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### Indigenous traditional trousseau from Bihar: A revival through “Design Intervention”

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#### Abstract

Once upon a time, Bihar had indigenous traditional trousseaus, but only a few have stood the test of time. One of these trousseaus, “Bharua Qaseeda Kurti” has gone completely extinct or forgotten by the people. Only to be found in museums or lying somewhere in someone’s house. It is beautiful, vibrant, and full of a high level of craftsmanship and artistry. Such art should be revived, preserved, promoted, and passed on to the next generation.

This trousseau has two attractive features. The first feature is a magnificent hand-embroidered motif. The second feature is the unique style of sewing, drafting, and cutting techniques. The silhouette of this trousseau is also unique. Through intervention, an attempt has been made to make its second feature, ‘contemporary’, and to know what has been done so far to revive such extinct crafts and what have been the results.

**Keywords:** design intervention, sustainable fashion, couture fashion, high fashion, ready to wear, bespoke tailoring, made-to-measure, contemporary, craft-based skill training, livelihood programs, and employment opportunities.

#### Introduction

Bihar, one of the Indian states, is known as the Land of Buddha, the birthplace of India’s first Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, ferocious warrior Ashoka, Mata Sita, Guru of Sikhism: Guru Gobind Singh, and 24<sup>th</sup> Jain Tirthankara Mahavira. Bihar had four unique regions: Bhojpur, Mithilanchal, Santhal Pargana, and Magadha. (Now Santhal Pargana is known as one of the Indian States, Jharkhand).

All regions were diverse from each other in terms of history, culture, customs, rituals, food, festival, livelihood, etc. But despite the diversity, one thing was common between all the regions, the traditional attire worn by women: Saree, Qaseeda Kurti (blouse), and Tahmal (petticoat or underskirt). No doubt, the style of draping a saree was different in all regions, and the same is still in practice today.

Detailed information about Qaseeda Kurti can be read in the following research paper titled “Bharua Qaseeda Kurti”, One of the Forgotten Traditional Trousseau from Bihar (2022).

Intricately detailed, beautiful traditional trousseau, Bharua Qaseeda Kurti is a completely handcrafted blouse. It contains two types of craft.

- First is its beautiful intricate Qaseeda embroidery
- Second is its pattern cutting and unique sewing technique

Keeping in mind the uniqueness of this Qaseeda style, hand sewing, and hand stitching technique, the current research paper aims to revive this trousseau in different fashion categories like couture fashion, high fashion, and ready-to-wear, along with bespoke tailoring, made-to-order and sustainable fashion style. This traditional craft needs design intervention to save it and pass it on to the younger generation.

#### Research Gap

Many famous designers have tried to revive extinct, disappeared, faded Indian traditional trousseaus, fabrics, prints, embroideries, etc. Some famous and surviving costumes have also been worked on, such as the traditional costumes of Rajasthan and Gujrat. Most of the traditional costumes of the Indian royal houses have been revived by Indian lead designers like

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Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Ritu Kumar. Traditional trousseau Chamba Rumal from Himachal Pradesh has been kept in the category of extinct by the Government of India, and efforts are being made to revive it.

But no one tried to revive, didn't even pay attention to this trousseau of Bihar. This is completely ignored by the designer, craft enthusiasts, students, and State Government. We started to work on it in 2016.

#### **Design Intervention:** (A tool for the revival of the crafts)

Especially in rural India, a significant part of our economy, diverse typed, dispersed, and ignored handicraft sector were known as an unorganized sector. Initially, it was started as a part-time activity, but gradually, it has evolved into a full-time activity. This has been possible due to the market's huge demand over time. Handicrafts are currently playing a major role in sustainable livelihoods and employment opportunities. Currently, design intervention is bridging the gap between traditional processes and contemporary processes. It's needful:

- A. For the revival of extinct disappeared, forgotten, and faded crafts:
  - To save, preserve, and upgrade craft, craftsmanship, and artistry along with the upliftment of artisan's life and well-being.
- B. For commercial projects, where products are done routinely, design intervention helps:
  - to simplify the production process to develop a new range of products
  - to change the traditional design, shape, size, and color, and improve the functionality, utility, and efficiency of a product to contemporary design and be more saleable.
  - to explore the new possibilities of trends and techniques while keeping the essence of a particular craft safe.
  - to develop a positive understanding and healthy relationship between designers and crafts persons.

#### **Objective**

Understanding the importance of design intervention in crafts and craftsmanship, and artistry, the aim of this paper is

- to develop a range of ready-to-wear contemporary clothing with maintaining trousseau's essence.
- to introduce and popularise this trousseau in the fashion industry and the younger generation as a fashionable garment with innovative, contemporary, and sustainable designs.
- to revitalize this dead craft for sustainable livelihoods and generate employment opportunities, especially for women.

#### **5. Type of Fashion**

- A. **Sustainable fashion** means all manufacturing processes like pre-production; cropping, fibre, yarn, weaving, and post-production; material sourcing, dyeing, cutting, tailoring, finishing, packaging, promotion, and marketing of garment construction should be environment friendly. It also supports worker's welling; infrastructure, safety, security, and worker's quality of life; salary, wages, and health.
- B. **Couture Fashion** means order-based exclusive and expensive clothing with maintaining sustainable norms. Under this category, the garment is made in special demand and limited quantity maintaining high quality by hand executed technique for the individual customers.
- C. **High Fashion** means ready-to-wear clothing using

exclusive fabric and quality stitching, finishing, and detailing techniques. This category maintains current trends and forecasts of designs, colors, fabrics, prints, and details in a garment. High fashion supports made-to-measure clothing culture as well as ready-to-wear clothing culture.

- D. **The ready-to-wear fashion** category belongs to mass production for many sizes. This category refers to the simply designed garments that are made for many sizes without adjustment and alterations. It supports export quality garment culture. It's known as **prêt-à-porter** or RTW also.
- E. **Made-to-order** means customer-based clothing. It is the most sustainable method of developing a garment. In the current time, it is appreciated as a new norm of sustainable fashion.
- F. **Contemporary Clothing** means simple, sophisticated, trendy, quality material used and easily accessible in terms of price. This style targets mostly the younger generation of consumers.

#### **Research Methodology**

This paper is based on experimentation, exploration, and testing (review of customers). For the revival of this forgotten trousseau and craft, my approach is: collective

- The first step is to organize a training workshop on the unique style of hand stitching techniques (how to sew without a machine) for rural women.
- Second step: After the training, with help of trained women create a range of trained women to develop a range of ready-to-wear with contemporary design and develop an individual client-based dress (couture/high/sustainable fashion).
- Third step: for the review of garments, must sell digitally and at retail.

#### **Literature Review**

As we know that there are innumerable crafts in our country, but due to urbanization, mechanization, industrialization, and education, some of them have disappeared, some we have forgotten, some faded with time, and some are going to extinct. There is a need to save and preserve them. But on the other side of this situation, there are some famous ones also and some have been able to maintain their identity continuously.

The government of India, Indian State Governments, Union Territories, Institutes (NID, NIFT, IICD, Skill University) NGOs, Trusts, Private organizations, Designers, Brands, Individual Personalities, and a group of students have given big contributions to saving, preserving, and reviving such crafts and craftsmanship). Our crafts are also receiving international recognition because of their efforts.

In this order of reviving, preserving, promoting, and keeping Indian craft alive, here are some following examples, which we are discussing.

**New Education Policy:** Mahatma Gandhi was a strong proponent of "Learning by Doing", work integrated learning, manual skill honing, and self-reliance through sustainable livelihoods. These days Government of India is trying to implement Gandhi Ji's unique idea of "learning by doing" to strengthen vocational and skill-based education from school level to post-graduate level through NEP 2020. Because craft-centered education can give international recognition to traditional crafts as well as contemporize them for today's

needs, and at the same time can make students self-reliant.

The government of India (Ministry of Textile, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Culture, Rural Development, and Tribal affairs) is running two types of schemes with help of the Government of the Indian States and Union Territories.

First is National Handicrafts Development Program (NHDP)

- Marketing Support and Services
- Skill Development in Handicraft Sector
- Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana (AHVY)
- Direct Benefit to Artisans
- Infrastructure and Technology Support
- Research, Document, and Development Scheme.

Second is the Comprehensive handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme

Craft revival Trust is a non-profit organization, an initiative of the Ministry of culture, Government of India, dedicated to establishing a knowledge and information infrastructure for folk arts, crafts, and textiles. Trust is running many projects like:

- Parampara for research, document, and publication
- Saathi Re for bridging the gap between those who want to give support and those who need support
- Asia InCH works for Address Directory (Across Indian Traditional Craftspeople, Weavers, and Artists)
- India InCH works for Address Directory (Across Indian Traditional Craftspeople, Weavers, and Artists)

Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Electronics and IT have taken initiative for two projects to preserve and revive “Namda” the dying craft, and Upskilling of artisans and weavers of Kashmir in November 2021 under the recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) a component of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0 with the coordination of Handicrafts & Carpet Sector Skill Council (HCSSC). This pilot project is beneficial for 30 Namda clusters from 6 districts of Kashmir.

**Design Institutes:** The Government of India and private organizations have set up specialized craft-based institutes like “Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialization”, Wardha, Maharashtra, IICD (Rajasthan), IICT (Bhadohi, UP), SIDAC (Odisha), NID(Gujrat), CDI (Srinagar, Kashmir), Handloom School (MP), BRTC (Chichpalli, Maharashtra), IWS (Bangalore), DSEU(Delhi), Shri Vishwakarma Skill University (Haryana), and many more.

Designer Anita Dongre’s and Ritu Kumar’s contribution to the international recognition of Indian craft, culture, and practices, we can’t ignore. We can notice their love for traditional craft, attire, jewellery, footwear, looks, fabrics, prints, and patterns whether it’s their luxury collection or ready-to-wear or designer collection.

A big-name TATA TRUST is also running a craft-based livelihood program “Antaran”. The Antaran project aims to rejuvenate and revive of handloom sector through design interventions.

**Rivaayat (group of student’s initiative):** A group of few students from Shri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi, are working on the revival of dying art and craft.

- Their first venture is to increase the demand for terracotta pottery for the 600 potter families of India’s largest potter colony, Prajapati Nagar, New Delhi.

- The second Initiative is to preserve the water hyacinth basket craft. For this, they are training tribal women in “Khatima”, a small tribal village in Uttarakhand, and empowering them by providing a sustainable source of livelihood.
- The Pioneers of the Indian craft sector: In this order of preserving, promoting, and keeping Indian craft alive, we can’t forget the contribution of few individuals and craft enthusiasts, whose endless efforts and hard work have given an organized shape to spilt handloom and handicraft sector. We can say them, The pillars and Grande Dames of Indian crafts.

The pillar of the Indian craft sector, Ramon Magsaysay awardee, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, and congruent writer Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay (1903-1988) was known as “The Hathkargha Maa” because of her revolutionary vision and selfless contribution towards handloom. She pioneered an indispensable role in uplifting women’s financial and social empowerment through handloom, handicraft, and theatre.

Padma Bhushan, Pupal Jayakar (1915- 1997) was best known as “India’s Czarina of Culture”. She came into the eyes of the world when she founded a craft fair and festival and took the Indian village’s art and craft to the world platform. She had played a big role in the revival of Mahabubani Painting of Bihar.

Jasleen Dhamija, a craft revivalist, veteran writer, and Indian textile and art historian, is known as a Pioneer of Textile Research. She has worked for community development, handicraft, the prosperity of Indian textile and handloom, and especially women’s employment, a handicraft board, where she directly worked with artisans in rural areas.

Ela Bhatt, Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Gandhian, Founder of the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and Head of Textile Labor Association (TLA) women wing, has won numerous national and international recognition including Ramon Magsaysay, The Right Livelihood award for Changing lives of home-based textile women worker to respected self-employed women.

Padma Shri, Laila Tyabji, is also a Craft Activist, Founder of Dastkar (New Delhi), Social worker, Writer, and Designer. She has opened the world market to artisans and craft people. She believes in contemporary design ideas. She likes to use the internet and social media as strong and direct marketing tools.

Padma Shri Runa Banerjee is known for her work towards women living in slum areas and marginalized women. She has fought for the payment of fair wages to the artisans of Chikan Embroidery Industry, Lucknow, UP. Ms. Banerjee started an organization in 1984 called the Self-employed women’s association (SEWA) with the mission “earn while you learn”. For her single-handedly immense and selfless contribution to society, she was nominated for the ‘NOBEL PEACE PRIZE’ in 2005 from the central region of India.

Mrs. Sally Holkar, Founder and CEO of Women Weave (WW) Charitable Trust, and Co-founder of REHWA Society. She is one of the members of the royal family (Queen Ahilyabai Holkar, Maratha dynasty).

WW charitable trust is working for the revival of handloom and sustainable, profitable, and dignified livelihood for Maheshwar weavers. Within WW charitable trust, Gudi Mudi, The Handloom School, and Khat-Khat projects are running. Gudi Mudi project supports only the poorest and weakest women as divorced, widowed, separated, handicapped and laborers, who work in cotton farming with no family income.



The Handloom School running a Barefoot project to train the young generation, especially girls for weaving and spinning. Under this project, WW has applied a holistic approach to education and a collective approach to skill training.

Under the “Khat-khat” project, WW has set up a unit for regular employment. WW is initiating the first-time revival of only hand spinning, weaving fabrics, and sarees. This project is completely run by only tribal women.

Jaya Jaitley is a craft revivalist, curator, promoter, politician, writer, and founder of Delhi Haat and Dastkari Haat Samiti. Under the theme Krishi and Kala, she promotes craft and craftsmanship with their traditional food, recipe, and way of serving food. She has designed and documented 24 extremely exquisite and unique Craft Atlas for the Indian states.

Ms. Judy Frater, a US-born, textile researcher and co-founder of India's first design school for tribal artisans “Kala Raksha Vidyalaya”, founder of “Somaiya Kala Vidya”, is also known as Textile and Craft Curator. She has been living and working for tribal communities of Kutch for 30 years. She noticed their potential in handicraft and handloom weaving. She explored the variety of tribal embroidery. She encourages artisans to innovate and trains artisans on attracting and retaining customer attention, understanding their feedback and needs, and, most importantly, delivering on time.

Jasmina Zeliang is the winner of the JSW X AD Prize for contemporary craftsmanship and the founder of “Heirloom Naga”, a textile and weaving centre in Dimapur Nagaland. She has given a height and unique identity to Naga Textile on the global stage. She started her centre with the single tribal female weaver and now she is working with approx. 450 tribal women. She empowered this single tribal female weaver first and set an example of how to generate employment.

Textile and fashion designer Swati Kalsi is a creative thinker and innovator. She introduced to the world a beautiful, excellent, classic, and contemporary style of handcrafted Sujani craft. She developed her first high-end luxury clothing range of Sujani hand embroidery through design intervention. Due to the high level of craftsmanship and artistry, her first collection was recognized as an exquisite and museum-quality collector's item. One of the art pieces of the first collection was displayed in Albert Museum.

Nomad Community Kalbeliya is known for its tribal dance form, but they have one another skill in their hand: Bed-Quilt making. Bed-Quilt locally known as ‘Godadis’ and made from old cloth and fabric scraps.

Madan Meena, Kota heritage society convener and nomadic community researcher has found in his survey, that some women of this community were making this hand-stitched bed-quilt. Because of lockdown, they had no dance performance offer. Madan Meena has taken initiative to train Kalbeliya women for sustainable livelihood and decided to revive this hand-stitched bed-quilt craft. For this project, the Indian Institute of Craft and Design, NIFT Jodhpur, NIFT Kannur, and Gitanjali of Moha Jewellery came forward to arrange training, materials, and funds too. Intern Pallavi Singh, a student from IICD stayed with these women for two years in the Boondi District, Rajasthan. She trained to give the contemporary look to bed quilts. Gitanjali Brand has taken responsibility to sell bed quilts.

This research paper is inspired by such individual strong women, who made society stronger through their unforgettable efforts and revolutionary in-kind contribution. These individual talents have revived, preserved, and conserved Indian crafts and craftsmanship. They have revitalized Indian crafts and restored sustainable livelihood, generated employment, and empowered especially rural, poor, weak, and forced women.

## 8. Challenges and Support:

To recreate and popularise this traditional trousseau into contemporary design was a big challenge. The biggest challenge was that of the fund and the second challenge was to make it for which one unit was needed to explore. For this revival project, we met many designers and manufacturers, but things did not work out. Kanishk Bhardwaj, one of the old students, a reputed designer, who successfully runs a clothing company “Haryarnv- A sustainable fashion Brand”, agreed to support this project. The entire project was sponsored by his company and all finished products were marketed, promoted, and sold under the same brand.

In the exhibition, digital and retail marketing was used to sell. In the view of today's time, the dresses were made for females from 18years to 45years.



Fig 1: Brand Haryanvi

## 9. Exploration

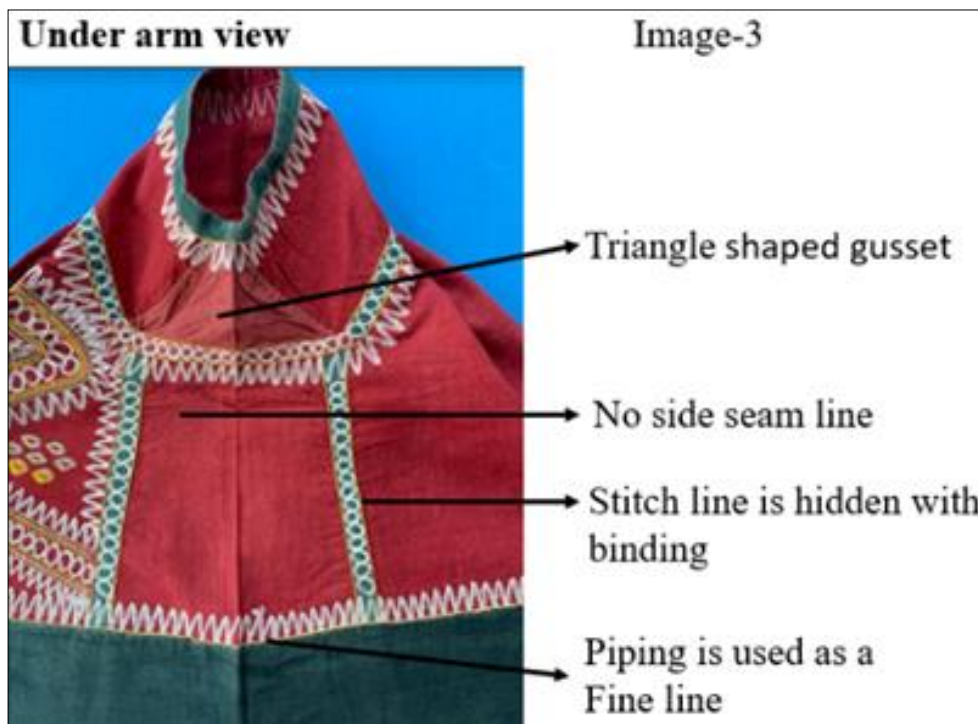
We started this project in October 2016 and we were ready for the promotion and sale at the end of January 2017. For the revival of this trousseau, we analyzed pattern cutting and sewing techniques. It's a slightly A-line trousseau with a square armhole. All explorations like designing, patternmaking, muslin-fits, fabric, cutting, tailoring, finishing, promotion, digital marketing, retailing, exhibition, made-to-order, customer feedback, courier, packing, delivery, etc.

were done in the manufacturing unit of 'Haryarnv- A Sustainable Fashion Brand'.

At that time, HARYARNV had 15 employees and 6 interns in total. Only 3 of them were men (tailors), and the rest were women. Women were managing to account, maintaining files, storing, sourcing, embroidery, pressing, thread cutting, finishing, packing, courier, cleaning, etc. It was a collective approach to finish this project.



**Fig 2:** Description of Kurti: front and back view



**Fig 3:** Under arm view

### Description of Kurti

#### Front view (2A)

Handcrafted (stitching and embroidery both) and adorned with a beautiful, vibrant centre motif "Shining Sun"

- i. Square armhole with short sleeve and triangle-shaped gusset
- ii. Shoulder to waist length (Kurti length)

- iii. Stitch line is hidden with different color binding, facing, piping and embroidery
- iv. Sleeve bottom finished with binding and piping
- v. Crew neckline, front slit, and finished with binding
- vi. side seam line Motif used: Centre motif- Circle with Mandala style filling, Zig-Zag pattern in the whole Kurti,



- small hill patterns  
vii. Bottom of the Kurti finished with contrast wide border

- a. Light embroidered  
b. Full neck  
c. Stitch line, armhole, sleeve, bottom same as the front

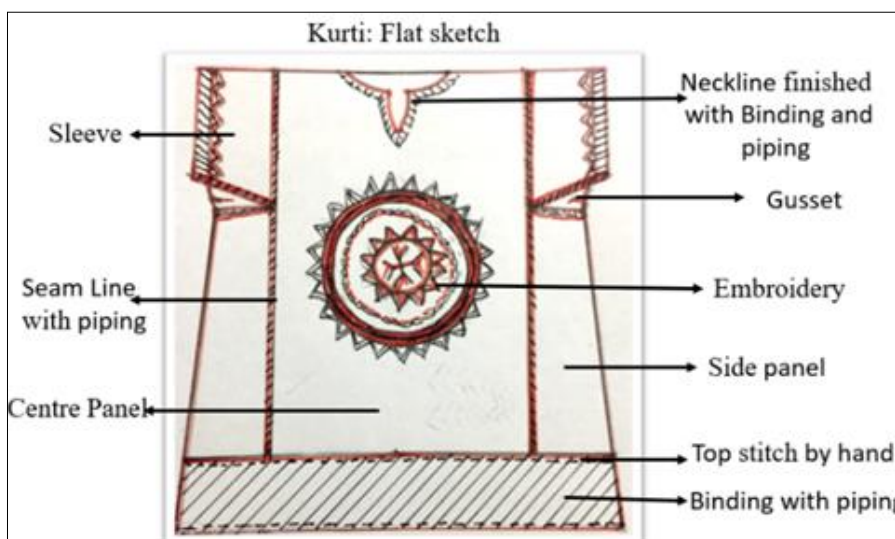
#### Back View (2B)



**Fig 4:** Stitching and Detailing Technique

The numbering in the Fig-4 on stitching and detailing technique stands for the following:

1. Usage of piping as a decorative line (make difference between two things). Piping gives extra strength to the stitch line of a dress and enhances the decorative effect.
2. **Detailing:** This is a very small, intricate, subtle, and unique feature called an element of design. Specially used to enhance the design. The biggest characteristic of detailing is, that when we use this small element in the design, people can't ignore noticing.
3. Backstitch is a multi-usable hand embroidery stitch and wing stitch. A permanent kind of tacking or basting by hand, it is mostly used in couture fashion garments. When we use it for permanent stitching, need so much
4. Triangle-shaped gusset used in the underarm for the better movement of hands. Sometimes rhombus and square-shaped gusset were also used for the sleeve. Gusset a small piece of fabric is used for easy movement, wider opening, and reducing stress from tight-fitting clothing. The shape of the gusset can be rhombus, diamond, square, or triangle.
5. Hemming from the back side of the dress. Hemming is also a permanent kind of basting or tacking sewing technique that is also done by hand.
6. Used contrast color for sleeve bottom band.



**Fig 5:** Flat Sketch

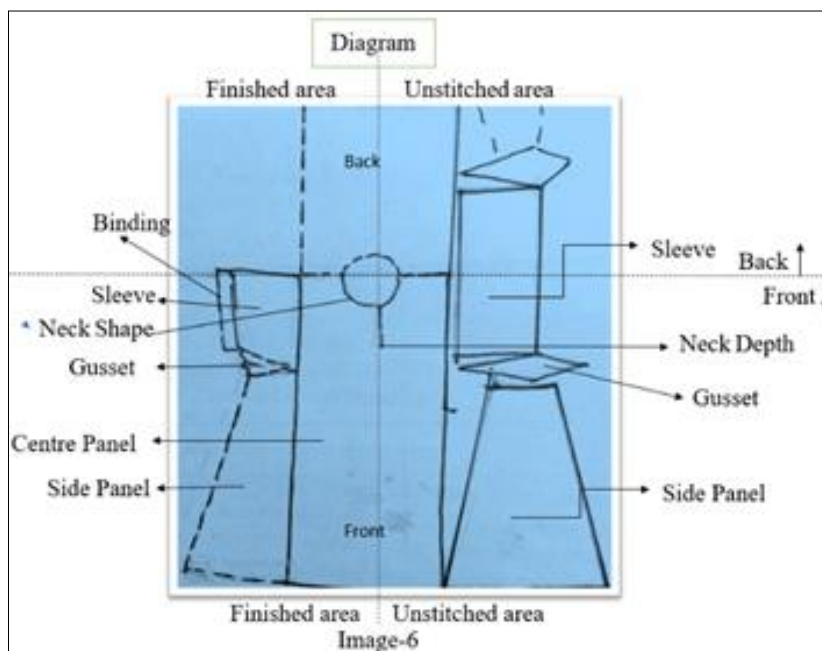


Fig 6: Diagram

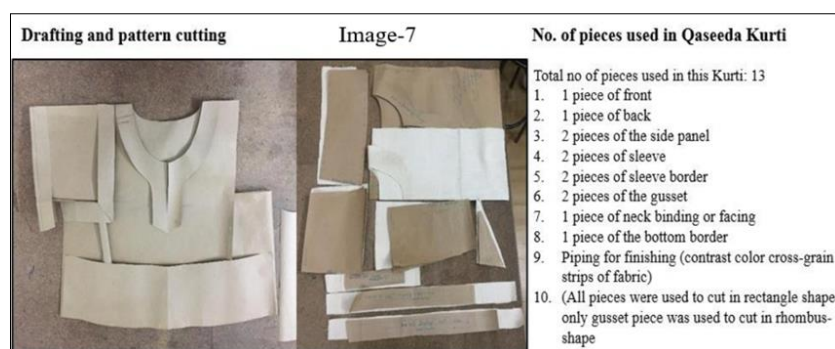


Fig 7: Drafting and Pattern Cutting

### 11. Contemporary Design:

We designed two types of contemporary clothing range of crop tops and long dresses. In crop top, we played with the sleeve, neck, collar, facing, and bottom. In the long dress, we add a pocket, waistband, back yoke, variety of sleeves, collars, plackets, and high low bottom. The materials used are

Linen, Cotton, Ikat, Kasavu Cotton, Machilipatnam Kalamkari, and Chanderi Silk. We can see this in Figs 8, 9, 10, and 11. We tried to keep our design sustainable. A single Long dress and crop top can wear repeatedly with many styles.

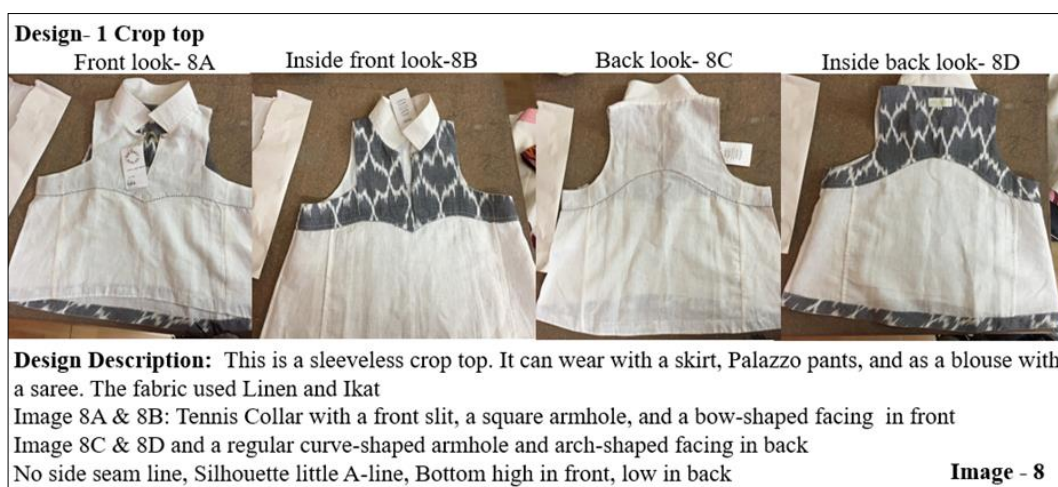
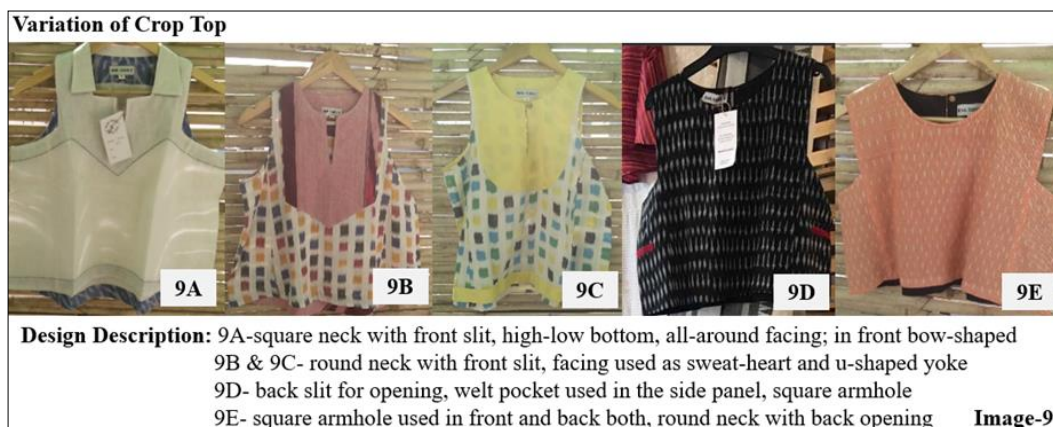
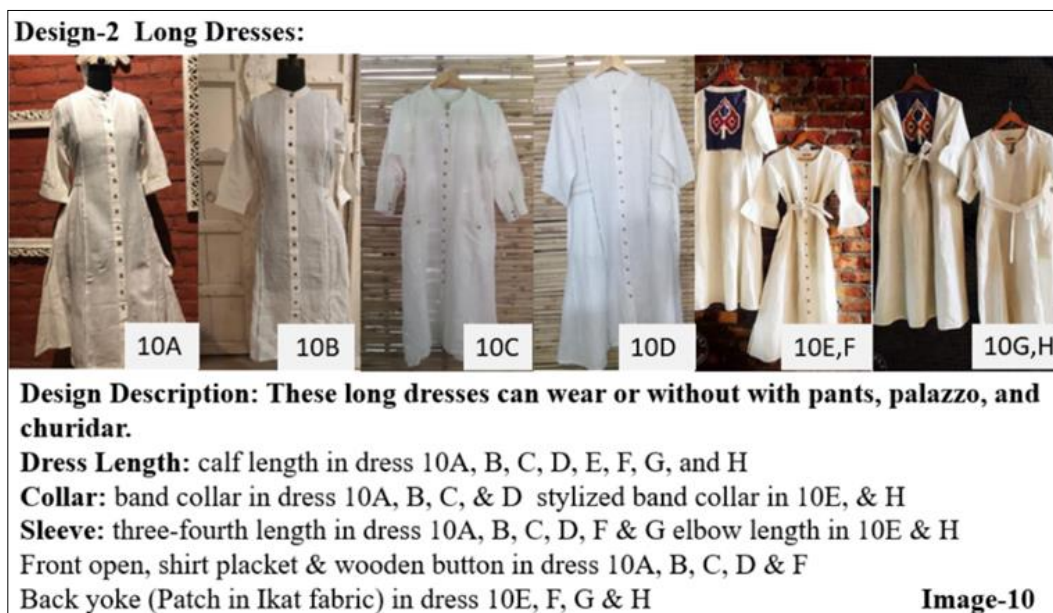


Fig 8: Design-1 Crop Top Fig Source: From Haryarnv





**Fig 9:** Variation of Crop Top Fig Source: From Haryarnv



**Fig 10:** Long Dress Fig Source: From Haryarnv



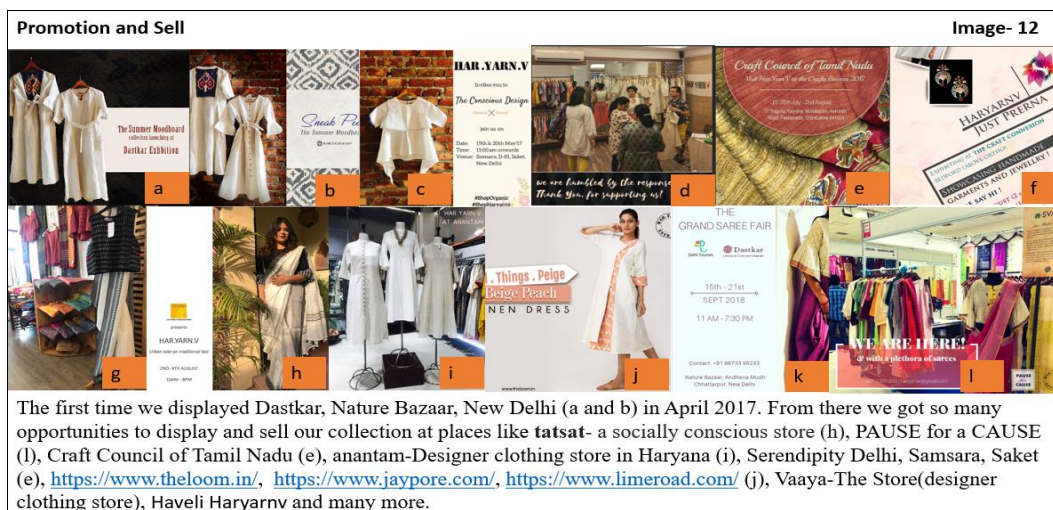
**Fig 11:** Crop Top paired with Palazzo and Saree Fig Source: From Haryarnv

## 12. Promotion and Sale

After making the sample, now it was our turn to sell it. A photoshoot was done for the promotion and decided to sell it both online and offline. Until then, we were not sure whether it would be sold because fitted blouses with saree were in

trend, but people wanted to purchase stylish blouses. When we displayed, we got so much appreciation and order. From April 2017 to 2018 under the banner of Haryarnv, it was displayed and sold online and offline (exh) in many places.

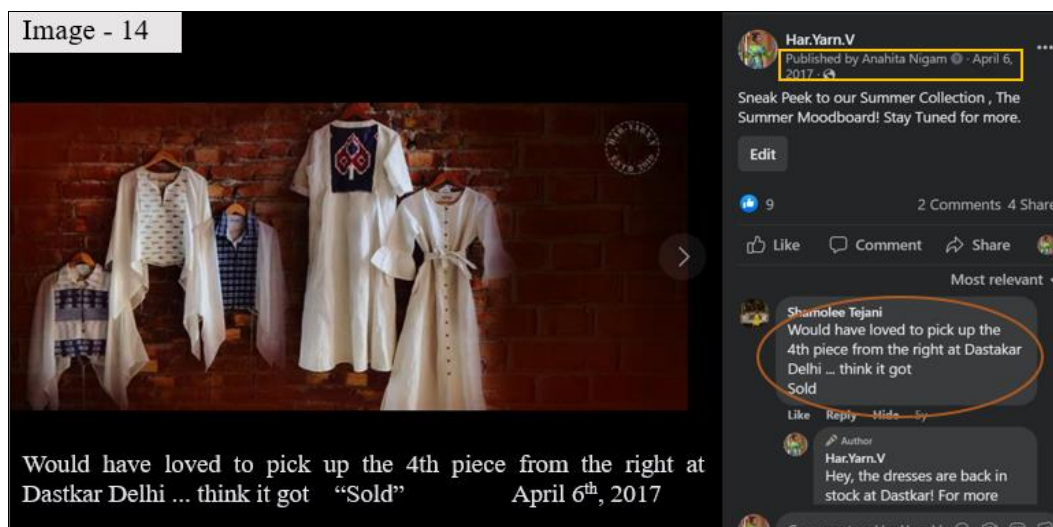




**Fig 12:** Promotion & Sell Fig Source: <http://www.haryarnv.com/>, [https://www.facebook.com/Haryarnv/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/Haryarnv/photos/?ref=page_internal), <https://www.instagram.com/official.haryarnv/>



**Fig 13:** Sustainable Design: repeat & restyle Fig Source: <https://www.instagram.com/official.haryarnv/>



**Fig 14:** Appreciation & Order Fig Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Haryarnv/photos/1128038370640439>

### 13. Conclusion

When we designed and thought of developing a crop top, we did not expect it to be appreciated. We made crop tops and for the promotion, a photo shoot was done by matching with a skirt, pants, palazzo, shorts, and saree. During the promotion, we noticed the crop top was liked more by women above than 25 years as compared to young girls. We had the same experience with the dress as it could be also worn with or without lower too. We also noticed women wanted to purchase such dresses that they could use in multiple ways. This contemporary style is still in demand and Haryana is trying to complete orders with design interventions.

We tried to make this project sustainable and, in this sequence, the women working on the brand floor were given training in cutting and tailoring crop tops. We got excellent support from these trained women.

In the craft revival project, the design, quality, cost, material, shape, size, color, features, packaging, usability, and functionality also play an important role.

### 14 Suggestions for the Design Institutes:

- Design students are considered aspiring designers in our society. They take risks to accomplish what they think. So:
- Design Institutes can greatly contribute to the revival of rare, extinct, dying, disappeared, and faded crafts. They can motivate their students to research, innovate, and uses of design thinking process for design intervention.

Young students can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, artisans and designers, product and usability, cost and market value, traditional promotion and social media methods, challenges and opportunity, sustainable livelihood and job creation, traditional skill and machine, etc. through innovative ideas.

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