



A hot cuppa fashion!

Here's the latest brewing in ethical fashion...

On last count, there were more than 600 textiles being sustainably produced. Corn, soya, hemp, wood pulp, stinging nettles, recycled plastic bottles, pina, bamboo and numerous other materials are serving as resources for designers to create innovative, fashionable clothes. The latest addition to the list of eco-friendly fabrics is one made out of coffee grounds. Conceived by Taiwanese Singtex Industrial Company, is it of little wonder that the company's general manager came up with the idea of using the coffee grounds, that would otherwise only contribute to landfills, into a fabric as he sat sipping a hot cup of coffee at Starbucks! Apart from taking care of Starbucks' waste grounds, the same company is also making sportswear out of recycled plastic bottles, a practice first started by California-based Patagonia, which

claims to have utilised 92 million bottles in this fashion! There is an army of people trying to make fashion sustainable, and like any other country, India too stands to benefit by switching to ethically sound fashion, in fact, maybe more so than others.

The textile industry consumes maximum water after agriculture; about 8000 chemicals go into turning raw material into textiles and almost 25% of the world's pesticides are used to grow cotton alone. While India is among the top cotton producers in the world, it is also among the leaders in growing organic cotton. "Fashion is now much more concerned with the environment... In fact, it is more concerned now with the well being of the people who make the clothing," says Susan Waters, founder of Cotton Roots. Cotton Roots is into fair-trade and organic corporate clothing, and has found its solution

for natural dyes in India. Using natural ingredients like coffee, tea, pomegranate, henna and onions, Cotton Roots is creating ethically sound aprons, T-shirts, towels, tea towels and shirts. "The chemical dying process uses heavy metals, creating toxic waste and using huge quantities of precious water. When our cloth is dyed naturally using plants, no heavy metals are used as other natural fixing agents are employed and the water can be directly used to irrigate the crops without the need for any treatment. I knew that it was possible to purchase Fair-trade cotton in India. I also found that only in India could I find "natural dyeing" on a commercial scale. The cotton is grown in Madhya Pradesh (*Mahima Organics*) and it is dyed in Ahmedabad," says Susan.

Varun Gupta was one of the six Indian designers who collaborated with six British

designers for Shared Talent India, funded by The Centre for Sustainable Fashion, DEFRA, and their designs showcasing sustainable Indian textiles were shown at the Monsoon stand at Estethica at the London Fashion Week held last month. Says Varun, "We invited a lot of suppliers from India including Aura Herbal Textiles, which is into herbal dyeing. Then there was Pushpanjali, a fair-trade company which is into fair trade-cottons, jerseys, khadi etc. We also had Zameen, which is into organic cotton. We're promoting handloom and peace silk."

Whether the interest in sustainable fashion is only a passing fad, or a precursor to the way forward, the innovations in ethical fashion definitely make for many an interesting coffee or tea time conversations! **B&E**

Anu Gulmohar