

# HANDCRAFTED SUSTAINABILITY

What we do makes a difference and we have to decide what kind of difference we want to make. Sustainable fashion might just be the solution.

BY CHITMAN KANWAR AHUJA

**A** London College of Fashion, UK graduate, Karishma Shahani Khan founded her eponymous label, *Ka-Sha* in 2012. Inspired by India's culture and heritage, she re-interprets her designs as functional, contemporary fashion.

Sustainability is a key focus in her work and is not just limited to the use of natural fibres. With a strict no-waste policy, she upcycles the waste from one line and reinvents them as patchwork jackets, footwear and rugs for her 'Heart to Haat' initiative, as well as accessories for her collection.

We speak to her as she unravels her love for design, keen eye for a greener future and her endless romance with handicrafts.

Edited Excerpts:

**Launching a label soon after graduation, what made you take such a risk?**

I had been studying for a long time and wanted to put things into a more practical perspective. For me fashion has always been a way of portraying my emotions on textile. And luckily, it happened very organically, I finished college, participated in a show and that's how I went forward with the entire process.

**From London to the Indian market, how difficult was the transition?**

It was a difficult transition. But I believe that



we in India, are a little behind in the world of design. People do not take the business and education of fashion seriously here, so it often becomes limiting. As a designer I wanted to provide a different perspective to people, and try to instill the belief that fashion has different connotations for everyone. It's about creating clothing that helps people be more comfortable in their own skin.

But in the last couple of years, we know of many young designers coming up with fascinating work, everyone's designs are quite different from each other. So the entire

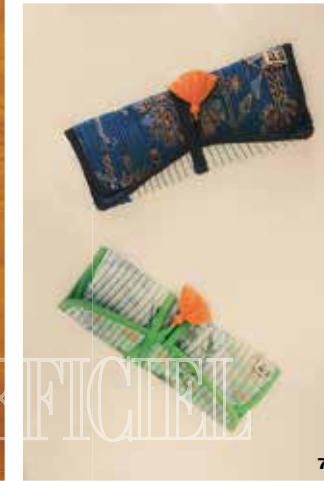


1. Designer Karishma Shahani Khan  
2 & 3. Looks from *Aakar* Collection  
4, 5 & 6. Models in AW'18 - *Dvaita*  
7. Products from *Heart to Haat* Range

language of Indian fashion is actually getting more interesting with each passing year.

**What was the biggest challenge in setting up *Ka.Sha*?**

Educating the customer was one of our biggest challenges, and trying to reach out to more people from where we are. We were trying to build something that is more sustainable and wanted people to understand it's true value. The treasure of handloom and why things cost a certain amount of money, is because we are paying people fairly, working with talented artisans, and making the



masses at large understand the fabric choices.

**What does your label stand for?**

It is about where I come from and about all the things India has to offer without being stereotyped, but in a diversified way. It is also about empowerment, as sustainability has more to it, than what people know of. It speaks volumes about the way you treat people and work with them, the type of inclusivity you have within is what speaks of you as a label.

We believe in the idea of reversible products which narrate a story and the idea of a textile being completely handmade. It comes under the big umbrella of sustainability but it is not just limited to being organic or inorganic, rather it is supposed stand for

comfort, functionality and most importantly where I come from.

**What made you go the sustainable route and what would make more and more people take it up?**

I think because it is the ideal way to go. In India we have been practicing it for years, I remember our grandmothers would keep garments for decades for the next generation when they get married. And if that is not sustainability then I don't know what is. We have always utilised and reused products till the end and it is an inherent Indian trait.

Now more people are following it because not only is it a great trend but also way to educate customers at large. And our industry is the second largest polluting industry in the world so it is essential for fashion and sustainability to go hand in hand.

**'Heart to Haat' aims at creating heirloom pieces, how did you get that idea?**

'Heart to Haat' is a direct result of what *Ka.Sha* stands for, the idea was to create a label which is completely zero waste. Now we are collaborating with designers at large to help them manage their waste. We create pieces that are functional, up cycled and can be worn on a day to day basis. We are trying to

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change the stigma around the word organic, and making it more artistic and fun.

**You have been interacting with craftsmen and their contribution in your creations are inevitable. Do you feel that they getting their due from the industry at large?**

No, I don't think so. I also think that the word sustainability has been abused at large, and we need to work on it. But on the flipside of it there is definitely a change but a more heartfelt change is required. As there are always people who are doing what they can to pursue the idea to the fullest and then there are some who are just riding the wave.

**Your label operates with a commitment to a zero waste policy, everything is used and reused. How do you think are you playing your part as an ambassador of responsible sustainable fashion?**

I think we are just doing our work, and at times you come across someone who imbibes the idea of the possibilities of a greener world of design. The aim is to just let people know the story behind every ensemble, where it comes from and who makes it. It is less about me and more about the 20 other people who have handcrafted it.

**What is your take on idea of sustainable fashion being expensive for the sake of it?**

That is exactly what we want to change with *Heart to Haat*, we are trying to make products true to their value. As they do not always have to be expensive, a product should be valued at how much effort and manpower has gone into it rather than for it being organic or sustainable.