



Poly'nAsia

A Fashionable Fusion of Tongan & Indian Textile Traditions

This exegesis is submitted to

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“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.”

Samita Bhattacharjee

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project. Michelle Khan was the project advisor. Rita Ali and her crew performed the Indian dance at a very short notice. Kasina Paea and Malieta Tasi performed a Tongan dance. Mika was responsible for some brilliant choreography. Ricardo D'Souza was a very lively model and helped with organisation. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of them. I also thank Heather Galbraith, gallery director and curator, for yielding to all our demands.

Last but not the least, I thank my husband Pradip and my daughter Shilpi for their patience and support.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Jyotsna Bhattacharya, who passed away on 31 December 2003.

Abstract:

Poly'nAsia is a practice based research project that identifies and builds from the affinities between traditional Tongan and Indian textile techniques. It seeks to explore and synthesize the parallels between two textile traditions – tapa¹ of Tongatapu in Tonga and kalamkari² of Masulipatnam and Kalahasti in Southern India.

The project functions within the framework of the wider cultural and social contexts. It does not follow a strictly premeditated path or a rigid time line. An intuitive, organic approach is adopted instead, to complement cultural traditions, taking time to build understanding, trust and respect.

A collection of contemporary fashion garments and textiles is produced, inspired by yet distinct from these traditional textiles. The collection is synthesized i.e., it combines elements of tapa and kalamkari to form a coherent whole. This collection has contemporary relevance, while retaining the traditional handcrafted component of tapa and kalamkari.

The investigative and creative process that culminates in the Poly'nAsia collection is documented in this exegesis. The collection was presented at a fashion show on 3rd February, 2005.

¹ 'Tapa' – the inner bark of the paper mulberry (Gillow & Sentance, 1999, p.33).

² 'Kalam' means 'pen' and 'kari' means work. The Persian work 'kalamkari' can be literally translated as 'pen work' (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.40).

Introduction:

The focus of the project Poly'nAsia is to create a collection of contemporary fashion garments and textiles inspired by the parallels between two traditional textiles - 'tapa' of Tongatapu in Tonga and 'kalamkari' of Masulipatnam and Kalahasti in Southern India. This collection has contemporary relevance while retaining the intrinsic handcrafted qualities of 'tapa' and 'kalamkari'.

As a fashion designer in India, I worked extensively with the Indian block printers from 1989 to 2001. I migrated to New Zealand in May 2001. This gave me an opportunity to explore Polynesian textiles. Inspired by the visual and technical similarities between 'tapa' cloth of Tonga and 'kalamkari' fabric of Southern India, I decided to create a fashion collection of garments and textiles based on the parallels between 'tapa' and 'kalamkari' and to explore the socio-cultural contexts and technical aspects of these two traditional textiles.

'Kalamkari' is the Persian name given to printed and hand painted cotton cloth produced at the towns of Masulipatnam and Kalahasti in the state of Andhra Pradesh in South – Eastern India. In Kalahasti the cloth is painted with a 'kalam' or 'pen'. The 'kalam' is a sharpened length of bamboo with a felt or wool pad tied to the point. In Masulipatnam, printing blocks and wax resists are used for most of the work rather than the pen alone. Cotton cloth is subjected to a process of bleaching, mordanting³, resisting⁴ and printing to produce detailed floral designs.

³ The word 'mordant' derives from the Latin word 'to bite'. The mordant 'bites' the fibre in combination with dye to fix colours (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.14).

⁴ 'resisting' – 'screening' and 'covering' with a removable and impermeable substance that successfully resists the colour yet can be removed (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.39).



Fig.1:1. *A Kalamkari Panel.*

‘Tapa’ or bark cloth is made from the inner bark of trees like the paper mulberry in South America, Africa, South –East Asia and most significantly in the South Pacific Islands. ‘The word is derived from the Samoan word *tapa* for the uncoloured border of a bark cloth sheet and the Hawaiian *kapa* for a variety of bark cloth’(Neich & Pendergrast, 1997, p.9).



Fig.1:2. *A Tapa Panel.*

In Tonga, Tapa cloth is called Ngatu. It is made by stripping a whole paper mulberry sapling of its outer bark, soaking it in sea water for about two weeks and then stripping off the inner bark. The inner bark is cut in thin strips which are beaten against a flattened log with a hard woodbeater or ike. This process doubles its width. In the next stage, small pieces of beaten cloth, feta’aki are joined by a group of women working on a convex bench to which patterned rubbing tablets or kupesis made out of leaf strips are bound. Working in pairs the women go through a process of rubbing the bark cloth pieces with brown pigment so as to bring out the pattern of the kupesi and joining them with

arrowroot till the desired length of ngatu is arrived at. The patterns are then highlighted with black or brown dye.

Poly'nAsia seeks to create a collection of fashion garments and accessories founded upon, yet distinct from parallels between tapa and kalamkari. It is concerned with the problem of combining two traditional textile techniques and cultural influences from different parts of the world into a new contemporary design technique. It also introduces new techniques to tapa and kalamkari artisans and encourages innovation without compromising the intrinsic handcrafted quality of these textiles.

Given the contemporary context of swift travel and communication, cross-cultural interface is inexorable and inevitable. The challenge lies in utilizing cross - cultural dialogues to the advantage of artisan crafts. Identifying and developing affinities between artisan crafts across man- made barriers will infuse new interest in these crafts and ensure their survival.

For this project, direct interaction between the two artisan communities was ruled out owing to paucity of funds. I decided to travel back and forth, working with the two artisan communities.

This research project focuses on the design process and the social and contextual issues associated with this cross cultural arena. Since this is a practice based research, I have not focused on theoretical issues around such practices. The creative and investigative process documented in this exegesis comprises 20% of my thesis. The collection or the practical work, presented at a fashion show on 3 February 2005, constitutes 80% of my thesis.

The project Poly'nAsia is divided into two phases:

In the first phase of the research process, the contextual issues are addressed and experiments with the two textile techniques are carried out, thus creating an infrastructure for the second phase.

In the second phase, fabric research inspired by tapa and kalamkari is applied to requirements⁵ of fashion. Inherent to the definition of fashion are phrases like 'the latest and most admired style in clothes, cosmetics and behaviour'⁶. Fashion is also defined as 'a continuing process of change in the style of dress and adornment that are accepted by a large segment of the public at any particular time'⁷. Hence a fashion design project has to address issues like the specific categories of clients and apparel, a particular season, fashion trends and forecasts.

As stated earlier, Poly'nAsia is divided into two phases – contextual issues and the fashion perspective. These two phases are further divided into sub – phases as illustrated in the table below.

⁵ core customer profile, category of apparel, season, forecast

⁶Definition of fashion (n.d.)

Retrieved 20 June, 2004, from WordNet at The Princeton University web site:
(<http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn>)

⁷ Mowen, John., & Minor, Michael. (n.d.) *Consumer Behavior: A Framework*.
Retrieved 20 June, 2004, from the Consumer Behavior web site:
(<http://www.consumerbehavior.net/glossary.htm>)

Poly'nAsia	
ADDRESSING CONTEXTUAL ISSUES	ADDRESSING FASHION
Identification of parallels	Inspiration
Establishment of historical links	Precedent
Addressing social and ethical issues	Core customer profile
Experimentation – Stage 1, Stage 2 & Stage 3	Silhouette, colour palette, design process, accessories
Innovation vs acceptance	Presentation – fashion show
Inferences	

Contextual Issues:

The first phase of the project consists of the following sub-phases:

Identification of parallels:

Kalamkari and tapa use vegetable dyes extensively.⁸ Both use the technique of ‘mordanting’ i.e., using metal oxides as an intermediary substance in combination with dye to fix colours. The imagery of both crafts has strong links with nature.⁹ Both use a combination of printing, resisting¹⁰ and painting. The tools are similar – in the case of kalamkari, the ‘kalam’ may be a short, pointed bamboo stick or a charcoal stick made of bamboo twig, while a tapa artiste uses the dried key of a sharpened pandanus fruit, sharpened to a point to form a paint brush. Both tapa and kalamkari have manifold uses – ceremonial, religious and utilitarian. Both are used for bedding, garments, headgear and pennants.

Establishment of a historical link:

‘The skill and the knowledge of making cloth from bark ... were carried out of South-East Asia by the first peoples to move into the South Pacific Islands. Some archeological evidence suggests that tapa was being made in southern China and mainland South – East Asia more than five thousand years ago” (Neich & Pendergrast, 1997, p.9). Primary evidence of dyeing and mordanting of cotton cloth is found at Mohenjodaro, an archeological site of the third millennium B.C. on the Indian sub-continent. Maxwell (2003) states that fragments of Indian indigo batik dating from as early as the 6th century AD discovered in China at sites along the ancient silk road suggest that from the

⁸ Both tapa and kalamkari use the turmeric plant for its primary yellow colour and to create secondary colours such as green. Kalamkari uses the roots of the Madder plant ‘chay’ for red colour, safflower for yellow and indigo for blue. Tapa derives the brown pigment from the koka tree and the black dye from burnt candlenuts.

⁹ Tapa motifs range from breadfruit leaves, pandanus leaves and bloom, shell, tortoise, starfish, worms, footprints of various birds. Kalamkari at Masulipatnam depicts Persian inspired floral motifs.

¹⁰ ‘resisting’ - ‘screening’ and ‘covering’ with a removable and impermeable substance that successfully resists the colour yet can be removed (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.39).

time of the Indus Valley Civilisation in the third millennium B.C. indigo and madder dyed cottons had been created on the Indian sub – continent for trade. “By the end of the sixth century Indian traders had settled in Canton and throughout Thailand, Cambodia and the Indonesian archipelago, irrevocably influencing the religious and the cultural development of each land” (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.8). This geographical spread of early Indian textile technology could explain why crafts like tapa and kalamkari use common techniques and tools.

Addressing social and ethical issues:

In the first phase of this research project (March–May 2003), a network with Langa fonua a Fafine Tonga or the Tongan Womens’ Cooperative was established with the help of Brenda Railey, a Pacific Arts exponent. Brenda Railey’s Samoan/Tongan/Niue background and her familiarity with the Pacific arts proved crucial in overcoming the initial skepticism of Tongan tapa artisans. “Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology” (Smith, 1999, p.15). Hence, this project did not follow a strictly premeditated path or a rigid time line. An intuitive, organic approach was adopted instead, to complement cultural traditions, taking time to build understanding, trust and respect. Creative directions evolved through informal conversations over morning tea. Personal and professional experiences were shared and problems were addressed. Brenda Railey recalled how her grandfather who owned the first cinema hall in Tonga would get farm fresh vegetables and eggs as payment for cinema tickets. I recounted stories of grateful villagers bringing pumpkins and other sundry items as tokens of gratitude to my grandfather, a lawyer, for legal services rendered free. Thus, social parallels between the two artisan communities e.g., extended family tradition, respect for elders and ancestors, modesty, hereditary and hierarchical social structure, community living and hospitality and the fact that I had been brought up in a similar social environment further facilitated the process of my acceptance into the artisan communities.



Fig.1:3. *Television personality Pio Terei¹¹ and Samita Bhattacharjee with the Tongan tapa artisans of the Langafonua a Fafine Tonga and Brenda Railey.*

Participation in the actual printing process facilitated the flow of knowledge in both directions. Tapa artisan Vaioleti Taupeaafe recounted stories about how an Egyptian queen introduced the art of stenciling and Egyptian motifs to tapa artistes in Fiji¹². It also reinforced the notion of reciprocity or giving back “through increased knowledge, increased skills and training...” (Tolich, 2001, p.49). I urged the artisans to become more innovative and precise. I also introduced the technique of Indian block printing to Tongan tapa artisans and the Tongan kupesis or rubbing tablets to Indian block printers. I visited the latter in October 2003.

¹¹ In September 2004 a programme called ‘My Best Friends Are Indians’ was aired on the National Television Network, New Zealand. This programme featured me and my work with the Tongan tapa artisans. Pio Terei anchored this programme.

¹² Apparently an Egyptian woman had married a Fijian king and accompanied him to Fiji. She was responsible for introducing Egyptian motifs and stenciling techniques to Fijian tapa artistes. I have found no documentary evidence to substantiate this story.

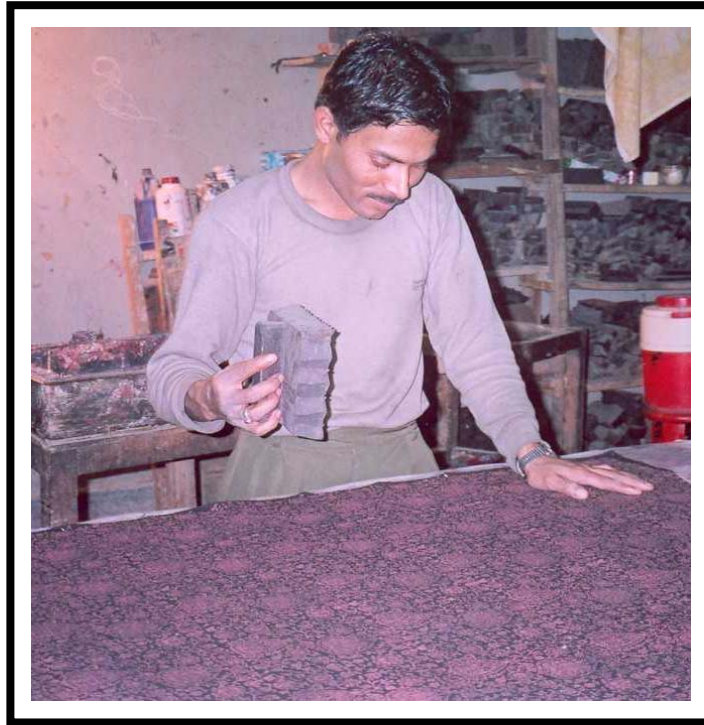


Fig.1:4. *Indian Block Printer at Work.*

Tapa or ngatu in Tongan society is ‘wealth’ or ‘koloa’ – ‘what one values’. According Phyllis S. Herda (2000) it is an “important element of the culture” and has “retained its importance for gifts and exchanges at traditional ceremonies” (p.57) like births, weddings and funerals. The use of bark cloth made from paper mulberry is intrinsic to Tongan tapa making. Hence Tongan tapa artisans were initially hesitant to practise their skills upon anything but tapa. But over time my ongoing participation in the actual process of tapa making and gradual acceptance by the artisan community helped overcome this initial resistance.

Experimentation:

Floral motifs inspired by plant imagery are common to both cultures and were selected for my designs. Tapa frays when subjected to pressure. It does not withstand the rigours of sewing or daily wear and tear very well. I decided to use tapa for accessories like handbags. For garments, I selected tussar silk. Tussar is untreated, handcrafted silk. It parallels the rough texture and defined silhouettes of tapa and the coarse cotton used by kalamkari artisans.



Fig.1:5. *Experimentation: Stage 1.*

The experimentation was divided into three stages. In the first stage the Tongan women rubbed the tussar fabric with kupesis or rubbing tablets using brown pigment to create a backdrop frangipani flowers. This backdrop was overprinted with kalamkari motifs using wooden blocks.



Fig.1:6. *Experimentation with stencils.*

In another experiment the same procedure was repeated with floral stencils. Tussar fabric was partially covered with floral stencils. I traced floral motifs on plastic sheets and made cut outs that served as stencils. The exposed fabric was rubbed with kupesis. Stencils were removed thereafter and kalamkari blocks placed within the floral impressions. This experiment made use of the resist technique followed by tapa and kalamkari artisans. Kalamkari artisans use wax. This is later washed off or ironed out. Traditionally, in Tongan tapa the use of stencils is not prolific. In recent times, Tongan tapa artisans have begun to use stencils fashioned out of x-ray plates.

These initial experiments demonstrated that the Tongan artisans could successfully work on a medium other than tapa. It also established that the skills of the Tongan and the Kalamkari artisans could be successfully combined on a fabric that would withstand the rigours of wear and tear. The handcrafted

component had been retained. Tussar silk is handcrafted. Techniques like rubbing and printing with traditional tools and vegetable dyes had been deployed.

The process of synthesis commenced in this first stage of experimentation. It was consolidated further in the second stage. In this stage there was a shift from printing the running fabric to placement printing i.e. printing along the selvage or placing motifs selectively. Placement printing presupposed constructed garments and not fabric lengths as the outcome. Hence there was a shift from unstitched fabric to stitched garments. Drapery and simple silhouettes inspired the garments. Draped garments are intrinsic to the Indian and Tongan cultures. Archeological evidence of draped garments is found in the Indian sub – continent since the Indus Valley Civilisation. Hindus considered stitched garments impure as needles were originally made out of bones. Also draped garments offered versatility and comfort in a predominantly tropical climate. Tongan men and women have traditionally wrapped tapa or woven mats around their bodies. Given their rigid structures, tapa or mats could not accommodate complicated patternmaking. Hence the silhouettes were simple.

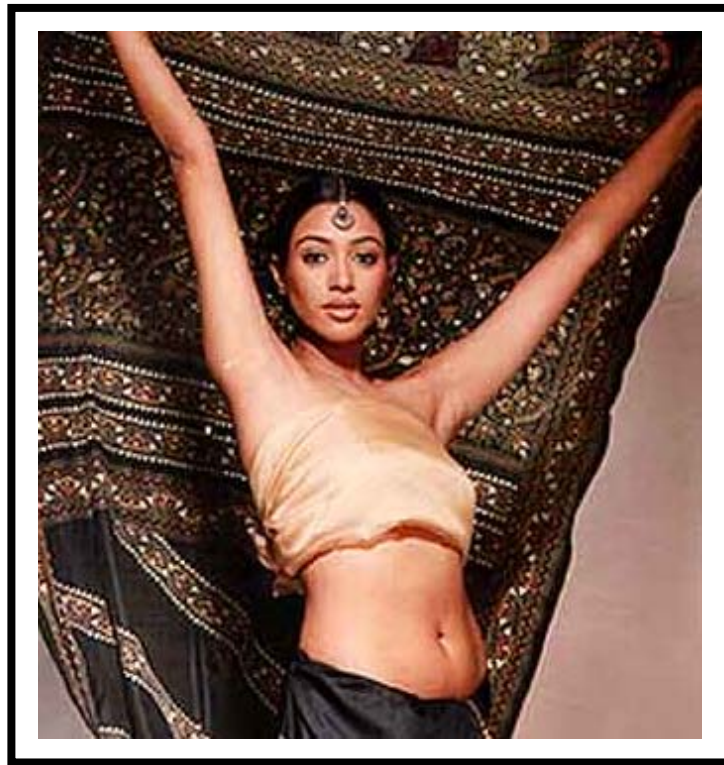


Fig.1:7. *Sari*¹³ – a classic example of Indian Drapery.

¹³ An unstitched length of cloth, approximately four to nine metres long and one metre wide, draped around the body.



Fig.1:8. *Tongan costume. Floral Imagery.*



Fig.1:9. *Tongan costumes. Simple drapery.*

In this second stage of experimentation, Tongan women started working with wooden blocks depicting tapa motifs – thus getting familiar with the techniques and tools used by kalamkari artisans. These wooden blocks were crafted by block makers in India and brought to New Zealand¹⁴.

¹⁴ I have not been able to find a printing blockmaker among tapa artisans. Samoans have started using flat wooden design tablets or upetis. These have replaced leaf upetis. However leaf upetis are used for rubbing and not printing.



Fig.1:10. *Experimentation: Stage 2.*

In stage 2 of the design development process, draped skirts and layered tops were designed to incorporate a backdrop of kalamkari. Tongan women printed these with wooden blocks. Blocks were split and placed along the closings so that when the skirts and blouses were fastened the prints synchronized to complete the pattern. Stage 2 made a greater demand on my skills as a designer. I had to mark specific areas where I wanted the Tongan artisans to place the blocks. Also the Tongan women mastered the technique of printing with single blocks quite easily. However when two or three different blocks needed to be aligned the result was somewhat diffused.

There was also an important difference in the socio economic context of the Tongan and kalamkari artisans that influenced design development. The

Tongan artisans are women. They are happy to make extra money by selling their craft. They are being paid for their work. They also have grave concerns about the future of tapa making. Nonetheless I could not overlook the fact that a key aspect of the exercise was community activity for them, “a time to work together, sing, gossip, cement old friendships and make new ones”(Armstrong, 2004, p.2). They took great pleasure in learning new skills and were not overly concerned when placement of blocks went awry. I decided to solve the issue of misplaced blocks by:

- (a) incorporating this as a design feature in my garments and fabrics
- (b) using blocks that required no infills

The kalamkari workers are men. They derive their livelihood out of printing and selling kalamkari. While working with the Indian block printers in September-October 2003 and January–February 2003, I detected their strong economic concerns. They refused to waste time experimenting with kupesi or the Tongan rubbing tablets. I solved this problem by agreeing to pay them even for the hours they spent experimenting with the kupesi. This produced some positive results.

Tapa and kalamkari have many similarities. Nevertheless, there appeared to be one major difference. While kalamkari motifs inspired by their Persian counterparts appeared to be more intricate, tapa motifs seemed simple and bold. However in depth research revealed that fine tapa was made earlier in several parts of Polynesia¹⁵. In the third stage of experimentation, as part of an effort to synthesize tapa and kalamkari motifs, I sought to create an intricate block inspired by old tapa¹⁶. At the outset no blockmaker would make a block so diverse and complicated. Ultimately an elderly block maker agreed and a block inspired by a now extinct tapa motif was developed.

¹⁵ Niue tapa in the 1880's was contained within a rectangular or circular format. The patterns were abstract shapes and plant forms delicately drawn with fine black lines and usually set on a grid. The motifs were small, carefully arranged to fill planned spaces, and meticulously painted. Dr. Roger Neich (curator, ethnology, Auckland War Memorial Museum) mentioned to me in an interview that there is no evidence of Niue tapa being made currently. Some attempt has been made to screen print these motifs.

¹⁶ . I could not find evidence of very intricate tapa in Tonga. Hence I decided to revive an old tapa motif from Niue. Brenda Railey's part Niuean heritage lent legitimacy to this experiment

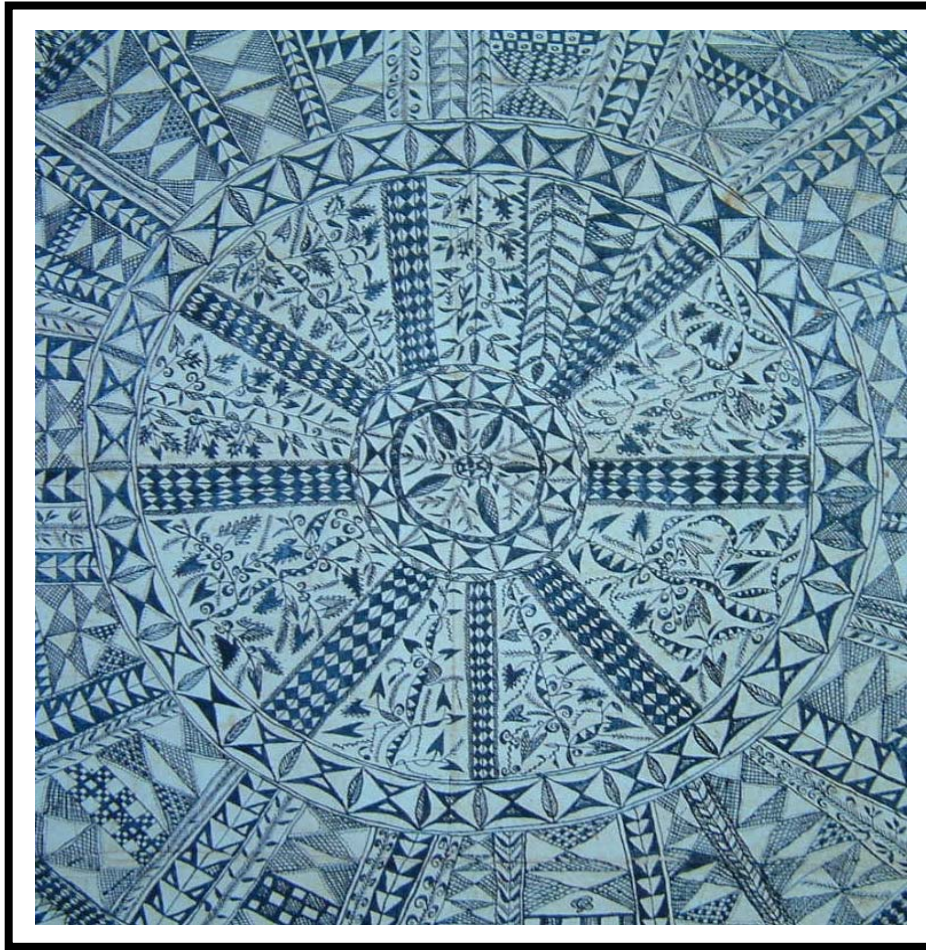


Fig.1:11. *Extinct tapa motif. 1886.*



Fig. 1:12. *Old tapa motif on kalamkari. Poly'nAsia Collection.*

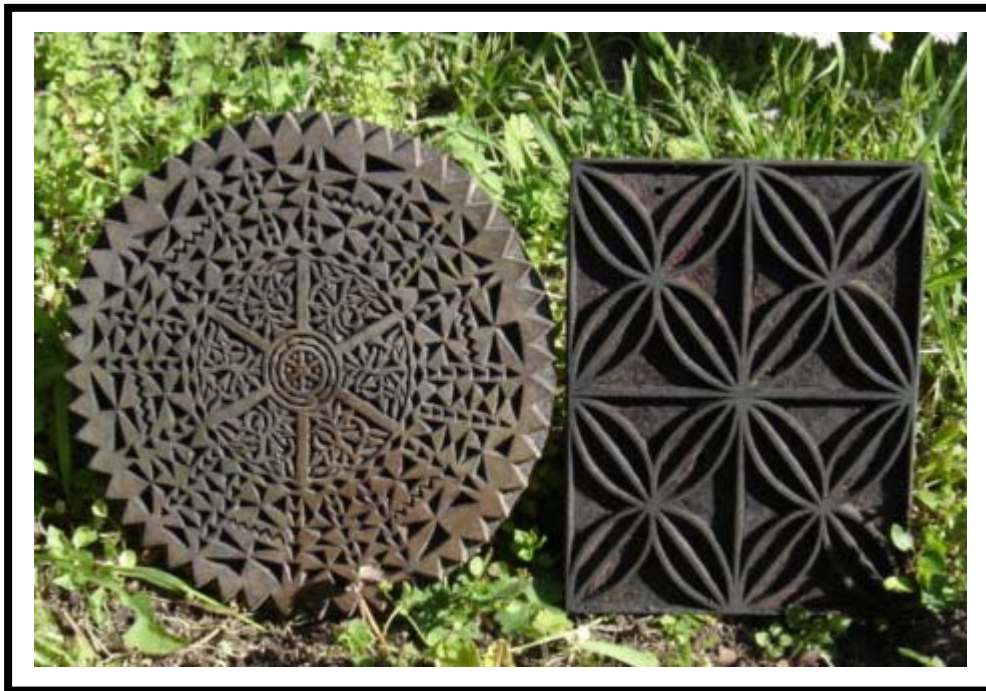


Fig.1:13. *Wooden Blocks inspired by old tapa motif.*

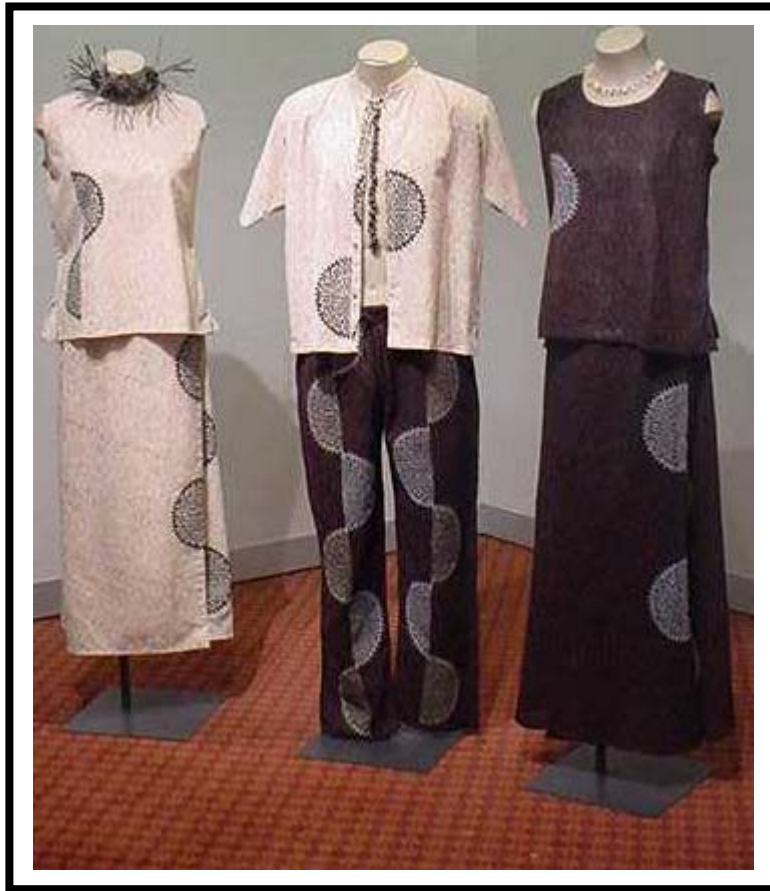


Fig.1:14. *Old tapa motif overprinted on kalamkari.*
Poly'nAsia Collection.

Innovation vs acceptance:

In phase 1 of this project, I analysed potential social and ethical contexts of this project. I discussed issues of innovation and acceptance with experts and academics like Dr. Roger Neich, curator of ethnology at The Auckland War Memorial Museum. Dr Neich was of the opinion that so long as the artisans retain some control there is nothing wrong with innovation. R. Neich, personal communication, (August 20, 2003).

Dr Phyllis Herda – Senior Lecturer Womens’ Studies, The University of Auckland has worked extensively on Tongan quilts. I discussed the issue of social acceptance with Dr. Herda. She mentioned that sewing, piecing and appliquéing quilts is a relatively new textile tradition in Tonga compared to tapa which has been long categorized as wealth and accorded the highest respect in terms of protocols of exchange. However, Tongan women living overseas, mostly in the United States did not have access to raw materials for traditional tapa. They started making quilts. Dr. Herda pointed out how the traditional textile repertoire of Tongan women that earlier comprised of tapa and mats has now expanded “to include these quilts in order to fulfill cultural expectations at significant life events including births, first birthdays, weddings, anniversary celebrations, title installations and most commonly, at funerals or as grave decorations ” (Herda. Phyllis. S, 2000, p.58). From this conversation, I concluded that within the traditional framework of tapa, many new approaches were being incorporated as a result of changes in social circumstances. P. Herda, personal communication, (September 5, 2003).

Fashion designers can make significant contributions to artisan crafts. As a fashion designer who has closely worked with artisans, my biggest challenge is to present artisan crafts in a way that has relevance to contemporary fashion. Innovation in artisan crafts is acceptable so long as it retains the intrinsic qualities of the crafts, contributes to its long-term survival and benefits its traditional exponents. This innovation may come from within the community or

from outsiders with vision and conscience. Over-zealous protectionism, often by self – appointed guardians of artisan crafts, may prove counter- productive. This may prevent learned and ethical designers from working with the artisans. As a result, traditional crafts may lose out on valuable input.

Inferences:

The first phase of the project resulted in experimental garments. The garments were generic, did not form a collection and did not apply to a specific category of customers, season or size range. They were displayed as installations on mannequins at The Aotea Gallery, Aotea Centre, The Edge® in Auckland from 11 May to 6 June 2004. For the first time this concept of synthesized fabrics and garments was presented to the public. The feedback received was favourable. Many visitors expressed a desire to buy the clothes. The exhibition was covered by Auckland City Harbour News (May 19, 2004, p.5) and City Scene (16 May 2004, p.2). Tongan artisans participated in the exhibition and the tapa making demonstrations that followed with spontaneous enthusiasm. Dr. Phyllis Herda had earlier mentioned how quilting is influencing tapa designs. She illustrated how a traditional Western patchwork pattern, 'Grandmother's Fan' was depicted on a piece of recently made Tongan bark cloth. In our project too, the artisans were now exploring the idea of printing some pareos using the rubbing technique. The tapas they were painting had also become more innovative and precise. The experimental garments were entered in the Style Pasifika Fashion Awards competition in September 2004. I was selected as a finalist in three categories – urban streetwear, menswear and the three piece collection. Brenda Railey and I co-authored a review of Poly'nAsia. It was published in Context – dress/fashion/textiles, the official publication of the New Zealand Costume and Textile Section of the Auckland Museum Institute (November 2004 – March 2005, p.34-35). I presented a paper on Poly'nAsia at the AUT Faculty of Arts – Post Graduate Student Mini-Conference on 11 October, 2004. I also presented a paper on Poly'nAsia at Southern Threads: Connecting dress, cloth and culture, the fourth annual symposium of The New Zealand Costume and Textile Section at the Otago Museum in Dunedin on 5-6 March, 2005.

At the end of the first phase, key contextual issues had been investigated, the relationship with artisans was on firm grounds and the feedback had established the viability of wearable garments based on the concept of synthesized parallels. The process of experimentation had proved that techniques like rubbing, resisting and printing with wooden blocks could be combined to arrive at effective results.



Fig.1:15. *Poly'nAsia garments on display at The Aotea gallery, Aotea Centre, The Edge[®], Auckland, New Zealand from 11 May–6 June 2004.*



Fig. 1:16. *Tongan Tapa Artisans at the Poly'nAsia Exhibition, at The Aotea Gallery, Aotea Centre, The Edge®, Auckland, New Zealand, 11May–6 June, 2004.*

The Fashion Perspective:

In the first phase, the foundation on which a collection of fashion garments and textiles would be created had been laid. In the second phase, the creation of a fashion collection was embarked upon.

Inspiration:

I looked for designers who had used indigenous influences to create fashion garments. I finally met Samoan fashion designer Lindah Lepou. In an interview with me, Lindah acknowledges the presence of a Pacific component in her design. She is inspired by her ‘environment: sea, sky, cultures, people, plants, insects, animals, music...’. However she refuses to create dresses that are overtly Pacific.

Her ‘goal is to be the first “Samoan” owned label to compete internationally with designers like Dior, Chanel and Versace’ and be able to hold her own. Lindah Lepou, personal communication, (10 June, 2004).



Fig.2:1. *Fashion garment designed by Lindah Lepou out of coconut shells.*

I was also inspired by the Florentine designer, Emilio Pucci. Pucci made simple and wearable garments - sun or shirtwaist dresses, slim pants, mannish shirts and full skirts. He used the finest of natural fabrics. According to Luigi Settembrini (1996), Pucci was an enthusiastic traveler and was keenly alive to the needs of other heavy travelers. During these years civilian air travel was becoming popular and this new way of moving from beaches to ski slopes, from snow to sun and back made mass tourist migrations faster, more international. Pucci's silk jersey dresses were resilient, weighed 248 grams and had relevance to the new needs of dressing.

Emilio Pucci was one of the first designers to allow fashionable women to wear slacks at the meals, in the countryside or at the seashore.... The slacks were worn with mannish shirts, made of printed silk twill, and could be worn loose, or else knotted in front, or gathered with a wide belt. It was simple, neat and elegant: a formula for success.... (Katell le Bourhis,1996, p.596).

His clothes reflected the vivid hues of the Mediterranean and Tuscan landscapes - hot pink, turquoise, purple, lime green, orange, peach and gold. Pucci, in his own words, "rediscovered colour and created a symphony of combinations" (Kennedy, 1991, p.98). The colours he placed next to each other were thought to clash, but he broke all rules. "Flowers of all colours grow together harmoniously in the fields" (Kennedy, 1991, p.98), he declared. His clothes had brilliant colours painted into patterns inspired by visits to Africa, India, Mexico and Brazil. To quote his biographer, Shirley Kennedy, Pucci engulfed all in "colour and joy" (Kennedy, 1991, p.7).

According to Luigi Settembrini (1996), the thing Emilio Pucci knew how to do best was promoting events, ideas and occasions. "When Emilio Pucci rode down Fifth Avenue on a prancing white horse, wearing a hat with a long plume and the cuirass of "calcio in costume" the crowd went mad with delight He was also keenly aware of the value of the image in terms of marketing" (p.594).

Emilio Pucci was one of the first to achieve “a true symbiosis between creativity, communications and marketing” (Katell le Bourhis, 1996, p.597). Emilio Pucci inspired me to create clothes that respond to sartorial needs of targeted customers, to draw upon my colourful environment and present my collection in an effective manner.

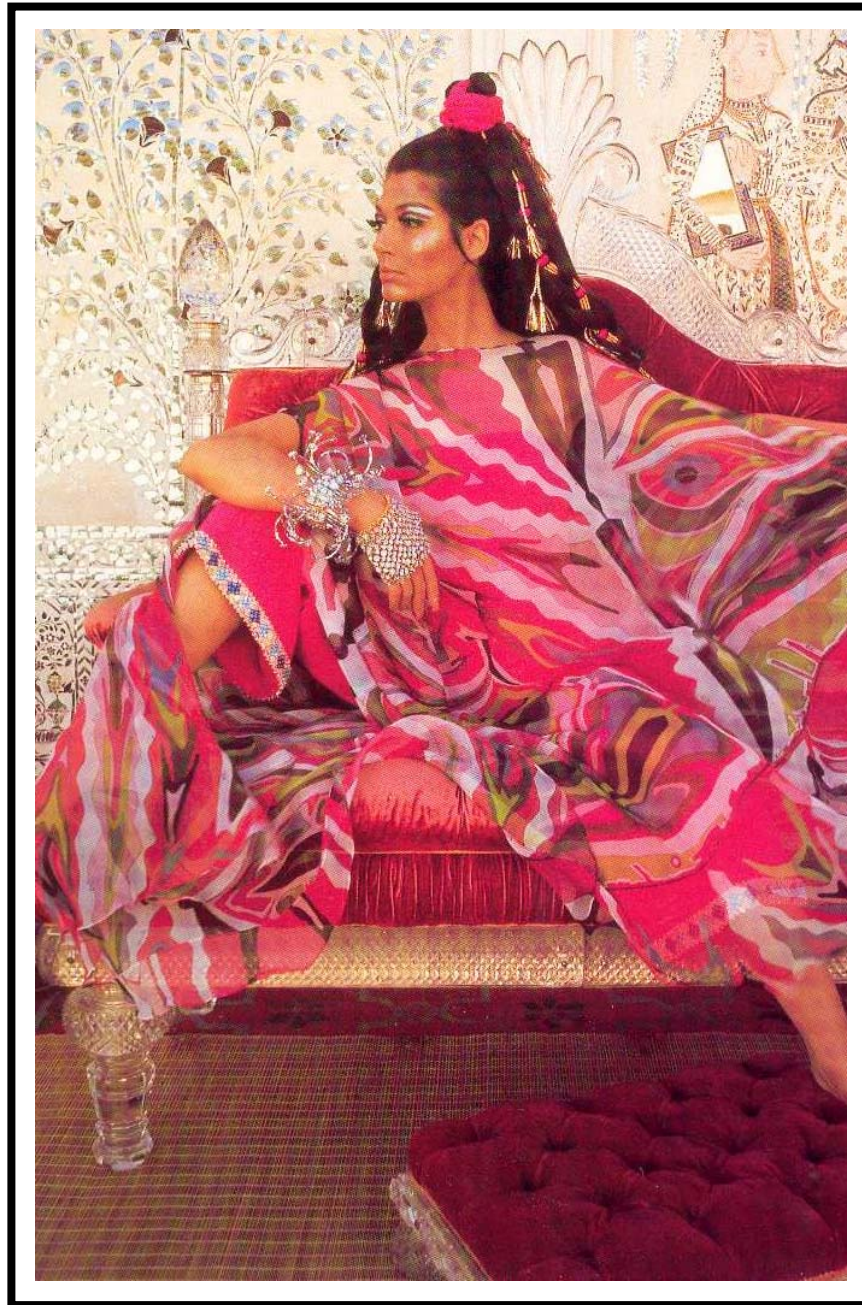


Fig.2:2. *EmilioPucci: The prince of prints.*

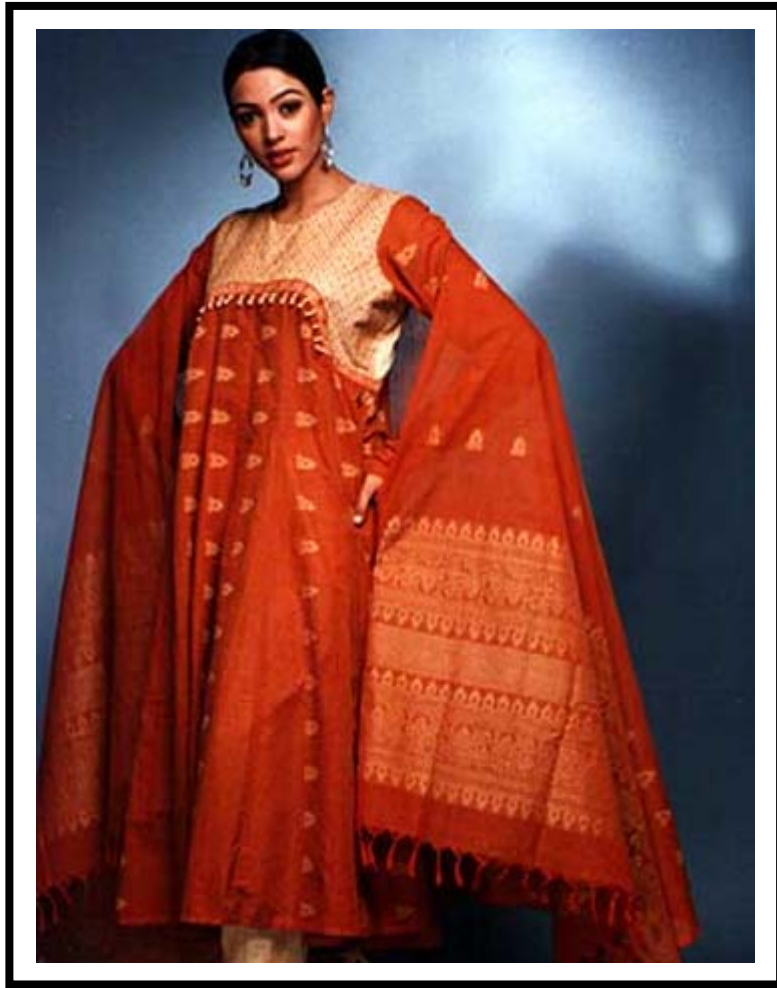


Fig.2:3. *Revival of Khadi by Samita Bhattacharjee.*

Precedent:

Poly'nAsia applies traditional textile techniques to contemporary fashion design. Working on this project, I drew upon my previous experience in rejuvenating 'khadi'. 'Khadi' or handwoven cloth from handspun cotton – a symbol of homespun independence¹⁷ – found limited patronage in independent India till early '80s. I, along with my colleagues, worked to upgrade the fabric and create well designed and executed garments. Properly launched, 'khadi' became a fashion statement.

Core Customer Profile:

My collection is inspired by two textiles from two different parts of the world. It would appeal to those who appreciate artisan quality and innovation. Being handcrafted it will have a price point higher than that of street wear. Natural fabrics and vegetable dyes also entail careful maintenance. I decided to target well traveled, well read and refined professional men and women with some disposable income and an eye for the extraordinary. The garments fit size 10 women and medium size men - a compromise between ramp quality and the size requirement of real men and women¹⁸.

¹⁷ "In the struggle to achieve independence from the British, Mahatma Gandhi seized upon the idea of using the domestic weaving industry as a ... symbol of homespun independence..."(Gillow & Barnard,1991, p.13) to combat the influx of cheap English cloth. After India's independence in 1947, khadi or handspun cotton was primarily used for mass production of garments sold from government emporia to a limited clientele. In the eighties, designers redefined khadi by improving the quality of both the fabric and the garments made from khadi. These garments were launched at fashion shows. They received wide publicity and patronage from the social and political elite. This was an ongoing movement that was responsible for a resurgence of interest in ethnic, handcrafted fabrics over synthetics and man made fabrics.

¹⁸ A fashion collection addresses a particular customer profile. This is a broad category that a designer keeps in mind while creating a collection. It does not exclude other customers.

Silhouette:

The silhouettes of the garments are inspired by eastern drapery. The current trend for eastern style prints, oriental style silhouettes, decorative detailing, draped dresses, ultra wide wrap front sarong pants, sheer fabrics and ultra flat thongs¹⁹ provide relevant points of reference for this collection.

Colour Palette:

The colour palette harmonises the earthy tones of tapa and kalamkari with the vitality and freshness of the summer 2005 season reflected in ochre, saffron, green, fuchsia and lime.

The Design Process:

The collection of garments is designed for Summer 2005. It covers both daywear and eveningwear.

The first segment of this collection comprises of casual daywear. It consists of drawstring shorts, front open shirts, wraps, sarongs²⁰ and camisoles²¹. This segment also has relevance as resort wear.

The second segment of day or work wear consists of skirts, dresses, ruched pants²² and reversible jackets for women and drawstring trousers with reversible coats for men, inspired by Indian 'pyjamas'²³ and 'bundgalas'²⁴.

¹⁹Carey.Jo.(2003) *What's in store hot looks*.

Retrieved August 22, 2004, from wgsn-edu.com

(http://www.wgsn-edu.com/members/whats-in-store/hot-looks/ws2003jan24_005878g)

²⁰ "piece of fabric tied around the waist" (Seeling, 1999, p.637).

²¹ "item of underwear that covers the body from the bust to waist, with narrow straps and straight neckline" (Seeling, 1999, p.629).

²² Inspired by Indian 'churidars' or pants with bangle like gathers or wrinkles around the ankle

²³ the word is a compound of two Persian words, pae and jama, the first meaning 'legs or feet', and the second 'covering', thus signifying 'leg clothing' (Goswami, 1993)

²⁴ Close neck coats

In the third segment, the women replace day jackets with sheer organza overshirts²⁵ or wear the jackets inside out. The reverse sides of the jackets are embellished with folk embroidery, thus lending a more festive look to the entire attire. Divested of the sleeves, men's bundgalas become natty Nehru jackets²⁶, Coordinated with short sleeved front open shirts, hitherto hidden under the coats, the dress is appropriate for casual evening wear.

The focus of this project is to combine traditional textile techniques to create a collection of garments that have contemporary relevance. Contemporary urban professionals have different sartorial requirements at different times of the day. They have very little time to change into appropriate attire. The collection of garments created for this project seeks to cover the sartorial requirements of busy urban professional men and women from morning to evening with minimum changes.

²⁵ The organza overshirts act as transparent films over actual garments. They add a hint of formality which transforms day garments into eveningwear.

²⁶ Stand – up collar sleeveless jacket popularized by the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru.



Fig.2:4. *Sketches of casual daywear.*



Fig.2:5. *Camisole with Flax Straps.*



Fig.2:6. *Translucent Robe*



Fig.2:7. *Front Open Shirts and Drawstring Shorts.*

Casual daywear or resort wear:

For this collection four ensembles are fashioned out of Poly'nAsia fabrics, two each in men's wear and women's wear category. The first ensemble consists of a camisole worn with a wrap skirt and a translucent tussar robe with surplice closing. In the second ensemble a camisole is worn with an ankle length sarong. The straps are fashioned out of plaited flax²⁷. Menswear comprises of front open shirts worn with drawstring shorts or wraps. This collection is reflective of the drapery and simple silhouettes of Indian and Polynesian garments. It uses natural trimmings and fabrics. At the same time this collection is wearable and contemporary.

²⁷ Fibres of the flax plant are widely used in Tonga and India to make mats, baskets and linen fabric



Fig.2:8. *Sketches of Formal Daywear (women)*



Fig.2:9. *Sketches of Formal Daywear (Men)*



Fig. 2:10. *Off Shoulder Shift Worn with Reversible Jacket*



Fig.2:11. *Girdle Dress Worn with Reversible Jacket*

Formal daywear consists of six ensembles – four in the women’s wear category and two in the men’s wear category. In the first two ensembles off shoulder shifts²⁸ are worn with jackets and bangle pants or loose ‘pyjama’ like trousers. The third ensemble is inspired by the floral girdle Tongan women wear around their waists. The fourth ensemble is a wrap skirt co-coordinated with a blouse. The blouse has stenciled motifs of Gardenia flowers. In menswear the casual shirts of the daywear collection are covered by formal jackets and shorts and wraps are swapped for full length trousers. The stenciled Gardenia flowers are repeated on men’s jackets.

²⁸ “loose falling unstructured dress” (Seeling, 1999, p.637).



Fig.2:12. *Sketches of Formal Eveningwear*

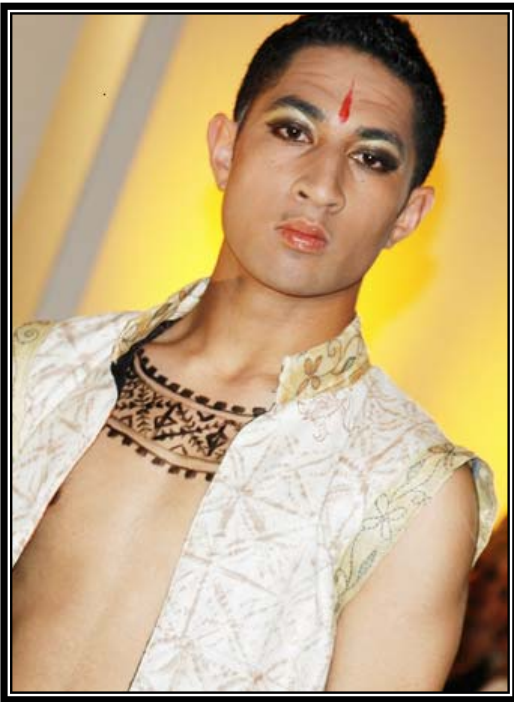
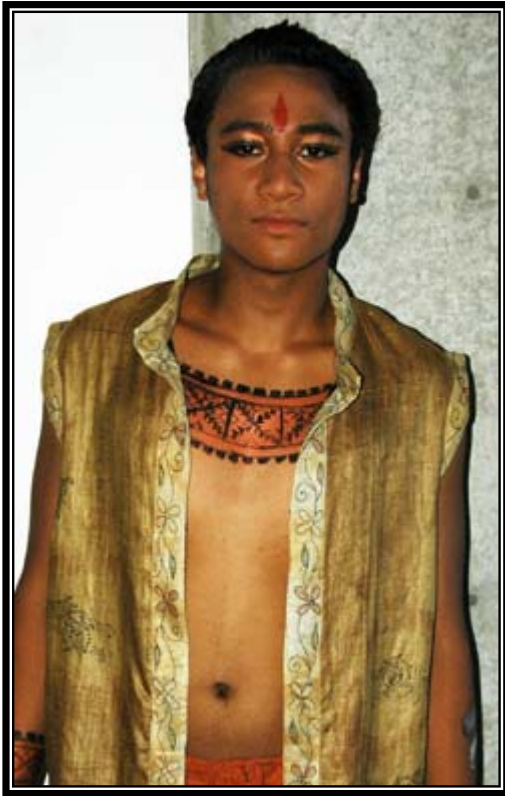


Fig.2:13. *Photographs of Formal Eveningwear*

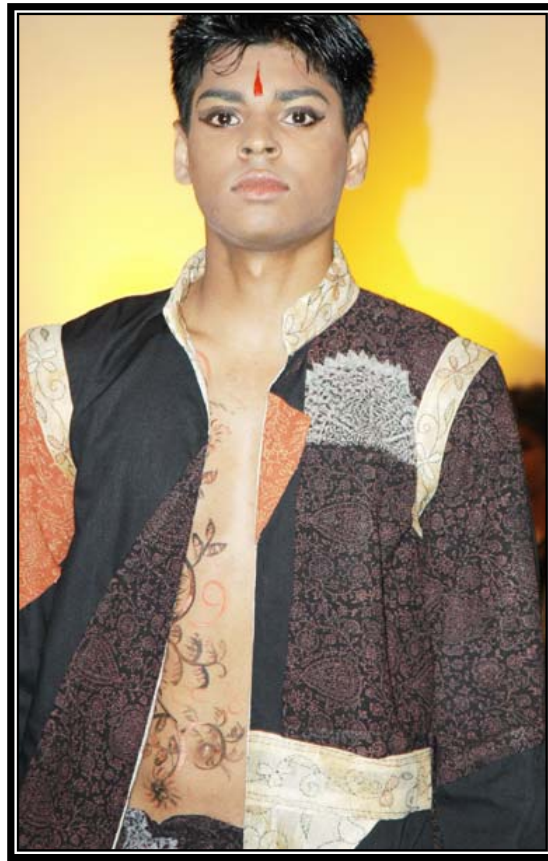


Fig.2:14. *Close-up of Reversible Jacket.*

Eveningwear:

This collection caters to the sartorial needs of urban professional men and women who have to attend evening functions directly after work. In women's wear day jackets are either replaced with sheer organza jackets or worn inside out. In menswear the jackets are divested of their sleeves and worn inside out. The reverse sides of all jackets are embellished with folk embroidery²⁹ and transform daywear into eveningwear. Folk embroidery is done by hand on natural fabrics and draws from natural imagery.

²⁹ I have used 'applique' of Western India. "Applique in Gujarat is known as 'katab' (a word probably derived from the English 'cut-up') and usually takes the form of pieces of coloured fabric stitched on to a cotton ground." (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.62). I have also used the kutchi style of embroidery "characterized by predominant chain and open-chain stitching and the profuse use of mirrors" (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.61) and 'kantha' embroidery. The 'kanthas' of Bengal in Eastern India were originally fashioned out of layers of old saris or dhotis (a rectangular length of cotton cloth worn by Hindu men). "Three or four sections of sari or dhoti were laid on top of each other and then quilted. The simple running stitch used in



Fig.2:15. *Neckpiece made out of crocheted raffia.*



Fig.2:16. *Neckpiece made out of cowries.*

quilting produces an embroidery – like design whose details were filled in with satin and stem stitch” (Gillow & Barnard, 1991, p.129).

Accessories:

The natural theme is echoed in shell, feather, raffia and beaded jewellery, flax brooches, turbans, bandanas and floral ornaments for the hair and footwear embellished with Poly'nAsia fabrics and shells.

Presentation:

The final collection of garments and textiles from the second design phase addresses issues of fashion while being inspired by the parallels between tapa and kalamkari. It was presented to academics, aficionados and colleagues at a fashion show on 3 February, 2005 at Auckland University of Technology, School of Art & Design, Gallery 1, Level 1, 34 St Paul Street . The parallel lifestyles of the two cultures contributing to this project was reinforced through food, music and cultural performances. Tongan and Indian food was served to the audience at the end of the show. Rita Ali and her dancers presented an Indian dance. Kasina Paea and Malieta Tasi performed a Tongan dance.



Fig.2:17. *Indian and Tongan Dancers.*

The relationship-based process was extended to include the participation of the Tongan artisans in the fashion show. Members of Langa fonua a Fafine Tonga performed Ma'ulu'ulu or the sitting dance.



Fig.2:18. *Members of Langa fonua A Fafine Tonga at the Fashion Show.*

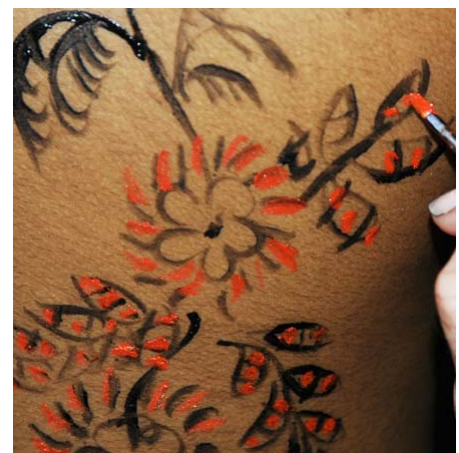


Fig.2:19. *Body Art on Poly'nAsia models.*



Fig.2:20. *Kohl Rimmed Eyes and Vermilion Smeared Forehead*

Dancers from the Toro Toro Trust modeled the clothes on the ramp. Music and choreography by Mika were a lively blend of Tongan and Indian themes. The choice of models was eclectic as Poly'nAsia strives to have universal appeal. Indigenous influences were manifest in kohl-rimmed eyes, face tattoos, body art and vermilion smeared foreheads.



Fig.2:21. *Glimpses of the Fashion Show.*



Fig.2:22. *The Designer Takes a Bow.*

All garments, except one, were displayed at an exhibition on 4 February and 5 February at Auckland University of Technology, Gallery 2, Level 1, 34 St Paul Street, Auckland. One garment, a pair of trousers, was stained with body paint and could not be displayed. This is likely to happen when a collection of garments is exhibited after a fashion show immediately. However, a fashion collection is first presented to buyers and critics at a fashion show. Till then the collection is kept a secret to avoid unwarranted attention and plagiarism. Hence the exhibition could not have preceded the fashion show.



Fig.2:23. *'Poly'nAsia' - The Exhibition.*

Conclusion:

Poly'nAsia presents a cross-cultural synthesis of traditional Tongan and Indian textile techniques with a contemporary design perspective. The process is inextricably linked to a "creative endeavour that operates on artistic, social and cultural levels" (Armstrong, 2004, p.2), as the project functions within the framework of the wider historical and social contexts. Social interaction is a vital component of Poly'nAsia as my creative directions have evolved through informal conversations and relationship building.

Poly'nAsia connects artisans from two different parts of the world while retaining the cultural integrity of the two artisan communities. It enables "the participants to benefit in various ways, the Tongan and Indian artisans have been introduced to one another's traditional techniques, creating the potential to expand on their art practices. There is also the potential for commercial benefits as the cross-cultural approach ensures international appeal " (Armstrong, 2004, p.2).

The Tongan artisans have successfully transferred their skills to a medium other than tapa. Their traditional skills have been combined with that of the kalamkari artisans in India to create a collection of fashion garments. As a result of their exposure to the design requirements of this project and to fashion events, the tapa artisans have become more innovative and precise. They were in the audience at the Style Pasifika Fashion Awards show in September 2004, where the Poly'nAsia garments were finalists in three categories. They are looking forward to participating in the fashion show on 3 February, 2005.

The kalamkari artisans were familiarized with this project through photographs and video recordings of tapa artisans and their work methods and the Poly'nAsia exhibition at the Aotea Gallery. They are not entirely convinced as they have had limited participation in this project owing to a paucity of funds. The skepticism of kalamkari artisans arises not out of a reluctance to share their

expertise. They were very forthcoming when I asked them several questions about kalamkari printing. When confronted with the issue of plagiarism they were confident that no one could take their craft away from them. An elderly printer pointed out that 'kalamkari' ran in 'their blood'. I also discussed the issue of 'globalisation' vis a vis 'preservation of local identity' with academics in India. They stated that since time immemorial India has believed in 'unity of the universe' and 'sharing of knowledge'. The partial apathy of Indian artisans can be attributed to their unfamiliarity with the Australasian region and the cultures of people living therein.

I hope this project and the resultant fashion show will enable me to find sponsorship for visit to New Zealand by two kalamkari artisans. This will help the kalamkari artisans to have a better understanding of the geographical location and the purpose of this project. I will facilitate interaction between the tapa and kalamkari artisans. This may result in new discoveries and innovation.

Poly'nAsia has increased my understanding of the Polynesian society and its art and crafts. I have made new friends and discovered new horizons. At the end of two years of the project Poly'nAsia, my relationship with the tapa artisans is on firm grounds. In the years to come, I will work with the two artisan communities to create fashion collections within the framework of tradition.

Poly'nAsia is an ongoing process that has its beginnings in this thesis. I hope that Poly'nAsia eventually succeeds in becoming an "experience of creating lasting cultural connections" (Armstrong, 2004, p.2) through fashion.

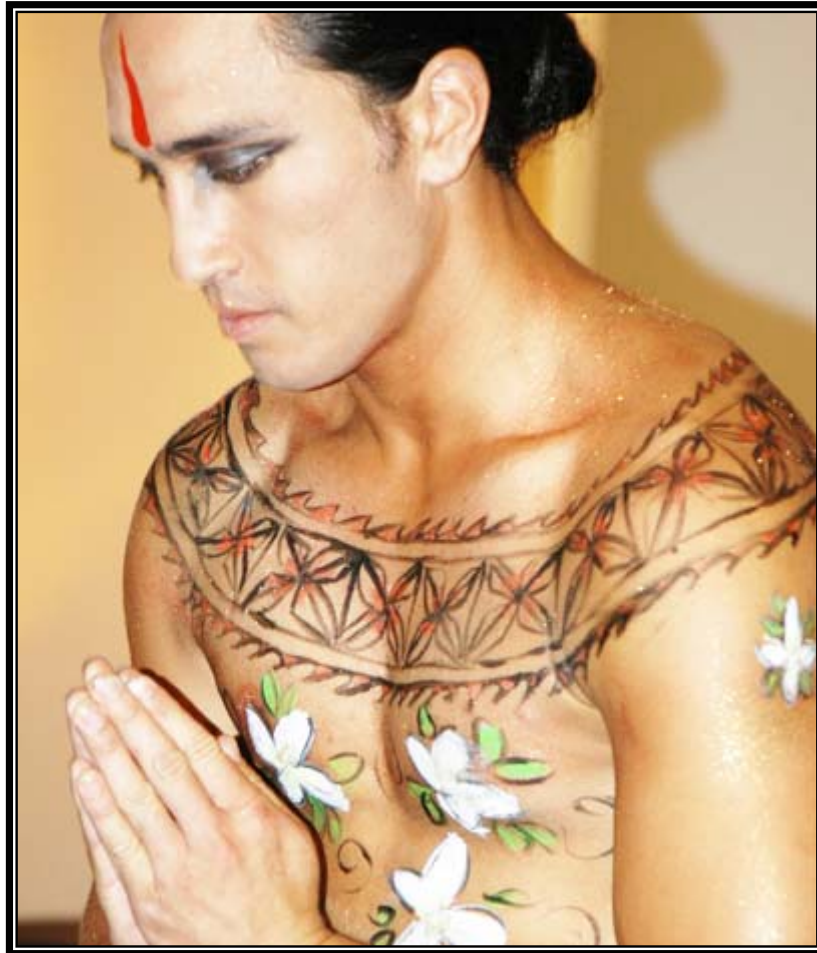


Fig.2:24. *The Finale.*

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