

# NOT JUST IN PASSING

*Padmaja Krishnan of Mumbai-based Transit Design has a dream - to continue creating cutting edge clothing through ecological processes that her great granddaughter will be proud of!*



## Why do you prefer to call yourself a 'fashion and textile artist'?

**PK:** The term 'designer' is a little overused and I do not really understand how a designer is different from an artist or a craftsman; and what distinguishes each of them. I draft my patterns, draw my khakas, compose my textures, dye my cloth and sometimes even sew my garment. It's a matter of how one perceives her work and herself. A person who sings may call herself a singer, a vocalist, a musician, an artist or anything else...what really matters is the music she creates.

## What interests you about textiles?

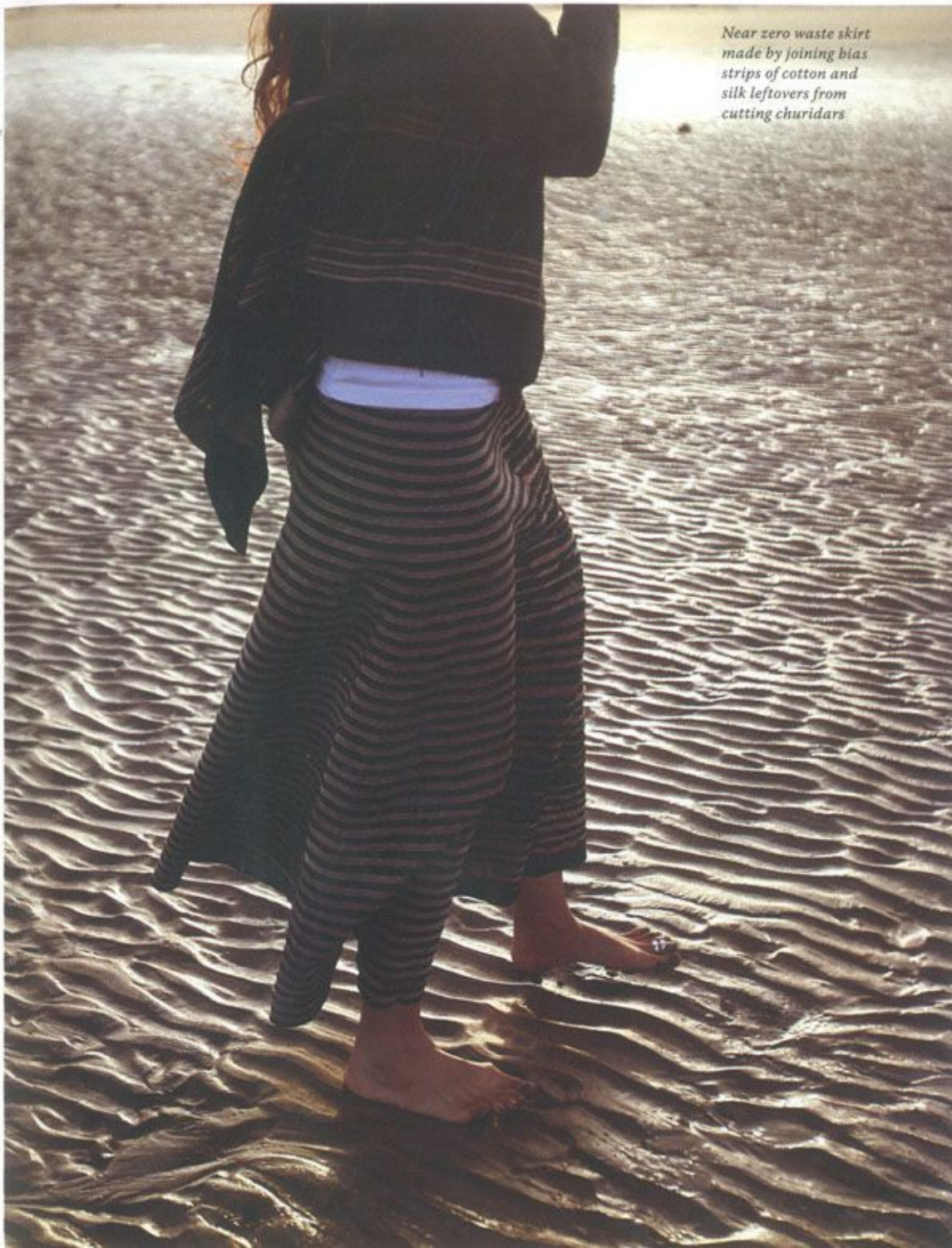
**PK:** Everything about textiles excites me – its tactile nature, its texture, its stretch, its form, its color, and its function. The fact that a piece of textile is always with us, at birth, at death, and at almost all times in between establishes the fascinating connect it has with human life. I find the anthropological aspect of textiles, the way it reflects, enriches and sometimes even robs a society, culture, politics and the economy, an amazing study.

## When did you start your own label?

**PK:** I did a Diploma in Fashion at National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in New Delhi. After three years at NIFT, I worked as a design consultant in Delhi for three more years and at the end of 2005, packed my bags and returned to

[www.transitdesign.in/blog](http://www.transitdesign.in/blog)

*Near zero waste skirt made by joining bias strips of cotton and silk leftovers from cutting churidars*



## TEXTILE

Kolkata (where I was born and brought up). I had no concrete plans other than to reconnect with my roots. A few months passed by and I realized the city did not have an exciting job for me and back then I never believed I was the kind to start my own label. I always loved 'making clothes' and couldn't spend too long not doing that. So one day I took out my mother's old sewing machine, bought some paper, tools and some fabric and started making clothes. 'That' was my big leap into starting my own label. A few months later I won a grant for fashion entrepreneurship that was sufficient motivation for me to hire a studio and tailors, buy machines and set the ball rolling.

### What inspires your creations?

**PK:** The unexpected inspires me and so does the ordinary, everyday and inconspicuous.

### What attitude does your collection convey?

**PK:** Eclectic, understated, elegant, mischievous, sometimes even foolish...but then again, it's never the same.

### Who identifies with your collection?

**PK:** Nina, Carolina, Maya, Meeta, Misti, Naomi, Jayashree, Aparna, Roopa, Sonali, Eleanor, Garima, Yoshiko...eccentric, creative, constructive, progressive people from anywhere in the world!

### What kind of fabrics do you work with?

**PK:** I work with natural fabrics only as they are pleasing to the eye and feel great to touch. And when they are hand spun-hand woven (what in India is referred to as *khadi*) they have a beautiful, natural human touch to them. I never have a scheme. My choices in color, form or texture are random, intuitive and impulsive, though our intuitions and impulses can often be attributed to things we have been exposed to as a child. I was brought up in Kolkata of the 1980s and back then I remember there was a great influence of *khadi* and natural colors in what people wore; the city had a remarkable sense of simplicity and quiet artistic elegance in its sense of clothing and living, which has left an undeniable impression on me. I still source fabrics for my collection from the little *khadi* shops in Kolkata which I used to visit with my mother even as an eight-year-old.

### Are you trying to revive Indian textiles through your collection?

**PK:** I am a student of Indian handicrafts and textiles. The textile tradition of India is timeless, fascinating, inspiring, soulful and most importantly, sustainable. The craft communities are



Near zero waste  
bolero *khadi* silk  
jacket created out  
of bias strips

actually the backbone and life support of the Indian fashion/textile industry, and yet, a profit driven economy like ours has little respect for the communities that kept these traditions alive. I wish to have a mutually enriching long term relationship with the craft communities I work with so that there can be true development of the craft and the community at an economic as well as socio-cultural level.

### How are buyers responding to your collection?

**PK:** I haven't sold through buyers so far. I sell through trunk shows and personal exhibitions. Currently I retail only through Grasshopper in Bangalore.

I enjoy connecting with my end customers directly. I make clothes that are stylish, elegant and contemporary, but they also have an unpretentious simplicity about them. Hence, there are many who immediately connect with them and there are also others who just cannot understand why I make them!

### What is the reaction to your collection internationally?

**PK:** Internationally, people see my look as an alternative and contemporary interpretation of Indian fashion. They find it quirky, clever and artistic. I do not design differently for the international market, but have had exhibitions in



Hundreds of little scraps of silk were patched and sewn together to create this textured jacket

London, Tokyo, Hong Kong and America. It delights me that the pieces I create for my local customers in Mumbai and Kolkata are the same ones I send to Tokyo or London and interestingly, the people there connect with the same silhouettes. Even someone with an eclectic taste such as Eleanor Coppola chose to customize a classic Indian *khadi kurta* with a grunge twist from my studio in Kolkata for her husband Francis Ford Coppola's birthday.

Presently, there is an 'India' buzz in all fields, internationally. The fashion industry in India has been growing rapidly the last decade. India has a fantastic textile heritage and has a huge population of very skilled craftsmen. India also has a versatile population that wears the most diverse and wide range of colors, textures, forms and silhouettes in fashion – from sarees to denims, *churidars*, short skirts, *khadi*, micro fabrics, leather, knits, and *lehengas*. From ochres, reds and purples to mints and peaches; and pastels to black and white monochromes, you have it all.

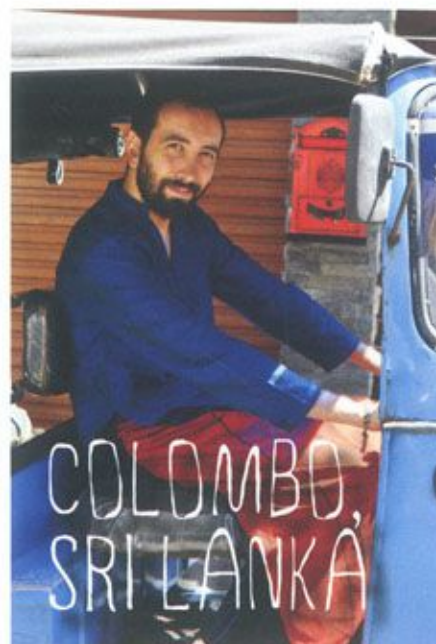
The irony is that while the West seems to be looking at us for inspiration, we want to continue to ape the West and distil our cultural wealth.

#### What is your understanding of the term 'innovation' in relation to fashion?

**PK:** True innovation is precious and timeless and hence not easy to achieve. There is more innovation in relation to fashion than is needed. Some introspection could precede innovation. Fashion that changes too fast only fosters greed, consumption and exploitation. Innovation is desirable but there is also something calming, attractive and sustainable about 'continuity'.

#### Is functionality in fashion as important as style and substance?

**PK:** There is no one way to look at anything. Fashion, like everything else, is an interpretation. There can be fashion for style, for substance, for suspense, for sensation, for gimmick, for horror, for decadence, for anything. It takes all kinds to make this world interesting. ■



Designer on the Road, Cagri Cankaya does work in Sri Lanka that touches his heart!

[www.designerontheroad.com](http://www.designerontheroad.com)



Hello from Colombo, Sri Lanka! I'm doing great here among some lovely people, and working as an art director with McCann Erickson, one of the most well known advertising agencies in the world. The 55-year-old Colombo branch is probably one of the oldest agencies here. I work for a client called Etisalat, a gsm company. I am also helping other teams with ideas and concepts for various projects, such as a non profit project for disabled people.

Sri Lanka has a law for disabled people - if you have a company, you have to hire one disabled person for every 24 employees on the staff. While this is a good thing, nobody is actually doing this! We wanted to work on a campaign - my creative director Alyna told me that we could do anything and use any media. So, instead of making one of those usual print ads for disabled people that say 'They are no different', I wanted to say the opposite. I said 'They are different' and this is what makes them so special and worth employing.

I recommended creating a human resources application for disabled people, where they can upload their information, and resume and employers can search for the right disabled people to hire. There will be categories for different kinds of disabled people and we will use well known disabled people, such as Ray Charles or Beethoven, as icons for each category.

I also worked on packaging for tea and two different calendar projects for Etisalat. They asked us for a simple desk calendar but they wanted to change their communication, which was serious and maybe a little bit boring so far, in a creative and smart way. I didn't want to create just another desk calendar, so I came up with a time box idea. The idea is simple - it's a cube box with a roller. Inside the box we have 10 calendar years printed on rolled up paper. There are also two small pens at the back of the box, one green and one red. At the end of every day you fill in the days with these colors - red means you have had a bad day and green means you have had a nice day!

Sri Lanka has lots of important days and festivals. For the second calendar, I planned special images for specific days for each month. On every card, there are around 30 numbers and every day you connect one dot to another; at the end of the month you draw a picture about that month's special day! The box can turn into a stand for the cards when folded, and can be used as a desk calendar too.

An important thing about Sri Lanka is that they use three languages for everything - Sinhalese, Tamil and English. It's a tough situation - even advertising is done in different languages and every revision from the client has to be made thrice! If you can work in advertising in Sri Lanka I think you can survive anywhere! For more about Colombo take a look at my blog and watch my videos about the city. Cheers! ■