Artisan Culture

Rethinking Sustainability through Collaborative Exchange between Emerging Australian Designers and Indian Artisans in Fashion and Textiles

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Sustainability, Fashion Design, Heritage textiles, Artisan, Collaboration, Textiles, Education, Artisanal
Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Table of Contents

Keywords.................................................................................................................................i
Certificate of Original Authorship ..........................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................................iii
Table of Contents ...................................................................................................................iv
List of Figures ..........................................................................................................................vii
Abstract ....................................................................................................................................xi
Terms and Definitions ...............................................................................................................xii
Introduction ...............................................................................................................................1

Chapter 1: Literature Review .................................................................................................6
  Garment Industry Research ................................................................................................. 6
    The Impact of Offshore Manufacturing on the Australian Industry ................................. 7
    The Rise of the Indian Manufacturing Industry ............................................................... 7
    Business Between Australia and India .............................................................................. 8
  Sustainable Fashion .............................................................................................................. 9
    Ethical/Social and Cultural Studies .................................................................................. 11
    Environmental/Ecology .................................................................................................... 13
    Economics .......................................................................................................................... 13
    Designing Opportunities with a Sustainability Agenda .................................................. 14
  Traditional Artistry Within India ......................................................................................... 15
    Heritage Textiles In India ................................................................................................. 15
    The Challenges Facing Indian Artisans ........................................................................... 16
    Opportunities for Building Sustainable Livelihoods for Artisans ................................. 17
  Collaborative Exchange Between Artisans and Designers .............................................. 19

Chapter 2: Methodology and Project Description ..................................................................22
  Methodology ..........................................................................................................................22
  The Field Work Project .........................................................................................................23
    Project Description .......................................................................................................... 23
  The Tours as Research Enquiry ............................................................................................29
    Tour One – Introducing Traditional Crafts ..................................................................... 29
Chapter 3: Sustainable in Business Practice

Sustainability within the Industry

Transformative Learning Experiences for Emerging Fashion and Textile Designers

Sustainable future models of practice for emerging designers

Skill Development

International sourcing

Intellectual Property Rights

Developing Sustainable Business Practice

Social and Ethical Sustainability

Fair Working Conditions

Raising Gender Equality

Raising Artisan Rights

Health and Safety

Child Education

Building Ethical partners

Respecting Intellectual Property

Developing Ecologically Friendly Alternatives for Textile Manufacture

Seasonal difficulties

Reducing Environmentally Harmful Chemicals

Sourcing Ecologically Friendly Raw Materials

Developing Economic Sustainability

Opportunities Between Australia and India

Chapter 4: Collaborative Exchange

Collaborative Practice in the Australian and Indian Fashion Industries

Strategies for developing collaborative partnerships

Stage One: Research
Stage Two: Engaging Collaborative Partners .......................................................... 96
Stage Three: Building Rapport and Socialising Together ..................................... 100
Stage Four: Experimenting .................................................................................. 105
Stage Five: Sustainability Considerations ......................................................... 112
Stage Six: Raising Wider Awareness of Collaborative Practice ......................... 113

Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 116

Glossary ................................................................................................................. 119
Indian traditional textile ...................................................................................... 119
Block Printing ..................................................................................................... 119
Dying .................................................................................................................... 122
Embroidery .......................................................................................................... 125
Weaving ............................................................................................................... 128

Appendices .......................................................................................................... 130
Appendix 1: Tours Table ...................................................................................... 130
Appendix 2: Interview Questions Education Facilitators ................................... 131
Appendix 3: Interview Questions Artisans .......................................................... 132
Appendix 4: Interview Questions Students ......................................................... 133
Appendix 5: Interview Questions Industry ......................................................... 134

Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 135
List of Figures

Figure 1: The Hon. Julie Bishop, MP (here representing DFAT) and Edwina McCann (AFC) signing the MoU. Photo by AFC ................................................................. 8

Figure 2: Rajat Jain and team. Photo by Julie Lantry ................................................................. 26

Figure 3: The Fashion Tours ........................................................................................................ 28

Figure 4: Medhavi and Akiib explaining about ajrak printing. Photo by student designer Joanna ................................................................................................................. 31

Figure 5: Cecilia and Ashok accepting the blessing from the Priest. Photo by student designer Felicity ................................................................................................................. 33

Figure 6: Students and artisans working side by side. Photo by student designer, Bonney ................................................................................................................................. 34

Figure 7: Student design based on graphic found in Sydney. Photo by Julie Lantry .. 35

Figure 8: Student discussing knit sample with Jyotsna. Photo by Julie Lantry .......... 36

Figure 9: Surplus fabric store in Seelampur recycle market. New Delhi. Photo by student designer Natalie ................................................................................................................. 36

Figure 10: Raju working on student block print design. Photo by UTS Lecturer, Donna Sgro ................................................................................................................................. 37

Figure 11: Student Kantha stitch on recycled fabric. Photo by student designer Traci ................................................................................................................................. 38

Figure 12: Student block print design. Photo by Julie Lantry ................................. 38

Figure 13: Sanju preparing a design for a student. Photo by Julie Lantry ............ 39

Figure 14: Julie interviewing tie-dye artisan. Photo by UTS lecturer, Alana Clifton Cunningham ................................................................................................................................. 41
Figure 15: Rahul Mishra with his 2014 collection for David Jones. Photo by Woolmark ................................................................. 47

Figure 16: Tree of Life advertisement with Bird block print. Photo by Tree of Life. .. 48

Figure 17: Thread work variations. Photo by student designer, Felicity .................. 50

Figure 18: Student initial sketch with finished embroidery and body placement.
Photo by student designer, Scarlett ................................................................. 52

Figure 19: Akira Isagowa hand-embroidered garment. Photo by Akira Isagowa....... 53

Figure 20: Sewing centre at Samarpan Foundation. Photo by student designer,
Maureen........................................................................................................ 62

Figure 21: Women from The Stitching Project with UTS students. Photo by student
designer, Scarlett ........................................................................................ 63

Figure 22: The Stitching Project Craftmark label. Photo by Fiona Wright............. 68

Figure 23: Drying ayurvedic fabric for Soulmate Intimates. Photo by Ayurvastra ..... 72

Figure 24: Bombay Beads, Kanari Bazaar. Photo by student designer, Marissa ....... 74

Figure 25: Embroidery made from sequin waste. Photo by student designer, Mandish
..................................................................................................................... 75

Figure 26: Seelampur Markets. Photo by Julie Lantry......................................... 76

Figure 27: Stack of fabric remnant in Seelampur. Photo by student designer, Traci. 76

Figure 28: Cow walking over dyed fabric on the road. Photo by Julie Lantry .......... 83

Figure 29: Pamela Easton (second from left) and Lydia Pearson (third from right) of
Easton Pearson with Patrick Suckling (middle) at the Australian High
Commission in New Delhi. Photo by ANI News............................................. 85

Figure 30: A six-stage process ........................................................................... 90
Figure 31: aari metal work and traditional block print design by Anu. Photo by Robyn Beeche.......................................................... 91

Figure 32: Student embroidery mood board. Photo by Julie Lantry ...................... 92

Figure 33: Traditional sujani embroidery by Sanju Devi. Photo by Julie Lantry........ 93

Figure 34: Contemporary sujani embroidered jacket by Jiyo. Photo by Robyn Beeche. ................................................................. 94

Figure 35: Contemporary cream-on-cream block print by Kissing Cousins. Photo by Robyn Beeche.......................................................... 97

Figure 36: Easton Pearson collaboration with rabari artisans. Photo by Robyn Beeche................................................................. 99

Figure 37: Embroidery completed by different artisans. Photo by Julie Lantry......... 99

Figure 38: Hindu protests against Lisa Blue Designs. Photo by Neranda Nanu/Getty/Daily News New York.............................................. 102

Figure 39: Rajeev Sethi with students and artisans from Tour One. Photo by Alana Clifton-Cunningham. .................................................. 105

Figure 40: Michelle Jank collaborating with Ashok Ladiwal. Photo by Robyn Beeche. ................................................................. 106

Figure 41: Michelle Jank and Ashok Ladiwal aari embroidered Gown. Photo by Robyn Beeche................................................................. 107

Figure 42: Student journal. Photo by Julie Lantry ......................................... 109

Figure 43: A handloomed brocade by Manish Arora. Photo by Manish Arora ........ 111

Figure 44: Contemporary design by student designer and ajrak block print artisan. Photo by Julie Lantry.............................................. 119
Figure 45: Student block designs from Tour Four. Photo by student designer, Joanna ................................................................. 120

Figure 46: Block maker preparing a block design. Photo by Julie Lantry. ................. 120

Figure 47: Nandu Kanwar and student using pigment ink block technique. Photo by
Julie Lantry. .................................................................................................................. 121

Figure 48: Sawdust sprinkles after mud print. Photo by Julie Lantry....................... 122

Figure 49: Fabric drying after dying. Photo by Julie Lantry. ................................. 123

Figure 50: Tie-dye textile. The garment is tied for dying, then unravelled. Photo by
student designer, Maureen...................................................................................... 124

Figure 51: Mud resist samples being immersed in vat. Photo by Julie Lantry. ....... 124

Figure 52: Sample pot dying with natural dyes at Kullu Karishma. Photo by Julie
Lantry. ..................................................................................................................... 125

Figure 53: Long needle stitching. Photo by student designer, Marissa.................... 126

Figure 54: Combination of aari contemporary embroidery stitches designed by Rajat
Jain. Photo by student designer, Kaevi................................................................. 126

Figure 55: Chikankari embroidery. Photo by UTS Lecturer, Alana Clifton Cunningham.
.............................................................................................................................. 127

Figure 56: Traditional chikankari design. Photo by student designer, Kaevi. ........ 128

Figure 57: Hand looming recycled cloth at Tellonia. Image by Julie Lantry .......... 129
Abstract

Attentiveness to ethical and ecological sustainable practice is building in the garment industry. However, many researchers still consider the garment-making manufacturing system to be ethically and ecologically unsustainable. There are multiple factors contributing to this view, including overconsumption, waste accumulation, poor working conditions, low wages, and health-and-safety issues.

This thesis explores how industry connections between emerging Australian designers and traditional artisans in India can foster new possibilities for ethically sustainable collaborations between Australia and India. Much of the research emanates from a series of curated tours, where Sydney-based tertiary students undertaking undergraduate degrees in fashion and textile design were encouraged to collaborate with individual artisans, ethical manufacturers, and environmentally sustainable producers in Northern India. Simultaneously, Indian textile artisans were encouraged to apply their traditional technical skills to contemporary design, thus enabling new opportunities for these processes to enter the global market.

Using a combination of participant observation strategies and semi-structured interviews, this research draws on data collected from students and industry professionals between July 2012 and September 2013. This data was supported by my own experiences as a fashion practitioner working with Indian manufacturers.

In this thesis I argue that firsthand experience for students working with artisans, suppliers and ethical manufacturing practices will increase awareness of the complexities of a sustainable fashion future. This research offers a sustainable model of collaborative practice for future generations of emerging designers, which will build a deeper understanding for better ways to source and design. For artisans, the significance of this thesis could be to build an economically sustainable practice considering contemporary design. It suggests ways to engage in ethical and sustainable practices working with Indian artisans. The outcome of this research aims to contribute to a growing field of ethical practice in fashion and textiles.
Terms and Definitions

*aari*: Form of embroidery practiced in various regions such as in Kashmir, Vrindavan, and Kolkata.

*ajrak*: Unique form of block printed shawls and tiles found in Sindh, Pakistan; Kutch, Gujarat; and Barmer, Rajasthan in India. These shawls display special designs and patterns made using block printing by stamps.

*bandhani*: Type of tie-dye textile decorated primarily by plucking the cloth with the fingernails into many tiny bindings to form a figurative design. Bandhani making centres are situated in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Sindh, Punjab region and in Tamil Nadu.

*Bespoke*: Clothing made to an individual buyer’s specification by a tailor. The distinguishing points of bespoke clothing are the buyer’s total control over the fabric used, the features and fit, and the way the garment should be made.

*Carbon footprint*: The amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of the activities of a particular individual, organization, or community.

*chikankari*: Traditional embroidery style from Lucknow, India. It is one of Lucknow’s best-known textile decoration styles.

*Closed-loop system*: System of production that embraces the circularity of materials; the notion that all component parts of a product can and should be broken down at the end of its useful life to be reconstituted into new products.

*Couture*: Design and manufacture of fashionable clothes to a client's specific requirements and measurements.
**Ethical fashion:** An approach to the design, sourcing and manufacture of clothing which maximises benefits to people and communities while minimising impact on the environment.

**Fair trade:** Trade between companies in developed countries and producers in developing countries in which fair prices are paid to the producers.

**Fashion miles:** Distance a garment is tracked during its manufacturing process.

**Fast fashion:** System of production whereby designs quickly move from catwalk to consumer in order to capture current fashion trends. Fast fashion clothing collections are based on the most recent fashion trends presented at Fashion Week in the spring and the autumn of every year.

**GOTS:** Global Organic Textile Standard. An organic certification organisation.

**Greenwash:** Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image.

**Khādī:** Indian homespun cotton cloth.

**Low impact dye:** Dye that has been classified by the Oeko-Tex Standard 100 (an international certification process) as eco-friendly. Generally, low impact dyes do not contain toxic chemicals or mordents (which fix the dye to the fabric), require less rinsing, and have a high absorption rate in the fabric (~70 percent).

**Natural dyes:** Colourants derived from plants, invertebrates, or minerals. The majority of natural dyes are vegetable dyes derived from plant sources—roots, berries, bark, leaves, and wood—and other organic sources such as fungi and lichens.

**Offshore:** Made, situated, or registered abroad, especially in order to take advantage of lower taxes or costs or less stringent regulation.
Organic cotton: Cotton grown from non-genetically modified plants without the use of any synthetic agricultural chemicals such as fertilizers or pesticides.

Outsourcing: To obtain (goods or a service) by contract from an outside supplier.

Peace silk: Form of silk manufacture that allows silkworms to emerge from their cocoons to live out their full life cycle. The silk is degummed and spun like other fibre instead of being reeled. The resulting yarn is soft, fluffy, and light.

Slow fashion: Movement that embraces a slower pace of trend and production.

SME: Small-to-Medium Enterprise.

sujani: Form of embroidery originating from Bhusura village in Bihar, India.

Supply chain: Sequence of processes involved in the production and distribution of a commodity.

Sustainable fashion: Design philosophy which seeks to create a system of fashion production that can be supported indefinitely in terms of environmental and social responsibility.

Transparent supply chain: Information for end users given by companies about their suppliers and sourcing locations.

zari: Type of gold thread used decoratively on Indian clothing.

Zero waste: Practice of pattern making that creates little or no wasted fabric when cutting.