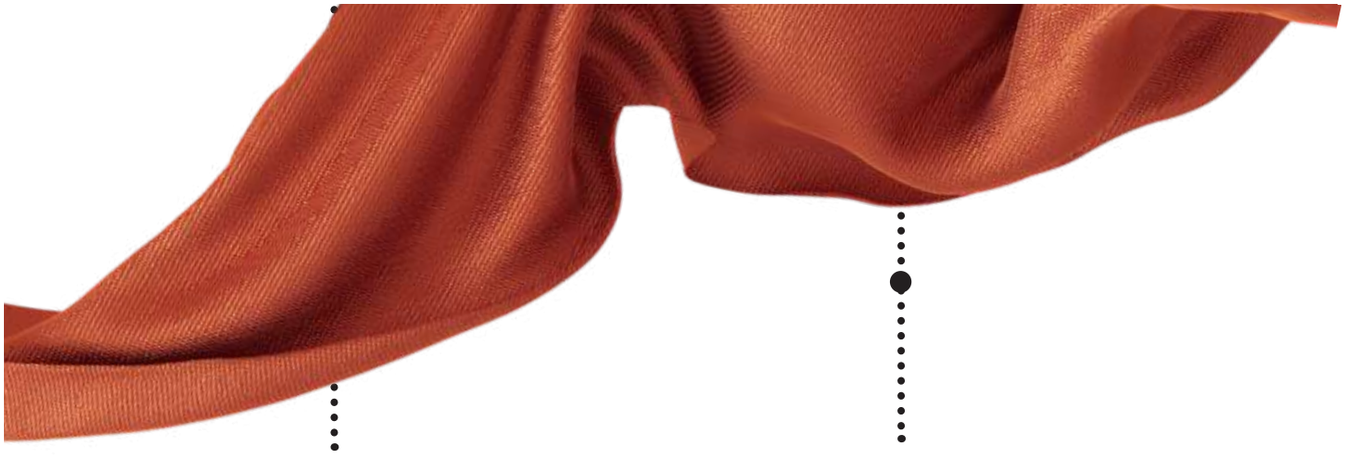
C. SEKAR

C. Sekar is a forward-thinking weaver hailing from Anakaputhur, located near Chennai, and serving as the Head of the Anakaputhur Jute Weavers' Association. Renowned for its traditional handlooms, he has embraced the concept of incorporating banana fibre into the weaving process. This initiative aims to breathe new life into the handloom industry, which is facing the risk of losing its distinct identity amidst the urban chaos. Leveraging his innovative heritage, Sekar is currently utilising banana fibre to craft saris, and along with his fellow weavers, they are actively working to promote textiles based on banana fibres on a larger scale with the technological support from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR KHADI

The Ministry of MSME conceived the Centre of Excellence for Khadi (CoEK) to address the needs of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). The Centre of Excellence for Khadi is envisaged to be a centre for experimentation, innovation, and design for Khadi fabrics, apparel, accessories, and home fashions. CoEK is set out to make khadi a universal, classic, and value-driven brand. The objective is to enable Khadi Institutions (KIs) to effectively design, produce, and market high-quality, differentiated khadi products in the Indian and global markets. CoEK is set up at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), with the Delhi centre as the hub and four more centres: Bengaluru, Gandhinagar, Kolkata, and Shillong as the spokes.





CRAFT CLUSTER INITIATIVE, NIFT

NIFT, with the active support of the Ministry of Textiles, Office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms), and Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), has developed and implemented a new Craft Cluster Initiative Programme that aims to provide the students with continuous exposure to the handloom and handicraft clusters, thus providing an opportunity for creative innovation and experimentation. Through this initiative, NIFT aims to reach out to artisans and craftsmen at the grass-root level. The artisans and craftsmen involved in the initiative will benefit from knowledge dissemination, exposure to urban markets, design intervention, innovative designs, and linkages with new markets.

HEMALATHA JAIN

Hemalatha Jain, the founder of Punarjeevana Trust, established the organisation with the vision of reviving and sustaining traditional crafts and supporting artisans. The inception of Punarjeevana is rooted in her doctoral research, titled 'The Study of Sustenance of Patteda Anchu'. Initially commencing with just one weaver in North Karnataka, Punarjeevana has now expanded its reach to Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Kashmir, Bihar, Pune, Kolhapur, Aurangabad, and Madhya Pradesh. Hemalatha has played an active role in revitalising over 10 declining handloom weaves. Currently, her focus extends to traditional practices involving bamboo fibres, nettle fibre extraction, northeastern dyeing techniques, and traditional farming methods including natural fibres and dye plants.

JAHNABI PHOOKAN

Jahnabi Phookan, an entrepreneur with over three decades of experience, is the co-founder of Jungle Travels India and Assam Bengal Navigation Company, both National Tourism Award-winning companies. She also established Lahé Looms, a residential weaving centre in Assam since 2011, focused on reviving traditional weaving techniques and motifs. Jahnabi Phookan has been instrumental in promoting handmade and handcrafted products from the Northeast, emphasising indigenous silks and natural dyes. Her work has contributed significantly to the cultural and economic revival of rural weavers in the region. At Lahé Looms, she experiments with the combinations of wefts and warps in four silks of Assam: Muga, Eri, Oak Tussar, and Mulberry. Lahe Looms is a story of empowerment with sustainability.

KARISHMA SHAHANI KHAN

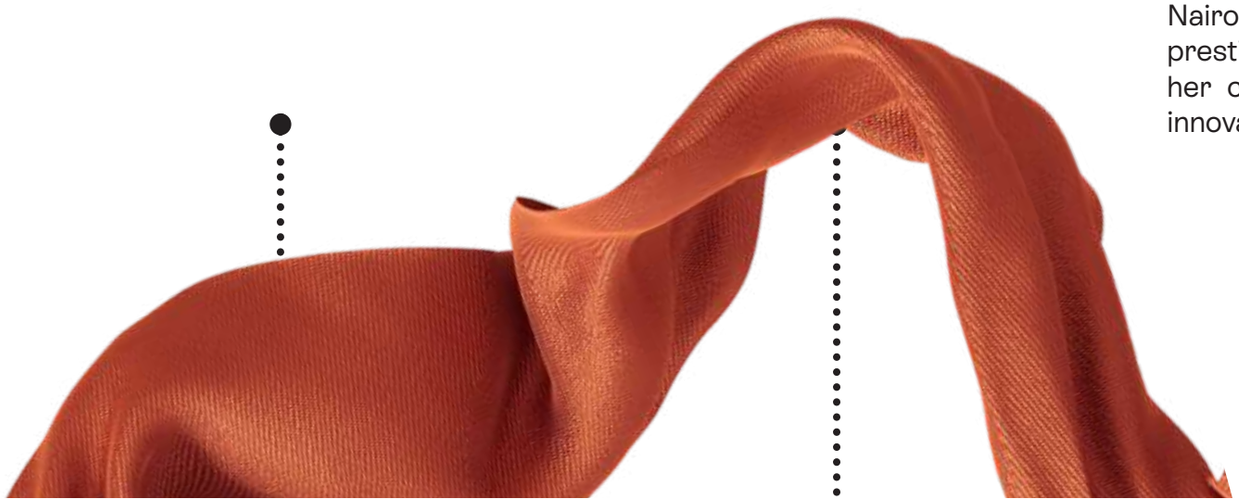
A graduate of the London College of Fashion, Karishma Shahani Khan founded the label Ka-Sha in 2012. Her work focuses on clothing as a medium to celebrate handcrafts, revisiting artisanal techniques new and old. The clothing prides itself in its quality and processes, mindful of the maker and the wearer. Her need to build a label that adapted its waste into a functional system led to Heart to Haat, a method inspired by the indigenous ideology of reusing, repurposing, and reclaiming. Here, clothing and textiles of all shapes and sizes are reclaimed and repurposed, drawing from the techniques of craft through innovation, alongside a circular focus on the afterlife of Ka-Sha's own product offering.

PACES CRAFTS PVT. LTD.

P.A.C.E.S. stands for Production of Artisanal Crafts for Empowerment of Society. Paces Crafts was founded by the Belgian non-profit organisation 'Solid'. The organisation develops exclusive handmade textiles for the export market. The Paces workshop is located in Jharkhand, where women are trained in the crafts of hand-weaving, crochet, sewing, and embroidery to make exclusive handmade products for the international market. Each of their products conveys a unique story of the artisan who made it and her journey of empowerment. Paces Crafts makes products of hope that aim to contribute to a positive change for people who wear and make the clothes.

PANKAJA SETHI

Pankaja Sethi, a visionary textile designer and researcher for over 14 years, creates hand-woven experimental textiles inspired by indigenous traditional weaving design language, craft, and innovation. Armed with a degree in Textile Design from the NIFT, New Delhi, and an MA in Social Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Pankaja seamlessly blends academic knowledge with hands-on expertise. Collaborating with weavers in Odisha, her creations are modern and simple. Recognitions include features on Facebook India's 'Digital Beti' platform, an award from the National Alliance of Women, participation in the 'Fabric of Being' exhibition at the Nairobi Summit in 2019, and various prestigious fellowships that underline her commitment to preserving and innovating traditional textiles.



SANJAY GARG

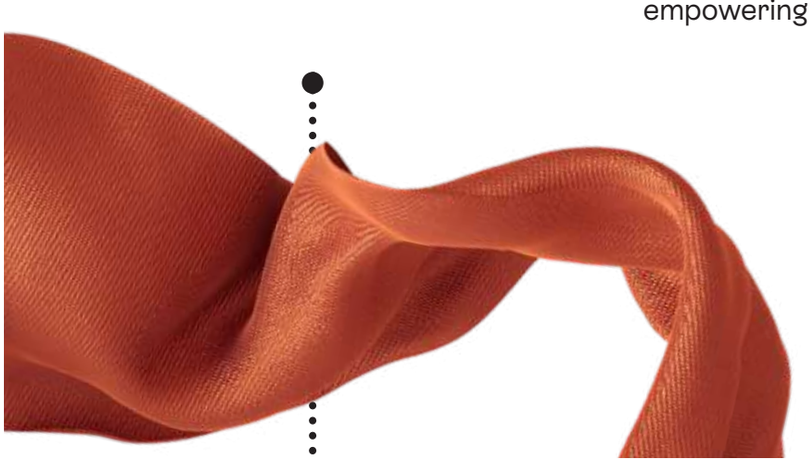
Sanjay Garg emerged from an upbringing in the village of Mubarikpur, Rajasthan. As a student of Textile Design, he developed his unique language in 2008, working in Chanderi, Madhya Pradesh. Garg started his own label, 'Raw Mango', and undertook innovations within the yarn and weaving process to create a new visual vocabulary and weaving interventions that, over a decade later, visually define Chanderi today. Created with karigars across Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Varanasi, Raw Mango's designs innovate upon century-old skills in pursuit of defining a new aesthetic language.

SARITA GANERIWALA

Founded in 2007, Karomi began its handloom journey in West Bengal, India, starting with a single weaver. Inspired by Bengal's rich textile heritage, founder Sarita Ganeriwala chose to specialise in Jamdani, a traditional extra-weft weaving style. Collaborating with her sister, Sarika Ginodia, they infuse contemporary design into this ancient craft. Each Karomi jamdani, from concept to weaving, reflects a blend of modern creativity with traditional technique. Karomi is committed to eco-friendly practices, utilising natural fibres and upcycled yarns, and supporting rural artisans in Bengal. Today, Karomi works with over a hundred artisans, pushing the boundaries of jamdani to establish it as a sustainable, fashion-forward art form while economically empowering the community.

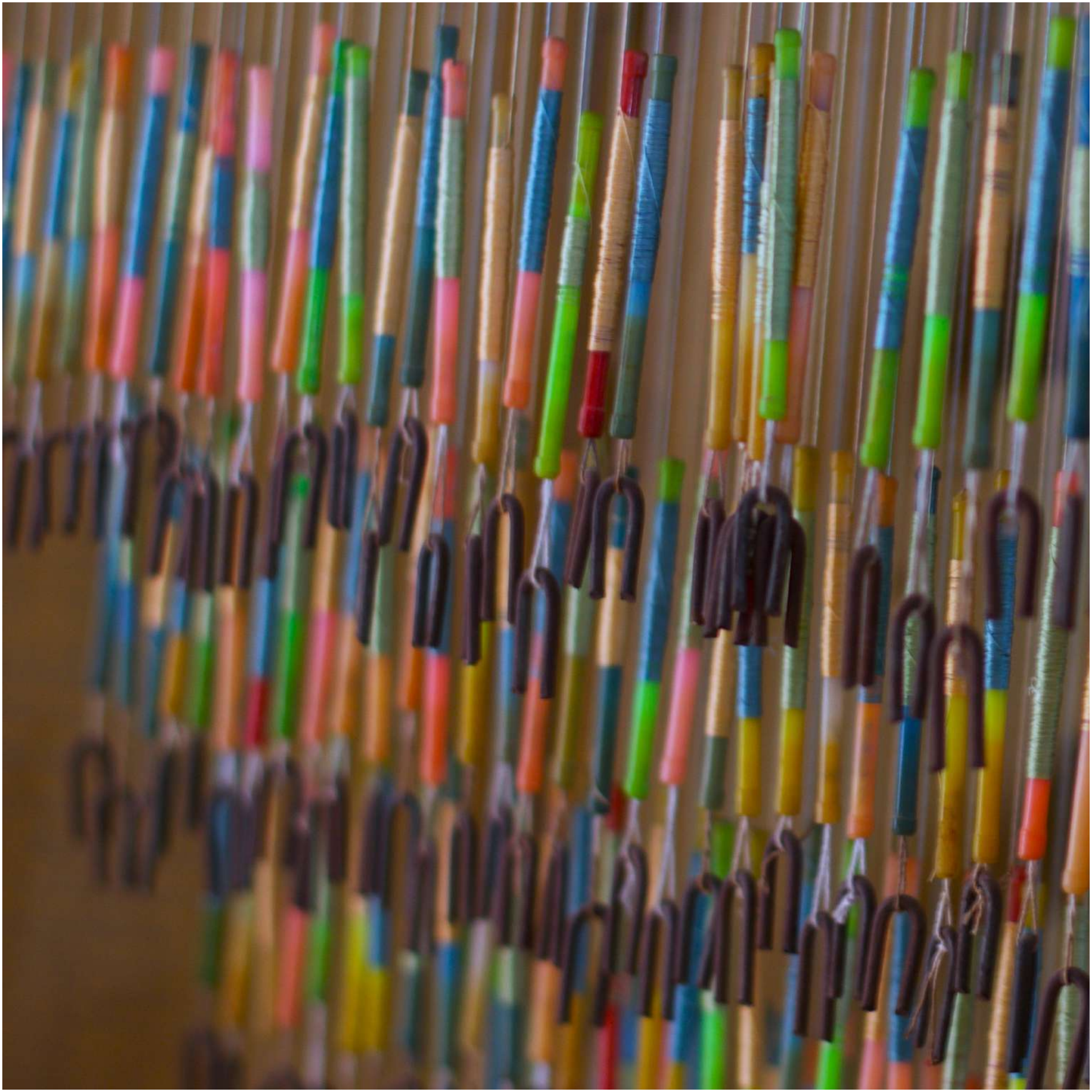
SHANI HIMANSHU AND MIA MORIKAWA

For over a decade, the creative minds behind '11.11 / eleven eleven,' Himanshu Shani and Mia Morikawa, have dedicated themselves to elevating everyday craftsmanship and promoting the belief that the utilisation of indigenous cotton and natural dyes represents the authentic essence of Indian luxury. Renowned for its use of indigenous materials, the label uses heritage techniques such as handloom weaving, hand painting, miniature tie-dyeing, and quilting. The label maintains its unique handmade vision by departing from mainstream manufacturing and producing small-batch, slow-made clothing in collaboration with groups of artisans located all across India. Each season, the brand dissolves distinctions between geographic and gender boundaries; the looks are safe for the skin and transition seamlessly between cultures from day to evening wear. The silhouettes are relaxed with a sartorial touch that echos the brand's 'seed to stitch' philosophy.



WEAVERS' SERVICE CENTRES

Established by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, in 1956, Weavers' Service Centres (WSCs) are pivotal training and development hubs for textile weaving. Conceived by Pupul Jayakar, WSC aims to propel the handloom sector towards global sustainability. They conduct studies on Indian handloom and weaving techniques, preparing samples to train weavers. The centres foster innovation by providing technical assistance, facilitating interactions between artisans and experts, and documenting traditional weaving practices. WSCs also organise exhibitions, seminars, and workshops and confer national awards to weavers. Currently, India boasts twenty-nine WSCs, contributing to the revival of traditional weaving practices nationwide.



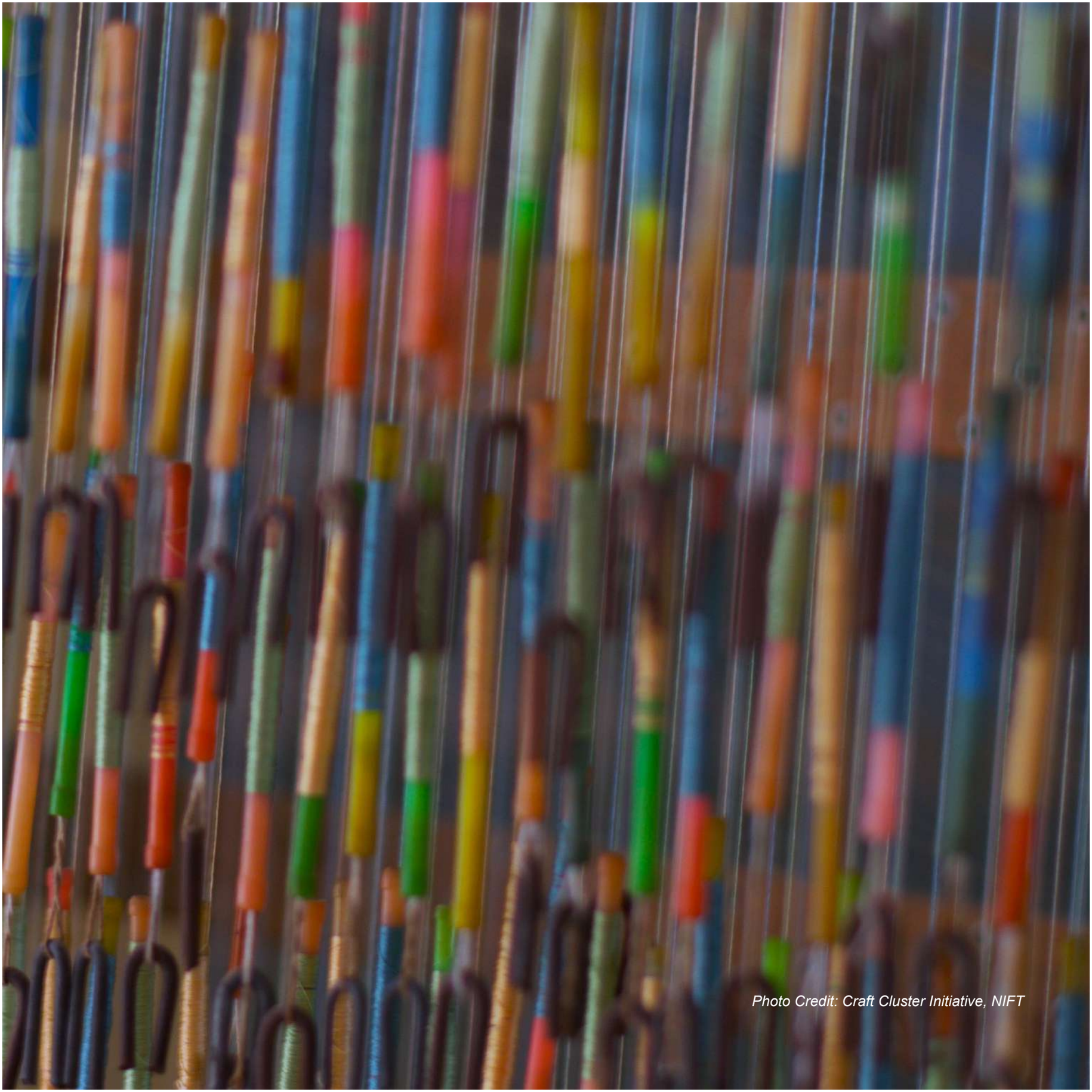


Photo Credit: Craft Cluster Initiative, NIFT

वस्त्र मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
TEXTILES
सत्यमेव जयते

Development
Commissioner
(Handlooms)

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National Institute of Fashion Technology

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