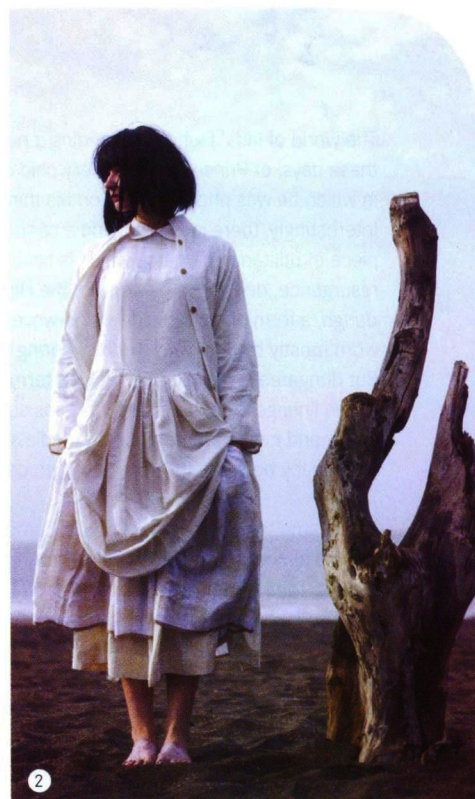


A garment made of handloom fabric designed by Sanjay Garg of the label Raw Mango

A subtle hand-woven fabric ensemble by Runaway Bicycle



HANDLOOM BRAND
A mark of standardisation, the India Handloom Brand denotes 100% natural and colour-fast fabrics. Says Alok Kumar, development commissioner, Handlooms, "To maintain standards, we regularly monitor handloom fabrics and conduct quality tests at government laboratories."



HANDLOOM MARK
Provides a collective identity to handloom products and guarantees the buyer that the product is genuinely hand-woven.

If this sector has to expand, we have to make handloom relevant to youngsters

Smriti Zubin Irani

Fortunately, with the allocation of funds and an aggressive government stand in re-aligning Indian fashion with its heritage, it looks like things could be taking a turn for the better. Smriti Zubin Irani, Union minister of Textiles, is upbeat about reviving handlooms through design inputs. One of the several focus areas her team is looking at for a holistic development of the Indian weaving community is to "establish a direct connect between weavers and designers". "Designers can guide weavers on how to present their art better and also identify and develop traditional products that can be turned into items that appeal to consumers across the society. We are planning to get the Fashion Design Council of India on board for this initiative," Irani says.

The future of the loom

Today, with the rise of social consciousness about our responsibility towards the environment and thus, environment-friendly practices, traditional hand-

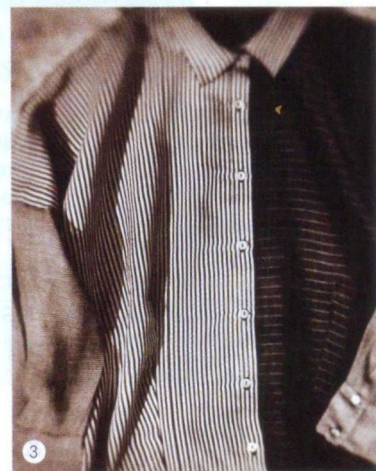
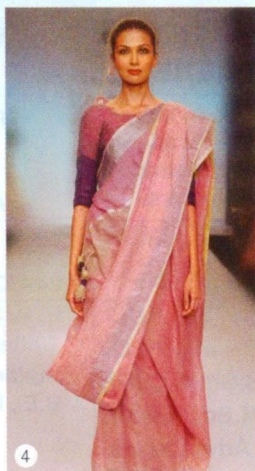
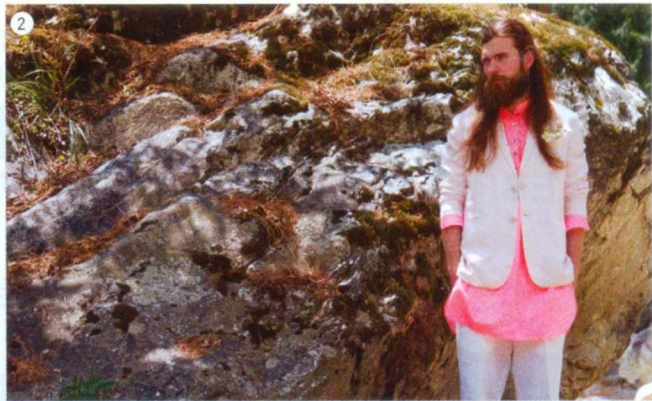
dyeing techniques with organic colours, hand-woven and locally sourced textiles are making a comeback. Physical stores are competing with virtual ones to establish hand-crafted traditions as couture. Says designer and textile innovator Anavila Misra, "Even till a few years ago, Indian hand-crafted garments stood only for embroideries. Now, the focus is on reviving old weaving techniques to create something comfortable and utilitarian yet unique and fashionable." Thus, handloom has come to stand for something more than just coarse bedsheets. Abraham and Thakore elaborate, "Even younger designers realise the potential of hand-woven art. With this, there is also a decrease in the need for Western approval or of an international logo to say Indian fashion has arrived."

Irani supports the thought. "If this sector has to expand, we have to make handloom relevant to youngsters. We are encouraging established Indian



1, 2, 3 Handloom creations for men by designer Suket Dhir

4 A contemporary hand-woven saree by designer Anavila Misra



DESIGN CONTEST

To mark the National Handloom Day, designers have been invited to experiment with hand-woven fabrics. Alok Kumar, development commissioner, Handlooms, says, "Through this contest, we want to highlight hand-woven fabrics' modern relevance. And the response has been overwhelming. We have received about 1,500 entries, out of which 95 have been selected. We are also funding the garment creation. About 18 winners will be declared and an exhibition and fashion show will be held."

MONEY AID

The Handloom Day will also see disbursement of Mudra loans by the textile ministry to weavers who require financial help.

apparel brands to source directly from weavers. The aim is to cut out the middlemen and make sure that weavers who are at the bottom of the retail pyramid reap the benefits of the beauty of their craft. We are also encouraging more e-commerce portals to buy directly from the weaver. Through these brands and e-commerce sites, I want to connect the weaver to the youth, who are socially conscious and appreciate the social impact of handloom products," she says.

A day for handloom

It was on August 7, 1905, that the Swadeshi movement began in India against the British, and Indians were exhorted to boycott imported textiles. And this is the reason Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose this day last year to be celebrated as National Handloom Day. This year, apart from other activities, the Ministry of Textiles is planning to focus on special programmes to aid weavers. "I want to use this day to not only generate more interest in handlooms, but also address some fundamental problems faced by handloom weavers in India. The first is the lack of education among their children; the second, the lack of smart skills to present and market their products; and the

third is related to the complex procurement process of their goods," says the minister. Talking about the success of the concept of Handloom Day, development commissioner, Handlooms, Alok Kumar says that it has encouraged weavers immensely. "The day is not only a tool to generate more product awareness, it also evokes a sense of pride in them. We are already witnessing a revival of several weaver clusters and the industry is upbeat about its future," he says.

On the day, the textile ministry is planning to launch a programme with the help of the National Institute of Open Schooling to facilitate the education of weavers' children, who are unable to complete their schooling due to socio-economic factors. For those children who want to pursue a degree, the ministry is signing an MoU with IGNOU. The ministry also plans to sign an MoU with the Ministry of Skill Development to ensure Weaver Service Centre members are trained in packaging and promoting their products. "The day should focus on how buying a handloom product can better the life of a person and contribute to sustaining the craft," says Irani. Maybe now we can vouch for more power to the handloom!