

Crafting Futures: How India's Local Fashion Practices Shape Regenerative Sustainable Systems

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Abstract

“We need to reconnect fashion to local craft traditions if we’re serious about sustainability.” — Stella McCartney, Fashion Designer.

India has long been home to some of the world’s most profound sustainable fashion legacies. As the global fashion industry accelerates towards unsustainable consumption and exploitative production cycles, India’s indigenous practices offer regenerative, culturally rooted alternatives. These practices are not simply nostalgic; they are blueprints for sustainable futures grounded in ethics, resilience, and circularity.

For example:

- The Indian handloom sector employs 3.52 million artisans across 2.8 million looms, making it the second-largest rural employer after agriculture (India Energy Portal, 2023).
- Handloom weaving and khadi spinning are virtually fossil-fuel free, operating without electricity.
- Between 2015 and 2023, khadi fabric production increased by 115%, reflecting growing demand (KVIC, 2023).
- Over 2,000 registered Indian fashion brands now focus on indigenous textiles, local sourcing, and low-impact design (Fashion Revolution India, 2024).

These statistics reflect rising consumer and entrepreneurial interest in sustainable fashion systems in India. One such system is the textile recycling of saris. India generates over one million tonnes of textile waste annually, a significant portion of which consists of post-consumer garments like saris (Ministry of Textiles, 2022). Saris in India, often handed

down across generations, are frequently repurposed into quilts, baby clothes, bags, and blouses, forming an informal circular economy rooted in cultural practices (Curiosity Saves the Planet, 2023).

This paper investigates recycling as a method of regeneration in Indian fashion, with a central focus on the recycling and reinvention of sarees, which support both ecological responsibility and social upliftment.

This paper uses a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative research includes analysis of sector data, textile recycling metrics, and case studies of sustainable fashion brands. Qualitative research involves documenting sari reuse and recycling practices nationwide and conducting interviews with artisans, home-based recyclers, and designers..

By critically examining sari recycling and other regenerative craft practices, this paper argues that India's local systems offer viable, culturally rooted alternatives to linear fashion models. It contributes to broader discussions on how to relearn fashion by transforming education, production, and consumption systems for regenerative futures.

Keywords

sari recycling, regenerative fashion, sustainable fashion India, circular economy, craft traditions, textile reuse, fashion education, local knowledge systems, upcycling, kantha, godhadi, I Was a Sari.

INTRODUCTION

India is a country where culture, heritage, and material traditions are passed down through generations, forming a deep-rooted system of value, longevity, and continuity in everyday life. Textiles, particularly the sari, function not only as garments but as cultural artefacts, repositories of memory, and embodiments of sustainable practices that precede contemporary circularity discourse by centuries. As global awareness of environmental degradation increases, the fashion industry has been urged to transition from a linear “take–make–waste” model to more regenerative systems. As Radhakrishnan (2022) and Härrä, Levänen, and Linnanen (2024) explain, “The economy that was linear

(take-make-waste system) has shifted to a circular economy where product designs are created to reduce waste and the waste generated is converted into new products (upcycling) or resources (downcycling),” allowing materials to enter successive cycles of use rather than becoming waste. Long before the global conversation on sustainability emerged, Indian households and artisanal communities had already developed robust systems of reuse, repair, and regeneration. Across regions, traditional textile practices embody the principles of circularity not as environmental mandates but as cultural habits and intergenerational knowledge systems. Singh and Rani (2021) highlight that different Indian states are practicing many traditional textile techniques to recycle and upcycle textile waste... including Kantha of West Bengal, Sujani of Bihar, Kathputlis of Northern Indian states, Panja Dari of Haryana, Namda and Gabba of Kashmir, Kausti of Karnataka, Patchwork, and Chindi Rugs. These crafts demonstrate how indigenous methods have continuously extended the lifecycle of textiles, thus silently contributing to the sustainable future of the textile industry.”

Despite these rich traditions, modern India, like the rest of the world, faces increasing textile waste due to mass production, fast fashion, and changing consumption patterns. This raises an important question: how can India’s cultural heritage of reuse and emotional durability inform a contemporary circular fashion ecosystem? By examining traditional sari reuse, emotional attachment to garments, intergenerational clothing practices, and emerging recycling industries, this research explores how India’s unique socio-cultural fabric offers crucial insights for building sustainable textile futures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global textile waste and sustainability challenges

“Unsustainable fashion is aggravating the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature, land and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste,” Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP. “We need to focus on a circular economy approach that values sustainable production, reuse, and repair. By working together, consumers, industry, and governments can support genuinely durable fashion and help reduce our fashion footprint” (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2023).

The fashion industry is one of the most polluting and resource-intensive industries. Every year, 92 million tonnes of textile waste are produced globally. Production of garments has doubled from 2000 to 2015, while the duration of garment use decreased by 36 percent. Eleven percent of plastic waste comes from clothing and textiles, with only 8 percent of textile fibers in 2023 made from recycled sources (UNEP, 2023). Textile consumption in the EU increased from 17 kg per person in 2019 to 19 kg per person on average in 2022; at the same time, around 12 kg of clothing per person is dumped each year in the EU (European Parliament, 2022), which is more than 30% of waste creation. However, while it is the actions of the West, the consequences are borne by third-world low-income countries, where inadequate waste management infrastructure leads to dumping and pollution (UNEP, 2023).

India's textile waste landscape

In India, the Textiles Committee (2021) highlights that the textile industry produces a vast amount of waste during its production cycles, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, and carcinogenic chemical discharge. The report stresses the importance of transitioning from the traditional linear economy of “take, make, dispose” to a circular economy model in which materials are kept in use for as long as possible, waste is minimized, and products are regenerated at the end of their lifecycle.

India's long-standing traditions offer valuable models of sustainable textile practices. For example, Razai, a quilt made from used cloth, exemplifies resource efficiency and cultural preservation. Similarly, traditional garments such as Saree, Dhoti, and Lungi—unstitched rectangular fabrics—demonstrate affordability, longevity, and zero waste principles, reflecting the inherent sustainability embedded in indigenous design practices (Textiles Committee, 2021).



Fig.1 Sari (Google Arts and Culture)



Fig.2 Dhoti (MAP Academy)



Fig.3 Lungi (MAP Academy)

Contemporary Indian enterprises are also advancing sustainability through upcycling and recycling initiatives. Brands like Bunko Junko transform waste fabrics into garments,

accessories, and home décor, while Doodlage Retail LLP recycles post-consumer waste and cuts scraps into new textiles, creating durable, seasonless clothing. These ventures bridge tradition and innovation by merging cultural values with modern sustainability practices. However, challenges persist: sorting textile scraps remains labor-intensive and costly, and recycled materials often require additional processing, increasing production costs compared to virgin materials (Textiles Committee, 2021). Despite these constraints, such initiatives reveal India's potential to lead in sustainable textile innovation by aligning artisanal skill, cultural heritage, and environmental responsibility.

Traditional and contemporary practices of sari reuse

“In India, cloth is never simply “thrown away”. Less often voiced but frequently alluded to is the fact that unwanted clothing never travels up the social hierarchy, given the cultural importance of new clothes and their association with ritual purity. But what I quickly discovered was that (out of sight of most of the middle and upper-middle classes) houses, markets, and warehouses are literally overflowing with heaps of used cloth and clothing: one might say, mountains of rags waiting to be turned into riches. From this mass of saris and shalwar kamiz, dealers and fabricators create new products and niche markets through entrepreneurial recycling, both producing clothing for the local poor and exporting fashionable furnishings and street wear for Western markets.” (Norris 2008)

A sari is a long, unstitched fabric designed to drape and wrap around the body. These garments are reused, repurposed, and remanufactured in several different ways as part of age-old traditions, showing evidence of circular fashion and sustainability as a lifestyle within the country.

Traditionally, fabric from old cotton sarees is made into layers and stitched together using running stitches to give a unique design effect. This product, termed “Kantha,” is used for infants and children as blankets and wraps, as it is soft and suitable for the Indian climatic conditions. Kantha work is famous in the eastern states of India, like Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, and Odisha. The nomadic Bakkarwal and Gujjar tribes of Jammu and Kashmir use acrylic yarn for embroidery on the old woolen felt blankets and convert them into beautiful, needle-worked, handmade rugs, caps, bags, and other accessories with beautiful hand

embroidery. Similarly, the nomadic tribes in Rajasthan, India, do patchwork (godhadi), embroidery, and mirror work to give a bright new look to their dresses (Bairagi, 2014, p. 1)



Fig. 4 Kantha embroidery (MAP Academy)



Fig. 5 Godhadi (museum of goa)



Fig. 6 Mirror Work (NIFT, Gandhinagar)

Sari borders have always been saved in the practice of thrift and either sewn onto new plain silk saris or used to decorate salwar suits. In both rural and urban contexts, women have historically saved the decorative borders of worn saris, sewing them onto new plain fabrics or using them to embellish salwar suits (a traditional three-piece outfit consisting of a tunic-style shirt, a pair of loose-fitting pants, and a scarf).

This practice not only extends the life of the fabric but also reflects the value placed on craftsmanship and material continuity. Worn saris, especially fine silk ones, are also reused within the home as furnishings and children's clothing. Valuable saris with ornate zari borders are often repurposed into patchwork cushions, hangings, and tailored garments, serving both local elites and the Western market. (Norris, 2010)

Emotional durability and intergenerational value of garments

In an Indian household, a saree isn't just a garment; it is regarded as an emotional and financial investment. It is an investment that is passed through generations, developing emotional attachments and durability. Old garments also serve as family heirlooms and carry symbolic significance. Certain pieces are hoarded as emblems of heritage and affection, handed down across generations or used in symbolic rituals such as wrapping a newborn in a family sari. Through such practices, women embed memory, identity, and continuity into their clothing, illustrating how textiles function as both cultural and emotional repositories (Norris, 2010).

In India, hand-me-downs have long played a crucial social role, functioning both as a means of preserving sentimental value and reinforcing social hierarchies. Historically, middle- and upper-class individuals avoided wearing second-hand garments from outside their social circles due to stigma associated with lower social classes and castes. This hierarchical circulation ensures that garments retain both emotional and material value within trusted networks. While contemporary thrifting movements are making pre-owned clothing more socially acceptable and even fashionable among urban youth, these practices largely remain confined to elite circles, highlighting how traditional patterns of intra-family and downward garment circulation continue to influence perceptions of second-hand clothing in India.

Hierarchies of clothing circulation and social exchange

India's unique cultural and economic landscape has encouraged both informal and industrial recycling routes. At the household level, old textiles are repurposed into utilitarian items such as cloth pads, cushion stuffing, and cleaning materials. Traditional crafts like Bengal's *Kantha* embroidery and Haryana's *Chindi* weaving have long exemplified fabric reuse, stitching together old saris into new forms such as quilts and rugs (Jain & Gupta, 2024). Community-level collection systems further support this culture of reuse; for instance, the Wagdi or "Bartan Wali" community in Gujarat traditionally collects second-hand clothing in exchange for cooking utensils, maintaining a localized model of circular exchange (Jain & Gupta, 2024).

Each state of India has its indigenous regional art and culture. There are many traditional textile techniques for recycling textile waste consistently practiced in different states of India.. Many of the traditional textiles of India serve an essential function in recycling old fabrics; examples are *Kantha* from West Bengal, *Panja Dhurrie* from Haryana, patchwork and

kathputli from Rajasthan, and Sujani embroidery from Bihar, while certain traditional textiles use antique fabric and produce beneficial products. (Singh & Rani, 2021)

Sustainable Indian fashion brands and circular innovation

1. I Was a Sari

Practice: Mumbai-based social enterprise (2013). Upcycles discarded saris into fashion & lifestyle products, while training marginalized women.

Impact: Has “repurposed over 2 million square meters of fabric” and collaborated with “800+ women artisans”.

System: Circular design — saris are cut, stitched, and patched into new garments, combining sustainability with social empowerment.

2. 3 Clothing (Three)

Practice: Minimalist Mumbai label using organic cotton, handloom fabrics, natural dyes, and zero-waste cutting. Focuses on timeless, seasonless design.

Impact: Operates on a made-to-order model to avoid overproduction (fashion media sources).

System: Supports regenerative crafts (handloom weaving, vegetable dyeing) and minimizes waste in design.

3. Doodlage

Practice: Delhi-based upcycling pioneer (2012). Collects factory off-cuts, deadstock, and post-consumer textiles to make patchwork garments & accessories. Runs repair and recycling programs.

Impact: In Q1 2022 alone, it “saved and reused ~15,000 meters of fabric waste”.

System: Follows a zero-waste philosophy — “every leftover piece is meticulously separated and transformed”

4. 11.11 / eleven eleven

Practice: Delhi brand (2009), rooted in craft-based slow fashion. Uses handspun khadi, natural dyes, handloom weaving, and hand-painting.

Impact: Produces clothing from “100% natural dyes” and indigenous cotton

System: Fully regenerative model — sustains artisan livelihoods and avoids synthetic fabrics.

5. Kartik Research

Practice: Contemporary menswear brand by Kartik Kumra. Integrates heritage crafts (Ajrakh, embroidery, khadi weaving) with modern silhouettes. Uses deadstock fabrics and natural indigo.

Impact: Small-batch, handcrafted production recognized by Vogue, GQ, and SSENSE.

System: Regenerative approach — revives traditional craft techniques and repurposes surplus textiles.

6. Dwij

Practice: Mumbai startup dedicated to denim upcycling. Transforms discarded jeans & denim scraps into bags, backpacks, and apparel.

Impact: Has reclaimed “over 2,000 meters of discarded denim”, saving water and emissions linked to new denim.

System: Shreds, reweaves, and handcrafts denim into new fabrics and accessories.

7. Ka-Sha (Heart To Haat)

Practice: Artisanal label combining zero-waste and circular design. Sister initiative Heart To Haat repurposes off-cuts (up to ~16% waste) into accessories, toys, and embroidery thread.

Impact: Systematically reuses nearly all cutting scrap

System: Repair (“Re-Turn”), reuse, and collaborative waste collection across designers.

8. IRO IRO

Practice: Jaipur-based circular design collective (2016). Turns handloom waste & textile scraps into new fabrics and garments using weaving, block printing, and natural dyes.

Impact: In ~3 years, transformed “10 tonnes of textile waste”, preventing 200 tonnes of CO₂ emissions.

System: Circular craft-based production with artisan collaboration.

9. Rkive City

Practice: Delhi streetwear label (2020) making one-of-a-kind jackets and shirts from recycled denim, deadstock canvas, and shirting waste.

Impact: Brand created to give “landfill-bound fabrics a second shot at life”.

System: Zero-waste ethos — reuses scraps (fabric, buttons, zips) in bold, embroidered designs.

10. Upasana

Practice: Auroville-based womenswear label. Incorporates scraps, offcuts, and even landfill finds into its garments. Uses asymmetrical designs to showcase odd-shaped waste.

Impact: Achieves near-zero waste in production by turning leftover fabric into final designs.

System: Reinvents textile waste into central design features.

Indian government initiatives and policies on textile recycling and sustainability

The Indian Ministry of Textiles has established an industry-wide Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Task Force to co-create a long-term vision for sustainable textiles. The government also released a draft “Roadmap 2047 for a Sustainable, Circular, and Resource-Efficient Indian Textile Industry,” which outlines strategies for capacity building, awareness creation, sustainability certification, and regulatory frameworks to advance circularity (Ministry of Textiles, 2025).

On National Handloom Day 2025, the Minister of State for Textiles announced that the ESG task force had begun identifying critical points in the textile value chain for targeted environmental and social interventions. Pilot projects include the establishment of Textile Recovery Facilities for waste processing, promotion of upcycled textile products, and training programs for designers, artisans, and entrepreneurs in circularity practices (Dar, 2025). These initiatives show how the government is linking infrastructure development with capacity building to create a nationwide framework for sustainable textile production.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify the practical and material challenges designers encounter when working with recycled or upcycled textiles in India.
- To analyse how aesthetic value is maintained or enhanced despite the irregularities and imperfections inherent in reused materials.
- To examine how Indian traditional reuse practices—such as sari recycling, kantha, chindi, and patchwork—are integrated with contemporary global sustainability standards.

- To explore the role of emotional durability, generational textile values, and client attachment in shaping circular garment-making practices.
- To evaluate how sourcing systems, industrial recycling hubs, sustainable fashion brands, and sociocultural attitudes collectively contribute to India's regenerative circular fashion ecosystem.

Primary Research

The secondary research concludes India is home to age-old traditions of sustainability, and the primary research helps understand their application in today's industry dynamics.

Qualitative Research: Interview

(i.) Sample size: 3 interviews of designers/academicians and sustainability design practitioners

(ii.) Work experience:

Industry: craft, retail industry, research, education, writer, costume design

(ii.) Years of work experience: 20-35 years

(iii.) Method: face-to-face and telephonic interviews

(iv.) Analysis: visualisation as a table comparing opinions on sustainability and its practice mechanics.

Table 1. Interviews with Fashion Design Industry Experts

QUESTIONS	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3
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When you work with recycled or upcycled textiles, what practical challenges arise? For example, do you face issues such as inconsistency in fabric quality, dyeing, or consumer acceptance?	I always start with a strict quality check; we used to fabric-test (check fiber content percentages) because durability and how to care for the garment matter. Recycled or mixed fabrics can be inconsistent in fiber content, finish, and performance, and that affects labeling and care instructions. For couture work, I needed top-quality trimmings, embroidery material, and base fabric; otherwise, the piece won't last. If the fabric isn't durable or the fiber content makes it fade or wear out quickly, then the so-called sustainability disappears because people buy	When I work with recycled or upcycled textiles, the first major challenge is sourcing the fabric; sometimes they're not clean, they come in odd shapes, and need extra work just to be usable, which adds to production costs. There's also a big issue with inconsistency; every piece is unique, so if I make something once, I often can't recreate it exactly, especially with patchwork or quilting. It's difficult to achieve consistency in both design and silhouette, and mass production is more or less impossible when aiming for sustainability.	I face several practical challenges when working with upcycled textiles, mainly that I don't always get cuts of the same size, so I have to think creatively about how to use those pieces. In recycling, when garments are broken down into yarns and new fabric is made, the main constraint can be color—sometimes all the yarns mix and then I may need to bleach and re-dye to get the desired color. Consumer acceptance hasn't been too difficult; I find it's more about the design.
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	replacements. So the practical challenges are: ensuring consistent fiber content, confirming durability, and using materials that will stand the test of time.		
How do you balance aesthetic appeal with the imperfections or irregularities that often come from reused materials?	I balance it by designing for longevity and craft rather than gimmicks. If you use the best quality materials and careful hand-finishing, you can play with a garment's form later (convert a sari to a tunic or a corset to a gown). The base quality lets you accept irregularities because the piece still functions and looks refined. Simpler, well-fitting silhouettes and excellent finishing make a piece feel timeless and	Honestly, I don't worry about achieving perfection. I think perfection is subjective, and instead of hiding irregularities, I treat them as part of the design as design elements or unique selling points. What matters most to me is a well-finished garment with proper lining and fastenings, but I see unfinished or imperfect elements as giving each piece its unique character.	I often use surface ornamentation or texturing to balance out or conceal imperfections in reused fabrics.

	wearable despite imperfections.		
How do you combine Indian traditional reuse practices with international sustainability standards while still retaining a sense of local identity?	Indian fabrics are very diverse and carry an “Indian look.” International designers often have custom fabrics with specific properties, so you can’t always swap them directly. The solution is to respect the character of Indian textiles and apply them thoughtfully - fusion silhouettes, considered applications, and designing with the fabric’s identity in mind. At the same time, maintain international-level quality (customize or source better base cloths when needed) so the garment meets durability and usability standards.	Combining Indian traditional reuse techniques with international sustainability standards is complicated. International standards focus a lot on processes—how materials and water are sourced and treated, labor conditions, and fair wages. Indian crafts work differently; processes like weaving or embroidery can’t easily be standardized. However, I try to be mindful, for example, in my use of dyes, choosing sustainable or natural options when possible, while respecting the unique ways Indian crafts operate.	I haven’t specifically worked with international sustainability standards when supplying abroad, as none of my clients have asked for it. However, I try to make garments in a way that they can be worn multiple times by using components that mix and match, and sometimes I use double fabrics, which can be re-dyed and updated over time, creating something new and keeping the local identity intact.

How do you source your fabrics and materials, and what kinds of difficulties or challenges arise in this process?	I sourced fabrics both from local Indian markets and through specialized suppliers for couture. The main difficulty is getting the right quality for particular constructions, for example, true wool-crepe that falls correctly is very hard to find in India. Some fabrics that look similar in shop samples don't behave the same in a finished garment, so sourcing the exact quality required for a cut or an embroidery application is challenging.	I source materials from various places rejected fabrics from quality control, discarded garments, second-hand vendors, and especially old saris. The challenge is the variability; the quality and type of material varies a lot, from early post-consumer waste to pre-worn garments, so I never really know exactly what I'll get, and that makes planning and design difficult.	I have not sourced recycled or upcycled fabrics from outside sources. When I had my own manufacturing unit, I used leftover side cuts from production as my main upcycling material.
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How do you handle clients who have emotional attachments to their garments and create emotional durability within these fabrics? For instance, when customers disagree with design outcomes or feel restricted by sentimental connections, how do you address these concerns?	In my experience, most clients were informed and cared for the garment from day one, so emotional durability came from careful original making: choosing high-quality fabric and materials, meticulous finishing, and designing with future reuse in mind. Because pieces were made to last, clients often returned years later to have them adapted or gifted to the next generation - conversions were possible because the original making allowed it. So emotional durability is built into the making, and technical knowledge of how to convert garments helps me honor clients' attachments.	I approach each project by considering the client's emotions and lifestyle at the core. For example, I recently preserved my grandmother's saree by splitting it up: one part was kept as is, carefully preserved; the other was framed as art in my home. Sometimes, clients want their pieces left untouched; other times, they're open to creative transformations. Sustainability isn't just about keeping a material out of landfill—it's also about making sure what we create will actually be used and valued by the person.	Most of my clients have come to me with sarees that they want to retain or repurpose. I work with them by using part of the original saree to create a new one, and with the leftovers, I make additional garments or mix them with new fabric. I haven't encountered many restrictions; the process is collaborative, and I try to respect their emotional connection to the materials.
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Do you believe that sustainability and circular usage of fashion can serve as a long-term solution to the pollution and waste issues faced by the fashion industry?	Yes, but only if people understand what sustainability actually means. It's not simply choosing a "natural" or "organic" fabric - sustainability is about durability and economic sense. If an organic fabric costs a lot but wears out quickly, that's not sustainable. A sustainable garment lasts, can be restyled or reused, and is accessible in price or lifespan to make sense at scale.	I do believe in the potential of circular fashion as a long-term solution, primarily because it keeps materials in the loop and out of landfills. Sustainability is more complex, but if we design garments more mindfully, by planning their entire life cycle, enabling reuse, upcycling, or repurposing after their initial use, we can have a meaningful impact on waste reduction.	I believe in circularity as a long-term solution. As for sustainability, I feel it's more of a lifestyle choice—it has to be personal. Sustainability is often used as a loose term in our industry.
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How do you think technology influences the process of manipulating or transforming fabrics in circular design?	In the couture work I did, technology played very little part - most work was handcrafted and highly customized. We tried patternmaking tools or certain tech once or twice, but the designer preferred one-of-a-kind hand techniques. So technology isn't always necessary; for mass or industrial applications it helps, but for bespoke, hand-finished couture, the technical skill and manual making were primary.	Technology has both positive and negative impacts. On the downside, e-commerce and social media constantly tempt us with new fashion, pushing unnecessary consumption. But technology also enables transparency, traceability of fabrics, and better monitoring of environmental impacts, like water treatment. So, it aids the process in important ways even as it creates challenges.	Technology definitely helps by speeding up production and automating some processes, like cutting layers of fabric. Circularly, the main impact of technology is at the design stage, not so much during cutting.
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Do you think social media and e-commerce platforms support sustainable fashion brands like yours by aiding visibility, or do they contribute more to greenwashing, making it difficult for authentic voices to stand out?	Social media is a double-edged sword. It can raise awareness, but it also creates pressure not to repeat outfits (trolling around repetitions) and generates celebrity-driven fast copy markets. When celebrities wear something, it gets copied cheaply without quality control - that increases waste. So while social platforms can help authentic brands be visible, they also encourage unsustainable behaviors and make it harder for genuine voices to stand out among PR and greenwashing.	While not addressed explicitly in the transcript, my comments suggest that social media and e-commerce create both opportunities and problems. They provide visibility but also flood the space with greenwashing, making it harder for authentic, truly sustainable brands to stand out among superficial claims.	Social media can be used for greenwashing, so its support depends on the brand's ideology. If a brand is committed to sustainability, these platforms can help with visibility, but they can't prevent greenwashing by brands that are not genuine.
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What is the biggest challenge you have faced in establishing your systems and gaining the trust of your customers?	The biggest challenge is maintaining the highest quality consistently - from sourcing the right fabric to hand finishing - so that customers trust the piece will last and can be passed on or remade. Building that production discipline, being involved in production, and educating customers about why quality (not just label claims) matters were key to earning trust.	A major challenge is dealing with the stigma attached to reused or upcycled clothing, especially among older or less-informed consumers. Not everyone is comfortable with second-hand or hand-me-down garments, which is a barrier—so building trust and shifting mindsets, especially outside younger or more trend-aware audiences, is something I continually work on.	I used to have clients who brought me their pre-loved garments; working with them was usually mutually easy, and I didn't face major challenges in gaining their trust.
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How does your brand personally interpret and integrate circular fashion within its creative or production process?	I integrate circularity by making pieces that are timeless and technically convertible: use the best materials, hand-finish everything, and design with future reuse in mind so an embroidered choli or sari can later be turned into a gown or tunic. The production practice - high quality, durability, and technical knowledge to adapt garments later is how circularity is practically implemented.	Personally, I use pattern-making that minimizes waste, designing garments that can be easily repaired, and trying to avoid mixed materials (like zippers and plastic buttons). I aim to make garments size-flexible, so they fit longer and can be shared, and I want the pieces I create to always have a pathway to come back to me for repurposing, keeping the loop closed.	I focused on upcycling the side cuts that were left over after production, sometimes from batches of 200 or 500 pieces. Recycling of scraps was my way of integrating circularity into my process.
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Do you think generational values regarding fabric reuse and recycling affect your ability to acquire materials or attract customers?	Yes, cultural attitudes matter. In India, there is still scope to build awareness: people worry about what others think and may shy away from visible reuse. But I've seen examples (like a guest who wore the same styled outfits across days) that show styling can change perception. We need to teach styling and aesthetic reuse so that reuse becomes aspirational again.	Absolutely. Traditional practices like quilting and kantha have declined because there's now a stigma attached to second-hand clothing. People see it as a sign of not being able to afford new things, rather than valuing the story or sustainability. While younger generations are driving trends like thrifting, the older generation still resists, and overall, only a small percentage of the population is really aware of or participating in these models.	I find that today's generation believes a lot in upcycling and recycling and is more conscious about what they use, so generational values actually support my ability to attract customers.
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RESULTS

1. Practical challenges when working with recycled or upcycled textiles

- Designers consistently face inconsistent fabric quality, variations in thickness, weave, and durability.

- Colorfastness and dye absorption become unpredictable due to previous washes or unknown fiber compositions.
- Consumer acceptance is mixed—some appreciate the uniqueness, while others perceive reused materials as “second-hand” or “imperfect.”
- Scaling production is difficult because each scrap batch is different, making standardization nearly impossible.

2. Balancing aesthetic appeal with imperfections in reused materials

- Imperfections are often reframed as design features, such as patchwork, visible mending, or kantha stitching.
- Designers adopt a storytelling approach, highlighting irregularities as marks of history and authenticity.
- They strategically use clean silhouettes to balance the textural complexity of mismatched or aged fabrics.
- Some incorporate hand embroidery or artisanal detailing to elevate rough textures into premium-looking outcomes.

3. Combining traditional Indian reuse practices with international sustainability standards

- Designers blend methods like kantha, chindi weaving, patchwork, and border repurposing with global standards such as LCA-based sourcing, traceability, and EPR principles.
- Cultural identity is preserved through motifs, draping logic, craft techniques, and local textile knowledge.
- Compliance with certifications (GOTS, Fair Trade) is challenging because traditional crafts are informal and decentralized.
- Designers emphasize that indigenous reuse systems are already circular, and they reinterpret them for global markets without dilution.

4. Sourcing fabrics and the challenges involved

- Sourcing comes from factory deadstock, post-consumer garments, artisanal waste, or scrap dealers.

- Designers struggle with irregular supply, limited availability, and a lack of reliable documentation on fiber content.
- Some clients hesitate to give personal garments due to sentimental value, slowing down the sourcing process.
- Waste segregation at the industry level is poor, making material sorting time-consuming and labor-intensive.

5. Managing clients' emotional attachments and creating emotional durability

- Designers often act as mediators, balancing client sentiment with practical design constraints.
- When clients disagree with outcomes, designers provide co-creation sessions, showing moodboards, samples, or mock-ups to align expectations.
- Emotional durability is strengthened by retaining meaningful elements—borders, motifs, embroidery sections, or recognizable fabric panels.
- Some designers educate clients about the value of transformation, helping them see upcycling as preserving—not destroying—the memory.

6. Is sustainability and circular fashion a long-term solution?

- Most believe circular fashion is essential but not sufficient alone; it must be paired with reduced consumption and better infrastructure.
- Upcycling is seen as a long-term cultural solution, especially in India, where reuse traditions already exist.
- Designers highlight that circularity can slow down waste generation, but industry-wide adoption is needed to make an impact.

7. Influence of technology on fabric manipulation in circular design

- Technology supports pattern generation, digital prototyping, and material simulation, reducing physical waste.
- AI tools help visualize how scraps can be recomposed, aiding efficient layout planning in patchwork and zero-waste design.

- Digital printing enables designers to mask imperfections or unify mismatched textile surfaces.
- However, the final manipulation remains craft-driven, as reused fabrics require hand-based adjustments.

8. Role of social media and e-commerce—support or greenwashing?

- Social media gives small sustainable brands visibility, niche audiences, and education-based storytelling.
- At the same time, heavy greenwashing by large brands creates noise and confusion, making authenticity harder to prove.
- E-commerce algorithms favor speed and trends, so slow fashion brands must work harder to communicate value.
- Brands rely on behind-the-scenes content to build trust and differentiate from superficial sustainability claims.

9. Biggest challenges in establishing systems and gaining customer trust

- Convincing customers that reused textiles can be premium and hygienic is a major hurdle.
- Setting up transparent sourcing and production systems is difficult due to the informal waste ecosystem.
- Price justification is challenging because upcycling is labor-intensive, leading customers to compare it to cheaper fast-fashion options.
- Trust is built slowly through clear communication, testimonials, and transparency about processes.

10. How the brand interprets and integrates circular fashion

- Many brands see circularity as a design philosophy, not a trend—something embedded from sourcing to finishing.
- Circular practices include zero-waste cutting, modular garments, repair services, take-back programs, and upcycling lines.

- Brands emphasize craft retention, treating artisans as custodians of traditional circularity.
- Circularity is also expressed through small-batch production and discouraging overconsumption.

11. Impact of generational values on fabric reuse and customer attraction

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- Older generations contribute materials because of their habit of saving fabrics, enabling strong sourcing for upcycling.
- Younger consumers are increasingly drawn to sustainability narratives, but may lack long-term material attachment.
- Family traditions—gifting saris, saving borders, mending clothes—create a cultural familiarity that supports brand acceptance.
- However, some customers still equate reuse with economic necessity, creating social stigma barriers that designers must challenge.

CONCLUSION

India's long-standing culture of repair, reuse, and craft-led transformation offers a regenerative blueprint for the future of sustainable fashion. Contemporary designers are expanding this legacy by merging indigenous practices with global standards, proving that circularity thrives most where tradition and innovation walk together. In this evolving landscape, the path forward is shaped by systems that honour India's inherent legacy of sustainability.

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