

BOOKS

A thoughtful piece of work, **Limitless Traditions** tips its hat to India's rich craft heritage

THREADS THAT ENDURE



Envisioned by renowned textile revivalist and designer Gaurang Shah and authored by Shefali Vaidya, **Limitless Traditions** honors the enduring legacy of India's textile traditions while tracing Gaurang's longstanding efforts to preserve them.

A fascinating read, the book explores the evolution of Indian textiles, pays tribute to the tireless work of artisans, and details Gaurang's journey as a designer and a creative. It further sheds light on the trust he has cultivated with artisans over time and the indelible mark this collaboration has left on the timeless pieces they have crafted together.

Gaurang talks to WOW! about his passion for weaves and creating a legacy.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO TAKE THE TRADITION YOU WORK WITHIN FORWARD AND BE CALLED A REVIVALIST TODAY?

I accept the word revivalist with humility. When people call me a revivalist, I think of the weaver in Banaras who told me, "This motif has been woven here for 300 years. You are not starting something new; you are continuing it."

For me, revival means bringing life back to knowledge that already exists in the hands of artisans. I see myself as a custodian and a student. My responsibility is to carry the thread forward, give the artisan the

opportunity to work at the highest level of his or her ability, and make sure that knowledge reaches the next generation.

"The most beautiful work happens when the designer and artisan listen to each other" – Gaurang Shah

WHAT IS THE MOST VALUABLE LESSON YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM WORKING WITH ARTISANS?

The greatest lesson has been that the artisan is never simply executing a designer's drawing. The artisan carries the knowledge of the loom. I may bring an idea, a color, a motif, or a new composition, but the weaver tells me how that idea can live in thread.

That is why I call them artisans. The most beautiful work happens when the designer and artisan listen to each other. When both sides are willing to ask what the loom can do, what emerges is something that neither could have arrived at alone.

CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PAYING ARTISANS FAIRLY TO ENSURE THESE TRADITIONS SURVIVE?

Fair payment is the foundation of everything I do with handloom. A weaver cannot spend six to nine months on a Venkatagiri saree, or months working on an intricate Kagazi Jamdani composition, without knowing that the time, skill and concentration involved will be properly valued.

I can ask a weaver to attempt the extraordinary only when I have first taken care of the ordinary: regular work, fair income, timely payment and a reliable market.

YOU CALL THE RUNWAY YOUR TEMPLE AND TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES BEFORE STEPPING ONTO IT. WHAT IS THE REASON BEHIND THIS RITUAL?

The reason is simple. The textiles we are presenting have grown from a civilization where cloth, ritual, architecture, temple art, and sacred geometry have always

been connected. The artisans who made these textiles for generations worked within that visual and cultural world.

Taking off my shoes is my way of acknowledging the hands behind the cloth, the tradition behind the weave, and the thousands of years of knowledge that have brought that saree to the runway.

IN LIMITLESS TRADITIONS, YOU EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR HANDLOOM TO HAVE A PLACE IN EVERY ROOM AND AT EVERY STAGE OF LIFE. HOW DO YOU ENVISION ITS FUTURE?

I see the future of handloom as a living part of everyday Indian life. The saree has always been central to my work, but it was never the whole point. The larger idea is handloom as a way of life.

The future also lies in giving the artisan meaningful work, giving the customer a reason to live with the textile, and giving every generation an opportunity to discover the beauty of handwoven cloth.

A tradition remains alive when it is used, worn, lived with and passed on. That is how it becomes a living inheritance.

■ IPSHITA

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