

# When fashionistas go on a GREEN DRIVE

RAMESH SHARMA

by Ashlin Mathew

**C**OUNTING your carbon footprints is in fashion all right. The 'go green lobby' is popular among some designers too, who are determined to quell the notion that fashion and ecological concerns don't go hand in hand. They are creating high fashion garments and objects for the home that use material produced in an environmentally conscious manner, utilising the least possible resource and causing minimal harm to the birds and the bees.

It's not a new concept, but one that had been pushed to the background and is being revived in India and all over the world. The popular store Fabindia in fact epitomises the idea and has been around for 52 years. Its late founder John Bissell began with the idea of utilising the skills of traditional artisans to create contemporary garments. Today, the store's hand-woven and hand-printed garments are famous throughout the world. Products are organic and natural and sourced from small towns and villages in the country. While this brand is the leader when it comes to green-chic, several other young designers have gained popularity.

## PROCESSES THAT CONSERVE

**DESIGNER** Deepika Govind has come up with *Denim Green*, an organic denim collection, intended to provide eco fibre and hand-woven textiles. Govind says that the organic denim goes through the wet process in a plain rinse wash with simple enzymes, which consumes a minimal amount of water. The process doesn't hurt the environment either. And then you have the brainchild of Bina Rao and her husband, K. Sivakesa Rao - *Creative Bee* - that offers a range of eco-friendly products in both fashion fabrics and home furnishing.

Here, all processes are done by hand and no electricity been used at any stage of production. The absence of machinery provides employment to more craftsmen and local artisans; and the entire production process has no harmful impact on the surrounding environment, as most of the raw materials are locally grown and biodegradable.

*Creative Bee* revives the traditional arts of hand block printing, hand-painted Kalamkari and weaving, providing a large number of craftsmen with a sustained livelihood. "Their skills are constantly upgraded by the in-house R and D wing, through which they earn improved wages," says Shivani Nirula, the Delhi coordinator. "We use all natural non toxic and biodegradable ingredients to produce our hand-made textile products. Vegetable and plants are grown and cultivated to yield natural dyes, for example marigold, indigo and pomegranate," adds Shivani.

*Lila* is a label started by Shruti Narayan two years ago. Narayan's idea was to use pure cotton and raw silk in natural dyes and simple colours to create garments that are adaptive to the climate. "I didn't want to use hand-block prints but wanted to use yarn-dyed products to produce clothes that didn't bleed and are easy to

maintain," says Nayayan.

*Do U Speak Green* is another fashion line endorsing environmental-friendly clothing. Garments from this line are made from mainly organic cotton and bamboo cotton fabrics with eco-friendly dyes and water based prints. No chemicals are used in their clothes and director, Shishir Goenka, says that encouraging the growth of organic cotton helps keep the land free of harmful chemicals and fertilizers.

The company contributes 10 per cent of their sales to conservation organisations such as Bombay Natural History Society.

**Eco-cologically chic garments and home furnishings are in vogue**



Shivani, manages *Creative Bee* in Delhi; Below: Bina Rao, founder of *Creative Bee*



## ECO CHIC HOMES

**ECOLOGICALLY** chic- home furnishing and indoor items have been given a fashion twist too. Walk into cafe Ziro at Hauz Khas village and you will be greeted by tetra-pack wallets, cd coasters and other kitschy items in the affiliated store, all products of *Green the Gap*, started by the NGO Swechha in 2008 in Delhi as a way of raising awareness on environmental issues and providing secure employment with reasonable wages. "Through reusing waste in innovative ways to create high quality, useful products, *Green the Gap* empowers consumers to make choices about their shopping habits," says Goenka. These products are made

from waste and recycled materials. Customers are encouraged to be active citizens who spread an environmental and social message through their consumer choices. "We want to make people think about the issue of waste disposal, and hope to change attitudes. We employ a dozen tailors on a full-time basis who transform waste materials into new products," added Goenka.

With designers endorsing sustainable fashion, can stylists be far behind? Says independent stylist Rishi Raj, "We have progressed with ecological fashion but we need more research and development in the field for it to become completely sustainable and viable. We need to be able to choose this over synthetic fabric."