

Is It Possible To Transform Sunlight, Wind, Water and the Earth Into Rich, Textured Fabric That Does Not Harm The Environment?

By Linda Kaun

Shailini Seth Amin of MORALFIBRE emphatically responds, 'Yes'.

The living energy and spirit of the artisans creating her hand made fabrics is spun into each thread and woven into every meter of cloth. The mere act of hand spinning and hand weaving creates a meditative, peaceful state of mind, which is transmitted into the fibres themselves. This in turn energizes whoever buys, sells or wears this cloth. MORALFIBRE products are not only 'organic' – they are alive.

In addition to this unique quality, choosing these 'almost carbon-neutral' products takes a step toward creating both a pollution free environment and sustainable livelihoods for hundreds of skilled and unskilled workers.

Join me in this interview as Shailini graciously answered my questions about her passion and vision behind MORALFIBRE.

L.K. Shailini, can you tell me more about the name MORALFIBRE? What does it signify?

S.S.A. Our brand name stands for 'Clothing with a Conscience'. This stems from our threefold vision. First of all, we create superior quality fabrics that are all completely hand spun and hand woven, using natural dyes.

Second, because of our hand production processes, we've got probably the only 'almost carbon-neutral' fabrics and their products on the market today. Meaning we use almost no electricity for production, our dyes don't pollute the water, and we can source our raw materials locally here in Gujurat, India, which is one of the largest cotton growing regions.

So from farm to fashion, to marketing and selling through the Internet, our environmental impact is extremely light. This goes far deeper than simply using organic cotton in a product line.

Third, we practice social sustainability at all stages. This supports and enhances the lives of hundreds of workers in local villages where employment opportunities are few.

L.K. So for you, it's not just producing goods to be sold, but each step on the way is equally important. Now, let's start with your fabrics. Actually I was surprised when I received your samples. In my mind I thought they might be a bit rough. In fact, you have a wide range of textures and weights, in whites and neutrals to soft natural colors on cotton, silk, wool and blends. And far from being rough, they have a lovely hand with many interesting patterns woven right in.

S.S.A. Yes, people often tell me they're surprised at the range of different types of cloth we carry. All are subject to strict quality tests. An added bonus for customers is the flexibility to make smaller runs of fabric. They get to experiment with weaves and dyes to produce limited editions of custom designs. This is nearly impossible at a large factory.

L.K. You also have your own product lines. Tell us about those.

S.S.A. Our home furnishings line includes bed linens, pillow covers and gorgeous bedspreads with modern, stylized floral or abstract patterns. These are all hand appliquéd and embroidered by women living in the city slums. It's wonderful to offer these healthy, chemical free furnishings especially when you realize we spend nearly a third of our lives sleeping and relaxing.

The Feel-Well Fashion Clothing range includes Sleep, Spa, and Yoga wear, a Natural Collection of classic styles for men and women and a new line of Kids wear is coming up soon. All are allergy free, made with natural dyes and no harmful chemicals. The clothes feel cool and comfortable as they absorb moisture and perspiration. They actually get softer with each washing.

L.K. Please talk more now about the whole environmental issue. We all know this is of increasing concern globally, but in particular for the textile industry, which is known for its high-energy consumption and problems with polluting the environment. How does MORALFIBRE make a difference in this area?

S.S.A. Yes, this is a major benefit of our fabric production. Because we rely on human energy instead of electricity or other power sources like coal, we contribute almost no pollution to the environment. Working with natural dyes also means we protect both workers and consumers from developing allergies.

And, since the fibres are not machine produced, we don't need to use petroleum scours, silicon wax, formaldehyde, anti-wrinkle agents or chlorine based bleaches. Our entire process is cleaner, simpler, using natural oils or starch from boiled rice. When we use natural dyes, we don't have to bleach the fabric first. Most of the time, the original sheen and softness of the fibres are maintained.

L.K. You're also focused on the social sustainability aspect of producing your fabrics. We hear this phrase used a lot, but what does it mean in practical terms?

S.S.A. To answer your question, I need to back up a bit first. Our Indian readers will be very familiar with the roots of MORALFIBRE's products, and that is the 'Khadi' cloth industry first started by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s, who encouraged us to hand spin and hand weave fabric for our own clothing. Khadi became a symbol of resistance, of self-reliance, of freedom, and independence for India.

MORALFIBRE took a look at the state of the Khadi cloth industry that had deteriorated over the years and decided to develop its full potential as a socially conscious product. We are moving it into the 21st century with better production, strict quality control, development of new designs, and new uses of this inherently environmentally safe product that also honors the workers who make it.

We are tackling this issue of creating a socially responsible and sustainable business on several fronts at once. First of all we work locally, which reduces our carbon footprint considerably.

Secondly, we support several existing Khadi workshops that produce high quality cloth and introduced improvements to overall working conditions.

Third, by supporting well-run Khadi units, more women can move out of poverty in rural villages where jobs are scarce. This maintains the vitality of village life and means they don't have to migrate to large overcrowded cities.

We hope to develop a prototype model for this segment of the manufacturing industry, eventually expanding it to other areas of the country.

The thing that makes all this possible at a very real level is the worldwide connection through the Internet. We can make a profound positive impact on local communities and have people all over the world benefit from these rich hand made fabrics.

L.K. How are your fabrics different from other Khadi cloth being produced today?

S.S.A. The fundamental difference is our commitment to strict quality control and a research and development program we're building up. This includes a wide range of issues from which types of organic cotton are most suitable for our products, and natural dyeing, to the hand spinning and weaving techniques and equipment.

L.K. Shailini, are there any final thoughts you'd like to share?

I'd like to make it clear that the foundation of MORALFIBRE is based on an inherent value in creating with our hands and hearts, in honoring the skill involved in weaving cloth. It's not something we take lightly. It's the soul and foundation of our work. The art of spinning and weaving was seen as magical in times gone by. Then the industrial age of machines came in and, yes, made it faster and cheaper. But the cloth lost its voice, its heart.

We have an opportunity now to put the heart back into the cloth. So every time a person wears it, uses it or sells it, they are energized as well. It's like a chain reaction. A big part of this energy stems from the fact that this hand spun hand woven cloth not only frees the environment from pollution but helps move thousands of workers, mainly women, out of poverty by giving them a skill in a region where there are few jobs to be had. It's a win-win-win situation.

L.K. Lastly, who are your main buyers? And how can people find out more?

S.S.A. We sell wholesale to designers creating their own lines, both for garments and home furnishings, fabric wholesalers, retailers, eco-friendly buyers and of course people in the various categories matching our clothing range, spas, yoga, sleepwear and children's wear. Another arena is environmental groups and different NGOs working with these issues.

People can go directly to our website at www.moralfibre-fabrics.com to see our ranges and request samples. We're also a Premium Member of Fibre2fashion.