

# Sone athe (golden hands) : Intercultural co-design strategies for the sustainable future of artisans in Indian traditional handcrafted textile communities

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***Sone athe*** (golden hands)

Intercultural co-design strategies for the sustainable future  
of artisans in Indian traditional handcrafted textile communities

Deborah Emmett  
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## Abstract

This practice-based research focuses on traditional textile artisan communities in Kashmir, India, who create handcrafted products with expertise learnt through intergenerational observation and making. The research shows that the rich cultural heritage inherent in these communities has the potential for growth towards a sustainable future through co-design projects. Assumptions in contemporary co-design processes are, however, based on industrialised and technological contexts which need to be reconsidered when working with artisanal communities in India. As members of India's informal economy, these artisans tend to have low socio-economic status and limited educational opportunities. Consequently, the future of their craft heritage is now becoming economically and practically unsustainable, owing particularly to the global impact of fast fashion and the younger generations leaving the industry. Yet, at the same time, more and more consumers or users are becoming interested in traditional design processes and their provenance, and the makers and the techniques they use to produce these products, prior to purchase.

For this research, three co-design projects were conducted with the Kashmir shawl artisan community and Australian users and collectors of their products. Two embroidered pashmina shawls were created by artisans working directly with two customers in Australia, while the third co-design project reintroduced using natural dyes to the shawl community. This practice-based research on co-designing within the context of artisan craft heritage investigates and documents the role of 'facilitators' sourced from within the artisan community; a re-evaluation of 'value' as perceived by intercultural participants; and using digital technologies to connect user and maker through storytelling and lived experience. The relevance of relationship-building to sustainability, recognised within the frameworks of co-design theory and slow fashion, are key drivers of this research. Through the researcher's Kashmiri connections, these co-design projects were built on rare and unique access to artisans in their work environment who shared their perceptions of their work, relationships and values, without commercial or social status concerns.

This research proposes a new understanding of co-design methodologies in the Indian context and highlights the potential constraints of language differences and geographical distances between the intercultural participants. The research also contributes to a critical rethinking of assumptions within contemporary co-design practices, especially when working with participants whose culture and values differ. The emergent co-design strategies proposed in this research have significant

application to projects in other traditional artisanal communities in India, and towards a more sustainable future for handmade crafts.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Honorary Associate Professor Liz Williamson and Professor Stephen Loo for their guidance and wisdom over the past four years. Liz's knowledge of Indian artisanal textile practice and shared interest in travelling throughout India has been both insightful and supportive in assisting me to develop my research. The many hours Stephen spent reading and editing my writing is much appreciated.

I wish to thank the University of New South Wales' Faculty of Arts, Design & Architecture and Graduate Research School for granting scholarships that enabled me time and travel funds to fulfil my area of research. In addition I would like to thank Penelope Ralph for her invaluable skills in helping me copy edit my thesis.

This research study would not have been possible without the cooperation and enthusiasm of the many artisans from the Kashmir shawl community who were willing to participate in the research co-design projects. I am indebted to them for sharing their thoughts and welcoming me into their homes and businesses. A special thanks to Jane and Deborah, the Australian co-designers for their sincerity, and to my family in Kashmir for their support.

Finally I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to my husband, Riyaz Hakim. His comments, perceptions and patience have assisted me in navigating my way through these years of research. As my translator and tireless supporter, he should share the credit for my work.

## Access to Practice

This research is practice-based. I have developed a website [yourgoldenhands.org](http://yourgoldenhands.org) as a repository for the creative practice. The homepage of the website exhibits the pashmina shawls and scarves co-created in the co-design projects of the research, as well as four videos - *Just for You* and *#naturaldye #naturaldyedpashmina* document the three projects while *A Slow Fashion Story* is about the Kashmir embroidery artisans way of life and work practice. The fourth video *Perspectives* records viewpoints about value by some of the projects' intercultural participants.

The other two pages of the website, 'About the Projects' and 'Get Involved' are in development, in preparation for the continuation of co-design projects between interested customers and the Kashmir shawl community in the future when the overall website is further developed to become public-facing.

## Prologue

'*Cha shie sone athe*' ('you have golden hands') is a Kashmiri expression for artisans that remarks upon their exquisite handcraft skills.

A particular conversation initiated my investigations into the possible development of co-design projects with traditional textile communities in India. In June 2018, my brother-in-law, Ayaz Hakim, and I visited the Srinagar home of two brothers, Ghulam Hassan and Ghulam Mohammed, who had learnt *sozni* embroidery by watching their father embroider. They have been doing this embroidery on shawls for 25 years, working for around 12 hours per day, six days a week. Neither have received formal education and while they can read and write only a little, they are masters of their needlework.

Ghulam Hassan explained the process of his work. Like most handcrafted textiles in India, the creation of an embroidered pashmina shawl involves a community of artisans, the *sozni* embroiderers being just one part of this community. The pashmina fibres used to hand-weave the shawls are so fine that only the delicate needlework of *sozni* embroidery is suitable for these shawls. Ghulam Hassan works out the colours to be used for the embroidery on each piece. Experience guides his choice of colours depending upon the base colour of the shawl, but he is also influenced by fashion trends in colour. His son, Wasim, learns about colour trends from customers and tells his father.



Figure P.1 Pashmina shawl embroiderers, brothers Ghulam Hassan and Ghulam Mohammed (right) at work in their home, Srinagar, Kashmir  
Digital photographs by Deborah Emmett.

Ghulam Hassan and Ghulam Mohammed discussed the current state of the handcrafted shawls industry. They spoke about competition from machine-made shawls and the reduction in quality of their shawls due to demand by merchants for cheaper products. Yet the two brothers love their craft and hope that their quality hand embroidery has a future. The brothers suggested that quality could be maintained if the customer had direct contact with them and a shawl could be made to order.

Earning only about RS250 (AUD5.20 in 2018) a day, they concede there is little incentive for their more educated children to learn the craft. Although customarily done by men, some women are now also doing the needlework owing to changing economic and social circumstances.

Recently, Wasim Hassan has taken up a role in his father's work, using his education and communication skills to help sustain the business. This role is to secure embroidery work from both local and export markets. When his father has selected the embroidery colours, Wasim distributes stencilled shawls and threads to embroiderers who work in their homes, and he does the accounts. By having direct contact with customers through social media Wasim can bypass the middleman. Generally, a middleman or facilitator buys the handloom pashminas from the weavers and selects the designs from the *naqash* (draftsman), which are then given to the embroiderers. On completion, the shawls are collected by the middleman, washed and sold. With Wasim organising all these steps, this traditional embroidery family can cut out the middleman.

Wasim's involvement in the family business and having direct contact with their customers, even those outside of India, is made possible by smartphone technology. Ghulam Hassan told me how they now prefer commissioned pieces of high-quality embroidery they know will be appreciated and for which they will receive agreed remuneration. While such a shawl might take between eight and twelve months to complete, the bespoke value of the craft is maintained. For Ghulam Hassan and Ghulam Mohammed, it is not about producing great quantities of embroidered shawls but sustaining their embroidery business with integrity.

I was inspired by their vision and considered that the customer of such shawls could become more involved in the developmental process to augment the sustainability of the craft through their commitment during all stages of production.

The following practice-based research was made possible by what I consider unique and privileged access to artisans in Kashmir through my Kashmiri family connections, whereby the artisans shared their viewpoints about their tradition-based livelihoods and plans, without commercial influence. My own background

enabled me to reach out and connect those artisans with customers in Australia who appreciate and value their textile products.

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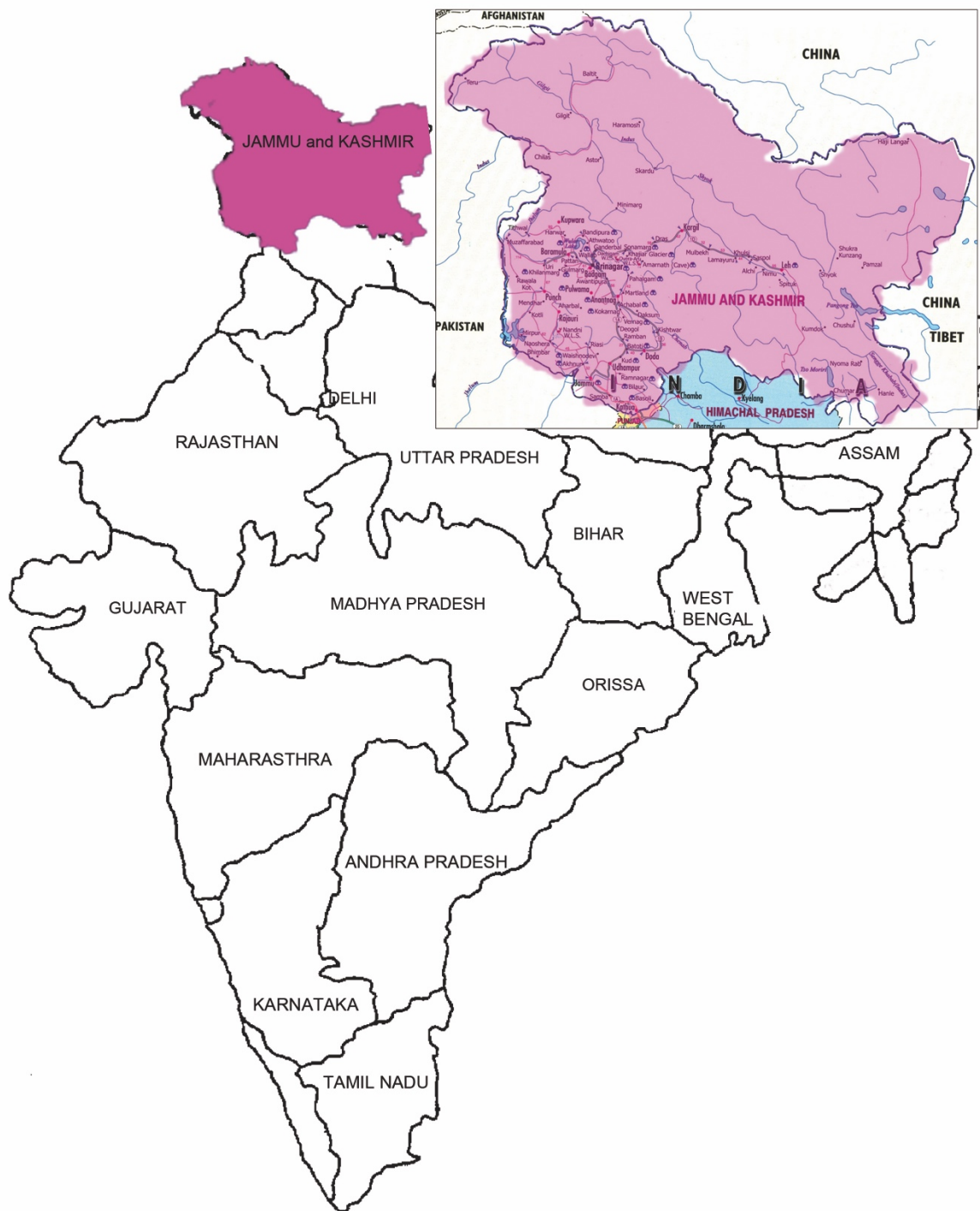
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*Map of India with the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the north  
(inset detail Jammu and Kashmir)*

<https://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/maponline/base-maps/indian-states>

## Chapter One: Introduction — scope, significance and aims

### 1.1 Field and context of research

The field of study of my practice-based research is traditional textile studies and practices and the site of my research is artisan communities in India, specifically, the Kashmir shawl community in the north Indian state of Kashmir where these textiles are produced. The artisans who live and work in this community use natural and locally sourced materials to develop their handcrafted products with skills learnt through intergenerational observation and practice and from knowledge of materials and techniques that has evolved over time. For these reasons, I will argue that these artisan communities represent sustainable design, cultural inheritance, and responsible environmental practices in the context of a wider global society. Increased ethical concerns about environmental degradation and exploitation of labour in the textile and fashion industry has consumers and users of the artisanal textiles wanting to know more about the techniques used and the makers of the products they purchase, because 'craft provides a framework for explorations of how ethical, sustainable and environmental principles are manifested in, and through, particular materials, processes, and objects.'<sup>1</sup>

The craftsmanship of traditional textile communities using their culturally inherited techniques is being adopted in new contexts for a global market. Some examples are discussed in Chapter Four. While artisans are prepared to adapt their skills to create new products that are more saleable or have greater commodity appeal to a wider reach of contemporary consumers, often this is in response to the intervention of designers from outside of their communities. Designers, both foreign and from within India, utilise artisanal craft techniques to develop their own products. In these scenarios, the traditional craft context and design practice inherent within the communities are often made redundant. From my own conversations and working relationships with textile artisans in India, it is apparent that the creation of new markets does not necessarily translate to the financial sustainability of their products.<sup>2</sup> In turn, the younger members of the artisan communities do not find sufficient financial incentives to continue working within their craft and cultural heritage.

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<sup>1</sup>Sharmila Wood, "Sustaining crafts and livelihoods: handmade in India," *Craft + Design Enquiry* 3, 2011, <http://www.craftaustralia.org.au/cde/index.php/cde/article/viewFile/21/20>.

<sup>2</sup>Deborah Emmett, "Artisan Voice: An Investigation of the Collaborations between Skilled, Traditional Textile Artisans in India and Foreign Textile and Fashion Designers from the Artisans' Perspective and Their Viewpoints of Their Craft Industry in Contemporary Times" (Master's thesis, University of New South Wales, 2015), 34.

### 1.1.2 Indian governmental / political influence on textile artisan communities

This research, while focusing on the Kashmir shawl community, will discuss the situation of Indian traditional textile communities in general since the partition of the subcontinent, and during the last two decades, following Indian economic policy reforms, especially those made in the 1990s. Since the formation of the Republic of India in 1947, governments have been supportive of Indian handicrafts, as Chapter Two discusses. Many craft promoters and textile academics believe the revival of Indian craft production derives from the Swadeshi campaign that included promoting hand-spinning and hand-weaving of cotton khadi fabric and continued with Nehru's socialism, under which the government made efforts to foster crafts and related village industries.<sup>3</sup>

Government-supported handicrafts boards such as the (recently dismantled) All India Handloom Board were established. Many textile artisans who remain in their traditional communities attempt to sustain their craft businesses, often by relying upon government schemes and grants. The government of India has a program which bestows the title of Master Craftsman upon eligible artisans. Misri Khan, for example, an artisan embroidery group leader in remote Darasat Village, near Barmer, Rajasthan, is a government-recognised Master Craftsman. In an interview in 2013, Khan said while he was pleased to have the opportunity to attend government-organised exhibitions, he did not consider that these events would contribute to the sustainability of his business, explaining, 'I don't have an export licence. We have taken loans from the government and others to do this work. We are very poor and don't have exposure to the western market and so don't get the money we need. With interest on loans we are running on losses.'<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Prior research

Building on my own extensive experience over 20 years of working with artisans in India while directing and designing for my textile design company, Tradition Textiles, I conducted a series of interviews with Indian textile artisans as part of a Master of Design Honours completed at UNSW in 2015. From the beginning, I valued the relationships developed with the artisans but observed that their viewpoints on their craft and collaborations with designers remained unrecorded. In those interviews, I sought to determine the artisan's position on working with foreign fashion and textile designers.

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<sup>3</sup>Emmett, "Artisan Voice," 4.

<sup>4</sup>Emmett, 13.

Apart from recording the artisans' perspectives on their experiences and the textiles produced, my master's study also detailed the structure of their traditional communities in relation to their craft practices and daily lives. It was evident that the artisans considered their socio-economic position to be poor and felt their communities were excluded from technological advancements occurring in other sectors in present-day India. The need to earn money was consistently mentioned by most of the interview participants. Crewel embroiderer Mohammed Ibrahim Dar, discussing the current situation of his craft, noted,

'The girls are interested but not the boys. A boy can get a job laboring and earn RS400 [AUD\$8 2014] a day while the girls can only earn RS150 – 200 [AUD\$ 3 - \$4] per day doing embroidery. The girls can't do a laboring job but they can embroider in the home and what they earn is sufficient to add to the family income.'<sup>5</sup>

This example demonstrates how limited opportunities to earn a supportable income has forced some members of the artisans' younger generation to move away from their family crafts.

### 1.3 Why this research?

Traditionally, artisans created products for their local communities, but the migration of rural village populations to larger urban centres for alternative work in India has meant a loss of markets for the artisans. In my own experience as a designer, when sourcing artisans to work with in India, initial contact is frequently undertaken by an agent or business broker based in the city. With these middlemen or 'facilitators' controlling the marketing of the artisanal products, artisans have become disconnected from the consumers of their handcrafted textiles. In his Foreword to *Designers meet Artisans*, Indrasen Vencatachellum, UNESCO Chief, Section for Arts, Crafts and Design, points to the need for designers to act as intermediaries between the artisan and the consumer — 'a "bridge" between the artisan's knowhow and his [sic] knowledge of what to make.'<sup>6</sup>

Since completing my master's research and continuing my own textile practice in collaboration with different artisan communities in the Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kashmir, I have witnessed increasing global awareness of the fashion and textile industry in relation to its sustainability, the working conditions of artisans,

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<sup>5</sup>Emmett, 29.

<sup>6</sup>Indrasen Vencatachellum, foreword to *Designers Meet Artisans: A Practical Guide*, (New Delhi: Craft Revival Trust; Bogotá: Artesanías de Colombia SA, 2005), v, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147132>

and appreciation of handcrafted products. Recent industry trade fairs I have attended now include artisanal, handmade products; in New York, for example, the industry wholesale market, NY NOW, features 'Global Design' and 'Artisan Resource' sections. Furthermore, rising social consciousness of ethical design principles when working with artisan communities has prompted the development of many projects that use a collaborative model within India, established by fashion and textile businesses, non-government organisations (NGOs) and educational institutions. While these projects have given artisans opportunities for design training and product development, as the examples in Chapter Four highlight, to date, the success and sustainability of these collaborative models have not been evaluated by the artisans or by academic researchers. The case studies presented in Chapter Four as part of the current research address this gap.

Collaborative models initiated by government, NGOs, and commercial businesses and industry offer innovative approaches to opening potential new markets for artisans to evolve their creativity. In this thesis, I analyse the scope of the artisans' participation in the case study collaborations to understand whether, because of the new products now being made in such collaborations, the artisans' cultural heritage is undervalued. Textile artisans traditionally conceived and designed products using local materials sold in local markets, mostly to local users. The artisans knew the purpose or end use of the products. They were not mass-produced or standardised, so each item had a unique element according to specific end user requirements. Many of the pieces — embroidered garments worn at family weddings, for example — were made within the cultural context of the artisan's own community.<sup>7</sup> However, from my previous research, conducted between 2012 and 2014, I found that overall, the artisans were pragmatic in their approach to their crafts and open to change.<sup>8</sup> When an opportunity arises, they adapt their skills to accommodate new materials, or adjust the quality for a price-conscious market.

It is unfortunate that often, the artisans' wages are the first casualty of economising in the production of a handcrafted textile. As India emerges as a technologically and industrially developed country, circumstances for traditional textile communities are becoming more challenging. Although some opportunities are available to the artisans through collaborations, their economic position remains tenuous. While the artisans are capable and prepared to adapt their crafts, they are often estranged from the finished products, either because they work only on a section of the product, or the completed article is foreign to their own social and cultural experiences. As artisans become disconnected from the traditional context of their crafts, their cultural heritage is eroded.

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<sup>7</sup>Emmett, 9.

<sup>8</sup>Emmett, Chapter 2.

#### 1.4 Scope of research: new design emphasis of co-design theory and sustainable fashion

The theoretical framework for this research is based on co-design theory and its correlation with slow fashion. This theory evolved from participatory design, developed in northern Europe. Co-design theorists Elizabeth Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers explain co-design as user-centred design whereby the user or customer is brought into the developmental stages of design. In this concept, the focus is not so much on the end-product, but rather on the design experience which gives the users control based on their needs.<sup>9</sup>

The slow fashion movement has developed in reaction to the mass consumerism of fast fashion.<sup>10</sup> Slow fashion emphasises the use of local materials, traditional craft techniques and small-scale production. A correlation between slow fashion and co-design theory exists in a shift to values associated with developing relationships between participants, and the significance of that experience. Discourse among textile design researchers, design theorists and proponents of slow fashion relevant to sustainable design and within the theoretical framework of co-design increasingly calls for direct links between consumers or users and the makers. This is based on the belief that the textile or garment has greater intrinsic value if the maker and final user know each other, thereby adding to the knowledge and sustainability of the item.<sup>11</sup> The proposition of the relationship between the traditional textile artisans in India and consumers passionate about their handcrafted textiles is the essence of this research which, aiming to develop sustainable models that re-position the artisans in the maker-and-consumer design process of co-design, asks the following research questions:

*What co-design strategies are appropriate to sustaining future practice for traditional textile artisan communities in India? How does this research throw new light on the relevance and potential for expansion of co-design practices in an intercultural context?*

The consumers in this research are customers of handcrafted textiles living in Australia who were selected to co-design with artisans from within the Kashmir shawl community, based on their accessibility to the researcher. Although distinctive, these participants can be deemed representative of other consumers and artisan communities co-designing together in an intercultural context. While my

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<sup>9</sup>Elizabeth B. N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, "Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design." *CoDesign* 4, no. 1 (2008): 5-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710880701875068>.

<sup>10</sup>Kate Fletcher, *Craft of Use: Post Growth-Fashion* (London: Routledge, 2016), 24.

<sup>11</sup>Marilyn Delong, Mary Casto, Yoon Lee, and Seoha Min, "Sustainable Clothing from the Users Perspective," (paper presented at the International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference, 2015).

usual role when working with artisans on a textile or garment is as a designer, in this research, which aims to develop a more social and networked model, I adopt a new role, as a 'facilitator.'

Contemporary co-design theories<sup>12</sup> tend to be discussed from a Eurocentric standpoint that emphasises design research and designers, since co-design was first developed as a new approach to design within northern Europe's regulated, industrialised structures. Nevertheless, based on my research, observation and evaluation, I suggest that ideas within the co-design framework can be applied to traditional artisan communities working in contemporary markets, given critical reassessment of its underlying considerations and assumptions.

The significance of the artisans' cultural heritage and practices are discussed in relation to current co-design suppositions concerning the user and the maker. Liz Sanders and Pieter Stappers claim:

'Success is no longer defined primarily by monetary value such as sales in the marketplace. Beyond monetary value, we now see experience value, the objective of which is to meet the wants and needs of people, as well as social value, the objective of which is to be able to deliver on more sustainable and convivial ways of living.'<sup>13</sup>

The aim of the three co-design projects devised for this research is to reconceptualise co-design theory by integrating it with traditional textile communities. At the commencement of each of these projects, the user of handcrafted textiles is brought into a particular community's complex network of artisans responsible for the many processes in the creation of a specific textile or garment. Showing how the structure of artisan communities operating within India's informal economy diverges from the industrial parameters of conventional co-design, the three projects provide the opportunity to examine some of the assumptions associated with co-design and reconceptualise its processes in an intercultural setting.

In *From Designing to Co-Designing to Collective Dreaming: Three Slices in Time*, Sanders and Stappers write about a change in the roles of design researchers, designers and end users. Before the arrival of co-design theories, the focus of the design process was the designer who developed the product, while design researchers then assessed the responses of users to the product; as for the makers or users, there was no input by either until the prototype was produced. In co-

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<sup>12</sup>Elizabeth B. N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, *Convivial Design Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design* (Amsterdam: BIS, 2012).

<sup>13</sup>Liz Sanders and Pieter Stappers, "From Designing to Co-Designing to Collective Dreaming: Three Slices in Time," *ACM Interactions*, xx1.6 November-December 2014, 30, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2670616>.

design, the emphasis is on designing with the involvement of both the user and maker from the outset of product development.

Exponents of slow fashion place human-centred interaction at the heart of the production of culturally authentic fashion and textiles. In *Slow Fashion: An Invitation for Systems Change*,<sup>14</sup> Kate Fletcher aligns slow fashion with its predecessor, the so-called slow food movement, which similarly emphasises local resources, traditions, and production with aim of reducing overconsumption and waste. She proposes a similar assessment of values and behaviour in the fashion industry to counter its dominant business practices and economic priorities:

‘The slow culture vocabulary of small-scale production, traditional craft techniques, local materials and markets that has proved so successful in food, offers one set of responses to these questions.’<sup>15</sup>

Slow fashion represents a vision of sustainability in the fashion and textiles sector based on values and goals that reject fast turnover in production and consumption. The co-design projects of this research contribute to elucidating the principles of slow fashion through the key environmental and cultural concepts addressed in sustainability as they pertain to artisan communities. The research proposes supportable co-design strategies for the artisans and users of their textiles, as well as relationship building, changing perceptions of value by the different project participants, and shared communication techniques. Although handcrafted artisanal textiles typically follow the slow fashion ethos in developing the co-design methodology, this research will explore how, in co-design processes with artisanal textile communities in India, users perceive not only the utility, but the value of these textiles and their surrounding value systems, and how these perceptions can be integrated into the co-design processes. This research includes a qualitative survey of interested consumers of handcrafted textiles in Sydney, Australia, undertaken to gather their perceptions about the textiles and their value as well as their knowledge of the artisans who make them, before initiating the co-design projects.

As co-design theory developed within the framework of structured industrialisation and advanced manufacture, the role of designers shifted in orientation and ethos. Instead of their leading the design and production of things, everyday users or consumers would contribute quality ideas in the design process: designing with, rather than for users. Although placed at the centre of the value creation process, users within a Eurocentric structure are assumed to already know and be familiar with the market value of a product or service. This pre-existing knowledge of

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<sup>14</sup>Fletcher, Kate, “Slow Fashion: An Invitation for Systems Change,” *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design, Creative Process and the Fashion Industry* 2, no. 1 (2010): 259-266.

<sup>15</sup>Fletcher, “Slow Fashion,” 264.

commodity value cannot, however, be assumed when co-designing in an intercultural environment. Slow fashion has emerged in reaction to the existing structure of the industrial, commercial fashion industry. Advocates of co-design and slow fashion aim to foster sustainability and shift the emphasis of value to 'lived experience.' This research argues that the exchange of lived experiences between the participating artisans and users of their handcrafted textiles necessitates a redefinition of assumptions about value and sustainability in an intercultural context.

#### 1.4.1 Communication and digital connectivity

With digital connectivity, and the ubiquitous use of smartphones and social media, Sanders and Stappers consider the public involvement and more global inclusivity in design that has developed means that '... we can collaborate anytime and anywhere through our connected devices.'<sup>16</sup> They see this development reflected in participatory design or co-design processes which value the user's lived experience and make knowledge sharing possible among a broader range of participants. Recognising the significance of digital communication for the future of co-design, the co-design projects of this research explore the relationships between contemporary digital technology and the lived experiences of the projects' participants.

Taking a co-design approach, I propose to connect users with artisans through digital communication platforms including WhatsApp, Zoom and video, so their narratives and stories can be told. The artisans sharing their stories with their customers in a transfer of information enables the consumer to provide design meaning and purpose. I will argue that this move can redress the disjunction between consumers — in both contemporary western societies and the immense Indian urban population — and the textile making process. No longer do people see how textiles are made since textiles are not produced in their home environments. At the same time as the stories behind the textile artisans' products are gaining the interest of consumers, the artisans I interviewed for my earlier research spoke of their disconnection from the products they made. Who bought them, and how were they used? I found through my investigations that this separation was often attributed to the structure of artisan communities in which numerous individuals with different skills are involved in the fabrication of one product. Users of handcrafted textiles therefore need to be informed about the artisans' processes, their techniques and the materials they use.

Video of the co-design projects, which includes documentation of the artisans and their making processes as well as digital interactions between the participants in Australia and Kashmir will be shared via a website constructed on completion of the

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<sup>16</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "From Designing to Co-Designing," 28.

projects. This eventually public-facing website will have two functions: to exhibit the textiles produced with the associated project documentation, and to provide a platform for connecting artisans with interested consumers for future co-design projects. The website will potentially support a key aim of this research — to provide the artisans with a more sustainable future.

## 1.5 Scope of research: artisan communities in India's informal employment sector

Artisan communities belong to India's informal employment sector. The government-established National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) found that 86% of total employment in India in 2004-2005 took place in the informal sector. The chairman of the commission, Arjun Sengupta, defined this sector as consisting in '... all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers.'<sup>17</sup> Among such enterprises, as Amit Basole states in his doctoral thesis, "Knowledge Gender and Production Relations in India's Informal Economy,"

'[o]ne such small-scale industry that continues to be important from the employment as well as output perspective is the textile industry. Being the single largest artisanal industry in India after food production and processing.'<sup>18</sup>

Although informal and unorganised, textile production is still a significant component of the economy. Moreover, its structure is emergent and fluid and, operating outside of regulated, industrialised structures in India, not generally observable. Traditional textile communities have been shown support by the Indian government, yet they remain members of the informal economy. In *Why Does India Have a Large Informal Sector?* Bhupinder Singh writes that during the post-colonial period the Indian government prioritised formalising industrialisation in the steel and power sectors, while

'... it curbed the large scale expansion of the textile industry in urban areas, which could have otherwise helped formalize the mass labour engaged in weaving and small scale industries in rural as well as urban sectors.'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Arjun Sengupta, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, *The challenge of employment in India: an informal economy perspective*, Report of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2009), 2.

<sup>18</sup>Amit Basole, "Knowledge Gender and Production Relations in India's Informal Economy." PhD diss., Amherst:University of Massachusetts, 2012 Open Access Dissertations (531), 12.

<sup>19</sup>Bhupinder Singh, "Why Does India Have Such a Large Informal Sector?"

Those working within the informal sector, including artisans, belong to low socio-economic sections of society, typically with poor levels of formal education. The artisans' self-perception as manual practitioners, trained as apprentices or by family members, has affected the integrity of their communities. With formal education being promoted as a path away from manual labour, many artisans believe that their children's futures lie in careers elsewhere. As interviewee Kunwar Pal, who carves designs into wood blocks for block printing, observed, 'Most block makers are illiterate because they start the trade at a very young age and so don't study. If they study, they probably will not be block makers.'<sup>20</sup> Many artisans have apparently lost confidence in the inherent value of the traditional knowledge of their crafts.

### 1.5.1 Structure and traditional knowledge in artisan communities

India's artisan communities are mostly in rural locations, although in recent times many artisans have migrated to urban centres to seek employment. Their worksites may vary from the artisans' homes to workshops or small factories. Usually, a textile business or community will be based around a key technical process that requires highly developed skills like weaving or embroidery. Linked to this technique are pre-processing roles like spinning and dyeing, and certain postproduction processes, such as washing and thread cutting, which require varying levels of skills. The different roles performed by artisans are widely understood within a textile artisan community. The collaborative model of the artisan community, which requires interdependence of various skills to develop and produce a specific textile product, is accepted historically and culturally. Although individual artisans have specific roles in the textile production process, they also possess tacit, or implicit, knowledge or overview of the whole manufacturing process, which does not, however, necessarily equate to knowing the destiny of the finished textile, nor who will use it.

Artisans learn their craft skills experientially, either by watching other family members or as apprentices. This passage of observation creates an intrinsic relationship between lived experience and tacit knowledge of technique and process recognised as traditional knowledge in the context of artisan communities. The artisan communities operate through their own network of interrelations based on their traditional knowledge and lived experience but are excluded from technological and industrial organisation and development in contemporary India. This was made particularly evident by the impact on the informal sector of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020.

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[https://www.academia.edu/9733103/Why\\_does\\_India\\_have\\_such\\_a\\_large\\_Informal\\_Sector\\_pdf\\_16](https://www.academia.edu/9733103/Why_does_India_have_such_a_large_Informal_Sector_pdf_16).

<sup>20</sup>Emmett, 27.

Increasingly, discourses in the fields of anthropology, social science and co-design examine the relevance of traditional knowledge. How traditional and tacit knowledge is considered a participatory phenomenon will be further explored in this study, specifically in relation to co-design theories. Traditional knowledge is regarded as ecologically safe due to the localised nature of its development within artisan communities who work within or near their living environments and utilise locally sourced materials.

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

Each chapter of this dissertation builds on the previous. Chapter Two reviews the literature relating to the theoretical framework, based on co-design theory and discourse on slow fashion, to the field of study and Indian traditional textile communities through a conceptual framework comprising of the following five key points.

- co-design strategies within the context of textile artisan communities
- relationship building: between artisans and users of their products from different cultures; new roles for facilitators
- re-valuation of value: differing perceptions of value
- sustainability: analysis of the distinction between environmental sustainability of artisan communities and the sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage
- digital connectivity for artisan communities enabling inclusivity with users

These five points, outlined in Chapter Two and referenced throughout the thesis, aim to reconfigure concepts of co-design and slow fashion in their interrelation with artisan communities.

Chapter Three presents a methodology for co-design and the specific co-design strategies developed for this research, justified by the conceptual framework and the arguments therein. Under the broader scope of an ethnographic methodology, I discuss my positionality in the research and planned documentation of the co-design projects.

In Chapter Four, I analyse the data from existing collaborations with textile artisan communities in India collected through case study interviews and research, and establish the uniqueness of the approach taken in relation to co-design.

Chapter Five reviews documentation of three co-design projects based on the method and describes clearly how the key concepts play out. Two of these three projects entail the co-creation of two embroidered shawls by artisans from the

Kashmir shawl community and two Australian customers; the third project entails the reintroduction of natural dyes into the Kashmir pashmina shawl community. Each project is shown to have different outcomes, demonstrating that my co-design methodology is emergent, rather than a priori and applied. Critical reflection and discussion then show how this methodology, when enacted, draws new conceptualisations of co-design in artisanal Indian textile making.

#### 1.6.1 Co-design strategies within the context of textile artisan communities that exist outside of the regulated, industrialised structures of conventional co-design

The conceptual framework of the research is critically related to the chosen methodology, which takes a different approach from that of conventional co-design where, while the user's active participation is pivotal in the co-design process, the process itself is not based in textile industry-established design structures. By co-designing with artisan communities embedded in India's informal economy, my aim was to generate a nonconventional methodology of co-design that questions the assumptions of co-design. The methodology developed to undertake the co-design projects in artisan communities characterised by complex interdependencies implements some established co-design tools and methods, while also questioning its conventional paradigms through intercultural relationship building and artisanal product design processes, by way of fieldwork in India and the use of digital communication.

#### 1.6.2 Relationship building: between artisans and users of their products from different cultures; new roles for designers/design researchers as facilitators within artisan communities

From my study of textile artisans' communities, I observe that the relationships between the artisans constitute their core. Social networks, where each artisan has a specialised role, interconnect to produce the completed textiles. Each artisan performs their part in a series of required processes, from developing the raw materials to finishing techniques. Each role is ongoing; each artisan, continuing with their specific process, is not necessarily involved with the final product outcome. While this traditional system continues, changing economic and political circumstances in present-day Indian society, including the growth in urban populations and introduction of a Goods and Services Tax (GST) has alienated the artisan communities, who operate outside formal market structures, from the commodity market and their consumers. Interceptions by middlemen facilitators, and even by designers, have further distanced the artisans from those who use their products. Limited access and knowhow to reach an expanding global consumer

base has further reduced opportunities for artisans to develop their markets and achieve economic assurance.

Artisans from social sectors whose disadvantage is compounded by low literacy and education levels lack familiarity with urban living and as a result, most are now part of a 'piece-rate' payment system. While interviewing Rehman Sofi, of Sofi Handicrafts in Srinagar, Kashmir, I observed the operation of this business model. Women crewel embroiderers came to Sofi's workshop with completed crewel fabric lengths they had embroidered in their homes, for which they received payment. Sofi supplied them with more stenciled cotton fabric lengths and dyed wool yarn. Before distribution, these materials are weighed separately, and unused materials are returned on the embroidery's completion. Payment is calculated by the weight of the completed embroidered fabric after deducting the original weight of the stenciled fabric and returned wool.<sup>21</sup> The facilitator, in this instance Rehman Sofi, controls access to materials used, product design, and the consumer, while the embroidery artisans are dependent upon him and disconnected from the concept of the products and from the consumers who purchase them. This reflects a situation that is becoming more prevalent in artisan communities.

#### 1.6.3 Sustainability: analysis of the perceived inherent environmental sustainability of artisan communities compared to actual sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage and traditional knowledge

The purpose of the co-design projects specifically developed to enable direct collaboration between artisans and the consumers or users of their textile products is to construct a new positioning of the artisan communities. These projects emphasise sharing experiences, relationship building, and transfer of knowledge about design and process. Co-design theory, with a focus on the user participating in the making process, will be related to the explicit ways of learning intrinsic to traditional textile communities. Tacit knowledge is a key concept of co-design, but it is also integral as traditional knowledge to ways of learning in traditional artisan communities. The question of how to sustain this knowledge and the cultural heritage it implies within the proposed co-design projects will be investigated.

#### 1.6.4 Digital connectivity for artisan communities enabling inclusivity with users, analysis of artisanal techniques in conjunction with digital techniques

Using digital technology is the most practical means of connecting artisans and consumers given the geographic distances this research, limited to users of handcrafted textiles in Australia, entails. From my own experience of developing textile designs with artisans in India, affirmed in the responses of my master's

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<sup>21</sup>Emmett, 10.

research participants, I propose inclusion to be the most beneficial element in the design/making relationship. Image-based digital communication enables inclusivity between participants also distant in language and culture as well as introducing an equalising effect that reduces perceived power imbalances.

In my previous research, I found the use of digital technology was quite alien to the artisan-participants. Meeting them in their homes and workshops, I saw no evidence of any form of digital equipment apart from mobile phones. Indeed, there seemed to be a certain disdain for the idea of introducing such technology to their craft production. Crewel draftsman Fayaz Ahmad Jan responded abruptly to my question about technology:

'I don't have a computer and it doesn't affect my work because many of the artisans who do the embroidery will not accept computer tracings. They come and sit with me and I explain the work. The tracing might come from a computer but then we need to modify it, look into the minutest details to see if the embroiderer can do it or not. Modifications are always necessary.'<sup>22</sup>

Within the last few years, however, widespread technological change has occurred in India. The recent introduction of cheap smartphone technology in India proved to be integral to the planning of these co-design projects. Artisans, like a multitude of others in India's lower socio-economic classes, now have access, in one device previously beyond their financial capacity, to the internet, a camera, and various digital communication platforms. This research therefore investigates how the availability of direct digital communication with the user can empower the artisans.

#### 1.6.5 Re-valuation of value: differing perceptions of value; how the artisans perceive the value of their skills over materials with a focus on lived experience and storytelling

While finished textile products represent outcomes of the projects and will be valued for their demonstration of the aesthetic beauty of handcrafted work, they do not represent the primary rationale for this research. Rather, the finished pieces are secondary to the focus on aspects of the production process: communication, designing and making between the participants, as Chapter Five documents. Nonetheless, the question of value is relevant in this cross-cultural setting; culturally, the ways artisans and their customers think are quite different. Can co-creation help bridge the gap between maker and user such that shared values emerge at the point of exchange? In addition, it is hoped that a consequence of the co-design projects will be fostering the development of roles for the artisans' children so that

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<sup>22</sup>Emmett, 31.

they reengage with their craft heritage. A further hope is that the application of these co-design models enables transparent costing of products so that artisans receive fair remuneration for their craft, contributing to a more sustainable future for the textile artisan communities.

This resolutely practice-based research is built on participatory co-creation between artisans and real customers and users with their lived experience and expectations. While acknowledging the contribution of technology to the enactment of the research projects, its use is judicious in respecting the context, with a deep understanding of cultural differences. The challenge of this research is to determine whether the theoretical position of co-design — emphatically Eurocentric in industrialised structures — can give voice to non-European cultures, and to provide an evidence-based approach to sustainability for traditional artisanal communities in India.

## Chapter Two: Literature review - theoretical and conceptual frameworks of research

### 2.1 Introduction

The significance of this research is framed within the two theoretical areas, namely co-design and 'slow fashion'. I will discuss the general development of these theories and their evident interconnections as I address their relevance to the main subjects of the research — traditional Indian textile communities. The aim is to explore the possible co-design strategies that will sustain future artisanal textile practices for these communities. This investigation, based on practical fieldwork, involves an ethnographic methodology that is emergent. The conceptual framework for the research comprises the following five themes and their relevance to Indian artisan textile communities, which will be discussed in relation to co-design and slow fashion.

1. **Sustainability:** analysis of the distinction between inherent environmental sustainability of artisanal practices and sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage and traditional knowledge
2. **Co-design strategies:** within the context of textile artisan communities that exist outside of the regulated, industrialised structures of conventional co-design
3. **Relationship building:** between artisans and direct users of their products who are from different cultures; and consequently, new roles for artisans and designers/design researchers as 'facilitators'
4. **A re-valuation of value:** analysis of differing perceptions of value, including how the artisans perceive the value of their skills over material value through ethnographic research on lived experience and storytelling
5. **Digital connectivity:** for artisan communities enabling inclusivity with users, analyses of artisanal techniques in conjunction with digital media and communication technologies

The concept of co-design is an emerging practice in contemporary fashion and textile industry as a response to growing criticism of the fast fashion system.<sup>23</sup> According to Basole,

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<sup>23</sup>Fletcher, Kate, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 186.

<sup>24</sup>Basole, ""Knowledge Gender and Production," 31.

'New paradigms of participatory and sustainable development [are] a reaction to the perceived top-down and ecologically destructive nature of prior development models.'<sup>24</sup>

The popularity of fast fashion within the industry this century, alongside the elite position of fashion designers, relegates the consumer, or fashion and textile user to a passive position, captured by marketing for mass consumerism and influenced by the fashion system and social media. Yet the fast fashion phenomenon is now being challenged, not only by environmental activists, but also by a growing number of designer-makers and fashion and textile companies calling for change to this system. They are demanding a more sustainable system that addresses concerns about the significant waste generated by this industry and the working conditions of those who labour in it.<sup>24</sup> Kate Fletcher considers that participatory design with more active roles for the user or consumer, although little explored, offers a way forward in creating a more sustainable model for the fashion and textile industry.<sup>25</sup> Practices based on materialist and consumerist approaches and attitudes are now being endorsed by commercial marketing, particularly for urban populations, where separation of nature and culture has become a dominant paradigm. Conversely, in traditional artisan communities, their cultural nexus with the natural environment forms a co-creative connectivity in the development of their design processes. Traditional artisanal techniques are cultural assets that sit at the centre of the slow fashion movement and make a critical contribution to design innovation moving forward.<sup>26</sup> To begin these co-design dialogues with respect to traditional Indian artisanal textile communities, I discuss their current positionality within industry in modern India.

## 2.2 Traditional Indian artisanal textile communities – social, economic and political positioning in India's informal economy

The significance of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) in providing 'meaningful development'<sup>27</sup> is gaining global recognition. A World Bank report from 2005 states that CCI 'can be part of the solution, fostering social inclusion, climate action, and income generating activities.'<sup>28</sup> In India, it has been recently estimated that 45-48% of the workforce are involved in the Cultural and Creative Industries<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 71.

<sup>26</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 194.

<sup>26</sup>Fletcher, "Slow Fashion," 264.

<sup>27</sup>Ritu Sethi, "The Building of Craft Policy in India," in *A Cultural Economic Analysis of Craft*, Vol. 24, eds. Anna Mignosa and Priyatej Kotipalli (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 111.

<sup>28</sup> The World Bank Group, *Cultural Heritage: An Asset for Urban Development and Poverty Reduction*.

[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCHD/Resources/430063-1250192845352/CHandslums\\_Oct.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCHD/Resources/430063-1250192845352/CHandslums_Oct.pdf).

<sup>29</sup>Sethi, "The Building of Craft Policy," 113.

comprising the many craft communities throughout the subcontinent. Most members of these communities are part of what is known as India's informal economy who work in their homes, workshops or small factories with ten or fewer employees, as defined in the 2004-2005 *National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS)*. The commission found that 86% of total employment in India was in this informal sector.

Although the employment of those working in the informal economy is diverse in practice, they generally have low socioeconomic status and limited formal education. Originally predominantly based in rural areas, in more recent times the informal economy has expanded into the urban centres as people migrate around India seeking employment. One of the largest sectors of small-scale industry in terms of employment and economic output and operating within the informal economy is the fashion and textile industry, the main source of contemporary artisanal production.<sup>30</sup> Artisans in the textile production sector of the informal economy live in proximity to each other in cities, towns or villages. And in these often family-based businesses, skills are gained and developed through intergenerational transfer of knowledge or learnt through apprenticeships.

The cultural value of craft has received government recognition in India since the formation of the Republic in 1947, but with the opening-up of the Indian economy in 1991, and the government's expanded private and foreign investment priorities, the emphasis became industrialisation and urban orientation. The shift in policy has resulted in advantages for urban and mechanised over rural and handcrafted. In *The Building of Craft Policy in India*, Ritu Sethi, Chairperson of Craft Revival Trust, provides an overview of the shifting Indian government policy towards craft and how that has impacted upon the artisan communities. To develop a post-colonial future, the Indian government sought not only political independence but also economic self-reliance. Within that framework, Mahatma Gandhi's vision to promote and utilise India's crafts became central to policymaking. From 1951 until the end of the 1980s, the Government implemented a series of five-year plans for the craft sector under the guidance of the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handicrafts and the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms. These bodies were initially chaired respectively by Kamladevi Chattopadhyay and Pupal Jayaker, who, having preeminent roles in the revival of Indian handicrafts, nurtured many of the country's national craft institutions. According to Sethi,

'Policy makers squarely recognized that the handlooms and handicrafts were not only an invaluable cultural tradition but equally an economic force impacting GDP and sustainable development.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Basole, 12.

<sup>31</sup>Sethi, 105.

Since India needed foreign exchange, the potential of Indian handcrafts for export was encouraged. Financial credit was made available to artisans for raw materials and equipment. Coincidental with support for craft exports, the government sponsored handloom shops for urban consumers, beginning with the New Delhi Central Cottage Industries Emporium in 1952. By the 1970s, more than a hundred such emporia were in operation around India with the aim of making a wide range of Indian crafts directly available to urban populations, cutting out the middleman. Research centres like the Weavers Service Centres and National Centre for Textile Design were established for artisanal technical enhancement and product development, initially for the requirements of foreign customers, as well as product marketing. From 1986 the Export Promotion Council of Handicrafts held programs around the world to promote Indian crafts.

But the change in economic policy in the 1990s brought reduced status for the craft sector. Policymakers, while 'continuing to acknowledge the sector's cultural underpinning and its huge employment potential in rural areas,'<sup>32</sup> perceived the sector as not contributing significantly to GDP and thus, it received less budget allocation. Since then, artisans have mainly relied upon the private sector and NGOs for support. Currently, no less than 17 different government ministries have policies that impact the craft sector, Sethi suspecting it is difficult for holistic, integrated policy and planning to be made for the artisan communities.<sup>33</sup>

Evidence exists of a reduction in government programs for artisans with decreased financial support.<sup>34</sup> This cutback is partially attributable to perceptions of members of India's mainstream, educated economy about the position of artisans in the informal economy. Considered illiterate, their skills are unacknowledged. Amit Basole reports that the director of the Banaras Weavers Service Centre spoke of the artisans 'as lacking in education and hence in knowledge also,'<sup>35</sup> while adding that the artisans are unhappy in the way they are treated at the centre.

Ashoke Chatterjee of the Craft Council of India discusses the perceived invisibility of artisans and their crafts, alienated from national investment and planning despite their environmental and cultural significance:

'In an era threatened by climate change, hand production offers a low carbon footprint and the promotion of local materials, while cultural and spiritual

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<sup>32</sup>Sethi, 109.

<sup>33</sup>Sethi, 111.

<sup>34</sup>Sethi, 108.

<sup>35</sup>Basole, 97.

factors of identity and self-worth go beyond statistical calculations into the heart of India's civilizational values.<sup>36</sup>

He cites an example of failed, uninformed government ministry schemes which in 2012 proposed to attach power machines to weavers' handlooms to increase production. Practically, this would have failed since the looms are constructed of wood and would not withstand the machine's vibrations. And as well, the idea clearly devalues hand production that is the globally recognised appeal of Indian crafts. Fortunately, artisan weavers throughout India protested — in an election year — and the idea was scrapped.

This insensitivity within India to the status of artisans can be viewed from several perspectives. First, the Indian government wants to present an India on the cutting edge of technology and, subsequently, rejects the craft sector as outdated:

'With transformational shifts in economic, social and political contexts across the world, India's artisans and their crafts came to be regarded by some influential decision-makers as embarrassing hangovers of a past that needed to be discarded along with snake-charmers and maharajas.'<sup>37</sup>

Second, the urban-based Indian middle class, vastly expanded in this century, has lost interest in the handcrafted products of artisans, preferring mass-produced global brands now readily available on India's open market. Third, demonetisation and the introduction of a GST in 2017 was designed to promote India as a modern economy, but as members of India's informal sector, often working in home-based businesses, the artisans had no access to GST returns. Their businesses were unregistered, and the required GST paperwork was difficult for many of the artisans who have limited literacy but, again, these problems were not foreseen by policymakers. Since then, however, artisanal hand process businesses with turnovers of less than Rs20 lakh (AUD\$36,000 in 2021) have become exempt from GST.

Attempts by the Indian government to develop an official account and ascertain the numbers of artisans employed in the informal economy have been made. An official estimate in 2015 figured that 250 million artisans worked in 600,000 communities across India.<sup>38</sup> In consequence of the country's unemployment crisis causing rural workers to migrate to urban centres in search of work, only to become homeless and poverty stricken, the government is now paying more attention to the informal sector, the greater part of India's workforce. The benefits for employment and

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<sup>36</sup>Chatterjee, Ashoke, "The Invisible Giant: Economics of Artisanal Activity in India," in *A Cultural Economic Analysis of Craft*, Vol. 24, eds. Anna Mignosa and Priyatej Kotipalli (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 204.

<sup>37</sup>Chatterjee, "The Invisible Giant," 206.

<sup>38</sup>Chatterjee, 208.

investment, particularly in rural areas, that artisans and their crafts can provide are acknowledged by Ashoke Chatterjee:

'The Indian Government has identified four thousand traditional product manufacturing clusters that include handlooms, handicrafts and other traditional products. It is here that outreach is essential to provide the capacities young artisans now demand: entrepreneurship, language, e-commerce and marketing savvy, and access to design and technology.'<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, I consider that the conceptual themes of sustainability and co-design are relevant to this practice-based research. The co-design projects demonstrate the potential for capacity development as well as offer artisans a new method of engagement with their customers that can provide future opportunities for the younger members of their communities.

### 2.2.1 Sustainability: analysis of the distinction between inherent environmental sustainability of artisanal practices and sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage and traditional knowledge

The dissemination of information is now more multi-layered with input from wide-ranging and widespread participants. Although outside of this research, but nonetheless significant, is the acceptance of acquiring knowledge through ways of learning beyond formal education institutions. This perception, emanating from the growth of the service industry in technology, continues to gain momentum and is particularly relevant in India, given the contribution to its economy from this industry, call centres being an example. In the artisanal craft industry, the spread of information for its economic development is based on a participatory approach, external to formal education systems.

In *Knowledge, Gender and Production Relations in India's Informal Economy*, Amit Basole writes about artisanal knowledge dissemination with commercial application applicable to India's informal economy as traditional knowledge. The interest in traditional knowledge is derived from 'the need to make the development process less "top-down" and more "participatory."<sup>40</sup> In light of the previously mentioned failures in government policy for the development of artisan communities and their crafts, this approach would seem most valuable where the participating artisans integrate their knowledge into planning and development. The methods of working and learning in artisan communities, as opposed to industrialisation and mass production, are also of value, since '[t]hese knowledges are seen as ecologically

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<sup>39</sup>Chatterjee, 210.

<sup>40</sup>Basole, 3.

friendly, having developed over a long period of time in the midst of populations that lived close to their natural environments.<sup>41</sup>

The Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, a discussion forum of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), has drafted a definition of the meaning of traditional knowledge:

'Traditional knowledge (TK) is knowledge, knowhow, skills and practices that are developed, sustained and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.'<sup>42</sup>

Traditional knowledge results from intellectual activity in a traditional context. To understand artisanal traditional knowledge in India, it is necessary to examine the organisation of their communities, which is not static, but evolves subject to economic, political and social influences. Judy Frater, author and educator, has researched and worked with artisan craft communities in India since the 1970s. In *Education for Artisans: Beginning a Sustainable Future for Craft Traditions*, she explains that typically, 'craft was made in a community-based horizontal social structure, in which artisans all held more or less equal economic and social status.'<sup>43</sup> Working from their homes or in local workshops, there was no managerial structure as in large industrial organisations. The artisans devised the concept for the product, sourced the raw materials locally and created the product. Since their customers were known to them there was an existing relationship between the user and maker, while the product was not available for mass distribution.

With a decline in product sales in local communities, along with government policy to scale up craft production for larger urban and overseas markets, there was a shift in the artisan communities' social structures. Master artisans take charge, usually training others through apprenticeships. 'They employ previously equal status artisans as workers, and gain higher social as well as economic status. The perception of the artisan as worker has re-emerged in a new, socially threatening form.'<sup>44</sup> The artisans' knowledge is their own, but the infrastructure, raw materials and access to markets is controlled by others. Master artisans act as the link between traders and other stakeholders and the artisans. Although control by

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<sup>41</sup>Basole, 3.

<sup>42</sup>World Intellectual Property Organization, *The Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore*, [https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo\\_pub\\_tk\\_2.pdf](https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_tk_2.pdf).

<sup>43</sup>Judy Frater, "Education for Artisans: Beginning a Sustainable Future for Craft Traditions," in *A Cultural Economic Analysis of Craft*, Vol. 24, eds. Anna Mignosa and Priyatej Kotipalli (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 272.

<sup>44</sup>Frater, "Education for Artisans," 280.

master artisans undoubtedly creates a more hierarchical structure within the artisan communities, it is accepted as a means to reach necessary contacts for external markets as well as providing opportunities to learn skills through apprenticeships. Even so, master artisans rarely have direct access to the market, instead developing their designs based on feedback from traders. From my own observations and research, artisans continually modify their designs to remain innovative for the market, and usually rely on others for ideas about market trends. There is, therefore, a transfer of knowledge about users when social structures change in their communities that further distances the artisans from the consumers of their handcrafted products. Simultaneously, to survive financially the artisans develop products that are alien to the cultural heritage of their craft.

A feature of artisanal production of a specific product is clustering in one geographical area, usually a town, rural area or city neighbourhood. *Cluster theory* has been influential in the Indian handicrafts sector and postcolonial crafts development. In *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* Michael E. Porter discusses geographic clusters in industry as advantageous for innovation and competitiveness. Clusters are not scattered physically; instead concentrated geographically where the whole group of industries becomes mutually supporting. 'Interconnections within the cluster, often unanticipated, lead to perceptions of new ways of competing and new opportunities.'<sup>45</sup> The labour is highly specialised while there is a domestic demand for the products. Although structures will vary Porter affirms that industry clusters often consist of small or medium-sized companies, that are privately owned, and operated like extended families as is the situation in artisan communities. The term 'cluster' has been adopted by small industry policy in India.

Artisans with specialised skills collaborate to sustain the craft's production. There is a flow of knowledge due to social and community bonds, either among generations of the same family or through apprenticeships and training. While each artisanal skill is applied independently there is a 'tacit' knowledge held by most of the artisans in a community area of the processes required to produce the textile piece. In this context, Amit Basole considers the terms 'traditional knowledge' and 'tacit knowledge' to be the same, depending on application, but distinct from formal education:

'Some describe the knowledge itself (such as "informal," "tacit," or "local") and others describe the communities which are supposed to hold it (such as

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<sup>45</sup> Porter, Michael E. "The Competitive Advantage of Nations." *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1990. <https://hbr.org/1990/03/the-competitive-advantage-of-nations>

"traditional," "indigenous," .... "local area"). Implicit in each label is a contrast with some other type of knowledge, scientific, formal, Western and so on.<sup>46</sup>

Clay Spinuzzi defines tacit knowledge as 'implicit rather than explicit, holistic rather than bounded and systemized, it is what people know without being able to articulate.'<sup>47</sup> The socio-cultural value of this knowledge cannot be underrated regarding the sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage.

The introduction of the Geographical Indications of Goods Act (GI), an intellectual property rights legislation, was introduced in India in 1999. It is applicable and extends its protection to products of traditional knowledge associated with or deriving from local cultural traditions. 'Of all the GI's granted to date over 60% of the total are in the area of traditional arts, crafts and handlooms.'<sup>48</sup> Although, as Amit Basole reports, often the producers of the crafts — the artisans — are unaware of what a GI is, the GI application is filed by an associated NGO or government organisation.<sup>49</sup> Ruth Clifford suggests in *Design Education and Handloom Weaving* that while GIs can benefit a specific artisan community's craft, serving to control widespread imitation by its recognition as an anthropological archetype, 'dynamism and innovation of the craft is prevented.'<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there are no legally enforced patents on designs in India. However, the introduction of GIs is a means to protect and sustain the traditional knowledge inherent in the artisan communities where they are implemented.

Judy Frater discusses how India, as it began post-colonial nation building, focused on expansion through modern industrialisation while, conversely, trying to maintain a national identity based on its cultural heritage. Traditional mechanisms for handcraft development of small-scale production came under threat. 'At the same time, the concept of design as an entity was introduced to India.'<sup>51</sup> Government-initiated design institutions like the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad and the National Institute of Fashion and Technology (NIFT) were established in 1961 and 1986 respectively. These schools formally educate designers who are 'working with the crafts and serving as a bridge, mediating between rural craftspeople and their evolving urban markets.'<sup>52</sup> Seeking new clients, artisans look to more distant, unknown markets, often through intermediaries such as designers.

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<sup>46</sup>Basole, 33.

<sup>47</sup>Clay Spinuzzi, "The Methodology of Participatory Design," *Technical Communication* 52, no. 2 (May 2005): 165.

<sup>48</sup>Sethi, 111.

<sup>49</sup>Basole, 159.

<sup>50</sup>Ruth Clifford, "Handloom Weaving and Design Education in India," in *Making Futures: craft and the (re)turn of the maker*, *Making Futures Journal* Vol 4 (September 2015), 3.

<sup>51</sup>Frater, "Education for Artisans," 273.

<sup>52</sup>Sethi, 109.

From my earlier research I found, however, that although designers, local or foreign, can bring new perspectives and innovations to the artisans there is a fine line between the benefits of new designs and products and artisans becoming disconnected from what they are being requested to produce.<sup>53</sup> As summarised in *Designers Meet Artisans*,

'It is culture that links a craft with the artisan; take that away, as in the case of 'external' design, and the link is broken. Therefore, outside intervention, unless carefully thought through, can effect irreparable de-contextualization.'<sup>54</sup>

When the artisan is separated from their traditional knowledge in craft production, their role becomes that of a labourer.<sup>55</sup> Frater considers that design intervention divides the design concept from its execution: 'Intervention further comes with an implication of power and hierarchy: that designers have valuable knowledge, while artisans have less valuable skills.'<sup>56</sup> The artisans become culturally disempowered while the next generation of artisans perceive that their family's craft has no value or recognition. The continuance of their cultural heritage becomes unsustainable. In the age of globalisation, and with the introduction of non-local knowhow into the artisan communities, new ways to preserve, develop and promote their tacit knowledge need to be found.

### 2.3 Co-design theory

Before planning co-design strategies within the context of textile artisan communities for this research, conventional co-design requires discussion; the shifting role of the designer and their relationship with the end-user of the product or service needs defining. In the traditional design model, a designer will usually develop a concept based on the requirements of their client in a market-driven process, as design academics and researchers, Liz Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers describe. Design research was the responsibility of market research consultants who enter the design project near its completion, after concept, process and prototype development.<sup>57</sup> The consultants' role was to ascertain the design's likely success in the marketplace, usually by asking potential customers if they would purchase the design and for what price.

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<sup>53</sup>Emmett, 36.

<sup>54</sup>Craft Revival Trust, Artesanías de Colombia SA, *Designers Meet Artisans: A Practical Guide* (New Delhi: Craft Revival Trust; Bogotá: Artesanías de Colombia SA, 2005), 9.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147132>

<sup>55</sup>Craft Revival Trust, Artesanías de Colombia SA, 8.

<sup>56</sup>Frater, "Education for Artisans," 273.

<sup>57</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "From Designing to Co-Designing," 27.

Sanders and Stappers identify a shift in this model, in effect a change of emphasis to the needs of product users. This shift occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the development of technologies with user-friendliness, like personal computers and mobile telephones, where input from the user was required before the prototype was developed:

'In the user-centered design process, we focused on the thing being designed (e.g., the object, communication, space, interface, etc.), looking for ways to ensure that it met the needs of the user. In user-centered design, the roles of the researcher and the designer were distinct yet interdependent.'<sup>58</sup>

Thereby, the attention of designers and design researchers moved to the front end of the design and its design processes.

Design thinking with the user has become the new way to design products and services over the past two decades.<sup>59</sup> New approaches to design research, planning and processes now emphasise participation and collaboration with the user in the design of either products or services. The user or customer has been brought into the initial developmental stages of design to become part of the design process instead of passive recipients of the design outcome. These shifts in emphasis focus less on the resulting end-product than the design experience itself.<sup>60</sup> Terms like participatory design and co-design are commonly used to describe these new methodologies of design.

Participatory design describes an approach that contributes to design processes that attempts to involve all stakeholders (employees, partners, customers, citizens, end users).<sup>61</sup> The participants become directly involved in the development of the design process for the product, system or service. The users can bring innovation to the design through consultation in the early stages of development, for instance, by taking part in focus groups that generate new ideas. Through social interaction, the participants create together — this is integral to participatory design. Companies perceive, by having the user of their product or service participate in the design process, that product failure can be avoided, and customer loyalty secured. Universal accessibility to digital media and personal communication technologies has enabled easier and faster communication between participants, expanding co-creation strategies and possibilities.

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<sup>58</sup>Sanders and Stappers. "From Designing to Co-Designing," 28.

<sup>59</sup>Lucía Sánchez de la Guía, Marina Puyuelo Cazorla, and Blanca de-Miguel-Molina, "Terms and Meanings of 'Participation' in Product Design: From 'User Involvement' to 'Co-Design,'" *The Design Journal* 20, no. sup1 (2017): S4539, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1352951>.

<sup>60</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 5-18.

<sup>61</sup>Sánchez de la Guía Cazorla, and de-Miguel-Molina, "Terms and Meanings," S4539.

'User participation is being more and more important to design culture and seems to increase the user satisfaction and the product success ... the relations between the user's participation and the strategy or models of business have increased during the last decade'.<sup>62</sup>

As the approach to design research evolves, so does its terminology. In *Co-creation and the new landscapes of design*, Sanders and Stappers use *co-design* as a term with a more specific meaning than the broader *participatory design*.<sup>63</sup> They argue that since the 1970s, user-centred design research, initially developed in northern Europe, proved to be useful for the design and development of consumer products. People who were users of the products or services were invited to have informative roles in the early stages of the design planning. This method did not receive widespread acceptance. Sanders and Stappers believe that the reluctance of companies to augment participatory design was because it denies the 'expert' mindset in business by assuming that everyone can be creative.

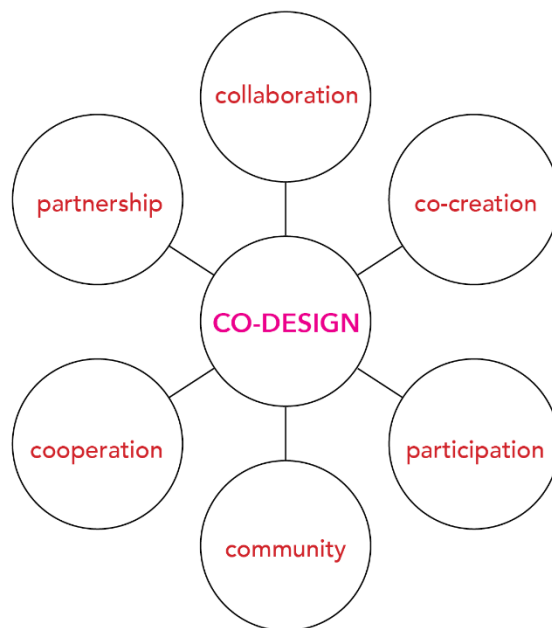


Figure 2.1. Diagram of the definitive context of co-design.

Source: Charles Ikem, "Can Using Co-Design Practices Help Improve the Outcome of Customer Journey Mapping?" Birmingham City University, 2012, 21.

In user-centred design, the researcher applies a combination of design theories with user observations and interviews to develop new knowledge provided to the

<sup>62</sup>Sánchez de la Guía Cazorla, and de-Miguel-Molina, S4549.

<sup>63</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 5.

designer. The designer then uses this information together with their own expertise in specific technologies to formulate concepts for the new products or services. In co-design, Sanders and Stappers weight the user's participatory role such that,

'... the roles get mixed up: the person who will eventually be served through the design process is given the position of 'expert of his/her experience', and plays a large role in knowledge development, idea generation and concept development.'<sup>64</sup>

Sanders and Stappers see co-design as being most relevant at the generation of the design process, before the more traditional steps of prototype development and product completion. While co-design involves designers, design researchers, and untrained people in co-creating for the whole design process, Sanders and Stappers consider that the development of tools to assist users in the formation of ideas and concepts is essential. They reference two main approaches: probes and generative toolkits, which are devised jointly by the designer and design researcher. Probes ask people to convey their experiences, emotions and opinions that can, in turn, inspire the designer. They can take many different forms, for example diaries, work- books, cameras with instructions, games, postcards, and so on.<sup>65</sup> Generative toolkits 'are typically used in facilitated collaborative activities, and their results (artefacts and descriptions or enactments of their use) can be analysed to find underlying patterns.'<sup>66</sup> After facilitating the process, the designer/design researcher must still give shape to the ideas. The role of the designer and/or design researcher is recast to that of a facilitator for users who assist in the generation of ideas.

Generative toolkits 'describe a participatory design language that can be used by non-designers (i.e. future users) at the front end of design so that they can imagine and express their own ideas about how they want to live, work and play in the future.'<sup>67</sup> For the non-designers, the emphasis of the toolkits is on making within the design process. Sanders and Stappers describe toolkits made of '2D or 3D components such as pictures, words, phrases, blocks, shapes, buttons, pipe cleaners, wires, etc.'<sup>68</sup>

Design facilitation, generally defined,

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<sup>64</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 12.

<sup>65</sup>Sanders, Elizabeth B. N., and Pieter Jan Stappers, "Probes, Toolkits and Prototypes: Three Approaches to Making in Codesigning," *CoDesign* 10, no. 1 (2014): 7.

<sup>66</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Probes," 9.

<sup>67</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Probes," 7.

<sup>68</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Probes," 9.

'... is the skill of effectively guiding a group of diverse individuals through a design process... achieved by supporting a collaborative and respectful environment that encourages full participation of the group.'<sup>69</sup>

In this context, the design facilitator assists the group to focus on customer wants and needs while encouraging innovation and problem-solving through the design processes. In co-design, the customers or users are included in the design process from the outset; the design researcher, who may also be a designer, assumes the role of facilitating a scenario for non-designers, providing stimuli (tools) to assist in the design process. For the co-design projects in this research, I consider that the role of the facilitator(s) should be expanded to encompass the complexities of inter-cultural communication between non-designers from different social and value systems, as I discuss later in this chapter.

### 2.3.1 Co-design case studies occurring outside of the regulated, industrialised structures of conventional co-design so relevant to textile artisanal communities

As Figure 2.1 indicates, the interpretation of co-design is broad, and its application as various as the people who participate in the projects and the products or services being designed. While co-design theory developed within Eurocentric, regulated industrial structures, the two examples of co-design projects reviewed below — a social enterprise project in Italy facilitated by service designers Daniela Selloni and Marta Corubolo, and a project about designing future textile solutions for Danish hospital environments facilitated by two RMIT lecturers in humanitarian engineering, Elisabeth Heimdal and Tanja Rosenqvist — have features I suggest could be applied in developing co-design strategies for artisan communities in India's informal economy with their characteristically more horizontal social structures. The co-design strategies and tools used in these two projects emphasise direct communication between participants to foster collaboration and take a bottom-up approach to addressing specific issues that require need-driven responses. This approach is a potentially appropriate *modus operandi* for co-creation projects between textile artisan communities in India and the users of their products.

Selloni and Corubolo write about two projects they have facilitated in *Design for social enterprises: Co-designing an organizational and cultural change*. The projects are social enterprises in the areas of childcare, elderly care, tourism and hospitality, and youth employment cooperatives. They consider the principles of 'participation, inclusion, trust and collaboration'<sup>70</sup> to be fundamental to cooperative structures.

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<sup>69</sup>Studio Dojo, <https://www.studiodojo.com/8-readings-to-guide-your-design-facilitation-journey/>.

<sup>70</sup>Daniela Selloni and Marta Corubolo, "Design for Social Enterprises. Co-Designing an Organizational and Cultural Change," *The Design Journal* 20, sup1 (2017): S3005-S19.

Selloni and Corubolo believe that for design innovation to occur in social enterprises, change must come from the ground up, from those who directly participate and not from organisations like government agencies or bodies outside of the community. By including the users of the cooperatives in the projects' early stages, they identified some existing hurdles, namely,

'... software, related to the lack of competences, skills, attitude and knowledge; hardware, associated to the need of physical tools and infrastructures; network, related to the absence or scarcity of connections and relationships; feasibility, associated with economical and legislative obstacles.'<sup>71</sup>

Using a co-design approach, Selloni and Corubolo provided their participants with tools in the form of 'barrier-cards'<sup>72</sup> by which stakeholders identified the previously noted challenges and 'actor-cards'<sup>73</sup> to convey their motivation for being involved in the cooperative. The pinpointed information, available both online and in face-to-face meetings, enabled all stakeholders to contribute co-design strategies connecting the social enterprises and their users and to sustain collaboration by 'decreasing the risk of working on old models of interaction, maintaining the focus on the user and the communities, promoting collaborations and partnerships, valorising existing resources and assets.'<sup>74</sup>

This promotion of community-centred design based on actions of support, shared vision and responsibility whereby individuals collaborate and develop empathy with each other is intrinsic to traditional textile communities. As the design and production of a handcrafted textile is dependent upon interconnected processes completed by different artisans in a community, the collaborative relationships between each other are essential to the successful completion of the textile. One key omission I note is that the user of the textile is not part of their collaboration, a point I develop in Chapter Five when describing the co-design projects involving artisans in the Kashmir shawl community and Australian users of their products. As facilitators, Selloni and Corubolo found specific tools and strategies to bring the users of social enterprises into their projects; so too, I believe co-design methods can be developed to include users in the artisan communities' collaborations, specifically through online interactions.

Elisabeth Heimdal and Tanja Rosenqvist developed generative toolkits consisting of non-competitive card games in a co-design project engaging architects, engineers

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1352809>, S3008.

<sup>71</sup>Selloni and Corubolo, "Design for Social Enterprises," S3008.

<sup>72</sup>Selloni and Corubolo, S3008.

<sup>73</sup>Selloni and Corubolo, S3009.

<sup>74</sup>Selloni and Corubolo, S3012.

and textile experts in designing future textile solutions for Danish hospital environments. In their article about the project, Heimdal and Rosenqvist assert that co-design processes have evolved to encompass not only end-users but also different professionals who co-design together. They determine that because of a growing need for multi-disciplinary design processes, 'owing to the increase in application areas of textiles and the increase in technologies incorporated in textiles,'<sup>75</sup> co-designing strategies must allow for the knowhow of all the stakeholders involved. When facilitating the co-design projects in this research, the toolkits I developed needed to be relevant not only to the users, but also to the differently skilled artisans in the community.

Discussing the function of participatory design games as tools, Heimdal and Rosenqvist explain,

'... the co-design participants do not compete against each other, but play together in order to design possible futures. Such design games could, for example, consist of different kinds of cards such as pictures of daily life activities (based on ethnographic studies of users) and words that can be used to label these activities.'<sup>76</sup>

After their project participants had met to identify existing issues in the hospital environment, Heimdal and Rosenqvist provided them with game cards for inspiration which included photos of textile applications and materials not necessarily used in hospitals. The aim of juxtaposing different cards was to stimulate participants to create new solutions, and they were encouraged to draw their ideas by using mind maps. These co-design tools were initiated at the beginning of the project and focused on ideas generation. In a second meeting, completed illustrations of the participants' mind maps were transformed into mock-ups using an assortment of provided materials. Heimdal and Rosenqvist conceded that using various materials to make product mock-ups had limited success, but the use of photo cards proved inspirational for the participants because,

'... the pictures of textile products worked as representative materials, as the pictures represented textiles. Together with the given instructions and the other game cards, they facilitated a constrained type of creativity, which seemed to work well with co-designers not having a large knowledge of the potentials of textile materials.'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Elisabeth Heimdal and Tanja Rosenqvist, "Three Roles for Textiles as Tangible Working Materials in Co Design Processes," *Co Design* 8, no. 2-3 (2012): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2012.672579>.

<sup>76</sup>Heimdal and Rosenqvist, "Three Roles," 183-4.

<sup>77</sup>Heimdal and Rosenqvist, 192.

The cards provided information about textile applications as well as context. The game cards have a similar purpose to using textile images, colour cards and embroidery swatches in my projects. There is a twofold advantage in using picture cards as generative tools for co-designing with textile artisans in India and users in Australia. First, since the participants in the projects are from different cultural backgrounds, visual cards can not only enable creative exchanges but also assist in transcending language barriers in the co-creating processes. The facilitator — the design researcher in this case — must be perceptive and sensitive, using their knowledge of all the participants, when developing the material for the co-design tools.

In the example projects discussed, the use of the toolkits and the emphasis on direct communication would seem, however, to imply that the project participants need to be physically present. The challenge here was to develop co-design tools that successfully encourage active involvement by the geographically distant participants engaged in the projects; it was, therefore, necessary to develop communication and exchange methods using digital devices. Digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp allow the sharing of visual information that will assist in resolving the problems of separation and distance between the project participants.

Although the two example co-design projects discussed above differ in context, one involving users of community cooperatives and the other industry professionals, they share common values of collaboration, communication and respect for relationships between participants which underpin initiating the co-creation design experiences that are central to the projects. The role of the design researcher or facilitator becomes salient to co-design in developing methods such as probes and generative tools to action the projects as well as provide context.

While co-creating within the co-design framework is applicable to traditional artisan communities working in contemporary markets, the parameters of equity among the participants involved in the co-design projects need to be established so that the cultural context of the handcrafted artisanal products is recognised and preserved. The traditional craft techniques used by the artisans and the knowledge contained in their design heritage need to be acknowledged and respected by the users of their textiles. In my master's research, woodblock printer Dinesh Chhipa revealed in my interview with him that although he prints designs supplied by foreign customers because this work provides employment for many people in the Sanganer area (Rajasthan, India), he 'prefer[s] the traditional designs instead of the designs from foreigners because the traditional designs are part of my art.'<sup>78</sup> As Judy Frater has observed, the artisans are capable of extending their design

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<sup>78</sup>Emmett, "Artisan Voice," 33.

innovation but it must take place within a recognisable context of the artisanal heritage of their community if cultural value for the artisans is to be maintained.

There is a dual purpose to this research's specific and contextual bottom-up approach to developing co-design strategies for the participants. First, the artisans are accustomed to working in a cooperative structure tied to a particular place producing textiles within known contexts; by maintaining this familiarity, the co-design strategies should foster feelings of self-reliance and independence for the artisans. Notions of inequality between the participants in the co-design projects, which could be problematic when there are differences in cultural and socio-economic circumstances, need to be addressed for the projects to successfully sustain traditions. By bringing in the user and getting them to participate at the ground level to identify specific issues with the artisans in a collaborative way, I intend to address any perceptions of power imbalance between the artisans and users from the outset.

#### 2.4 Slow fashion movement: sustainable and ethical design in the fashion and textile industry and its correlation with co-design theory

Key to sustainability is how we manage our relationship with the natural world. As humans we belong to the natural world and so share in a responsibility to care for it. Without recognising this connection, and by continuing to have a harsh impact on nature, we must expect nature to reciprocate in a catastrophic way. Sustainable fashion addresses both connectedness and reciprocity. The current system of mass-produced fashion encourages the consumer to be ethically and politically detached, but through exposure to stories, images and shared experiences consumers are becoming more aware of sustainable products and developing empathy with those who produce them. This accumulated knowledge has already given rise to a social consciousness in many art and design communities that has resulted in progressing ethical design practices. New markets of consumers for the products of traditional artisans are expanding because their 'crafts inherently represent, to the patron of sustainable practice, a connect and concern with material, and the environment.'<sup>79</sup>

In *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* and *Craft of Use: Post Growth-Fashion*, Kate Fletcher, Professor of Sustainability, Design and Fashion at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts London, provides thought-provoking content about sustainability and ethical design. Fletcher believes in creating a new starting point for sustainability which makes the user or customer's lived experience

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<sup>79</sup>Wood, "Sustaining crafts and livelihoods,"  
<http://www.craftaustralia.org.au/cde/index.php/cde/article/viewFile/21/20>.

of the textile product paramount, not industrial or commercial ideas about what sustainability is:

'A new layer or type of fashion commerce based on broader values than profit and sales growth, geared instead towards increasing the quality of fashion experience rather than its quantitative scale.'<sup>80</sup>

Commercial sustainability schemes tend to focus on the environmental impact of production, but when the user is involved in the production process, either in the making or by knowing the maker, their experience has a different value emphasis. It is about the durability of relationships as well as of the textile produced. There exists a correlation between the shift of focus to values in co-design theory, developing relationships between participants, and the significance of participating in the design experience. The case studies constituting Chapter Four will demonstrate the relevance of these values to traditional textile communities' futures within contemporary fashion. Collaborative projects that not only recognise the skills of the artisans but also value their cultural heritage are documented.

Terms such as eco fashion, design sustainability and ethical design increasingly feature in the marketing of western fashion labels. So far, progress towards sustainability in the fashion and textile industry is mainly conceived as technology-based solutions within production which 'overlooks the (significant) role of softer change in bringing sustainability improvements and sidelines the contribution of non-technologists, like designers and consumers.'<sup>80</sup> How both industry and consumers think about fashion needs to change. Legislation and compliance-driven agendas, brought about through pressure from consumers, environmental and socially conscious activists and the media, now act as restraints on the production and consumption of fast fashion. Fashion and textile companies must comply or risk their market reputations. While disclosure of chemical usage and pollution levels is expected, codes of conduct for employers of fashion labour are not always so strictly monitored and, to Fletcher, 'The key social challenges are to protect workers, provide more secure employment, pay living wages and respect workers' rights.'<sup>81</sup>

Fletcher views the fashion and textile industry as a system; as such, there needs to be a systemic shift that interweaves culture, behaviour and industrial activity. Sustainability and ethical design are linked to slow fashion, the movement that has emerged as the antithesis of fast, disposable fashion. Fast fashion companies are structured like most contemporary corporations on publicly traded exchange and investment, where the single most important thing is return on investment to the

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<sup>80</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 53.

<sup>81</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 58.

investors, to the exclusion of everything else. The fast fashion business model, prevalent for the past two decades, is based on continuous economic growth and the idea that wealth and having more of it brings happiness. Fast fashion 'draws on low-cost materials and labour, short lead times, and efficient large volume production. Created to be distributed, sold, and consumed in ever-increasing quantities.'<sup>82</sup> This business model thrives on mass production, standardisation of products and mass consumption. The resulting waste, environmental degradation and exploitation of workers in the industry are issues now being questioned. Taking a different direction, slow fashion prescribes the use of local materials, traditional craft techniques and small-scale production. Rethinking the growth-oriented system to accommodate this different mindset has the potential to promote a more sustainable industry.

Alternatively, if the slow fashion concept is used merely as a marketing strategy by the fashion industry and media, it will perpetuate the same system that produces fast fashion, 'because of the elaborate relationship between trends, commerce, and fashion, slowness becomes seen as a tool for increased material throughput and continual economic growth.'<sup>83</sup> Currently, the fashion industry cultivates idealisation of the expert and the elite who determine what we should wear while consumers passively follow their lead, disconnected from in the makers' creative processes and knowledge. Fletcher considers that slow fashion can enact a cultural shift in the fashion sector, similarly to the slow food movement, which acknowledges the universal needs of humans beyond culture, nationality and religion. If products do not satisfy our psychological and emotional needs, we are left feeling disempowered, which can lead to pessimism and a sense of loss: 'It follows therefore that understanding more about the relationship between fashion and sustainability is contingent on a greater understanding of needs.'<sup>84</sup>

When Fletcher suggests that, 'Sustainable fashion is about a strong and nurturing relationship between consumer and producer,'<sup>85</sup> she identifies a more 'needs-friendly' approach to production — which can be as straightforward as consumers supporting Fairtrade businesses, and organisations adopting more participatory design approaches to their production process.

With this emphasis on relationship, we begin to see commonalities emerging between sustainability in the fashion and textile industry and co-design, as Sanders and Stappers declare:

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<sup>82</sup>Fletcher, "Slow Fashion," 262.

<sup>83</sup>Fletcher, 263.

<sup>84</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 120.

<sup>85</sup>Fletcher, 125.

'Participatory thinking is antithetical to consumerism, in which personal happiness is equated with purchasing and consuming material goods. Hopefully, consumerism and the rampant consumption that goes with it has almost run its course... renewed interest in sustainable practices is also helping to fuel that fire.'<sup>86</sup>

#### 2.4.1 Relationship building: between artisans and users of their products; new roles for facilitators within artisan communities

In previous generations most people made and wore their own clothes. Notwithstanding an apparent renaissance in this practice, most consumers are not equipped with these skills and have little alternative to purchasing homogeneous mass-produced fashion products. This, in turn, perpetuates the current fashion system's structure of elitism and mass production.<sup>87</sup> Fletcher, however, cites a study which finds that

'... when people list their favourite clothes, handmade items were highly represented. It is suggested that having some control over our garments, either in a practical way through making, or more conceptually through influencing the design, brings people pleasure.'<sup>88</sup>

This insight forms a link between sustainability in fashion and co-design theory: both challenge mass consumerism. By designing together, the user and producer create a relationship from sharing ideas and collaboration. The user becomes an active participant and the values of sustainability, 'appropriateness, connectedness and engagement as well as the more strictly environmental values like resourcefulness'<sup>89</sup> become embedded in their understanding of material culture.

When the user or consumer is involved, the design and production processes become more transparent. Products created in this way become more individual and treasured, and 'user-engagement [can become] a route to producing more customised and unique products.'<sup>90</sup> Potentially, user participation, although currently a small-scale movement, will lead to a reduction in what we buy and discard directly impacting upon mass consumerism.

The role of facilitators, or middlemen, in traditional Indian textile communities who mediate between the consumers of artisanal products and the artisans is acknowledged to often result in the artisans' disengagement from the design

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<sup>86</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 5-18.

<sup>87</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 187.

<sup>88</sup>Fletcher, 190.

<sup>89</sup>Fletcher, 186.

<sup>90</sup>Fletcher, 194.

process and from the experiences of the use and users of their textiles. Another way of seeing a facilitator or middleman is as a leader. A person who is entrepreneurial and well-respected in an artisan community can direct the group's success in engaging with external markets. In *Artisans and Fair Trade*, Littrell and Dickson describe these facilitators as enterprise leaders who have 'a clear sense of purpose, strong organizational skills.'<sup>91</sup> With the development of co-design strategies for building co-creation relationships between the artisans and the users of their products, these facilitators could use *their knowledge of the artisans and those who use their products* to develop co-design toolkits and initiate the projects. Facilitators of the co-design projects who are themselves from the textile communities should be preferred, since they not only have knowledge of the craft, but also social and professional relationships within the communities. Their presence is instrumental to the future sustainability of the co-design strategies developed in this research.

#### 2.4.2 Relationship building: between artisans and users of their products; new roles for designers/design researchers as facilitators

Intervention by others from outside of the artisans' communities in design development is not a new thing in India; historically, the textile handcrafts relied upon patronage for sustaining their artisans. The Mughals, for example, introduced the paisley or *buta* motif, depicted in Figure 2.2, to artisans in northern India. During his rule (1556-1605) the Mughal emperor Akbar took a personal interest in the Kashmiri shawl weaving industry. He commissioned shawls, woven by men for men to wear, that had plain centres with *buta* border designs. Fine pashmina shawls were draped over the shoulder, a fashion started by Akbar.<sup>92</sup> According to Frank Ames,

"When the Mughal ruler Muhammad Shah (1720-1742) was presented with a shawl of a fascinating floral design he ordered 40000 rupees worth of this design be provided to him annually... the shawl came to be called 'Buta Muhammad Shahi.'<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Mary A. Littrell and Marsha A. Dickson, *Artisans and Fair Trade: Crafting Development* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>92</sup>Deborah Emmett, "The Fashion Diplomacy and Trade of Kashmir Shawls: Conversations with Shawl Artisans, Designers and Collectors," (paper presented at the Textile Society of America 2016 Symposium, Savannah, GA), 2016, 5.

<sup>93</sup>Frank Ames, *The Kashmir Shawl and its Indo-French Influence*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Woodbridge, UK: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 1997), 39.



Figure 2.2. Buta motif in waistband or mantle from Mughal period, early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Source: Frank Ames, *The Kashmir Shawl and its Indo-French Influence* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 1997), 271.

After Independence in 1947, the Indian government's intervention to expand the handcraft sector for product sales to larger foreign and urban markets was a mixed success. Unfortunately, the centralised organisation of the cooperatives meant that the government's objectives were not realised at the artisan community level, and the marketing input ineffective, while at the same time the high cost of raw materials reduced the artisans' wages. The failure of government programs gave rise to the involvement in the handcraft industry of NGOs and other private enterprises. In fact,

'... in the years since the liberalisation of economy, India's own fashion industry has flourished, helped by the arts and labour of the "traditional" crafts, which in turn have given fashion a distinct "Indian" identity.'<sup>94</sup>

Indian fashion designers, like Abraham and Thakore, Ritu Kumar, and Péro, among others, interpret international aesthetics using local material and skills. The following quote from the marketing material for Péro illustrates the intention of the designer while emphasising the anonymity of the artisans involved:

'The Indian-ness of Péro rests in the textile process, where materials pass through the hands of one craftsperson to the other, carrying forward the Indian tradition of hand-crafting and creating pieces that are at once unique.'<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup>Ruth Clifford, "Sustaining Handloom Weaving and Empowering Artisans: Design and Business Education in Maheshwar, India," (paper presented at the Non-Western Fashion Conference, University of Antwerp, November 2016), 3.

<sup>95</sup>Ogaan, <https://www.ogaan.com/designers/pero>.

The clothing designs remain the designers' creations despite the input of artisan traditional knowledge in their realisation. What of the role of the fashion designer in co-design? The designer can become a facilitator creating opportunities for people to work collaboratively. The designer shifts away from an elitist position to a more holistic one. These are the complex issues that this thesis aims to address.

Design collaborations between artisans and graduates of institutions like NID and NIFT in India have become common, often resulting from earlier connections made through collaborative projects between design students and artisans as part of the students' curricula. However, the urban-based designers are removed from the reality of the artisans and the character of their communities. As noted earlier, in the prevailing global fashion system the designers are perceived as elite and all-knowing; their access to global markets means they can receive recognition and status for their designs, so a class divide between artisan and designer is reinforced. As Ruth Clifford concedes,

'While practices of "co-design" or "participatory design" focusing on reciprocal collaboration between artisan and designer have sought to avoid these divides, the direct link formally educated designers have with the market has made it difficult.'<sup>96</sup>

A new approach to design development in India is design education for traditional artisans. The government and various NGOs run short-term workshops that provide design training as well as marketing education to artisans in rural areas. Two institutions offering long-term formal training programs for traditional artisans are now in existence. Judy Frater launched Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya in Tunda Vandh, Kutch, in 2005 and eight years later, the Somaiya Kala Vidya institute. The courses are conducted in the artisans' language in specific geographic areas, and traditional knowledge is a pre-requisite for all participants.

'The design course comprises six intensive two-week courses spread over a year. It teaches artisans to know and appreciate the design of their traditions, and to recognize aspects that make them unique. Then it teaches them to innovate. The strengths of the course are local orientation, and sustained input.'<sup>97</sup>

Business and management skills are included in the program. The success of the program is based on the traditional system of artisan-to-artisan skills transfer, but with a contemporary emphasis:

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<sup>96</sup>Clifford, "Sustaining Handloom Weaving," 3.

<sup>97</sup>Frater, "Education for Artisans," 274.

'Master artisan advisors teach students about traditions, as children once learned from elders; teaching weavers, printers and dyers together in classes revitalizes the interdependence of weavers and dyers in producing traditional textiles.'<sup>98</sup>

Frater considers that the program is not just about artisans earning more money, but also about feeling valued, and working independently and with the ability to have direct contact with customers. A group of the institute's graduate weavers claimed, 'We confidently know good design, we now have our own concepts and identity, we know how to take feedback, we can talk to our customers. Success is having a voice.'<sup>99</sup>

Empowering textile artisans to use their own intrinsic design knowledge, together with the attainment of business skills within a contemporary education system does appear to be a way forward. Accounting the vast number of traditional textile communities in India this education is, however, limited to only a few. There are many designers in India and from other countries, NGOs, and government-sponsored organisations collaborating with Indian textile craft communities, some of which have already been mentioned. In Chapter Four of this thesis, I present the research I conducted, which includes interviews with a selection of these enterprises, to ascertain the position of artisans in these collaborations and investigate any links to co-design conceptualisations.

## 2.5 Re-valuation of value: differing perceptions of value; how the artisans perceive the value of their skills over material value with a focus on lived experience and storytelling

In *Fashion, Ethics, Ethos*, Paula Dunlop discusses the shortcomings of activity design model that positions the designer as the autonomous creator and excludes any discussion about process or making. She questions the 'predominant outcome-centric conceptions that tend to govern the idea of ethical design practice.'<sup>100</sup> While ethical critiques of fashion design focus on the negative impacts of environmental waste and pollutants and labour exploitation, Dunlop finds that the 'lived culture of design – the relationships or connections through which design functions'<sup>101</sup> is overlooked. Design should instead be viewed as an activity embedded in pre-

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<sup>98</sup>Frater, 276.

<sup>99</sup>Frater, 278.

<sup>100</sup>Paula Dunlop, "Fashion, Ethics, Ethos," in *Design and Ethics Reflections on Practice*, eds. Emma Felton, Oksana Zelenko, and Suzi Vaughan (London: Routledge, 2012), 194.

<sup>101</sup>Dunlop, "Fashion, Ethics, Ethos," 196.

existing historical, geographical and social conditions and relationships. A community's culture is multi-layered and changeable formed through various interrelations, so with co-design we are not looking for ethical design outcomes but recognising that 'we live in terms of an ongoing engagement in a shared cultural environment.'<sup>102</sup> Ethical design practice is, therefore, the very practice of making in a shared situational and local context.

The customisation of fashion products as a means of developing the user's sense of connection to the products they purchase has gained momentum with fashion companies. In relation to co-design, Sanders and Stappers claim:

'Co-creation is by now being touted at all points along the product development process, particularly in the later stages. Websites such as [www.NIKEiD.com](http://www.NIKEiD.com) allow people to customise their own shoes, for example, by choosing colors and detailing. For many, co-creation is the latest trend in marketing and brand development.'<sup>103</sup>

Other companies, like Adidas, who developed Mi Adidas, Levi, and Longchamp, promote similar co-design opportunities for their customers. While this does offer users the prospect of self-expression and uniqueness in a product that suits their needs, it is within the limitations specified by the companies. It is a commercially driven approach to co-design I consider to be inauthentic, with the companies exploiting their customers' desire for product personalisation, all the while promoting their brand and profits.

A more authentic model for customisation of products involving users in a co-design process is in handcrafted fashion. The practice of craft where skills and expertise are developed slowly over time enabling 'an enriching experience, allowing for growth, sustaining narrative, and evoking an emotional response'<sup>104</sup> generates connectivity between the user and the maker. This 'slow fashion' model involves the user in knowing the source of materials and how the clothing is made. In a study conducted by DeLong, Casto, Lee and Min, people were asked about their experiences of garments to which they were attached. They found that while the material characteristics of such garments met the needs of the wearers, the study participants also 'had associated memories of a particular notable occasion for which the garment was purchased or as a gift, memories of the person who gifted the item.'<sup>105</sup> The perception of the item as a container of experience and meaning

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<sup>102</sup>Dunlop, 201.

<sup>103</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 8.

<sup>104</sup>Abigail Jane Sandberg, "Just for You" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2013), 4.

<sup>105</sup>DeLong et al., "Sustainable Clothing," 2.

would be familiar to the maker of a handcrafted object, as Sanders and Stappers explain:

'We really cannot separate making from telling and enacting. We have seen in practice that people make artefacts and then readily share their stories about what they made or they naturally demonstrate how they would use the artefact. The meaning of the artefact is revealed through the stories told about it and the scenes in which it plays a role.'<sup>106</sup>

The relevance of emotional attachment, storytelling and collaboration between user and maker to sustainability and co-design cannot be underestimated. When an object is designed to be loved and maintained for a long period of time by the user, the relational potential is significant.<sup>107</sup>

As discussed earlier, handcrafted textiles hold more intrinsic value when the maker and owner are known to each other, adding to the sustainability of the item. Perceptions of value will vary given the cultural differences between participants in this research's co-design projects. The process of a customised item being co-created by the artisans and users of the product while they share stories between them will establish a context in which all participants' perceptions of value are understood. To be realistic, however, expectations about value — cultural, social or economic — will differ between participants. As the researcher, I want to be aware of these differences prior to developing a co-design methodology for the projects. Chapter Three presents a survey I conducted with users of handcrafted Indian textiles to gain insight into their knowledge and value priorities related to the textiles and the people who make them.

Previous research provided me with artisan perspectives about value. Textile artisans I interviewed for my previous research overwhelmingly valued their skills, often telling stories about the craftsmanship of the master artisans from whom they learnt their craft. They felt that their technical expertise and the years spent working in their craft were of greater value than the materials used. To demonstrate this notion of value felt by artisans, I relate a story told to me by my late Kashmiri father-in-law, Sharief Hakim, about an embroiderer named Habib Phalgroo. Their association continued over fifty years, as Habib embroidered pashmina shawls for the Hakim family's textile company, Sharief & Co. Habib, from downtown Srinagar, Kashmir, was a renowned shawl embroiderer, famous for the specialised technique of *aksi*, a form of *sozni* embroidery, which produces embroidery that looks identical on both sides of the material, sometimes in different colours on each side. This

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<sup>106</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Probes," 7.

<sup>107</sup>Sandberg, "Just for You," 3.

extraordinary skill requires great expertise and very few embroiderers in Kashmir can still do this work.



*Figure 2.3. Habib Phalgroo at work embroidering c. 2002.*  
Photo courtesy of his family.

One of Sharief's customers wanted embroidery done on cotton, a material of low financial value compared to the usual pashmina fabric usually used for embroidery. Habib Phalgroo took the cotton fabric and completed the exclusive embroidery on the piece. Asked why he did such beautiful, time-consuming work on material that had such little value, he replied, 'I am not concerned about the bare fabric, my concern is my art.'

This story depicts how the perception of value will differ between the participants; Habib Phalgroo's based his concept of value on his skill, not on the materials used or the textile object. The focus on lived experience in design and making within the context of traditional artisan practice is central to the projects, to be acknowledged by all participants both within the artisan community and by the users living in Australia. The participatory approach of co-design, which encompasses the artisan communities in the whole design process, from identifying the problems and challenges to idea generation, prototyping and evaluating the design outcomes in collaboration with their customers, the users of their creations, speaks to the potential to attain sustainability for their crafts.

## **2.6 Digital connectivity for artisan communities enabling inclusivity with users; analysis of artisanal techniques in conjunction with digital techniques**

The role of digital media and personal communication technologies in enabling accessible and faster communication between geographically distant co-design participants in this research assumed paramount importance when travel restrictions

resulted from border closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Sanders and Stappers discuss how access to technology like smartphones and the internet brings designers and users closer together and, moreover, help break down existing corporate power hierarchies because control is in the hands of the customer or end-user. They consider this particularly in tune with the mindset of internet-age participants:

'The new generations are having an easier time in distributing and sharing the control and ownership. This change in attitude is possible largely because the internet has given a voice to people who were previously not even a part of the conversations.'<sup>108</sup>

Advancements in communication technology like the use of smartphones and social media assist in broadening the base of potential participants. In India, the proliferation of smartphone technology over recent years has revolutionised communication access for traditional textile communities, even in remote rural localities. In an interview about his book *India Connected: How the Smartphone is Transforming the World's Largest Democracy*, Ravi Agrawal claims that in 2019 nearly half a billion Indians had online access, a huge increase from only 20 million (who were mostly wealthy, urban-based males) in 2000.<sup>109</sup> This rapid growth is entirely due to smartphones that are both cheap and easily available. Agrawal explains that to less privileged Indians the smartphone is not merely a phone but the provider of access to the internet and other applications, often for the first time.: 'It is their first camera, it is their first screen, it is also their first Walkman or MP3 player; it is many things in one device.'<sup>110</sup> Illiterate people can use the smartphone's voice technology to speak to their phone while the internet, previously predominantly in English, now includes information in many Indian languages. The smartphone is a tool that potentially allows many Indians to overcome social and cultural constraints, as well as providing education programs to those who previously had neither access nor opportunity.

In the context of artisan communities, smartphones permit straightforward communication between the various interconnected participants in the craft's production. More broadly, using this technology to transfer knowledge skills, and training in business operation as well as product development would seem to be of great educational value to artisans working in a contemporary market.

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<sup>108</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 9.

<sup>109</sup>Talks at Google, 'Ravi Agrawal, "India Connected: How the Smartphone Revolution Is Transforming the World's Largest Democracy,"' YouTube video, 1:03:21, January 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOTqs9jx4L8>.

<sup>110</sup>Talks at Google, 'Ravi Agrawal, "India Connected."'

Communication with the users of their products, whether designers or customers in India and beyond, is generating new opportunities for collective creativity.

It is evident that the use of smartphones to access communication apps, particularly WhatsApp, is pivotal in India, particularly as large populations are increasingly migratory, moving around the country for employment and education. An example of communication solutions enabled by the use of smartphones for education to a diverse artisan base is given by Sally Holkar, who established the Handloom School in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh, in 2013, whose 'flexible curriculum includes teaching business skills, communication and IT, technical upgradation and design to weavers from all over India, identified via local NGOs or Government Weavers Service Centres.'<sup>111</sup> The Handloom School uses traditional methods of learning while applying contemporary design concepts with the aim of helping to promote handloom as a sustainable livelihood opportunity. Setting up looms for different weaving techniques related to each artisan's background skills is problematic, with critics claiming that the complexity has resulted in uniform methods that homogenise the weaving process. Another issue is that the participant artisans who must leave their local community for training have no support on completion of the course, returning to a community where, armed with their new knowledge, they can feel isolated from the school and the market. Sally Holkar claims, however, that communication with the weavers continues through use of WhatsApp, which 'keeps the country going now.'<sup>112</sup> Using this technology enables the artisans to share ideas and the progress of designs.

Judy Frater has instigated co-design opportunities at the artisan design institute Somaiya Kala Vidya, specifically between the artisans participating in the courses and designers from urban centres in India who wished to incorporate traditional crafts in their designs. However, these partnerships are not truly co-design, as Frater observes:

'The barrier to genuine co-design is the mutually perceived power imbalance. This manifests as designers assuming that artisans can't think creatively, and artisans assuming that they cannot dialogue with designers.'<sup>113</sup>

The designers and artisans also worked in different ways. While the designers first prepared the design specifications and expected the product to be made accordingly, the artisans developed the design through sampling, changing the

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<sup>111</sup>Clifford, "Sustaining Handloom Weaving," 8.

<sup>112</sup>Clifford, "Sustaining Handloom Weaving," 9.

<sup>113</sup>Judy Frater, "Closing the Power Gap through Internet Technology: The Artisan View," in *The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global*, (proceedings of the Textile Society of America 16th Biennial Symposium, Vancouver, BC September 2018): 3, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/>.

specifications as required. Frater's frustration with the outcomes of these co-design initiatives was resolved when digital communication was used as the primary connection between participants in other education-centred co-design projects.

At the instigation of Dr Jennifer Angus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the US, two long distance co-design projects were commenced to produce textiles with design student participants from Wisconsin-Madison paired with Ajrakh (woodblock) printers, *bandhani* (tie-dye) artisans and embroiderers from Somaiya Kala Vidya. A primary principle of the projects, 'was to work as equals, in addition to making fresh designs. Each team found its method of connecting.'<sup>114</sup> Participants used the internet and WhatsApp to communicate. The artisans did find communication difficult, although Frater, in her role as a facilitator, assisted them. They used visuals and minimal English to express their design ideas. The co-design toolkits for design inspiration consisted of trend forecasts and shared images from their homes to create theme boards.

Challenges existed for the two groups, including their different ways of understanding the inspiration materials and the American design students' lack of knowledge of the artisan craft technology. But overall, Frater considered this co-design project was beneficial for the Indian artisans, as she concludes in *Closing the Power Gap through Internet Technology — the Artisan View*: in collaborating with an American student they had not met, the distance and electronic communication had an equalizing effect that helped them communicate across differences in time, language and culture. Co-designing with University of Wisconsin students, many of the artisan designers developed personal connections and mutual respect that gave them the opportunity to experience complex thinking, extend their capacity, and appreciate their partners' capacities to solve design problems and create fresh approaches to their traditions.<sup>115</sup>

This co-design case study facilitated by Frater provides a relevant comparison with the intent of my research as well as its intercultural aspects. However, while Frater's participants in India and the US were students of design education institutions, the co-design projects for the current research involve members of textile artisan communities in India and consumers of their products living in Australia. The operational structure of the design institutions familiar to Frater's project participants enabled use of co-design methods such as toolkits to be easily communicated by the facilitator. This understanding cannot be assumed in developing co-design strategies for this research, yet there similarities in approach: the digital connectivity strategy that led to the development of relationships between the student designers; the sense of equality developed through distance

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<sup>114</sup>Frater, "Closing the Power Gap," 6.

<sup>115</sup>Frater, 10.

despite language and cultural differences; and participants' assessments of value, skill and process informed by sharing knowledge are all pertinent to the determination of methodologies to be used in this research.

## 2.7 Ethnographic research: different approaches

To address the main points of the conceptual framework as well as develop strategies for the co-design projects, different paths of investigation are included in this research. The methodology used for each area of research will be discussed in Chapter Three but first, I present an overview of the ethnographic methodology selected and explain the inclusions of and exclusions from the different approaches of ethnographic research.

Ethnographic research can be defined as an investigation into the organisation of a particular group or community with the focus on cultural and social aspects of that group. Ethnography refers to anthropological data gathering as well as to the analysis of specific peoples, settings, or ways of life.<sup>116</sup> An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to

'... study a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture.'<sup>117</sup>

Similarly in my previous master's research, the ethnographic fieldwork approach enabled me to become immersed in the artisan communities to observe, document, use notetaking, video and photography and, by conducting interviews, understand the position of the artisans. This approach proved also relevant for evaluating current collaborations between artisan communities and designers, NGOs, and design educational institutions, presented as a series of case study interviews in Chapter Four.

### 2.7.1 Autoethnography

My own positionality in the research is complex, being multi-layered. I am a design researcher, facilitator of the co-design projects, as well as a co-design participant in one of the projects. As previously mentioned, I have worked within Indian textile artisan communities for my textile business practice since 2003 and have, therefore,

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<sup>116</sup>Craig Calhoun, Dictionary of the Social Sciences, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715-e-561>.

<sup>117</sup>Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, (2010). "Autoethnography: An Overview" [40 paragraphs], Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

developed an understanding of the organisation and social layering of these communities. Although a power imbalance between myself and the artisans might be assumed, the reality is that relationships of mutual respect and trust required in this research project have developed over many years through my personal involvement. As defined in *Autoethnography: An Overview*:

‘Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act’<sup>118</sup>

A criticism of traditional ethnographic approach is that it is arguably connected to colonialism — the researcher enters a culture, exploits it and leaves, disregarding relational ties of members of that culture and the effects it may have had on that culture. This research avoids that pitfall, since my earlier business and research experiences have deepened my capacity to empathise with the artisans while clearly acknowledging differences in our backgrounds. Sustaining these different relationalities is key to ensuring the sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage and traditional knowledge because it enables their practice to be ongoing. By positioning myself in a collaborative relationship with an artisan community, I am better placed to facilitate and participate in the co-design projects where new strategies that acknowledge the social structure of that community must be developed. And by enlisting my personal experience for this research, opportunities for cultural and social involvement become possible with others outside of the community.

While maintaining my relationships within a specific textile artisan community, I deliberately approached members of that community with whom I had not previously engaged with in business transactions to investigate co-design strategies for this research. I wanted to avoid any perceptions of inequalities or coercion that might be interpreted through prior business relationships both within the community and with participants in Australia. In discussing both the theory of co-design and the concept of slow fashion, my emphasis is on relationship building among all participants: designers, makers and users and their lived experiences of a product’s development. My objective in initiating the co-design projects is to provide a level playing field for all the participants.

### 2.7.2 Co-design methodology

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<sup>118</sup>Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, “Autoethnography.”

To action their theory of co-design, Sanders and Stappers developed a co-design methodology of using probes and generative toolkits. The aim of these approaches is to assist the end-users in co-design projects, who have scant or no design experience, to develop ideas and discuss their own interpretations at the initiation of a project. The examples of co-design projects instigated by Selloni and Corubolo, and Heimdal and Rosenqvist, discussed earlier in this chapter, signify the designer or design researcher as the developer of probes or toolkits to be used for the projects. As the design researcher for this research, while endeavouring to utilise such co-design methodology for consistency with co-design models, I can consider and expose the assumptions, limitations and pitfalls within conventional co-design initiatives when applied to resolutely intercultural participants. The complexity of Indian textile communities, where various artisans with different skills engage in the production of a handcrafted textile and who perceive value differently between themselves and from the users of their products, will influence an emergent co-design strategy, including the use of specifically designed probes and toolkits throughout the duration of the projects.

### 2.7.3 Actor Network Theory

The aesthetics, worth and emotivity of a handcrafted textile will have different meanings and significance when positioned within different political, social, cultural and economic contexts. In addition, these values will vary between different political, social and cultural systems. The importance of an object like a textile is far better understood when viewed within a system, or systems, instead of as a single entity. As Kjetil Fallon says, 'Both people and objects become more eloquent when considered parts of collectives and systems.'<sup>119</sup>

Actor-network theory (ANT), developed by sociologists Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law in the 1980s, dismantles the distinction between human and nonhumans, both being encompassed in networks of association, and all referenced as actors. Latour defines an 'actor' semiotically, as an 'actant', that is, something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action.<sup>120</sup> The relational aspect of networks is seen in ANT as transitional where interplay between the actors is based on different interpretations, agendas, needs and desires.

To Latour, ANT methodology is a means of analysis where objects and social groups are products of network-building. Humans and objects are both actors in the network. 'The meanings of ideas and products are not inherent, but are formed

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<sup>119</sup>Kjetil Fallon, *Design History Understanding Theory and Method* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2010), 61.

<sup>120</sup>Bruno Latour, "On Actor-network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 373, accessed March 2, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40878163>.

through negotiations carried out in networks,<sup>121</sup> or how they are consumed, appropriated and used.

While I acknowledge the utility of the ANT methodology, because human relationships are the focus of this research, there is limited scope to deal with handcrafted textiles as actants in a network. There are certainly active networks at play in the projects in this research, but it is the cultural and social networks which are central, and the emphasis remains on human aims and strategies.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Fletcher suggests that through the dispersal and sharing of stories, images and experiences, we intuitively develop an insight into sustainability, with

‘... this “experiential knowing” [being] key to a richer, deeper and more true to life understanding of sustainability. Knowing about things because of an experience is recognized as one of the “four ways of knowing” used to explain how we know something beyond the traditional reaches of scientific and academic study. The four ways of knowing are experiential, presentational, propositional and practical.’<sup>122</sup>

Limitations experienced by traditional textile communities due to their position in India’s informal economy, with its low social and economic status has meant the depth of their traditional knowledge has been overlooked. Yet their community ethos is based on human connection and relationships—key values of both sustainability and co-design. While the functioning of their community relies upon the artisans’ tacit knowledge of the craft, the top-down structure of industrialisation in India, including the fashion and textiles industry, means that artisans are often relegated to the role of dependant workers without access to their consumer market. As Frater asks, ‘How to develop a market appropriate to smaller scale, highly diversified and higher value production of artisan designed work?’<sup>123</sup> A pertinent question, when the characteristics of artisan communities’ craft production and the users of their products ‘are all diametrically opposed to large-scale production. People who consume craft do not care about mass production. That is why they choose craft.’<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Fallon, *Design History*, 70.

<sup>122</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 126.

<sup>123</sup>Frater, “Education for Artisans” 281.

<sup>124</sup>Frater, 281.

These users value the connectedness conferred by the craft, both human and with the environment. Connectivity and inclusivity are common threads that link the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of sustainability, as this literature review has shown. With the ease of communication between widely separated participants via digital means, intercultural knowledge is readily accessible and knowledge sharing is possible. Earlier communication barriers between artisans and their customers have lessened through artisans' access to smartphone technology. Some artisans already market their products through social media and online craft shops like Jaypore, Gaatha, and India Kala, but direct contact with the user remains rare.

Users of handcrafted Indian textiles can become active participants in the craft design process. New co-design strategies need to be trialled using appropriate co-design tools and the assistance of culturally sensitive facilitators to understand how the user can be included in the design process developed in complex communities with long traditions and multiple artisan stakeholders.

Co-design theory is based around active participation of the user in the initial design process, contrary to the established design structures in industry. To date, the focus of co-design projects tends to be in the service, technology-based and architectural industries with limited reference to fashion and textiles, especially when the fashion system supports the pinnacle role of the designer as creative genius, and the users as followers of image and trends. I consider that within the sustainability framework for fashion and textiles, co-design models have significant potential to re-determine this emphasis on the designer. Sanders and Stappers ponder the future of co-design and how it will influence design cultures, and what influence will it have on world cultures:

'In the future, the new co-design languages that support and facilitate the many varieties of cross-cultural communication will become highly valued.'<sup>125</sup>

For the values of sustainability to flourish there must be an active community where new relationships develop between designer, facilitator, maker and user, all of whom share empathy with each other. These partnerships must be resourceful in finding opportunities to reduce waste and the consumption of materials and energy in new ways. This is especially important in fashion and textiles. As Fletcher says, 'through participation we devolve fashion's power structures and take a more active role in its production.'<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 9.

<sup>126</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 127.

## Chapter Three: Research Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The mixed methodology developed for this research is based on qualitative ethnographic methods and co-design research methods that are resolutely situation, location, and context based.

The thesis is divided into three parts which relate to three different methodological components:

1. a customer (user) survey (Chapter Three)
2. semi-structured interviews with existing artisan collaborations in India (Chapter Four)
3. three co-design projects with artisans in India and users in Australia (Chapter Five)

The user survey, collaboration interviews, and co-design projects each have their own objectives. In the transition from one component to the next in successive chapters, assumptions about the concepts of conventional co-design will be supported or questioned, while critical reflection on the five key conceptual points discussed in Chapter Two continues. The sequential bearing of the methodology, with surveys and interviews presented prior to the actual co-designed projects, is to establish both current collaborative contexts for handcrafted textiles from Indian artisan communities, and perspectives about these communities from users, in Australia, of these handcrafted textiles before detailing the co-design projects.

As the three co-design projects are highly situational and community-oriented, relying on the active building of relationships, whether reinforcing existing social ties or creating new ones, which are on occasions novel or unforeseen, I have not relied fully on conventional co-design methodologies. The outcomes of all three projects could not be predicted at the outset; nor are the values subscribed to by participants (users and artisans) consistent. The projects are designed to explore differences in values and perceptions, and cognisant of the participation of intercultural stakeholders.

In the conceptual approach taken, the co-design method is to be emergent and only fully explicable on completion of the projects. The subsequent intention is for these research methods to be accessible to everyone for the sustainability of future co-design projects involving textile artisan communities in India.

When inviting participants to partake in the research for either the case study interviews, survey or co-design projects I have relied upon my relational connections both in Australia and in India in three areas:

- Academic – as a lecturer in design I have attended conferences and other forums that focus on textiles and sustainable fashion where I have met fellow academics from other institutions, for example the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in India.
- Business – textile companies and artisan groups that I have worked with in India. To gain access to artisan communities I relied upon my own established work and family connections within Kashmir, India.
- Interest groups – as a member of textile appreciation organisations, i.e. The Asian Arts Society of Australia (TAASA) and the Textile Society of America (TSA), I associate with enthusiasts and collectors of traditional handcrafted textiles.

In all cases, the methodology involves a mix of creative, practice-based research and qualitative studies. In the following, I discuss the criteria or key principles adhered to in the research methodology.

### 3.2 The involvement of the researcher in the research

My own stance in the research has implications that may influence aspects of the study. My position is complex because it is multi-layered as a design researcher, facilitator of the co-design projects, and as co-design participant in one of the projects. I am a researcher, practitioner and academic as well as running a textile business in India where I have lived and worked for extensive periods over twenty years. During that time, I have engaged with textile artisans and members of their communities on both a business level and on a personal level as my husband, Riyaz Hakim, is from Kashmir, India where his family has engaged in the handcrafted textile industry over several generations. In my earlier master's research, which followed an ethnographic methodology, I came to understand artisans' viewpoints about their crafts and future in India through conducting interviews and fieldwork in their communities.

In my roles as a co-design project facilitator and participant in this research, I consider there is an autoethnographic aspect as I respond to my understanding of the artisan communities through my lived experience over extended time. While aware of the evident differences of culture and language, this method grants me access to the complexity of the artisans' communities with their hierarchies of status between members differentiated by economic disparity and levels of skill to produce the textiles. While some artisans specialise in the design of specific textiles,

others have lesser skills and work on the pre- and post-processes to complete production. Therefore, in initiating the co-design projects in these communities with customers or users of their textiles, I recognised that the research would be with non-designers without background knowledge in design. As the researcher, with a design background, I needed to develop methods to engage non-designers by asking, listening, learning, communicating, and creating solutions collaboratively. These co-design projects would be bottom-up initiatives dependent upon cooperation among the different participants. By contrast, research into existing collaborations with artisans is, in some cases, top-down, supported by the Indian government or large, regulated industrial corporations, both hierarchical in structure.

The translation of concepts and contexts necessary for the intercultural nature of the co-design projects required my role as a facilitator. I acknowledge that my presence influenced the design and production processes of the projects and that as the researcher I influenced the critical interpretation and reflection on the project outcomes.

### 3.2.1 Ethics application for participatory design research

Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences relying on data obtained by the researcher, including first-hand observations, interviews, surveys, and participant observation that will be adopted for this research. This method, with the use of limited participant numbers and focus on specific geographic locations, follows a traditional ethnographic approach. Ethical consideration for the research ensures that the findings are based on strong qualitative research.

As this research would involve interactions with people, ethics clearance was required by the University of New South Wales (UNSW). An application was made and approved by the Human Ethics HREA Panel B in December 2018.<sup>127</sup>

The methodology used to gather information for each component of the research was selected to best inform the next, as follows:

- Survey — to understand why customers who purchase artisanal, handcrafted clothing and textiles are attracted to these products (for example, the attributes of natural fibres, hand-worked embroidery or printing), a questionnaire conducted via email can provide clear insights into the

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<sup>127</sup>Since I travel to India for two periods each year, January-February and June-July, I applied for ethics clearance early in my PhD research to commence fieldwork interviews in India in January 2019. The ethics clearance approval continues until December 2023, by which time the research will be completed (appendix 1: UNSW HREA clearance letter).

customer's experience of these products. From the survey results, I could deduce and critically reflect on the respondents' values, aesthetic preferences, and knowledge of artisanal processes.

- Interviews — to successfully analyse existing models of collaborations of design businesses, design and fashion students and NGOs with Indian textile artisans to promote, sustain and develop new product designs and markets for artisans, a series of interviews were conducted in India. Where possible, interviewees included both the project initiators and the artisan participants to understand different perspectives on the outcomes and the sustainability of their collaborations.
- Co-design projects — to develop synergies between participating artisans in India and end-users in Sydney towards mutual learning and expansion of both groups' capacities for socio-economic benefit. The three co-design projects involved shawl artisans in Kashmir, India, and in Sydney, me, and customers interested in handcrafted textiles. The parameters of the projects were flexible, while their overall objective was to develop a co-design model for interaction and engagement between artisans and the Australian participants. Mainly using digital communication, the projects underscored the process of co-creating textile crafts through human-centred interaction. Video documentation assisted all participants to learn, through observation, about the textiles being designed and the craft skills required for the projects, as well as become familiar with each other's appearance and environment. The WhatsApp and Zoom platforms enabled communication about the development of the planned product and interactions between participants.

The main issue to be addressed in receiving ethics clearance entailed the selection and recruitment of participants, particularly as the research was to be mainly conducted in another country, India, and English was not the primary language of some participants. All participation was voluntary, and all participants were over 18 years of age. The interviews with the artisan participants were held in their own homes or workshops which were familiar environments where they felt comfortable. The co-design projects were similarly conducted in the artisans' own environments and facilitators from their own community were involved. Ethical considerations about the roles of these facilitators were discussed in each of the co-design projects to counteract artisan community assumptions about facilitators.

When conducting earlier research in India, the UNSW HREA committee requested that I got 'in country' approval, so a meeting was arranged with the Indian High Commissioner in Sydney. He confirmed then that seeking ethics approval in India

was unnecessary given the scope of the project. As this PhD research has similar scope to the earlier research study in India, the same action was followed.<sup>128</sup>

### 3.2.2 Intercultural research: language differences

A mixed method approach was adopted to collect the research data, including observation and diary documentation, photography, video, discussion and interviews, WhatsApp, email and Zoom. All participants were consulted and briefed prior to their choosing involvement. Many of the participants spoke English, although some did not, therefore the services of a translator was required. Riyaz Hakim (my husband) the translator who assisted with my earlier study, was also available to take part in the PhD research. He can speak Hindi, Kashmiri, Urdu and English and from his previous assistance, I know him to be a good and reliable source of accurate translations. The translator is required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The translator was able to translate the interview questions and responses and dialogue recorded during co-design project video documentation. Given the limited timespan of the interviews, the translation process was straightforward.

I envisaged greater complexities in the co-design projects given the long duration of the projects and their variations. The functions of the facilitator's role, including translation, varied between co-design projects, as Chapter Five describes. The need for language translation between participants to aid communication became part of the co-design strategy for each project and, because intercultural participants were involved, a point of critical reflection in the co-design framework. Participants were asked to sign a written consent form that explained the purpose of the projects and where they agreed to have their names included in the project written documentation.

## 3.3 Scope of Methodology

In setting out the aims of this research in Chapter One, five key areas of significance were identified, and form the conceptual framework for this research. These five themes, recapped below, could then be used to determine the methodological approach to the research:

- co-design strategies within the context of textile artisan communities
- relationship building: between artisans and users of their products from different cultures; new roles for facilitators

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<sup>128</sup>The master's research received two ethics approvals – Reference Number: 11 081 on 19/07/2011 and Reference Number: 12 132 on 7/12/2012.

- re-valuation of value: differing perceptions of value
- sustainability: distinction between environmental sustainability of artisan communities and sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage
- digital connectivity for artisan communities enabling inclusivity with users

Each of these themes are continuously addressed in reconceptualising conventional co-design methods as the thesis proceeds.

### 3.3.1 Methodology to build relationships: interrelationships and collaboration

In co-design theory, the importance of developing relationships between participants in the design process is consistently referenced. More generally, qualitative research using subjective observation methods such as participant observation and interviews where the researcher interacts and obtains information directly from the participants in a specific context, is 'largely borrowed from sociological and anthropological research methods, thus they are generally referred to as applied ethnography.'<sup>129</sup> Terms such as collaboration and co-creation in the context of working with artisan communities are increasingly being used in India by businesses, non-government organisations, and educational institutions within their mission statements and marketing material.

Before establishing the planned co-design projects, I thought it imperative to understand how existing collaborations in the field operate to determine whether any of these were applying a co-design methodology directly between the collaborators and artisan communities. My approach was ethnographical: observing and listening, and documenting.

I conducted a series of interviews in India in early 2019. In deciding who to interview, I attempted to represent collaborators from both design businesses and educational institutions including, where possible, the artisans participating in the collaborations, to gain perspectives from both industry and education. Those interviewed were then invited to take part in the research. The semi-structured interviews elicited qualitative responses, which provided data about the collaborations between the participating designers, textile design students and artisans. Each interview began with questions primarily focused on the participant's background, role and the nature of the textiles produced. Each interviewee discussed their own position in relation to other participants in the collaboration, how they each became involved in the project, and their perception of values in relation to their position as well as the value they placed on the textile products that

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<sup>129</sup>Kakee Scott, "Co-Designing Sustainable User Practices," Master's thesis, Delft University of Technology, 2008, 16.

were being created — whether economic, cultural or social. The interviewees discussed their knowledge and practice of the processes involved in developing the specific textile products. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed flexibility to develop further questions guided by their answers. Where the interviewee did not speak English, I was accompanied to the interview by a translator. From this series of interviews, I determined that co-designing is not directly carried out between artisan communities and customers or users of their textiles in current collaborations in India. In Chapter Four, I discuss the content of the interviews along with my reflections and conclusions.

### 3.3.2 Methodology for co-design projects

The methodologies used for the co-design projects in this research involved a range of strategies to encourage sustainable innovation, as well as social and economic sustainability for the artisan communities. As mentioned, the research approach is based on qualitative research and follows the co-design emphasis on equal and continuous roles for participants throughout the product development. Sanders and Stappers suggest that users not trained in design can be ‘co-creators’ or partners in all steps of the design process. As they explain, co-creation

‘... refer[s] to any act of collective creativity, i.e. creativity that is shared by two or more people... by co-design we indicate collective creativity as it is applied across the whole span of a design process.’<sup>130</sup>

The approaches taken to each of the co-design projects in this research have similarities, but also specific variations. What is common to all is the involvement of artisans and users with varying levels of previous design knowledge who would participate throughout the design and making processes of the projects. This includes facilitators of the design projects, and me, as the design researcher.

My previous insights into the structure of traditional textile artisan communities with their many interrelationships – familial, social and industrial – encouraged me to establish a social network between the artisans and the users in the co-design projects with the intention of building relationships. While the focus in conventional co-design is on the differences in the roles of designer, design researcher and users, I began with finding commonalities between participants — the Australian users and Indian artisan — through their sharing of information about family and home, personal experiences of the textiles and feelings about the proposed projects. Instead of prioritising co-design tools to initiate the projects, the participants shared

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<sup>130</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 6.

interactively, albeit by video, what they knew about the handcrafted shawls. This research is *with* the people, not studies of them.

My methodology for the co-design projects shifts from an ethnographical approach with its focus on observation to an anthropological one exemplified in the active involvement of all participants. Anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that while ethnography renders an account of the lives and experiences of a people, anthropology is 'open-ended because we do not seek final solutions but rather ways along which life can keep on going.'<sup>131</sup> He judges that an ethnographical approach objectifies people, while the anthropological method of participant observation

'... is to notice what people are saying and doing, to watch and listen, and to respond in your own practice. That is to say, observation is a way of participating attentively, and it is for this reason a way of learning.'<sup>132</sup>

The outcomes of the co-design projects could not be prearranged; their unfolding was both unpredictable and speculative. Assumptions made at the commencement of the projects could change or evolve as they progressed. The rationale for the co-design projects in this research was to determine possibilities for the artisans and users of their products to make and learn together in an ongoing, sustainable way that would have application beyond a singular research project. Furthermore, the structure established for the projects needed to be flexible to allow for contingencies of the participants' engagement and interpretations. The structure also needed to respond to changing conditions as experienced in the onset of the 2020/21 COVID-19 pandemic.

In a design context, ethnography is thought of an applied method to draw out values held by the user about a product or service, which purpose is uncovering their needs and attitudes in order to inform design requirements. Wendy Gunn and Louise Løgstrup believe that designing 'is part of social life; therefore, building relations between design practices and social life is crucial for design practitioners.'<sup>133</sup> They use the term design anthropology which, as Ingold asserted, is not about studying people, but working with them.

'This involves entering into a dialogic context of interaction with people, enabling action, emergent collaborative forms, co-analysis of field materials

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<sup>131</sup>Tim Ingold, "Anthropology Contra Ethnography," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (2017): 22, <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.005>.

<sup>132</sup>Ingold, "Anthropology Contra Ethnography," 23.

<sup>133</sup>Wendy Gunn and Louise B. Løgstrup, "Participant Observation, Anthropology Methodology and Design Anthropology, Research Inquiry," *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* Vol. 13(4) (2014): 430-31.

and engagement with, as opposed to capturing or trying to represent the other's point of view.<sup>134</sup>

Gunn and Løgstrup consider that anthropological observation can engage participants throughout an entire design process and be a part of transitional processes providing a constructive critique, while the processes and practices of designing can foster interactive relationships. In this research, the objective of producing the textiles was secondary in purpose and importance to the methodological approach to the co-design projects of mutual engagement between the participants for shared learning during the design process. In *Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design* Sanders and Stappers anticipate that this could be the future direction of co-design, where 'we are no longer simply designing products for users. We are designing for the future experiences of people, communities and cultures who now are connected and informed.'<sup>135</sup>

It is for this reason I refer to the co-design methodology as emergent; strategies changed as the project participants responded to their shared experiences. As the projects progressed, adapting co-design approaches became essential, particularly with the advent of international border closures.

### 3.3.3 Digital communication

The importance of digital communication to this research in developing relationships between the participants in the co-design projects cannot be underestimated. This became even more so with the unprecedented challenges brought by the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/21 which resulted in complete lockdown in India, affecting the artisan communities, and travel restrictions disrupting planned fieldwork. As previously discussed, access to cheap smartphones in India has enabled artisans to use this technology for communication, documentation and the internet. WhatsApp is the most popular application used as it is free and allows easy transmission of video, photographs and conversations. The more general use of Zoom during the pandemic became a communication tool used by the participants of the co-design projects as well. During the 2020 Zoom meetings I noticed the genuine interest and curiosity the participants expressed in meeting each other, albeit via screens.

In all communications between co-design project participants, including artisans and users, facilitators were required to initiate the correspondence. Digital communication between myself as a facilitator in Australia and the project facilitators from the Kashmir shawl community enabled setting times when

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<sup>134</sup>Gunn and Løgstrup, "Participant Observation," 430.

<sup>135</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 10.

Australian and artisan project participants could come together via Zoom. As the projects progressed, WhatsApp correspondence between the facilitators on the progress of the shawls, including photographs and videos that were then shared with the Australian user participants, were an expedient means for the users to provide their feedback on the shawl design processes – which discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

The interactive capabilities of the internet have allowed creative communities to be brought together in content generation, interaction and commerce, via social media platforms like Facebook or video-sharing websites like YouTube. Apart from providing product marketing opportunities, the possibilities for sharing knowledge through these platforms are unparalleled. My using information gleaned from watching YouTube videos to resolve issues in the third co-design project about natural dye techniques, as Chapter Five documents, is but one example. The accessibility and utility of digital interactive platforms has been transformative for India's low socio-economic population, which includes many in the artisan communities, enabling connectivity between artisans, and access to a wider customer base in India and beyond.

Digital connectivity provides possibilities for direct communication between the artisans and users that enable new ways of working for sustainable innovation in design. In the co-design projects, digital connectivity was the solution for the intercultural participants to communicate significant differences in knowledge about materials, process and values, suggesting possibilities for such projects to be ongoing. In *Methodologies of Open Co-Creation around Digital Culture* Enric Senabre discusses how, with the creation of digital cultures within organisations including NGOs, local governments and emerging enterprises, opportunities to generate sustainable solutions can emerge, but it is important 'to consider the inclusion of digital materials which are both suitable and authorized for possible reuse.'<sup>136</sup> A knowledge-sharing digital platform, using, for example, social media tools, for the generation of new experiences and products for the artisan community and their users, can evolve from the co-design projects in this research and its development was considered throughout the running of the projects.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy, of the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, consider that sharing information through communications technology has a socially equalising effect. Use of digital platforms encourages networks of consumers with common interests, skills and experiences to communicate openly 'without

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<sup>136</sup>Enric Senabre, *Methodologies of Open Co-Creation around Digital Culture* [White paper], Europeana Creative (July 2015), 8. [https://slidelegend.com/europeana-creative-template-europeana-pro\\_5afac68b8ead0e2a068b456d.html](https://slidelegend.com/europeana-creative-template-europeana-pro_5afac68b8ead0e2a068b456d.html).

geographic constraints and with few social barriers.<sup>137</sup> Noting the disparate skillsets and experiences of the users and artisans, this notion of shared communication without preconceived inequalities of status was important for this research. A method for communicating and consulting over an extended period needed to be in place for the co-design projects to proceed. While working on the ground within artisan communities would have been preferable for the research, digital connectivity was essential for the co-design projects given the geographic divide between participants as well as the previously unimaginable restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adopting technology as a communication tool for co-design between intercultural participants is, however, new and its pitfalls became evident, as this research showed. Challenges of language differences, technical quality and technology application knowhow, as well as connectivity issues were apparent in the Zoom meetings, and in the interpretation of materials captured in images and videos.

### 3.3.4 Methodology to define perceptions of value

The word *value* is semantically complex, and in this research, with its co-creation and inter-cultural focus, there were various interpretations of value among the participants. The value of a product, in this instance a handcrafted textile, typically refers to its commercial value at the time of exchange between the business and the customer, when ownership is transferred. The value of the product is determined by the business for the consumer through a financial transaction. Indeed, for the artisan communities, this exchange is salient to their livelihood, the financial reward from the sale of a completed textile providing a monetary injection to the makers' families. However, this exchange of capital and labour is usually hierarchical and often, the value of the artisan's labour in making the product is alienated from the value of the product through the process of commodification.

In the co-design projects, the practice-based approach between the participants from different cultures embodied their values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions in the product created. Writer, researcher and editor of *Garland Magazine*, Kevin Murray, proposes that an anthropological approach can establish how handcrafted products can be valued for their utility in connecting people:

'The value of object is more determined by the social relations facilitated by the exchange, rather than an abstract market value.'<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>C. K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy, "The Co-Creation Connection," *Strategy and Business*, no. 27 (2009), 7.

<sup>138</sup>Kevin Murray, "Social Craft: Perspectives from the South." (2018), accessed July 20, 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/37362913/Social\\_craft\\_Perspectives\\_from\\_the\\_South](https://www.academia.edu/37362913/Social_craft_Perspectives_from_the_South).

When people from disparate cultures come together to make a product, different values will become apparent. Just as an individual's interpretation of a product is subjective, and their values culturally specific, so too will individuals' values differ in relation to its context and materials.

Textile artisans interviewed for my master's research overwhelmingly valued their skills and spoke with admiration about master artisans from whom they had learnt their craft. Technical expertise and the years spent involved in their craft were considered more valuable than the materials used. Most of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of formal education and of their children attending school. However, the artisans also hoped that their children would want to learn their traditional crafts. While interviewing woodblock maker Kunwar Pal, his young son was in his workshop in Sanganer, Rajasthan, carving a block. The boy came after school each day to learn the craft. Also from Rajasthan, applique embroiderer Bhukhu trained her niece and daughter-in-law to do applique embroidery and told me how admired they were for their skills by other family members, particularly as their work supplemented the household's income. Indeed, most of the interview participants felt their skills were well-respected within their communities.

The structure of traditional textile communities, characterised by a network of artisans involved in different processes to complete a product, results in the valuing of their specific skill over the end financial value of the textile piece, particularly since the price is mostly determined by a third party such as a shop owner. In considering the artisans' thoughts about value in the planned co-design projects in this research, I decided to collect information about the opinions of customers or users of handcrafted textiles relating to value as a means of addressing its significance. Among other things, the information collection would help determine whether the financial value of the textiles was most important, or if there were other factors that influenced the value attributed by the users, for example textile materiality, their relationship with the artisan community, or their experiences of the artisanal making processes.

My method was to survey invited user-participants in Australia who I am aware, through my connections, have collections of handcrafted textiles from India. The open-endedness of the survey questions encouraged the participants to record their own responses to the textiles discussed and those who made them. This approach addressed the concept of 're-valuing value' as discussed in Chapter Two, by asking the participants to relate their memories and stories about their handcrafted textiles in the context of 'slow fashion'. I aimed to establish if, by the user's knowing from where materials were sourced and who made the handcrafted

textiles, an affinity with the products they purchased influenced their perceptions of value.<sup>139</sup>

Two of the survey respondents had cultural connections respectively in Southeast Asia and India and wrote about the special meaning handcrafted textiles from these regions have for them, particularly pieces passed down from family members.

'I have two *phulkaris* that were embroidered by my husband's grandmother and great grandmother on each side of his family.' (Survey 2)

The other two participants wrote subjectively about the special meaning the textiles had for them.

'They remind me of people who I have met and travel experiences... they are humbling... to consider how other people around the world live.' (Survey 1)

'I love to look at them and have them in almost every room in our house. In fact, three were so faded after 40 years that I decided to buy new replacements from Udaipur, Rajasthan. I ended up buying 5 not 3 textiles but when I returned home after a 6-week holiday there I still kept my original 3 faded and now very fragile pieces. I couldn't bear to remove them.' (Survey 4)

In reply to the question of what attracted them to handcrafted textiles, all survey respondents wrote that they appreciated that the textiles were not machine-made and that they reflect the culture in which they are made.

'I find the irregularities in handcrafted textiles charming and because they are generally made of natural fibres, the subtle variation in these, adds another layer of visual interest.' (Survey 1)

Another (Survey 4) also mentioned the natural fibres and natural dyes used in handcrafted textiles and enthused over a bag she owns made from scraps of old, beautifully embroidered cloth from Myanmar. The use of natural fibres in the creation of handcrafted textiles had a different significance for one of the survey respondents, owing to a health issue:

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<sup>139</sup>The survey questions and HREA consent forms were by email sent to the participants who then returned their responses by email (appendices 2 - 5: surveys 1 - 4). The survey did not require any identifying information such as name or age. The four participants all live in Australia.

'Apart from the texture of natural fibres being more appealing, I have a severe autoimmune reaction after wearing synthetic material on a very hot day.' (Survey 2)

The four survey participants were conscious of the cost of handcrafted textiles and wrote of the need to maintain a budget, if reluctantly.

'Price is always a consideration... and prices always seem inexpensive considering the costs involved to make items and their rarity... but no-one has an unlimited budget.' (Survey 1)

In the light of this research's focus on how artisans and users build sustainable relationships through co-creation processes, the survey respondents displayed mixed interest in knowing who made their products, with one commenting as an aside,

'I would probably be horrified if I knew that a young child suffered dreadful hours and conditions to create a piece.' (Survey 4)

However, the respondent's appreciation for the work of the artisans is evident.

'In 2015 I went to a Women's Refuge in Khimsar that had been set up by a philanthropist, Neela Moti. Every single item was beautifully made. I have a double-sided scarf from there that I still can't believe. It has been delicately stitched on each edge and was made with obvious love, not for a cheap commercial tourist venture.' (Survey 4)

Respondents varied in the degree of their knowledge about the sustainability of making handcrafted textiles. One respondent thought increased interest in handcrafted textiles would make their future development sustainable, while another focused on the inherent sustainability of traditional textiles owed to the processes and materials used. However, a third recognised the pressure that competition from machine-made goods placed upon sustainable artisanal practices.

'Less and less, I fear. I heard that the Rabari women in at least one village in Gujarat were instructed not to create their textiles by hand as it wastes too much time. They were asked to take their designs to a machinist.' (Survey 4)

Finally, asked if they would like to be involved in the design process of a handcrafted textile, such as through a co-design project, they all responded positively, while one, a business owner who frequently goes to India considered that he is already co-creating with the artisan communities

'I am already involved. Sometimes it's just choosing colours that I feel will be better received by my clients, or sizing that is more useful. Sometimes I take an existing technique and adjust it to suit my designs.' (Survey 1)

The survey respondents provided insights into their sense of value for handcrafted textiles. While their emphases were generally on the actual textile pieces rather than the artisans who made them. The financial value of the product was apparently of limited concern; instead, their felt association with the textiles whether through family bonds or personal experiences and memories was most important. It was evident there were lasting bonds between the users and their textile, notwithstanding their own cultural values seemed to be intrinsic to their individual expectations conditioned by existing in an established consumer system. Still, they were keenly interested in the cultural significance and artisanal story behind the making of the textiles.

'The history of their craft makes the product much more valuable and interesting than a generic machine-made product.' (Survey 3)

The survey was also a method of testing the user experience about matters of sustainability and co-design in relation to their collections of handcrafted textiles. While interest was shown, only the respondent who, through business interests, had spent time with artisans in India, related any experience of co-designing. It would seem the lived experience of designing and making together prompted questioning assumptions about value and, more specifically, what the participants valued. Processes of designing and making together in an inter-cultural collaboration between user and artisan can expose the different values of the different cultures, in practice as much as in the final product, as the co-design projects for this research showed.

Co-designing in this context shifts from 'a company-centric, efficiency-driven view of value creation,'<sup>140</sup> the orientation of European and North American industries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The shift to more human- and relationship-centred collaborative design this century has generally resulted in companies thinking about value creation in response to consumer experience.<sup>141</sup> In the co-design projects in this research, value was focused not on the textiles produced, but on the experience of all the participants, artisans and users and the connections formed through their co-design practice. This research proposes an additional dimension to value

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<sup>140</sup>Prahalad and Ramaswamy, "The Co-Creation Connection," 1.

<sup>141</sup>Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 1.

that is not solely consumer- or user-focused, by highlighting questions around 'value-creation'<sup>142</sup> for the different participants as the co-design projects evolve.

### 3.3.5 Artisanal textile design/making processes — artisanal traditional knowledge

Applying an ethnographic research method using surveys and interviews enabled me to obtain information about the key areas of relations and value for users, and in existing collaborations in the field of handcrafted textiles in India. The findings assisted me in constructing the emergent methodology for the co-design projects. Ultimately, the projects proposed designing and making as a means for all project participants (including myself as both user and researcher) of understanding what is meant by 'knowledge-by-doing'.<sup>143</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Two, co-creation and co-design share the same ideologies and practices, and have evolved from the design research area of participatory design. Clay Spinuzzi, a professor of rhetoric and writing at the University of Texas, posits participatory design as a research methodology rather than a design approach.<sup>144</sup> Understanding participatory design as a research methodology provides us with a framework for knowing by doing. Participatory design conceptualises 'community' as a collaborative, interconnected system, where members share information and resources.<sup>145</sup> Such co-working environments already exist in traditional artisan communities in India. The organisation of their communities is not a static, but an evolving system, and while subject to economic, political and social influences, the traditional artisanal roles and processes continue and are sustained. Artisan communities are complex, based as they are on a series of relationships revolving around interrelated processes in creating a specific textile. My initial quandary when planning the co-design projects was how to introduce and connect users of their handcrafted textiles within the context of existent artisan communities so they could become part of the design process. Moreover, how could I include the users in the design activities, so their creativity becomes incorporated into the practices involved in making the product in a sustainable way for future co-design relationships and innovation?

The act of storytelling where experiences and memories are expressed was frequently used by the survey respondents. One respondent related her experiences of artisan practices:

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<sup>142</sup>Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 27.

<sup>143</sup>Spinuzzi, "The Methodology," 163.

<sup>144</sup>Spinuzzi, 163.

<sup>145</sup>Clay Spinuzzi, Zlatko Bodrožić, Giuseppe Scaratti, and Silvia Ivaldi, "'Coworking Is About Community': But What Is 'Community' in Coworking?" *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 33, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651918816357>.

'I am very interested in finding out about the techniques used. I have visited Bagru, to observe block printing. There was a shop in Chandigarh where you could watch the craftsmen creating embroidered, appliquéd and drawn patterns on materials.' (Survey 2)

Although this respondent's experience was merely observational in that situation, it derived from her 40 years' practice in printmaking, as she explained in the survey. I found communicating the story behind a user's experience of a handcrafted textile or technique to an artisan to be an effective way to initiate the connection. Videos (with translated voiceovers) of the users relating their stories about their textile collections, were shown to the artisans as a method of introducing and connecting the various parties participating in co-design projects one and two, detailed in Chapter Five.

Australian designer Trent Jansen, who refers to himself as a design anthropologist, has worked on several intercultural collaborations with indigenous communities in Australia. While his research for the projects has arisen from conventional academic sources, he emphasises the importance of storytelling to directly engaging with the people who are part of the story. Sensitivity and trust are crucial when people are sharing their culture and stories: 'It must be created in a reciprocal mode of knowledge exchange facilitated by mutual interaction, with time spent between individuals across cultural divides.'<sup>146</sup> Jansen considers this process of sharing, with a balanced exchange of ideas and information, to result in better design outcomes. After listening to the users' stories, which included their backgrounds and experiences of their handcrafted textiles, the artisan participants in the co-design projects in this research were encouraged to share their own stories. Although video technology, instead of direct engagement, was of necessity used, this method nonetheless fostered a connectedness and initiated a source of knowledge between the participants which, as the projects proceeded, provided pathways of communication and discussion about design and design processes specific to the textiles being created.

### 3.3.6 Role of facilitators in the co-design projects

Jansen points to language barriers as a significant problem in intercultural collaborations, given 'it is difficult to engage in the complex conversations necessary when making artefacts,'<sup>147</sup> and adds 'those existing outside the Western paradigm with their own language and codes surrounding their own design

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<sup>146</sup>Trent Jansen, "Australian Design," In *NGV Triennial*, eds. Ewan McEoin, Simon Maidment, Megan Patty and Pip Wallis, (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2017), 511.

<sup>147</sup>Jansen, "Australian Design," 511.

processes, may have a different understanding of collaboration.<sup>148</sup> On a practical level, the inclusion of facilitators in the co-design projects who can translate exchanges between the participants does resolve, to a degree, the obstacle of language differences. In addition, each co-design project in this research was kept within the context of the specific artisan community's traditional practice of design and technical processes. This was because the users in the projects had indicated that was their area of interest, and this was a means of sustaining and strengthening the social and practice relationships that are material to making a specific textile product. This was unlike many interventions in artisan communities made by formally trained designers who, to create fashion textile designs, manipulate and change the techniques integral to that community, potentially resulting in the artisans' alienation from their products, as noted in Chapter Two. In these situations, the facilitator role is often perceived negatively, as a middleman between the artisans and designer who exploits the artisans for financial gain. In co-design, a facilitator should be trained and able to establish a process to involve the participants as well as resolve any dilemmas that arise. The facilitator needs to be open and encouraging towards the people taking part so that they feel not only included, but also free to contribute and express themselves.

Indeed, the facilitators from the artisan communities involved in the co-design projects this research were themselves part of the projects, with pre-existing roles that contributed to the production of the textiles, apart from their responsibilities in translating discussions between the participants. The artisans typically work from their homes or small workshops, with a facilitator actively liaising between them, moving the textile from one artisan to the next at each stage of the making process. In some instances, the facilitator is an adult child of one of the artisans, for example, Wasim, son of the shawl embroiderer Ghulam Hassan, mentioned in the prologue to this thesis. Not only do these facilitators have comprehensive knowledge of the entire process, they also have developed relationships with all the artisans involved and necessarily have good communication skills. In each of the three projects, the position and involvement of the facilitator was different, as discussed in Chapter Five.

The facilitators, either from the artisan community, or myself assisted whenever an opinion or technical issue interfered with the process, by 'asking questions or providing ways to create better flow,'<sup>149</sup> to keep the project going forward. The artisanal facilitator possesses a tacit knowledge of the complete design process, even though they may not be personally involved in every step. Tacit knowledge of the processes required to produce a textile piece is held by most of the artisans in a community, as discussed in Chapter Two. The users could only be brought into the

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<sup>148</sup>Jansen, 512.

<sup>149</sup>Senabre, "Methodologies of Open Co-Creation," 19.

design process at certain stages since they lacked experience of techniques specific to the production of these textiles. It was the facilitator's responsibility to identify the most constructive times for user interaction in the process.

The fact that this information had to be shared digitally in the co-design projects further complicated the interactions. Differences in values and interpretations arose among these intercultural co-design participants that required the facilitators' intervention. This problem is not unique to these participatory projects. Iversen, Halskov and Leong in *Rekindling Values in Participatory Design* aver that it is the role of co-design project facilitators to address issues of values among participants:

'This pervading concern for values also influences ways we work with stakeholders, such as how we facilitate the negotiation of design dilemmas that arises from conflicting values.'<sup>150</sup>

In consultation with the artisanal facilitators, who hold tacit knowledge of the design processes and the community, we were able to devise strategies to resolve problems that occurred in the co-design projects. There was a need for strategies that addressed concerns of design interpretation by the users who, unlike the artisans, were unfamiliar with the design techniques. They required further visual and verbal explanations to understand the shawl-making processes.

### 3.3.7 SAY, DO, MAKE Model

Co-design theorists Elizabeth Sanders and Colin William claim that users are potentially creative, but as customers of products or services they have rarely been utilised in the initial stages of a design process.<sup>151</sup> They advocate the 'Say, Do, Make' model, in which

'... methods are rooted in verbal communication and are used in situations such as traditional focus groups. Methods such as applied ethnography focus on what people do through direct or indirect observation. The make methods are unique in their ability to elicit creative expression from everyday people.'<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>Ole Sejer Iversen, Kim Halskov, Tuck Wah Leong, "Rekindling Values in Participatory Design," in PDC '10: Proceedings of 11th Biennial Participatory Design Conference Sydney, Australia, November 29 - December 03, 2010, (New York: ACM, 2010), 2.

<sup>151</sup>Elizabeth B. N. Sanders and Colin T. William, "Harnessing People's Creativity - Ideation and Expression through Visual Communication, in *Focus Groups: Supporting Effective Product Development*, eds. Joe Langford and Deanna McDonagh (London: CRC Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>152</sup>Sanders and William, "Harnessing People's Creativity," 1.

In combination, these methods can be used to understand the experiences and dreams of participants about a product or service. The use of toolkits, as previously discussed, has become an essential method in co-design to assist users in generating design ideas at the beginning of the design process for a product or service, since 'everyday people are creative when given appropriate "tools."' <sup>153</sup>

Sanders and William experiment with the use of 'make toolkits' consisting in images and words on sheets of paper, collage, cognitive mapping and modelling, proposing that the chosen methodology depends upon 'having defined goals about what you want to learn, and a procedure that builds towards those goals.' <sup>154</sup> Their focus on using generative toolkits is a method to enable users to communicate their experiences for effective product development. Trent Jansen uses co-design tools as a form of visual communication for making between collaborators and suggests this as an appropriate approach for intercultural projects. He discusses sketching exchanges 'whereby two practitioners converse through sketches, with the first sketching their interpretation of the idea, after which the second responds with his/her interpretation of the first sketch,' <sup>155</sup> the outcome eventuating as a combined sketch for the design idea.

In devising the co-design projects for this research, the focus was not only on the users, as in a conventional co-design project, but also on the makers — the artisans — since the intention was to develop methods for the participants to interact in designing textiles within the Indian artisanal context. I therefore needed to use different tools to those in the generative toolkits described by Sanders, Stappers and William which would apply in a speculative co-design situation but not fit the aim of the current research — to create the textiles from the outset.

The co-design methodology of 'Say, Do, Make,' with its mix of approaches, while applicable, required adaptation for an intercultural setting in which the several participants in each project would design within the tradition of the artisan communities' specific techniques. Some conventional co-design tools, such as photographs and colour cards, were useful at the beginning of the projects to assist the users to share their ideas about the textile designs with the artisans. For the making, I assembled co-design toolkits of images of contextual motifs and embroidery sample pieces for projects one and two so the users and artisans could share ideas visually to further develop the designs, akin to Jansen's use of sketch exchange, which helped to diminish the need to speak the same language.

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<sup>153</sup>Sanders and William, 2.

<sup>154</sup>Sanders and William, 10.

<sup>155</sup>Jansen, 512.

The introduction of the users into the initial stages of the design process within the artisan communities was a new experience for both participant groups. Conducted via digital communication, video and Zoom (projects one and two), and through face-to-face interaction (project three), the experience allowed participants to explore opportunities for innovation, to resolve difficulties they encountered, and make better decisions for the design processes.

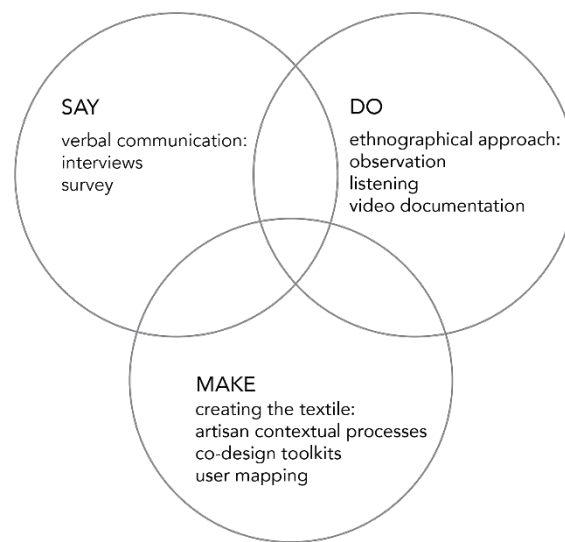


Figure 3.1. The various research methods embedded in the SAY, DO, MAKE model for the co-design projects.

Adapted from Elizabeth Sanders & Colin William, "Harnessing People's Creativity - Ideation and Expression through Visual Communication," in *Focus Groups: Supporting Effective Product Development*, eds. Joe Langford and Deanna McDonagh (London: CRC Press, 2001), 1.

The textiles created for each of the co-design projects in this research were developed over an extended time frame as each piece is handcrafted. Many interconnected processes were performed by different artisans involved in the creation of a specific textile. As previously discussed, although each artisan fulfilled a different task, they possess tacit knowledge of all the processes in creating a textile product in their community. Consequently, the differences between the artisans' practical, implicit understanding of the making processes, and that of the users, was of significance throughout the co-design projects. Although it was anticipated that each user's participation in the making processes would continue intermittently throughout the duration of the project, following their initial involvement, theirs was not a continued presence as was the artisans in the community. Therefore, in Chapter Five, as a method to document their access and interactions with different participant artisans, I mapped the users' journeys in a diagrammatical form representing all exchanges and steps they undertook in each

of the projects. The idea for this method of mapping the user's engagement in the project emanates from customer journey mappings commonly used in service design research with an emphasis on a customer co-creation process. The customer journey map is a 'method of visually representing the actual and everyday user experience of a service. Plotting touch points, interactions and gestures of users.'<sup>156</sup> In the projects for this research, mapping methods were invented to help visualise, formulate and evaluate proposed communications between the users and artisans throughout the duration of the projects. Due to the number of artisans involved in the making processes the mapping was pre-determined by the facilitators. The practical reality of these interactions changed as the projects progressed, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Reflecting on the sustainability of the projects at their conclusion, the value of user mapping assisted in viewing the users' interactivity with the artisans at varying points and times, which could then inform revisions to iterative strategies to maintain the viability of the co-design projects. In addition, the mapping provided a critical overview of the organisation and practices in each artisan community, informing the feasibility of users' involvement in the design and making processes within an existing network.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The mixed methodology developed for this research, based on ethnographic qualitative methods and the research methods of co-design, shared the approach of context-based research. The strategies and processes deployed in the different projects served to test the assumptions and limitations of current co-design frameworks when working in an intercultural context, specifically, artisanal communities extant within informal economies. The intention and primary focus of this research — to include direct artisan-user interactions in the co-design practice was still achievable by using digital communication technology, my plan to be on the ground in the artisan communities having to be rethought due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. While this unexpected change of strategy limited, to some extent, the scope of the research, it in fact provided an opportunity to learn from a realistic scenario given that often in intercultural projects, the participants are geographically distanced. The use of technology can be challenging, particularly as it was in relation to the users' perceptions of tactile materials. The capacities and accessibility of digital technology, such as image-based communication through social media, have enabled new platforms for exchange, which, in the case of the co-design projects at the centre of this research, has been ongoing beyond their

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<sup>156</sup>Charles Ikem, "Can Using Co-Design Practices Help Improve the Outcome of Customer Journey Mapping?" (Master's thesis, Birmingham City University, 2012, 40.

completion. The co-design projects were the ground for exploring strategies for using digital communication to enable interaction between the intercultural participants that can contribute to the sustainability of future projects involving artisan communities. The unexpected effect of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in modifying the methodology with the increased use of digital communication than planned at the outset. This new area of 'digital ethnography' is something for future research.

The role of facilitators from within the Kashmir shawl community was integral to the methodologies used for the co-design projects; the need for their involvement was greater than I anticipated when planning the projects. Their tacit knowledge of the traditional shawl-making processes assisted in the development of strategies to resolve issues of interpretation experienced by the users by drawing on methods familiar to the community — the freehand embroidery motifs used in projects one and two, for example. The facilitators identified the values of significance to their community that informed the strategies I devised to build relationships between the users and artisans in the projects. Together with the facilitators, I created a map of the not inconsiderable number of artisanal processes involved in creating a Kashmir shawl to determine when user interactions would optimally provide an experience of inclusivity in the community's design process.

Using the anthropological method of working with the participants (artisans and users) to gain insight, rather than studying them through observation, evolved from my own earlier experiences of being with textile artisans in India where I had the privilege of sharing their culture. Therefore, I chose not only the role of researcher but also that of user-participant working actively in the co-design projects. In addition, video-documenting the co-design participants' stories, communications, making processes, and viewpoints as the projects developed generated a record of what they had learnt through their experiences of the projects; for myself, this was knowledge of their relationships, values, and processes interwoven by social and cultural forces.

Through my experience of working in India, I am aware of existing collaborations of designers, NGOs, design education institutions and government organisations with Indian artisanal communities. In the next chapter, I examine these external systems that support informal textile craft practices and communities and determine their contribution to the sustainability of artisanal cultural heritage.

Chapter Five reveals how, method-wise, each of my three co-design projects had their own specific nuances in my approach to co-design. At the commencement of this research, I had no expectations of a predetermined conclusion, leaving myself, as the researcher, exposed to uncertainty. In wanting to ensure democratic research

methods, possibilities emerged for future co-design strategies which could be adapted to help sustain the practices of textile artisan communities in India.

## Chapter Four: Designers, textile and fashion companies, NGOs, and Indian educational institutions engagement with traditional textile artisans to promote their crafts

### 4.1 Introduction

To develop new co-design models for working with traditional textile communities in India, I had to first investigate and research existing collaborative models for handcrafted textile design and production within India. Since independence, the Indian government has acknowledged the skills of artisans, initiating the All India Handicrafts Board in 1952 for improvement and development of crafts. In this chapter, I focus on extant contemporary collaborations of foreign and Indian designers, a social enterprise and textile design institution initiatives with traditional textile artisans.

The poor socio-economic position of artisan communities, the loss of markets for their product, and the diminished interest of their children in continuing the crafts is well documented.<sup>157</sup> Despite the recognition accorded to the skills of textile artisan communities, the modernisation and intense urbanisation of India over the past three decades has left these cultural crafts struggling for their identity and survival.<sup>158</sup> However, there are many who want to assist the artisans in preserving their skills and encourage them to find new markets through the development of different products, as the examples in this chapter will show. The pros and cons of such interventions are will also be examined.

Different traditional textile communities throughout India are each known for a specific craft, for example weaving, hand block printing, resist-dyeing or embroidery, this list is not intended to be exhaustive. Government organisations, including educational institutions, have focused on these geographically diverse groups, referred to as 'clusters,' as well as established initiatives including the Weavers' Service Centres throughout India, and collaboration projects between design students and artisans. In the private sector, non-government organisations (NGOs) have set up incentive programs and design education schools for artisans with the aim of countering the threatened position in modern India of the artisan communities. With the expanding global customer base for 'slow fashion', which includes handcrafted and sustainable textile products, fashion designers from within India and abroad are appreciating and utilising artisans' skills in their collections.

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<sup>157</sup>Ritu Sethi, "Coming out of the Shadow: Contextualising and Codifying Traditional Indigenous Knowledge of Craft Practice into Mainstream Education," Craft Revival Trust Voice, accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.craftrevival.org/voiceDetails.asp?Code=234>.

<sup>158</sup>Chatterjee, "The Invisible Giant," 206.

This research documents different contemporary models of these artisanal collaborations using a combination of research methods to gain insights into their operation. The purpose of these case studies is to question and determine the sustainability of these collaborative projects and the empowerment of the artisan communities. Importantly, where possible, artisans involved in the projects were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the collaborative model as well as the impact on their cultural heritage of making new products in these modern collaborations.

## 4.2 National Institute of Fashion (NIFT) Craft Cluster Initiative

In Chapter Two, I discussed the Indian government's recognition of traditional crafts throughout India since becoming a republic, and its continuing initiatives to support and promote them. The success of government programs has been mixed: a common complaint of artisan communities is that the centralised bureaucracy is inaccessible and intimidating — the communities are often rural-based and unacquainted with government formalities and procedures. The Craft Council of India suggests that if Indian traditional crafts were introduced into the mainstream education system, Indian children will become sensitised to their craft culture, and the frequently expressed view that the artisan communities are outdated will be reversed.<sup>159</sup> From my own experience in India, and previous research with those involved with artisan communities, I know this idea to be generally accepted as a possible way forward. However, as art educator Shobita Punja points out, Indian school education remains based on cognitive learning, and not creative intelligence, which characterises the traditional knowledge of artisans.<sup>160</sup> Yet Punja, among others, believes the inclusion of craft culture in the school curriculum would enrich the education of young students. She suspects this absence of artisan culture results from a problem intrinsic to Indian society — its caste structure, in which artisan craft communities are mostly of low caste,<sup>161</sup> and belong to minority religions, such as Islam.

With the publication of the Indian government's 2020 National Education Policy, there does seem to be a shift in focus to include creative learning with its inclusion of,

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<sup>159</sup>Craft Revival Trust – Asia inCH, "Education for Artisans: Past, Present and Future," moderated by Ruth Sethi, YouTube video, 1:00:05, September 24, 2020, Craft Revival Trust and Journal of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Asia InCH, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlE2Pq1zH3c>

<sup>160</sup>Craft Revival Trust – Asia inCH, "Education for Artisans."

<sup>161</sup>Craft Revival Trust – Asia inCH, "Education for Artisans."

‘... much greater flexibility in the curriculum, especially in secondary schools and in higher education, so that students can choose the ideal balance among courses for themselves to develop their own creative, artistic, cultural, and academic paths.’<sup>162</sup>

The policy outlines initiatives for the higher education sector, whereby

‘... outstanding local artists and craftspeople will be hired as guest faculty to promote local music, art, languages, and handicraft, and to ensure that students are aware of the culture and local knowledge where they study. Every higher education institution and even every school or school complex will aim to have Artist(s)-in-Residence to expose students to art, creativity, and the rich treasures of the region/country.’<sup>163</sup>

In fact, artisan input in tertiary education design training has been included in India for some decades, but its extension into elementary curricula will be a positive step.

To bring contemporary design into the education system, design institutions like the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad and the National Institute of Fashion and Technology (NIFT) were established in 1961 and 1986, respectively. The founding principles of the institution, NID were based on The India Report<sup>164</sup> by industrial designers Charles and Ray Eames, that was commissioned in 1958 by the Government of India. The Eames were asked for recommendations on a programme of training in design that would serve as an aid to small industries. Following suggestions by the Eames these institutions, while providing formal education for designers, also aimed to work with craftspeople to create a nexus between artisan communities and their evolving urban markets. Ashoke Chatterjee, executive director of NID from 1975-85, confirms that artisans contributed a strong practical element to the institute’s design curriculum: ‘Right from the very start of NID there was large community of artisans, including master artisans on the campus, every one of the studios was run by artisans.’<sup>165</sup> The emphasis was on how the crafts of India could be brought into a design education curriculum for young Indians who would become designers working in various industrial sectors. Artisans and design students alike were exposed to the demands of the marketplace, including growing export markets in the 1960-70s when, while tradition was still respected, consumers wanted a contemporary look and feel to products. Chatterjee claims that the artisans welcomed ideas from foreign-trained designers because of

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<sup>162</sup>Government of India, National Education Policy 2020, 22.8, 54.

[https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf).

<sup>163</sup>Government of India, National Education Policy 2020, 22.9, 54.

<sup>164</sup>Charles and Ray Eames. *The India Report*. Report commissioned by Government of India. (Ahmedabad: National Institute of Design, 1958) [http://echo.iat.sfu.ca/library/eames\\_58\\_india\\_report.pdf](http://echo.iat.sfu.ca/library/eames_58_india_report.pdf).

<sup>165</sup>Craft Revival Trust – Asia inCH, “Education for Artisans.”

competition; they needed to find ways to flourish. The question of sustainability was an issue then as it is now for the artisans: how to maintain and grow markets for their handcrafted products while preserving their cultural heritage. The difficulties entailed in this dilemma were as diverse as the artisan communities themselves and posed problems for both the artisans and design students.

Still embedded in the curriculum of Indian art and design education institutions are programs where design students collaborate on projects with artisans. One example is the Craft Cluster Initiative Program that runs across NIFT's 16 campuses. This program exposes students to traditional handloom and handicraft clusters by their working directly with the artisans. A craft cluster is encompassed in a town or a village that has a specific ancestral craft technique that is passed down from one generation to the next. The craft is executed in a specific way and only by the artisans in that location and nowhere else in India. According to NIFT, '[t]he artisans and craftsmen involved in the initiative will benefit through knowledge dissemination and exposure to urban markets and design intervention, innovative designs and linkages with new markets,'<sup>166</sup> while the students have an opportunity for creative innovation and experimentation to assimilate crafts into fashion. The objective of the Craft Cluster Initiative is to 'sensitize NIFT students to the realities of the craft sector and give insight into regional sensibilities and diversities, resources and environment.'<sup>167</sup> In their third year of study student fashion and textile designers go to artisan communities, initially to document the craft's history and tradition.

For the NIFT case study, I interviewed two final-year NIFT textile design students, Phuhaar Mathur and Prakhar Chauhan, to learn about their first-hand experiences of their course in the Craft Cluster Initiative. Mathur explained the initial ethnographic method her student cohort used to establish where and how the focus of their cluster experience would develop:

'The project started 12 months beforehand. Our entire class were divided into three groups and sent to different areas in India. I went to Lucknow, Baramunchi, other friends went to Bikaner and others to Murbarapur. Murbarapur has very intricate weaving, Bikaner and Baramunchi has basic weaving. When we got back, we did a huge project, we discussed how the different clusters were developing their fabrics... it is in a very bad state, their living conditions are very poor.' (*Interview transcript 1*)

From their perspective, Mathur's student group considered that that the textiles currently being woven by the artisans were unprofitable because the artisans had

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<sup>166</sup>National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), "Cluster Projects," 2020, accessed 20 December 2020, <https://nift.ac.in/cluster-projects>.

<sup>167</sup>NIFT, "Cluster Projects."

little knowledge of design and colour use that would particularly appeal to a wider global market.

‘In India if you make a product with say, a particular orange it might sell but outside no one would pick it up from the racks. They have been catering for the masses instead of trying to understand how important the craft is and how they can profit from it.’ (*Interview transcript 1*)

After a year of investigation and research, these two students concluded that the Bikaner weaving community in Rajasthan seemed the one most in need of product development assistance.

Before commencing their cluster projects in specific artisan communities, the NIFT students undertake a training course in craft techniques before commencing their cluster projects in specific artisan communities. This is an advantage for the students; Phuhaar Mathur, for example, knew how to weave, but also found that she could learn from the artisans:

‘We spend two years at NIFT learning to weave, but that’s on a sample basis, in Bikaner it is on a production basis. By knowing weaving, I understand the feasibility of the production.’ (*Interview transcript 1*)

In the ten days she spent in Bikaner, she observed that traditionally, the weavers use only white wool to produce shawls that are then embroidered. ‘The emphasis is on the embroidery so that is where the value is placed and where the profit goes, not to the weavers.’ (*Interview transcript 1*) Mathur proposed to the weaver with whom she was working that if he introduced colour into the weaving in geometric lines and shapes, as Figure 4.1 depicts, then the shawls could be sold like that, without any need for embroidery. She further suggested that by adding colours, the woven cloth could be used for other products, like kurtas, or as dress fabric which would, in turn, attract a younger demographic.

‘My weaver was very excited to introduce colour into his weaving. His children are not interested in becoming weavers but as they watched him introduce colour they got excited and said Dad we would wear this. Then he got excited as it was the first time his children had shown any interest in 23 years and were coming to his workshop.’ (*Interview transcript 1*)



Figure 4.1. Phuhaar Mathur introduced coloured stripes to the Bikaner weaving designs.  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

At the beginning of the project, Mathur spent two days helping the weaver set up the loom, and then over the remaining eight days they took turns weaving while discussing where to introduce specific colours.

‘He was giving his input and I was giving mine, it was more a co-design thing, actually. Not about the weaving technique but about the aesthetics, he had never worked with these.’ (*Interview transcript 1*)

This would seem to be a positive outcome of the project because ordinarily, the Bikaner weavers would have little knowledge of what the final product looks like, since they never see their products in a store. The weavers belong to a khadi (hand woven cloth) guild for which they make pieces. They are agriculturally based weavers who intersperse their farm work with weaving, which they have learnt by watching older relatives. The NIFT Cluster Initiative project in Bikaner paid the weavers for their work and the students provided the materials to be used.

I asked Phuhaar Mathur if, for the artisans, the project went beyond the completion of her cohort’s time in Bikaner. She conceded that it wasn’t, but her enthusiasm about the experience was evident and she expressed her future plans:

'We would have to get back to them after college, but they would definitely want to work with us and I want to work with them. They are getting small projects with designers. The only issue for them is their kids aren't picking it up. We need to keep going there and tell them how important it is that they stay. The weavers need us to keep going there to continue making the product. Their market is mostly for shawls so we need to show them another market.' (*Interview transcript 1*)

Prakhar Chayhan, was the other member of the NIFT Craft Cluster Initiative cohort that went to Bikaner that I interviewed. Instead of working with the weavers, he spent nine days with 19 women embroidery artisans, each student in this group having one or two artisans to work with on product development. Prior to going to Bikaner, all the students had to do market research on the products that came from there and were sold to shops in Delhi like Khadi Bhavan, Bikaner Bhavan and Bikaner House, all government-supported emporia. Their research survey showed which of the artisans' products were not selling, and with this in mind the students went to the craft cluster to try to improve the products. Chayhan saw that 'embroidered products for men were not selling. I like wearing things that are a bit loud so I wanted to develop a product that I would wear and would sell in the market.' (*Interview transcript 2*) He produced a shirt design with a bird motif, supplying printed fabric to the embroidery artisans which they then embroidered, as shown in Figure 4.2. The bird motif theme was inspired by *Panchatantra*, a collection of Indian ancestral tales.

'Everyone in India knows these tales, they are bedtime stories with animals in them. Each story has a moral at the end of it. We chose this theme because we knew the artisans would also know these stories.' (*Interview transcript 2*)

The embroidery artisan used a simple embroidery stitch called *katchchi*, which translates to 'rough'. The embroiderer suggested that Chayhan use brighter colours so the motifs would contrast with the shirt fabric print.



Figure 4.2. Prakhar Chayhan's bird design embroidered on a shirt by Bikaner embroidery artisans. Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

Apart from learning about embroidery, Chayhan considered that having to develop the communication skills to establish a workable relationship with the artisans was of the most value:

'They had a way of talking and we had another way, so I had to bridge that communication gap. I talked in a way that they would understand. I cracked jokes. I was the only guy in the group and the women embroiderers were a bit scared of me. I cracked jokes and they soon knew that I was a friend.'  
(Interview transcript 2)

Chayhan felt that it was possible for the project to be ongoing after the students left, since the artisans could replicate the products that he believed would sell in Delhi.

An apparent transition in Indian tertiary design institutions has taken place, from the initial design education curriculum in the 1960s, when artisanal knowledge was intrinsic to the education of design students, as discussed by Ashoke Chatterjee<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>Craft Revival Trust – Asia inCH, "Education for Artisans."

to the present situation of intervention by design students into the artisanal craft in certain artisan communities. While the crafts of India are respected within these institutions, programs such as the NIFT Craft Cluster Initiative reveal that the artisan communities are seen to require education in design and product development to be viable participants in contemporary markets within India and globally.

Questions about sustainability and artisan community dependence after the conclusion of the students' design intervention projects need to be addressed. Although the intention of the projects is worthy, the students' concepts for new artisanal products usually relate to urban market trends that are ephemeral and erode intrinsic elements of the specific craft that make it distinct. The values of the students that consider traditional designs and processes to be outdated, and endorse the commercialisation of the craft, potentially endanger the continuance of the cultural heritage of the traditional textile communities.

#### 4.3 Indigene — Indian fashion designers working with artisan communities

The exposure of young Indian design students to artisan communities and their cultural heritage within the framework of their educational courses can impact their future career directions. This was made evident in the following case study in which the co-founders, Ruchi Tripathi and Jaya Bhatt of the Delhi-based fashion company, Indigene, were interviewed. Originally from the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra respectively, the two met at the Delhi National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), where they both studied textile design. Inspired by student projects which involved visiting and collaborating with traditional textile artisan communities, their passion for the handmade or handcrafted grew.

I discussed with Tripathi and Bhatt the concept of handmade and its relevance in modern India. Growing up in India people are accustomed to seeing hand-printed and hand-woven fabrics in the marketplace and, consequently, do not overly value them. These products are taken for granted while in the densely populated urban centres particularly, most people prefer to buy mass-marketed and produced global brands. These products are valued as modern by most, whereas artisanal handcrafted textiles are thought outdated. However, as Jaya Bhatt explains

'There is now more awareness from Indian customers. When labels like ours tell the story about how it is made, the process and the artisans who made it, there is a consciousness about it. The whole of India is flooded with fast fashion, international labels. But people still want to hear the handmade story.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

Bhatt's and Tripathi's knowledge of handmade techniques and relationships with the artisan communities developed over several years following their graduation from NIFT, working for handcrafted textile organisations in Rajasthan. In 2011, they decided they would like to start something of their own — Indigene — where they could bring several crafts together, their rationale being that

'Usually something is woven or embroidered, only one technique is used, but we wanted to bring an amalgamation of techniques together.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

After starting their company as a wholesale entity developing designs for a retail company, they launched their own collection, illustrated in Figure 4.3, at Indian Fashion Week in Mumbai in 2016. They now create two collections a year which they sell in high-end retail shops and online.



Figure 4.3. Indigene at Lakmé Fashion Week in Mumbai, 2016.

Video still from Indigene Craft website

<http://info.indigenecraft.com/runway/spring-summer-2017/>

They discussed the importance of developing relationships with the artisans who work on their designs that are based on mutual trust and a sense of responsibility. Bhatt explained:

'The eight years of work we had done before Indigene was very fruitful that way. We work with the same partnerships always because of the question of sustainability. If you move from one craft group to another in the next season it is not sustainable. We stay with the embroidery women in Delhi, Ajrakh block printers in Gujarat and Bengal handloom weavers.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

Tripathi continued that their garments are stitched by a group of women working in a social enterprise based in Nizamuddin, Delhi. Although not initially trained by Indigene, the women have further developed their stitching skills applying pintucks and pleating to the Indigene garments. The company supplies most of the group's work.

As trained textile designers, Bhatt and Tripathi agree that the starting point for them is the fabric. Fabric sampling can take up to six months. They explained their process of developing a block-printed fabric for their garments:

'We conceptualise the prints keeping Ajrakh [the block printers] in mind. We like to visit the cluster because changes can occur. It might not come out as we visualised, how it will work out when two colours are put together with the Ajrakh printing technique. We try to push the artisans to experiment a bit. Mostly we do the concepts on the computer and send it to them. Luckily the artisans are all email and WhatsApp savvy. Sometimes we ask for swatches of textures or colours we want and they send them. They are pretty independent.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

The artisans' in-depth knowledge of their craft influences the final fabric designs. The printers and weavers will tell Bhatt and Tripathi if colours won't work together, or if the product they envisage is infeasible for production, in which case they tweak their designs. Sometimes, Tripathi explained, the artisans need to be convinced about doing things differently:

'An artisan group, like the 15-20 embroidery women are used to doing things in a certain way, if one season one type of embroidery or motif is used, they take a while to get used to a new motif the next season. There is a time process for them to adjust to a new technique even though it may be only five new stitches.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

Bhatt and Tripathi hope that Indigene continues to grow in both the domestic and international markets as well as maintain their relationships with the artisan groups. It is, however,

'... a constant struggle for us as our intention is to keep engaging them [artisans] throughout the year. It depends on the market, if we are selling it means more work for the artisans, it is a constant cycle.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

Their customer base appreciates artisan-made fabrics, and this is integral to promoting their brand:

'We tell the story about our products on social media regularly. We have a series called Indie Made on our Instagram where we explain how a craft is done, or talk about an artisan, basically discuss the back end of the product, the whole process.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

Bhatt concludes:

'It is important to educate the customer. People want to know why the price is high so it is important that they know the story behind the product. It is not machine made, not fast fashion. It is something they can keep for a long time.' (*Interview transcript 3*)

The women who embroider for Indigene live in Delhi and their connection to this company was made through a facilitator, which is a typical way for many artisan communities to acquire work. I interviewed Geeta, one of the embroiderers, pictured in Figure 4.4, who shared her perspective of the work in creating Indigene clothing. She came from the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) to Delhi to earn a living; there, she does the embroidery in the rented property where she lives. The facilitator, Raji, receives the work from Indigene and then distributes it to the embroiderers, all of whom are from UP. The type of embroidery made by the women is called *katcha*, which means 'non-permanent thread,' and is commonly done domestically in Uttar Pradesh on bed linen, bedspreads and dress suits. Geeta explained that she learnt the embroidery technique by watching her mother:

'I started when I was 18 or 19. My mother didn't do this embroidery for a business but for home use. I started this way but then started embroidering commercially for Indigene to make a livelihood.' (*Interview transcript 4*)

Geeta has continued to develop her embroidery skills under the guidance of Raji, but especially of Raji's wife, who introduced Geeta to Indigene.

'Raji ji's wife is an expert embroiderer and she makes the sample for Indigene. Then I am shown what to do after seeing the sample. Raji ji also

explains what the embroidered fabric piece is going to be made into like a jacket.' (Interview transcript 4)

The design, on paper, is initially brought from Tripathi and Bhatt at Indigene by Raji before being copied onto fabric and the sample embroidered by Raji's wife in the specified colours and, Geeta continues, 'If it's complicated I come to watch Raji ji's wife make the sample or it is brought to me. I just have to know the thread thickness and colour.' (Interview transcript 4)

Geeta embroiders for five to seven hours a day as well as doing home duties. The extra income the embroidery generates provides for her family. It is continuous work, although Geeta mentioned that when a new sample is being developed, the embroiderers can lose up to six days of work while they learn to do the design, implying that they are not paid for sampling. Geeta is, however, resigned to this, saying,

'I am open to doing whatever is required. Sometimes new designs and at other times repeated embroidery designs from before. Fabrics change, embroidery patterns change but I like doing the new things.' (Interview transcript 4)



Figure 4.4. Geeta, an embroidery artisan, works on a design for Indigene.  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

When Geeta showed me a rack of completed Indigene embroidered jackets, I sensed that she was confident and proud of her work. Asked about her future as an embroiderer, Geeta replied,

'I want to continue as long as my eyesight permits or if my children tell me to stop. If I stop, they will continue the work. I have five children, two daughters and they already do the embroidery. One is eighteen and she does the same embroidery as me. She is studying commerce as well.' (*Interview transcript 4*)

Geeta did concede that if her daughter gets a government job after completing her degree, she will probably stop embroidering.

The key values nurtured by Indigene's Ruchi Tripathi and Jaya Bhatt in the operation of their business are sustainability, quality and relationships. They share their own passion for Indian handcrafted textiles with their customer base by relating the stories, techniques and processes behind the creation of the textile designs, including the artisans involved. These stories qualify the cost of their clothing pieces by explaining the intensive handwork expertise their creations demand. While the artisan communities they work with maintain independence, they are assured of continuing relationships with Indigene and, therefore, sustainable production. The role of the facilitator, Raji, is instrumental; he has a close relationship within the Delhi artisan embroiderers' community as well as a sound working relationship with Tripathi and Bhatt, in contrast to the common middleman *modus operandi*, in which there is no direct interaction between designers and artisans. Although Ruchi Tripathi and Jaya Bhatt create their own interpretations of handcrafted textiles in designing for Indigene, the textiles produced retain a contextual relationship to the cultural heritages of the artisans who contribute their skills.

#### 4.4 Maiwa — foreign company working with textile artisans in India

Maiwa was founded by Charlotte Kwon 1986 in Vancouver, Canada. Through her interest in using natural dyes, Kwon was drawn to textile artisans in India who for generations have produced hand-woven and printed textiles using natural dyes. She was alarmed to find that the artisans could not sell their textiles:

'It just stunned me that this work was so well developed, so exquisite, so deep from centuries of refining. They weren't able to find a local market that

would economically sustain them creating work of excellence. The local market wanted inexpensive textiles.<sup>169</sup>

Kwon recognised that to continue their crafts the artisans required a market; they needed to trade their textiles, believing,

'Craft is about trade. If there is no demand, even the most skilled craftsperson must abandon their work.'<sup>170</sup>

From the beginning, Maiwa has focused on the excellence of the specific textile craft. Unlike many western fashion companies working in India, Maiwa does not affiliate with agents or NGOs, but directly with the individual textile communities. Kwon spends long periods in India, travelling extensively with the Maiwa team which includes her two adult children.

'On each trip we log between 4000km-6000km on the road, going out to visit all the villages we work with — from Kutch to Bengal and from Himachal to Tamil.'<sup>171</sup>

Maiwa's product development begins in the village communities in India known for specific textile crafts. From a community, they commission a high-quality piece from one of its most skilled artisans in the group. The expert handcrafting techniques that create the textile establishes the benchmark of Maiwa's collaborations with the artisans. However, since Kwon is not permanently in India, when she is away from the communities Maiwa works with, relationships with facilitators become necessary. In 2009, for instance, Kwon met up with a Banjara woman, Laxmi Naik, the co-founder, with her husband, of Suraya's Garden, an embroidery initiative begun in 2002 in the Hampi/Hospet region of India. The diverse and previously nomadic Banjara tribe have a rich heritage of traditional folk embroidery identifiable by its distinct collection of patterns and stitches. Kwon characterises the ethos of Naik and her initiative:

'Naik possesses the design sense of a traditional Banjara embroiderer and the determined character of a Banjara woman. Both are necessary to manage Suraya's Garden in such a way that she can revive traditional stitches,

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<sup>169</sup>Charlotte Kwon, "Charlotte Kwon: 'Building a Beautiful Language: Maiwa's 30 Year Journey,'" interview by Fiona Coleman, *The Kindcraft*, 2017, accessed 30 October 2018, <https://thekindcraft.com/maiwa/>.

<sup>170</sup>Maiwa, "Revisiting a Quiet Manifesto for the Preservation of Craft – a 30-Year Journey with Maiwa," *The Maiwa Blog*, September 1, 2016, <https://maiwahandprints.blogspot.com/2016/09/revisiting-quiet-manifesto.html>.

<sup>171</sup>Kwon, "Charlotte Kwon: 'Building a Beautiful Language.'"

patterns and designs while still providing suitable employment for the women'.<sup>172</sup>

While successfully reviving traditional Banjara embroidery — Suraya's Garden having engaged around eighty women embroiderers in the craft — Naik found it difficult to contact the market for this exquisite museum-quality embroidery. In the collaboration with Maiwa, a more affluent, overseas market was found for these high-quality pieces, as well as assistance with product design. In 2012, Naik and her husband went to Vancouver, Canada to stage an exhibition of the Banjara embroidery, contextualised by a presentation about the history and culture of the Banjara, and workshops on their distinctive design and stitching.



Figure 4.5. Contemporary versions of the traditional kalchi (envelope bag), Maiwa collection, 2014.  
Source: Charlotte Kwon and Tim McLaughlin, *Textiles of the Banjara* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 165.

Kwon understands that while designers — Indian and foreign — like to use the textile skills of artisan communities to distinguish their collections, they prefer to keep the identity of these communities a secret as a means of protecting their businesses. She claimed,

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<sup>172</sup>Charlotte Kwon and Tim McLaughlin, *Textiles of the Banjara* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 164.

'You don't know where it's from, what village it's from ... you don't know who's done it. And that invisibility has turned artisans into labourers.'<sup>173</sup>

She also believes it unnecessary for designers to provide input into the artisans' textiles, since their own design sensibilities represent centuries of learning. Instead, Maiwa provides quality organic cotton, threads and dyes. Although the fabrics will often come from another textile community, the artisans use their own cultural context to make the designs. If a positive working relationship is developed between the artisans and Maiwa, only then are pricing and other product logistics worked out.

Maiwa has its own sewing unit in the block-printing village of Bagru, Rajasthan where under the supervision of Kwon's Indian business partner Mahesh Dosaya, two-thirds of their garments are now stitched. Dosaya, from the local Chippa community of block printers, plays a key role in the company, overseeing all aspects of production and shipping as well as co-ordinating the seasonal fashion and interiors collections with the Maiwa design team when they are in India. Kwon differentiates between the cloth produced by the artisans, and the clothing that Maiwa makes from it. The artisans make the cloth designs (Kwon does not consider herself to be a designer), although suggestions will be made about colour to make their cloth more marketable. Being aware of their market, Maiwa is very particular about quality control — they supply the materials because the artisans are hesitant to buy high quality threads and dyes. Costing of the artisans' work is determined transparently in meetings held in the villages. All expenses are noted, and payments are made incrementally.

In 1998, Kwon established the Maiwa Foundation, a charity which extends no-interest long-term grants ranging from CA\$500-15000, to artisans. The loans are often for immediate needs such as boring for a new well, new block printing equipment, or eyeglasses for embroiderers. Most of the charity's fundraising is done by Maiwa by auctioning the artisans' works. The grants are given transparently so that the artisan villages all know who has received them. When Kwon starts working with a new textile community, her aim is to encourage them to develop their businesses by learning about costing, quality control, and so on but to also seek other customers. Rather than be solely dependent on Maiwa, she wants the community to be empowered to sell their products successfully in a global market. This principle is exemplified by the Khatri family of Ajrakh block printers in the Kutch Desert, Gujarat, with whom Kwon first worked in 1997-98. She works with the three sons of the renowned Mohammad Siddik Khatri: Abdul Razzak, Ismail ("Dr Ismail") and Abdul Jabbar. Their expertise with natural dyes led Kwon to them. Although

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<sup>173</sup>Kwon, "Charlotte Kwon: 'Building a Beautiful Language.'"

already well known, the brothers acknowledge benefits of working with Maiwa which has extended the family's reputation to a wider international audience.

For Maiwa, storytelling is integral to their purpose of promoting crafts and the artisans who make them. Their documentary films and print publications, like *Textiles of the Banjara: Cloth and Culture of a Wandering Tribe*, result from in-depth research Kwon and photographer Tim McLaughlin undertake over long periods. While these publications and information feature on maiwa.com and social media and have brought the work of the artisans and their communities to a global stage, Kwon believes the most successful understanding of artisans is accomplished in the hands-on workshops, held in Vancouver and India, on disciplines such as natural dyeing and weaving.

'I really love the combination of makers and finished works. We try to create a connection all the time between the maker in India and the wearer — so they can come together to learn about each other and to learn about culture. Somehow the world is a bit disconnected, but there's people around the world whom you can connect with that way'<sup>174</sup>.

Kwon is an advocate of slow fashion; for her, the clothes we buy should have evidence of the use of the human hand. She recognises the power of consumers and believes they should be educated to buy better and less. For the artisans themselves, Kwon's aspiration is that they promote their craft traditions through channels like lectures and workshops and documentation of their crafts, which deserve patronage and respect for their techniques and communities and come to be regarded as a profession, not labour.

#### 4.5 Jaipur Rugs — a social enterprise

Jaipur Rugs is a carpet manufacturing and export company based in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Through a strategy of sustainable social enterprise, it been able to integrate global market trends with traditional design and craft techniques to produce contemporary designs for hand-woven carpets. Observing the poor state of low-caste carpet weavers in his home district of Churu, in Rajasthan, Nand Kishore Chaudhary started the company in 1978. He chose to not follow his father in the family's shoe-making business but instead, bought two looms and employed nine weavers to establish the social business model of Jaipur Rugs. He discovered that although middlemen found customers for the woven rugs, the artisans received no payment until the rugs were completed, or sold, or not at all. Chaudhary

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<sup>174</sup>Kwon, "Charlotte Kwon: 'Building a Beautiful Language.'"

developed a transparent payment system, supplied quality materials and looms to the artisans. Jasleen Sehgal, of Jaipur Rugs' marketing department, explained to me that Chaudhary was advised by his friend, the British art historian and writer Ilay Cooper, that the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East during the 1970s had caused rug exports to fall substantially, creating an opportunity to revive rug weaving in India. Early in the development of his business, Chaudhary initiated direct exports to markets as a means of bypassing the middlemen and connecting the artisan weavers to global markets.<sup>175</sup>

Chaudhary gradually expanded the company to include weavers in many villages around Jaipur. To manage the business, he set up village networks, appointing overseers to manage the looms in operation in Rajasthan. These supervisors were responsible for quality control, monitoring around 50 looms each by visiting each loom at least twice a week and distributing raw materials. In 1990, Chaudhary became aware that the Indian government was attempting to promote carpet weaving in the tribal belts of the Indian state of Gujarat:

'The government was using co-operative societies to develop carpet weaving in Gujarat. But I felt that co-operatives couldn't do this well so it would be a great opportunity for me'.<sup>176</sup>

He relocated to Gujarat and spent eight years developing a weaver network. Now, around 40,000 weavers in 600 villages across six states in India weave carpets for Jaipur Rugs.<sup>177</sup>

Chaudhary believes that everyone working for this social enterprise is part of a family. Nonetheless, Jaipur Rugs' success would appear to be mainly due to Chaudhary's business acumen. As the company (and public sentiment) has evolved, he realised that increasingly, buyers wanted to work with companies that eschew exploitative practices. Jaipur Rugs applied for and attained Social Accountability International's SA 8000 Workplace and Human Rights Standards.<sup>178</sup> In 2004, the Jaipur Rugs Foundation (JRF), a welfare foundation for weavers was established under the umbrella of Jaipur Rugs' unique socio-economic business model. It provides skill training and upgrading, basic literacy and numeracy education, and entrepreneurship development for the artisan weavers in the villages.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup>Jaipur Rugs, accessed 7 January 2021, <https://www.jaipur rugs.com/about-us/history>.

<sup>176</sup>Neelima Mahajan-Bansal, "Forbes India: Weaving the Magic Carpet," July 2009, accessed January 8, 2021, <http://origin-www.ibnlive.com/news/forbes-india-weaving-the-magic-carpet/97974-7.html?from=prestory>.

<sup>177</sup>Jaipur Rugs, accessed 7 January 2021, <https://www.jaipur rugs.com/how-we-impact/doorstep-entrepreneurship>.

<sup>178</sup>Mahajan-Bansal, "Forbes India."

<sup>179</sup>Jaipur Rugs, accessed 12 January 2021, <https://www.jaipur rugs.org>.

From my discussion with Jasleen Sehgal, I learned that there are 92 processes in making a rug, including formative processes, such as wool production in Bikaner, Rajasthan, the weaving itself, and the nineteen steps involved in the finishing of each rug that is done at a processing unit near Jaipur Rugs' main offices in Sanganer, Jaipur. The design department, at the same location, is led by Nand Kishore Chaudhary's daughter, Kavita, who was formally educated in design in the US, at the Art Institute of Chicago. As a result of her input, contemporary designs became the focus for the handmade rugs. At any time, around six designers work in the design section of Jaipur Rugs, most of whom are graduates of local design institutions such as NIFT. While, in the main, designs are provided to the artisan weavers to follow on a paper graph, Kavita Chaudhary also developed a concept known as Artisan Originals. This is an innovation whereby artisans can weave their own designs according to their own sensibilities, initially using leftover materials to weave the rugs whose designs are often based on animal motifs from the artisans' villages. Workshops in design and colour, and now Artisan Originals, are strategies for some of the artisan weavers' own designs to reach a global market.

To gain more informed insights into the artisans who work for Jaipur Rugs, I visited the weavers' village of Manpura Mahedi, 40kms from Jaipur. Here, I interviewed three members of the village's weaving network and heard each of their perspectives about their different roles. What quickly became apparent is that the Jaipur Rugs system that was established to control the production of rugs is based on relationships that traditionally form the structure of an artisan community. The micro-network of each village community has been adapted, as well as the associated processes completed by each artisan within many community networks, for the successful operation of the company.

Shanti is the head weaver in Manpura Mahedi. She learnt to weave by watching her brothers and women neighbours weave. After marrying, Shanti moved to her husband's village, but since there was no weaving work there, she worked as a construction labourer, with her three-month-old daughter swathed to her back. (*Interview transcript 5*) Later, returning to her ancestral home, she found that weaving was no longer being done in her village. Shanti explained how ten years earlier, she revived weaving in Manpura Mahedi, and became the head weaver:

'I heard that a man, a branch manager for Jaipur Rugs was looking for weavers in the area. When I contacted him he was not confident about my weaving skills so he said I won't give you a loom unless you have premises where the loom will be kept safe. I took a loan of 10000 rupees and built a shed and then invited the man to see if that was to the right standard. He said it was fine so I started with two looms and eight weavers.' (*Interview transcript 5*)

At the time of the interview, Shanti had six looms with 25 weavers. As her husband does not work, she supports her whole family through her weaving, and her children are learning the craft by watching her during their school holidays.

'We weave eight hours a day, 15 if there is urgent work. We weave six days a week, if we feel like it, we weave as well on Sunday.' (*Interview transcript 5*)

Shanti told me how she values her weaving, whether of designs from Jaipur Rugs or Artisan Originals. For the latter, she said,

'I get design ideas from inside and outside my home. From the wall bricks, the cow dung patterns on the floor, patterns on saris, leaves, flowers.'  
(*Interview transcript 5*)



Figure 4.6. Shanti, head weaver (centre) at her home in Manpura Mahedi village with her daughters.  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

As part of the community network of weavers in each village, Jaipur Rugs initiated a role for women in the villages, the *Bunkar Sakhi* or 'weaver's friend.' These women go around visiting the weavers to discuss any problems, particularly issues concerning weaving quality. Jaipur Rugs' Jasleen Sehgal shared with me that,

previously, there had been excessive wastage — of both in time and materials — in the woven rugs' production because of poor technique and quality control at the village level. Woven carpets had to be redone or discarded to meet standards expected by both export and urban Indian markets. There needed to be a person responsible for rectifying quality concerns at the micro village level, and it was important that the *Bunkar Sakhis* are known to the weavers for them to be trusted and, subsequently, for their suggestions about quality to be accepted. For the last four years, at the time of interview, the head weaver's daughter in law (also called Shanti), has been the *Bunkar Sakhi* in Manpura Mahedi. She learnt to weave before her marriage by watching her neighbours weave on two looms that she owned. Originally a weaver herself, she discussed the skills and opportunities that have developed through her position as a weaver's friend:

'Since working for Jaipur Rugs I have learnt everything new. Not weaving but how to communicate with other people and how to understand them. Before marriage I only studied to second standard and after marriage I forgot everything and just stayed at home. I did not even have the confidence to come out of my house to visit my neighbours. I forgot how to weave so when I became *Bunkar Sakhi* I had a lot of fear. I did not know about the carpet world, I did not know how to speak to people. I feared the weavers would think I knew nothing about weaving and would not accept me. How as *Bunkar Sakhi* would the weavers trust me as I knew little about weaving? There was a big skill gap, knowledge gap, I lacked confidence. I couldn't even dial a phone number. I went to the JRF [Jaipur Rugs Foundation] school here and learnt to read and write and other skills and gained confidence. I learnt how to communicate.' (Interview transcript 5)

Now Shanti, as *Bunkar Sakhi*, has the confidence to address members of the media when they visit Manpura Mahedi. I was told about other women in the village who had become representatives for the local government. It is evident that JRF programs in the villages empower the women weavers through education in what is traditionally a very conservative society in rural Rajasthan.

In my final interview, I spoke to Aful, who at that time had been employed as a Jaipur Rugs branch manager for four years. He was a weaver for 14 years, having learnt the craft from his aunt, but Nand Kishore Chaudhary had observed that Aful was a skilful communicator.

'He recognised that I was a magnet to the other weavers and connected to them with empathy. He told me to focus on this talent of my character.'  
(Interview transcript 5)

Aful is from Udaipura village in Rajasthan, but looks after 52 villages of weavers, travelling to each by motor bike, or phoning the *Bunkar Sakhis*. He explained his role:

'I take care of the weavers. If there is a shortage of yarn I get it for the weavers, I distribute the work, I connect with JRF for education programs and I arrange that timely payments are given to the weavers. I am the bridging gap between Jaipur Rugs headquarters and the weavers. I have a team of three quality supervisors and three *Bunkar Sakhis*. If they have some difficulty I then go to the village and work out the problem practically.' (Interview transcript 5)

Aful has been provided with many opportunities to progress within the Jaipur Rug business hierarchy through the recognition of his leadership skills, although he has never had any input into the designs of the rugs.

#### 4.5.1 Co-design project with Jaipur Rugs

On our return journey to Jaipur, I asked Jasleen Sehgal if Jaipur Rugs' customers ever had direct contact with the weavers. She acknowledged that, following the success of the Artisan Originals project, the company was currently expanding on the concept. I proposed that I develop a co-design model of designer/user (myself) with designer/maker (artisan weaver) to build on existing Jaipur Rugs' Artisan Originals and customisation programs; I would work directly with the artisans in the Manpura Mahedi community to design a woven rug. My intention was to use the knowledge gained from this co-design project to contribute to a sustainable artisan/user model for Jaipur Rugs.

Earlier, when interviewing Manpura Mahedi's head weaver, Shanti, I was intrigued by her reference to her immediate surroundings for design inspiration when weaving an Artisan Original rug. Aware of similarities in the colours and textures of the landscapes of Australia and Rajasthan, I felt this could be a common starting point for a design co-creation project for my PhD research. I requested to work with Shanti on the project. I planned to employ a generic co-design method whereby, as the design researcher, I develop a toolkit for inspiration for both the weaver and me (as user) at the beginning of the project. The toolkit, illustrated in Figure 4.7, consisted in:

- series of photo cards of landscape references in Australia and Rajasthan
- photo cards of existing rugs and motifs
- colour cards referencing the landscape photo cards
- study of materials – collection of different wools, silks and cottons



Figure 4.7. Co-design toolkit prepared for the Jaipur Rug project.  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

The co-design project began when I returned to Rajasthan in January 2020 but had eventually to be abandoned as it became evident to me that the project was not within the scope of this research. The following diary documentation explains my decision to discontinue this project.

*6 January 2020*

*Visit to Jaipur Rugs (JR) Design Department in Sanganer, Jaipur, arranged by Jasleen in JR Marketing. Met with JR designers Rohit and Akansha, both NIFT graduates. Rohit had been at JR one and half years after doing his course placement there. Akansha specialised in painting and weaving at NIFT and has also been employed at JR for one and half years. Akansha explained how the Artisan Original rugs are developed. No graph is used and the rug knot counts are generally 64 per inch. The artisans find it too difficult to develop their own designs if the knot count is higher as the weaving becomes more intricate. To weave an Artisan Original the artisan starts with her ideas, the JR designers check every week, make changes, add their own design input until the rug is complete. More commonly the weavers refer to a paper graph to produce contemporary designs of a higher knot count. These rug designs are created by the JR Design Department and form their commercial collections as documented on the Jaipur Rugs website.<sup>180</sup> Various materials are used including wool, silk, viscose and bamboo. They give the colour palette of the materials to the artisans. A third category is the 'co-creation' rugs where an image of the rug design and colours are given to the weavers and*

<sup>180</sup> Jaipur Rugs, accessed 20 June 2021, <https://www.jaipurrugs.com>.

then they weave their own interpretation without a graph but in consultation with the JR designers.

We discussed the planned co-design project and agreed on the size specifications (120x180cm) and materials to be used for my rug. I explained the prepared co-design toolkit that I brought with me to Akansha and Rohit and expressed my project requirement that the weaver can develop motif ideas and the rug design with me at the start of the project. They said the rug will take around two months to weave.

9 January 2020

I drove to Manpura Mahedi village with Akansha, Rohit and others. They go once a week to check the weavers' progress and discuss any difficulties. In the group was Hemmant who has worked at JR for four years as a designer. He was a weaver from a village, his parents are still weavers, but he had a natural aptitude for design and drawing. He has had no formal training but is self-taught from watching YouTube tutorials where he learnt figure and portrait drawing as well as Photoshop.

On reaching the village Marphool, the village branch manager, took us around Manpura Mahedi to meet a weaver, Savitri Devi to discuss the co-design project. I was disappointed that the co-design project was not with Shanti, the head weaver as I had requested because I felt that I had already initiated a relationship with her but whatever the reason, this option was not discussed with me. However, Savitri Devi has previously woven eight Artisan Original rugs and it was decided that I would work with Savitri Devi on the project because of her previous experience. Marphool spoke to her in the local language to further explain the concept and we showed her the toolkit photos and colours.

Savitri Devi learnt to weave from her neighbour in another village before her marriage. When she moved to Manpura Mahedi, after marrying, and saw the weaving taking place for Jaipur Rugs she contacted Marphool about working for JR. She has a weaving loom at her home where her sister and herself were in the middle of weaving one of Akansha's designs, a co-creation rug with no graph. Savitri Devi's 11-year-old daughter, Tanisha joined us. She regularly discusses rug designs with her mother. Tanisha started to draw a design based on the toolkit photos, she also conveyed that she would like to be involved in the design process for the project. Savitri Devi said that she 'draws with her loom' so designs as she weaves.



Figure 4.8. Akansha, designer from Jaipur Rugs, with weaver Savitri Devi (right) at home, her loom in the background.



Figure 4.9. Savitri Devi and her daughter, Tanisha, look at the co-design project toolkit.

Digital photographs by Deborah Emmett.

*Jaipur Rugs' designer, Akansha was to facilitate the co-design project. When we left Savitri Devi's home Akansha kept the toolkit for the purpose of matching the colours in the toolkit with woven wool threads at the JR offices. Next time she visits Manpura Mahedi, Akansha will take the toolkit and wool colours so further discussion and drawings can be made about the rug design. Before leaving the village, we walked around to other weavers' homes to look at their work. There are about 125 weavers in Manpura Mahedi, mostly two or three women work on one rug at a time.*

The project was to continue through digital communication via a WhatsApp group enabling Akansha to connect me with Savitri Devi on her frequent trips to Manpura Mahedi so we could develop the rug design together. At that time, January 2020, I planned to return to India in June. My interactions as the user were to be mapped at the different stages of my involvement within the rug making processes in that community. This of course became impossible with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and travel no longer an option. Despite attempting to maintain communication, the constraints of co-designing with participants who work in a commercial, hierarchal company structure, made this project infeasible for the aims of this research. Instead of being directly involved with the rug weaving community's network of artisans responsible for the numerous processes in the creation of a rug from the commencement of the project, I became the design researcher interacting with Jaipur Rugs' designers working outside the context of a traditional artisan community. Rather than contributing to reconceptualising co-

design theory, I considered that the facilitation would merely enforce the industrial parameters of conventional co-design. Consequently, I decided to withdraw from the project.

It is clear from the interviews that Jaipur Rugs has successfully applied its social enterprise model to support and provide opportunities for economic, educational, and healthcare benefit to artisans in weaving communities. The individual aptitudes of some like Aful, the branch manager, Shanti, the *Bunkar sakhi*, and Hemmant, the weaver/designer have been recognised and rewarded by promotion within the company structure. It is here, however, a complex concurrence between economics and cultural heritage occurs. The weaving communities have adapted their skills to produce the rug designs provided to them, using new materials, for Jaipur Rugs. The financial and social stability the communities receive for the work becomes dependent on the company's ongoing commercial success. The value of the artisans' skills is fostered, while the value of their cultural heritage diminishes.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

Ashoke Chatterjee believes that ideally artisan communities should be independent; although they are diverse, and each community has its own problems, it is necessary 'for each to set their own agenda, to give them the confidence and respect that is so often denied.'<sup>181</sup> He advocates that traditional craft communities not only need design education within the context of their cultural heritage, but also education towards self-reliance. Sustainable work for artisans is the key for their communities to prosper, but its facilitation must come from within the communities and not from external stakeholders.

Many young people from artisan communities have become disillusioned with the prospects for their traditional craft heritage. Often, those living in urban areas use their formal education to pursue different work opportunities. In more remote rural areas, traditional crafts, such as in the embroidery-producing communities of the Kachchh region of Gujarat, their craft is still a vital source of income. The women artisans in Kachchh have found it necessary to abandon their traditional craft and turn their skills to producing textiles for foreign markets or, alternatively, reduce the quality of embroidery for cheaper tourist industry products. According to Charlotte Kwon, 'To produce pieces more quickly, many of the expressive and intricate traditional stitches are either compromised or abandoned entirely.'<sup>182</sup> Thus, their cultural heritage is in danger of being lost. Kwon considers that for the artisan

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<sup>181</sup>Craft Revival Trust – Asia inCH, "Education for Artisans."

<sup>182</sup>Maiwa and Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Stories from an Indian Desert* (Vancouver: Maiwa Handprints Ltd, 2003), 26.

communities to maintain their highly skilled traditional textile craft, whether embroidery, block printing or weaving, the consumers of their products need to understand the culture of the artisans and their products. As textile historian Jenny Housego writes,

‘Craft people should not be frightened of charging good prices for their work. If they are to stay where they are and not move to other activities, then they have to ensure a good standard of living, and one in which their children will be happy to follow’<sup>183</sup>

The contemporary collaborations with artisan communities discussed in this chapter each recognise the skills of the artisans. Through the enterprise of companies like Indigene, Maiwa and Jaipur Rugs, Indian textile crafts have received exposure to global markets. The stories of the artisans are often central to their brand narratives. Although the artisanal products are altered by their design interventions, the case studies presented in this research show that excellence in craft quality is encouraged in the business strategies described. Judy Frater believes that to restore artisan’s cultural heritage a shift in values, from recognition of the artisan’s skills to the value of human connection is required so that the item, the handcrafted textile is made by someone we know. A worthy notion that may not always be achievable, however its advancement is a key aim of this research where the conscious consumer values the maker’s lived experience, the textile and its creation.

The interviews and research documented in this chapter reveal that a shift in direction by some of those collaborating with textile artisan communities in India is occurring. Direct interaction between designers and artisans, sustained by liaison through community-based artisan facilitators is now a more common approach. This move away from the previous designer/middleman/artisan model may signal a potential transition to more direct customer connections with artisans, as explored in the co-design projects of this research.

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<sup>183</sup> Jenny Housego, "Market Realities," in *Celebrating Craft Seminar* 523 (March 2003): 57.

## Chapter Five: Co-design projects: strategies for design and making between Indian textile artisans and the users of their products

### 5.1 Introduction

The case studies discussed in Chapter Four substantiate aspects of the conceptual framework of this thesis. Significantly, the salience of ongoing relationships and sustainability, whether of materials used or work provided, was confirmed through the interviews and research conducted with designers, design students and companies involved in existing contemporary collaborations with Indian artisans of handcrafted textiles. While their approaches to working with specific artisan communities vary, it is evident their education, experience, and knowledge of their market influence the decisions the designers, design students and companies make about the textile designs produced in these collaborations. Despite these stakeholders' recognition of the cultural and aesthetic values of the crafts, and their contribution towards sustaining the artisan communities, advocates of the need to preserve these textile crafts, like Ashoke Chatterjee and Judy Frater, are increasingly convinced that the artisan communities themselves need to be self-reliant. They contend that designs should remain within the context of the specific artisan community's cultural heritage, with facilitators from within their own community taking responsibility for the promotion of their crafts.

The continuing growth of companies who provide work to artisan communities, as discussed in the previous chapter, indicates that a substantial global market exists for quality handcrafted artisanal textiles. Yet direct artisan community engagement with the end consumer of their products is as rare now as it has been historically; the essential role of intermediaries in product exchange, both economic and physical, is either outside of the artisan community or beyond the reach of the artisans who make the products. This disjunction has led to the perception among artisan that their skills and processes are not valued, the low remuneration received for their work confirming their assumptions. Ethnographer Michael Herzfeld describes a 'global hierarchy of value' determined by those with 'control of the criteria'<sup>184</sup> of evaluation that privileges those who have the power to influence taste. Herzfeld considers this hierarchy to be external to local knowledge and production in artisan economies; as such, and as the case studies in this research demonstrate, it operates in these collaborations, despite attempts to avoid top-down demarcations, because of the direct links formally educated designers have with the market.

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<sup>184</sup>Michael Herzfeld, *The Body Impolitic: Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 207.

Informing co-design theory and the ethos of slow fashion, the convention of the designer's dominance in a design process and outcome is challenged by shifting the focus to the user of the product or service. Co-design methodologies give control of the design process to the customers or users based on their needs and experiences. The emphasis moves from what is produced to the user's experience in providing design input. Slow fashion advocate Kate Fletcher identifies both the practical and conceptual values of a handmade textile that derive from the user knowing the maker, and the user's input in the design.<sup>185</sup> This suggests a change in direction in a fashion industry model where uniform, readymade products preclude the opportunity for customers to create and participate. With the involvement of the user or consumer comes a demand for transparency in the design and production, the products created become more individual and treasured. By designing with the maker, collaborative relationships based on sharing ideas can develop, engaging the values of participants. As in co-design strategies that encourage active user participation, the values that determine sustainability — of relationships and/or resources — become, through connectedness and engagement, embedded in their understanding.

The question of values is complex, given the subjectivity of perception, and is highlighted in the three co-design projects for this research, which involve intercultural participants. Historically, what people wear is an indicator of social mores, economic status and innovation. Between different cultures, as these projects focusing on the creation of wearable, handcrafted textiles show, what is valued assumes even greater significance and may be modified by the making experience.

Adopting a co-design approach whereby Australian customers or users of handcrafted textiles could engage with an Indian artisan community to co-create textile pieces required strategies that accommodated the participants' language and cultural differences as well as their geographic separation. The users' input began at the outset of the project and within the context of the community's craft. My intention, in bringing in the user participants at ground level, to identify specific issues together with the artisans in a collaborative way, was to ascertain perceptions of power imbalance between the artisans and users, as well as participants' assumptions about value and what they valued.

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<sup>185</sup>Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion*, 190.

## 5.2 Overview and aims of three co-design projects involving Australian customers and an Indian textile artisan community — the Kashmir shawl community

The overall purpose of the co-design projects within this research is to develop a sustainable working model for artisans to engage directly with the users of their products. To relate co-design theory informing these projects to Indian textile artisan communities, a significant and necessary aim was to reinterpret conventional co-design, which has evolved within the structured economies of industrialised societies, for application in artisan communities belonging to the unstructured, informal economy of Indian society. Although the three co-design projects centre on the traditional shawl artisan community in Kashmir, from my discussions with these artisans I have found many of their concerns are shared by artisans in textile communities throughout India. Each of these communities specialise in a specific textile handcraft technique of embroidery, printing or weaving. While their skills vary, they are commonly concerned about the sustainability of their crafts in modern India. Therefore, while methods may need to be adjusted for relevance to unique communities, strategies developed for these co-design projects can potentially be applied in other Indian textile artisan communities as a means of encouraging self-reliance and, indeed, to ascertain if this is possible.

Early in this research, instead of involving a different community for each of the three projects, I decided to focus on one Indian textile artisan community, the Kashmir shawl artisan community. In this way, I considered that co-design strategies would remain emergent, with the knowledge gained through participant interactions in one project being built upon for the next. In some instances, the same artisans were involved between different projects. The Australian participants in Projects One and Two were two women, Deborah Anderson and Jane Rich, who are both passionate about Kashmir hand-woven, embroidered shawls. Although both women collect and wear these shawls, their reasons for being involved in the co-design projects differed: for Deborah, the shawls were to be an inheritance for her children; for Jane, it was her interest in customisation of textiles that she collects but had always bought through a third party. I will expand on their specific constraints and requests for the projects later in this chapter. These two projects commenced in April 2019, prior to my travelling to Kashmir for fieldwork in June of that year and continued until the completion of the shawls and their delivery in Sydney in October 2021.

The third co-design project for this research developed as the first two projects neared completion due to a hiatus resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that delayed my planned ongoing fieldwork in the shawl community in Kashmir. This unforeseen situation allowed time for reflection before commencing the third

capstone project. The aim of that project was to build on co-design strategies and findings from the first two projects, while investigating potential expansion of the global market for the artisans through the re-introduction of natural dyes into the Kashmir shawl industry. From earlier research and fieldwork, I observed that traditionally used natural dyes for shawl production in Kashmir were no longer sourced but in recent times, a global resurgence of market interest in the use of natural dyes and for naturally dyed textiles has occurred. The appreciation of dyes from natural sources represents a shift in consumers' aesthetic values that has evolved from a desire for more sustainable products with reduced environmental impact. With the re-introduction of natural dyes, I aimed to assist in the co-creation of a collection of scarves and shawls that would have sought-after appeal in a global market while assimilating the natural dyes into current processes used by artisans in the Kashmir shawl industry.

Given the physical distances between the participants, digital connectivity was always key to the outcome of the projects, enabling as it did the first two projects to progress despite the pandemic-induced travel restrictions. The capstone project three had a hybrid structure of digital communication and on-the-ground interaction between me as the user and members of the Kashmir shawl artisan community. While this project emphasised knowledge exchange in co-creating the naturally dyed scarves, I also aimed to devise a digital method for continued engagement between the artisans and their customers to sustain a market for these products and, consequentially, enhance new relationships and connectivity between the artisan community and their customers.

### 5.2.1 The Kashmir shawl community as representative of the structure of Indian textile artisan communities

Traditional textile artisan communities throughout India operate within India's informal economy, including the pashmina shawl community situated in Kashmir in northern India. As in other textile communities, artisans work in workshops or in their homes specialising in a specific skill in the sequential processes required to produce a shawl, beginning with the combing of *pashm* fibre from the *capra hircus* goat, to the fringing of the completed woven shawls, namely eighteen processes in all. Skills are passed on inter-generationally or through apprenticeships with a master craftsman. The shawl community's structure of independent yet symbiotic artisanal entities is representative of other Indian textile artisan communities notwithstanding their product specialties differ. They share a structural arrangement unrelated to the regulated, industrialised sector upon which co-design theory is often based.

The system of autonomous micro-enterprises operating in Indian artisan communities is grounded historically in a social structure that is caste-based, where castes are aligned with specific professions related to arts, crafts, agriculture and other manual work. The Hindu caste system is associated with social, economic and political status in India and artisans tend to belong to low castes or other, minority religious groups. For example, most members of the Kashmir shawl community are Muslims. Bhupinder Singh claims in *Why Does India Have a Large Informal Sector?* that the production relationship in ancient India where artisans worked on a contractual basis in collaboration with other artisans is comparable 'to contemporary setting "informal economy" where [the] majority of working class are either independent producers or engaged in contract-based activities.'<sup>186</sup>

During India's colonial era, first, of the Mughals (1526-1761), and then the British (1857–1947) there was little interest in formal industrialisation by these rulers, who instead respectively benefitted by heavily taxing the artisans, to the point of destitution.<sup>187</sup> Even so, due to the Mughal rulers' patronage of the textile sectors, industrialisation occurred with the introduction of wage labour; these industries remained, however, largely informal in their functioning. There were four forms of payment for labour in the Kashmir shawl industry during these times: "for wages" where the weaver was given a loan or advance to produce the shawls, which often resulted in the artisan's accumulating indebtedness to their employer; "contract" or piece-rate system; "sort of partnership" where the outlay for materials by the master craftsman was deducted on the sale of a shawl and then the remainder shared equally by the artisans involved; and finally, a "direct partnership" where all the proceeds from the sale of a shawl were divided equally between the master craftsman and the other artisans.<sup>188</sup> From my observations of the contemporary shawl industry in Kashmir, adaptations of these payment methods still exist, controlled by middlemen who contract master craftsmen who, in turn, distribute materials and work to other artisans.

The continuation of the textile industry's operation within the informal economy in post-independence India relates to the reluctance of the Indian government to invest in an industrialised structure for this industry which, according to Bhupinder Singh, would have included workers' unions and a set basic wage. Instead, the government opted to establish a scheme of co-operatives under the umbrella of the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handicrafts and the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms, as I discussed in Chapter Two, that

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<sup>186</sup>Bhupinder Singh, "Informal Sector," 6.

<sup>187</sup>Singh, " 8.

<sup>188</sup>Sherry Rehman and Naheed Jafri, *The Kashmiri Shawl: From Jamavar to Paisley* (Ahmedabad, India: Mapin, 2006), 83.

'... intended to keep [the] prevailing rural informal sector setup comprising of lower caste groups, engaged in weaving, artisan (sic), carpentry largely intact and instead sought to provide them a conduit through which [the] informal sector would get access to markets in urban areas to sell their produce.'<sup>189</sup>

History has proven that this direction taken by the post-independence Indian government has failed to provide artisan communities throughout India, including the Kashmir shawl community, with sustainable futures.

Although many artisans are disillusioned and concerned about the future survival of their cultural heritage, their pride in their craft skills is evident. Within textile artisan communities, the traditional knowledge of the craft continues to be passed on with adaptations made for that specific craft's survival. Unfortunately, this can mean a reduction in quality of the textile produced to make it more commercially viable as has been seen in the Kashmir shawl industry where middlemen or vendors demand cheaper products. Other changes have been pragmatic, evolving with changing social attitudes. For example, traditionally, only men embroidered pashmina shawls, while now in many Kashmiri artisan households, women are embroidering. They have told me the income they generate enables better opportunities for their children's education.



Figure 5.1. *Ishrat Ganie embroiders a pashmina shawl at her home.*  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

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<sup>189</sup>Singh, "Informal Sector," 15.

In the structure the Kashmir shawl community shares with other artisan communities in India's informal economy, traditional knowledge remains relevant, although changes have occurred with social and financial pressures. In previous research,<sup>190</sup> I have found that such modifications of tradition are also common in other artisan communities. Therefore, the co-design projects for this research focused on this one community as representative of other Indian artisan communities. From the projects' inception the co-design strategies were developed consistently within the context of the Kashmir shawl community — existing outside of the regulated, industrialised structures of conventional co-design. As such, the Australian project participants would engage in a bottom-up approach with multiple stakeholders each responsible for a process in the creation of the shawls rather than a hierarchical structure led by a designer.

### 5.2.2 Rationale for focusing on the Kashmir shawl community: researcher's connection

An additional reason for siting this research in the Kashmir shawl community is the accessibility I have as a design researcher to these artisans. As I have discussed previously, I have worked with various Indian textile artisan communities for over 20 years developing designs for my textile business. My intervention has given me cause to reflect upon the impact of my design decisions on the artisans I have worked with, their inherent design contexts and techniques. My connection with the Kashmir shawl community is, however, family oriented rather than work-related. There is no commercial benefit in my involvement. My husband is Kashmiri, and for decades his family has been associated with the shawl community. I have never worked with the shawl community as a shawl designer although I am familiar with the different processes and artisans involved in creating pashmina shawls.

My intervention in this community in initiating the co-design projects is not as designer but as a researcher and facilitator who has observed and acknowledges the traditional cultural context of the Kashmir shawl industry. I will not only reflect on my own perspective but also consider comments drawn from all participants. Fundamental to the methodology developed for the co-design projects is maintaining the design contexts and techniques traditionally used by this community.

### 5.3 The Kashmir shawl: a luxury, quality product with high commodity value in a global market; the question of value for the Kashmir shawl artisan community, their cultural and financial sustainability

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<sup>190</sup>Emmett, "Artisan Voice."

As previously stated, this co-design-based research focuses on the people involved — specifically, how the artisans and the users of their products interpret value. Being from different cultures, their perceptions of value essentially differ, but through an understanding of each other's cultural and social values gained by sharing the lived experience of co-creating together in the co-design projects, the aim was to develop strategies for the sustainability of artisan communities. Potentially, sustainability built on values can 'create self-generating human systems, building a more sustainable and progressive civilization.'<sup>191</sup> This is most pertinent when considering the Kashmir shawl community, whose products, namely pashmina shawls, are known for being luxury trade commodities both within India and globally. The material value of the shawls has oscillated over the past four hundred-plus years which, in consequence, has had social, economic and political effects on the artisans of this community.

The relationship between luxury and value stems from cultural and social conventions and is determined by the market for particular goods at particular times. Kashmir shawls exemplify textile products whose value has over time been continuously subject to market demand. Another reason for focusing on the specific artisan community that produces these shawls is to determine the relevance of commodity value to the artisans, which is contrary to their concept of value grounded in the individual processes of shawl production.

### 5.3.1 Brief history of Kashmir shawl industry — introduced materials, techniques and designs by occupiers/rulers

In *The Kashmir Shawl*, Frank Ames suggests that Kashmir shawl weaving derives from an expanding commercial market<sup>192</sup> that developed over three hundred years when Kashmir underwent four consecutive periods of foreign political rule, by the Mughals, the Afghans, the Sikhs and the Dogras. Each of these periods had its influence on the designs of Kashmir shawls. Existing shawl fragments suggest that the shawl industry in Kashmir came into existence in the late sixteenth century under the rule of Mirza Haider Dughlat. He encouraged many of the arts of Kashmir and is said to have introduced the concept of using *pashm* from Ladakh to be woven into shawls by the expert craftsmen of Kashmir who had previously used sheep's wool.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Arthur Lyons Dahl, "Values as the Foundation for Sustainable Behaviour," paper presented at the 5th Annual Conference of the International Environment Forum, 19-21 October 2001, Hluboka nad Vltavou, Czech Republic <https://iefworld.org/ddahl01b.htm> <https://iefworld.org/ddahl01b.htm>

<sup>192</sup>Ames, 13.

<sup>193</sup>Ames, 17.

\**kani* shawls are woven designs formed by the manipulation of small wooden sticks called *tojis* that interlock different coloured threads to complete each weft of the shawl. The pashmina threads are used to work the 'twill tapestry' pattern.

During the Mughals' rule, the Kashmir shawl trade was brisk owing to its geographic situation along the trade routes of Central Asia. Emperor Akbar, son of Mughal dynasty founder Babur, invaded Kashmir in the late 1500s. The Mughals introduced the paisley or *buta* motif to artisans in northern India at this time. During his 19-year rule Akbar took a personal interest in the Kashmiri shawl weaving industry. The shawls, woven by men for men to wear, had plain centres with *buta* border designs. Fine pashmina shawls were draped over the shoulder, a fashion started by Akbar. Court records show that he presented pashmina shawls as prestigious gifts to the nobility and other dignitaries, a custom that continues in present day in India.

After Runjit Singh's conquest of Kashmir in 1813, the Sikh love of colour and grandeur was reflected in the rich tapestry designs of *kani*\* shawls using colour combinations from the 64 vegetable dye-tints available at that time.<sup>194</sup> During the Sikh period, long shawls with large cone motifs and border designs, woven on two looms with the seams stitched together by a *rafugar*, or invisible mender, were sought after on the market. At the same time, embroidered shawls gained prominence. To make the Kashmir shawl industry more competitive, a cost-cutting alternative to embroidered shawls was introduced. In 1803, Khwaja Yusuf, an Armenian shawl merchant sent to Kashmir by his firm in Constantinople, observed the weavers' shawl production. He realised it would be less expensive to imitate the woven patterns with embroidered ones.<sup>195</sup> A rich tradition in *amlīkar* or needle-worked pashmina shawls began, using *sozni*, a needlepoint embroidery technique applied in silk or high-quality cotton thread.

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<sup>194</sup>Rehman and Jafri, *Kashmiri Shawl*, 92.

<sup>195</sup>John Gillow and Nicolas Barnard, *Indian Textiles* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 155.



Figure 5.2. Pashmina Shawl (detail) from the Sikh period  
Kashmir, c.1840–1860.  
Kashmir, c.1840 – 1860, TAPI COLLECTION 97.1419.

Kashmir shawls became fashionable in Europe around 1770. Napoleon's officers returning from the Egyptian campaign are said to have bought their womenfolk pashmina shawls, while General Allard, a former general in Napoleon's *Grande Armée* who joined Runjit Singh's army, established the first direct link between Parisian shawl manufacturers and those of Kashmir.<sup>196</sup> Soon after, writes Monique Levi-Strauss in *The Romance of the Cashmere Shawl*,

'The general feeling was that shawls from the Indian subcontinent had become a public necessity, along with coffee, tobacco, pepper and cinnamon. French dealers knew what their customers wanted and set off for Kashmir to order shawls from the weavers.'<sup>197</sup>

The fact that the number of paintings illustrating the Kashmir shawl during the First French Empire exceeds that of any other country is indicative of the unique status that the French nobility had bestowed on it as an object of fashion. Empress

<sup>196</sup>Ames, 39.

<sup>197</sup>Monique Levi-Strauss, *The Romance of the Cashmere Shawl*, (Ahmedabad, India: Mapin, 1987), 34.

Josephine's wardrobe contained hundreds of rare Kashmir shawls. When buying, she was reputed never to ask the price.<sup>198</sup>



*Figure 5.3. Madame Jacques-Louis Leblanc painted with her Kashmir shawl.*

Oil on Canvas by Ingres, 1823

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Catherine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1918, in *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch*, eds. Gary Tinterow & Philip Conisbee, 1999, [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/Portraits\\_by\\_Ingres\\_Image\\_of\\_an\\_Epoch](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/Portraits_by_Ingres_Image_of_an_Epoch)

Trade established by the English East India Company imported ever-increasing quantities of tea, spices, silk and cotton from India. Dresses made from Indian cotton muslin became fashionable in the late 18th century as part of the Neo-classical style. Kashmir shawls were ideal accessories for these dresses. They became highly sought after in Britain, with vast numbers of Kashmir shawls continuing to be imported into the nineteenth century. Traders introduced and sold them as valuable merchandise, and 'those who were lucky enough to have an acquaintance in the East India Company would sometimes receive exotic shawls as gifts. Widely familiar as "India shawls", they were stocked in "shawl warehouses" across the length and breadth of the country.'<sup>199</sup> As expensive, luxury commodities,

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<sup>198</sup>Ames, 135.

<sup>199</sup>Suchitra Choudhury, "'It Was an Imitashon to Be Sure': The Imitation Indian Shawl in Design Reform and Imaginative Fiction," *Textile History* 46, no. 2 (2016): 191, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2015.1121666>.

they were exclusively associated with the upper classes; indeed, Queen Victoria had a large collection of the shawls, many given to her as gifts.<sup>200</sup>

The constant demand for Kashmir shawls in Europe resulted in sophisticated imitation shawl techniques being developed in France and Britain from 1800. During the same period Kashmiri weavers modified shawl designs to satisfy European tastes. The invention of the jacquard loom in Europe reduced labour costs and increased productivity of imitation Kashmir shawls, creating fierce competition for the weavers in India.

But it was mainly changes in western fashion that contributed to a sharp decline in the Indian and European shawl industries from 1869. The wearing of a bustle in dresses to accentuate the curve of the back made shawls look ungainly.<sup>201</sup> This, together with the onset of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 put an end to the Indian shawl industry's European export market, resulting in a greatly diminished Kashmir shawl industry.

Nevertheless, the shawl industry continued to survive in Kashmir. At that time, the industry had already been suffering through British control under the Dogra prince, Raja Gulab Singh, who imposed exorbitant taxes and harsh, unfair working conditions on Kashmiri artisans and weavers. Many weavers left Kashmir and established businesses in Amritsar and Ludhiana in India's Punjab.

### 5.3.2 Contemporary influences on the commodity value of Kashmir shawls in a global market: the effect of competition and branding on the traditional context of the Kashmir shawl community

In contemporary times, unsettled political conditions caused by India and Pakistan's impasse over control of Kashmir has resulted in restrictions on everyday life affecting all Kashmiris, including the shawl artisans. On 5 August 2019, the Indian government revoked a constitutional provision granting certain autonomous powers to India-controlled Kashmir. As reported in the *Washington Post*, 'The move has raised worries of fresh armed conflict in an area that has already suffered decades of violence.'<sup>202</sup> On making the announcement, the Indian government imposed a strict curfew on Kashmir residents and cut off all telecommunications; mobiles, landlines and the internet for an extensive period, not to be fully restored for eighteen months. The functioning of the Kashmir shawl community network was seriously

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<sup>200</sup>Choudhury, "It was an Imitashon," 191.

<sup>201</sup>Levi-Strauss, *The Romance*, 52.

<sup>202</sup>Claire Parker, "India's clampdown on Kashmir continues. Here's what you need to know," *Washington Post*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/08/05/india-revoked-kashmirs-special-status-heres-what-you-need-know-about-contested-province/>.

impeded during this unstable situation, which also impacted upon the co-design projects of this research, as I will discuss later.

While political oppression has affected the livelihoods of the Kashmir shawl artisans, of more direct consequence is the effect of competition from within India and beyond on the cultural context of their products, the handcrafted pashmina brand, to use a modern marketing term. *Pashm* fibre is found in Mongolia, China and Nepal but the best quality of 12 – 16 microns is sourced from Tibet and Ladakh. This quality pashmina is used for weaving in Kashmir. Just as earlier imitation shawls were produced in Europe for the fashion market, consumer demand in the past few decades has resulted in the proliferation of machine-made pashmina shawls. Younis Nihami, director of the Geographical Indication (GI) unit at the Craft Development Institute (CDI), in Srinagar, Kashmir, discussed with me how pashmina began to be machine-spun and the shawls machine-woven 10 to 15 years ago to meet demand from the Middle East for pashmina *rumals*, or square head scarves. He added that since then, other fibres including wool, silk, angora and nylon have often been mixed with the pashmina in weaving to reduce costs.

A Geographical Indicator for Kashmir handcrafted pashmina shawls was implemented in 2013 and a facility for identification of the shawls established in Srinagar. The strict criteria relate only to the weaving process of the shawls and is as follows:

- *pashm* fibre must be hand-spun
- shawl or scarf must be hand-woven
- must be 100% *pashm* of 12 – 16 micron quality from Tibet or Ladakh
- the GI applicant must be from Kashmir

This recognition is an attempt to protect and promote the Kashmir artisans and their craft, adding value both materially and in production of this luxury accessory. However, GI certification has been given to a very small percentage of shawls produced in Kashmir, as Younis Nihami confirmed, with only about 10,000 pieces receiving approval since 2013. Although many pashmina shawls are still hand-woven, only 3 - 5% of *pashm* fibre is still hand-spun.



Figure 5.4. GI certification label attached to an approved pashmina product with an exclusive code linked to a secure GI registry website.  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

From a western perspective, pashmina shawls became well known as a fashion accessory in the 1990s due to the entrepreneurship of American designer, David Muir, who in 1992 began a weaving and dyeing workshop in the Kathmandu valley, Nepal.<sup>203</sup> His company, Pashm, employed local Nepali artisans to develop shawls woven from a mix of silk and pashmina in myriad colours that became popular fashion items. The addition of silk fibre lowered the cost of the products which therefore became more accessible to a wider market of consumers. The fashion trend for these shawls was global. Interestingly, *pashmina* has become a generic term for scarves of varying quality and fibres, which are far removed from the luxury item of a handcrafted, woven and embroidered Kashmir pashmina shawl.

The influence of fashion on the commercial value of Kashmir shawls continues in and beyond Kashmir. On a visit to the home of Kashmir shawl merchant or *mehajan*, Qayoom Beigh, I viewed his collection of traditional *sozni* embroidered shawls and *kani* shawls, as well as pashmina shawls in contemporary stripes, checks and two-tone, double-sided pashminas. He commented on the increased use of *zari*, or metallic thread woven with pashmina that is favoured by the Middle Eastern market. The adaptability to shifting fashion trends by the shawl artisans enables this traditional industry to survive, similarly to the products produced by other textile artisan communities throughout India.

The artisans understand the high value given to Kashmir shawls is determined by the commodity exchange market, and not the value imparted by their skills and labour. However, in this research, the artisans' cultural heritage is recognised and valued. In agreeing to participate in the co-design projects, the users already

<sup>203</sup>Apollo, <https://www.apollo.io/companies/PashmCompany/556977897369642525c73300#details>.

appreciated and valued the craft's traditional context. The users or customers wish to be educated about the artisan's culture and craft. As Judy Frater claims during the webinar, *Education for Artisans: Past, Present and Future*, the artisans' cultural heritage represents the design tradition of India and must be respected so that the artisans can be successful in their own terms.<sup>204</sup> Handcrafted textiles are luxury items whose inherent value derives from the human hand in their creation.

#### 5.4 Research methodology and the importance of digital connectivity between co-design project participants for relationship-building and inclusivity

The research methodology established for the co-design projects aimed to strengthen value creation through human connection with strategies that lead to sustainability for the artisan community and their craft and encourage increased confidence and self-reliance for the artisans. Co-design methods developed to fit conventional co-design theory tend to focus on the user of the product or service. However, the objective of these research projects was to develop synergy between the Kashmir artisans and the Australian participants for mutual learning as the foundation of socio-economic benefits for the artisan community.

Sanders and William considered that a combination of co-design methods can be used to understand participants' experiences and dreams about a product or service, based on their belief 'that everyday people are creative when given appropriate "tools."' <sup>205</sup> When developing the use of co-design tools for the specific projects of this research, the emphasis was on inclusivity as the mechanism of knowledge exchange between the participants: the artisans, who have varying skill levels, and the users. The keystone of this knowledge exchange would be connectivity between the participants. Digital connectivity, the solution to the geographic barrier between the Australian and Indian participants that enabled communication and inclusivity between the users and the artisans for co-design projects one and two, assumed even greater significance, with the advent of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

My experience of working remotely with artisans is that WhatsApp is currently the most used communication application platform in India to communicate with each other and with customers; the app is free to use and easily accessible on smartphones. Therefore, this platform was the preferred digital tool for communication in the co-design projects, particularly as photographs and video can be sent easily through WhatsApp. The ability to communicate using visual

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<sup>204</sup>Craft Revival Trust – Asia inCH, "Education for Artisans."

<sup>205</sup>Sanders and William, "Harnessing People's Creativity," 2.

documentation was equally important given the language differences between the inter-cultural participants.

To initiate the first two projects, and to establish connections between the users and makers, video was the tool used to record the Australian participants' personal stories and lived experiences of Kashmir shawls to share with the artisans. Storytelling, as discussed in Chapter Two, is acknowledged as a method of building relationships in co-design and slow fashion, not only for sharing knowledge about processes and material resources for value creation of the product, but also for users and makers to find mutual affinities and develop empathy with each other. In recent times, opportunities for storytelling through digital platforms have made it possible for some Indian craft artisans to have connection and exposure to an audience they usually have no immediate access to, the end consumer in a global context. For example, in *Crafting Stories: Re-articulating the World of Local Art, Stories and Listeners*,<sup>206</sup> Lokesh Ghai and Gauri Raje discuss their project of Zoom events where Indian textile artisans tell their stories of crafting the objects they make, including motifs used, their heritage and community traditions. While hearing each story, Ghai's and Raje's audience was also engaged in the visuality of the craft object through Zoom. While this can engender connection between the artisans and their interested audience, and since the purpose was not knowledge exchange, their audience were spectators, and not actively involved. In co-design projects one and two of this research, the video documentation focused on social commonalities found in all cultures with the Australian participants, in their homes, relating stories about their family relations and experiences of the Kashmir shawls they already own. This documentation is combined with the users discussing their ideas for the project shawls. Later, video of the artisans working and interacting in their own homes was recorded and shown to the Australian participants. The exchange of knowledge using this method of storytelling conveyed a sense of place and relational contexts for the participants as well as an understanding of making processes. Their stories are embedded in their everyday lives. While the participants could empathise through common human responses to stories and images of family and home, as the projects progressed, divergent perceptions of value became apparent.

Of course, the need for facilitation in the projects was essential; I had approached this research knowing that the artisans involved did not have ready access to the end users of their products. Instead, their shawls are given to middlemen to sell. While the users in the first two projects would not, being in Australia, have access to these artisans who make the shawls. My personal involvement as a user in the third

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<sup>206</sup>Lokesh Ghai and Gauri Raje, "Crafting Stories: Re-articulating the World of Local Art, Stories and Listeners," INDICA Conference on Indigenous Story Telling Traditions of India, January 21-22, 2022, YouTube video, 29:56, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siXKzmxHP\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siXKzmxHP_k).

co-design project, even when working directly in Kashmir for part of the project, still required the involvement of a facilitator. On a practical level, all the projects needed facilitation of language translation. The structure of the Kashmir shawl community involves many artisans each completing a step in the production of the shawls and is itself a practical consideration; a facilitator is needed to act as go between, moving the shawls from one artisan to the next. Therefore, the facilitators became a part of the methodology for the projects. The Kashmiri facilitators had pre-existing roles and relationships with the participating artisans in the shawl community prior to the initiation of the co-design projects, while I was the facilitator for projects one and two in Australia. I also anticipated that to sustain the co-design strategies developed in this research, I would have a continuing facilitation role in administering a digital platform for further interaction.

Then, considering the eighteen processes and artisans involved in creating a Kashmir shawl, I realised that the Australian participants would be unable to be in contact with every artisan, nor would it be necessary, particularly since communication would mainly be through digital channels. In planning the projects, I established a method of cognitive mapping which would provide a visual representation of the community's sequential processes and proposed interactions with the Australian participants at various points, which could be adjusted as the projects evolved. By mapping the user's actual engagement in this complex structure of processes, I would be able trace the interactivity in each project, identify further needs for facilitation, translation and problem-solving, identify errors made, and then articulate solutions within the methods of co-design specific to strengthening value creation and, thus, the sustainability of future projects. The co-design methods used for each project were purposefully emergent, and potentially different, so the mapping of individual projects would clarify their optimal application for the sustainability of future projects involving other textile communities in India.

In Chapter Three, I deliberated a shift in the methodology for the co-design projects from ethnographical observation to an anthropological approach to working between the participants based on active involvement for a collective learning and creativity. The use of digital technology for communication enabled connectivity between the Australian users and Indian artisan participants for exchange of ideas and techniques. As I will discuss, some of the exchanges were straightforward, using tools like colour cards and images of existing Kashmir shawl motifs for the initiation of projects one and two. However, as the projects progressed, despite supporting users' inclusivity with the artisans and users, digital techniques used in conjunction with artisanal techniques required further consideration and problem solving. The hybrid nature of interaction in the third, capstone project which combined digital communication with direct exchange

between the artisans and user — me — on location in Kashmir — suggested another option to assess co-design strategies for new ways of working for sustainable innovation in the Kashmir shawl community.

### 5.5 Co-design projects one and two: two embroidered pashmina shawls – the user's engagement with the Kashmir shawl community in the design process

The co-design approach for projects one and two was based on customisation, a co-creation trend among fashion companies, as Sanders and Stappers.<sup>207</sup> Customisation in this context relates to Jonathan Chapman's theory of emotionally durable design<sup>208</sup> which, instead of emphasising the environmental aspect of sustainability in product design, encourages designers to create products that endure because their users have an emotional connection with them. Unlike mass-produced goods, the individuality of tailor-made products expresses the user's or customer's sensibility as a result of their involvement in their design and manufacture. In the context of co-design 'made to order goods offer the customer the opportunity to co-design the products that they desire so that they suit particular needs and wants.'<sup>209</sup>

Sustainability through emotional attachment in the first two co-design projects is not related to the artisan/designer collaborations themselves but to the end-users of the artisanal handcrafted textiles and the relationships they develop with the artisans who create their customised products. These projects diverge from conventional co-design projects where the users mainly interact with a designer/design researcher at the beginning of the projects, who, ultimately, uses their design knowledge to interpret the outcomes. Here, in the first two co-design projects, authority is not the preserve of a designer but arises from the users and artisans initiating the shawl designs together.

The now completed shawls from these two co-design projects are woven from pashmina sourced in Ladakh and then embroidered with the fine needlework of *sozni* embroidery that is suitable for pashmina shawls. One shawl is an example of *neem jama*, which leaves some areas of the base fabric visible, and the other exemplifies *tuki jama*, or fully embroidered fabric. Typically, these handcrafted shawls take at least twelve months to complete depending upon the amount of embroidery. Describing the completed shawls, I refer to the material outcome of the projects, but these physical objects do not represent the research goal. The

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<sup>207</sup>Sanders and Stappers. "Co-Creation," 8.

<sup>208</sup>Jonathan Chapman, *Emotionally durable design: objects, experiences and empathy* (London: Routledge, 2005), 224.

<sup>209</sup>Sandberg, "Just for You," iii.

project documentation emphasises the co-design strategies developed to involve the users and makers in the design process that becomes interwoven with social and cultural influences discussed within the conceptual framework of this research. The design context remained the cultural heritage of the Kashmir shawl community while the Australian users shared information relating to their identities through intercultural exchanges with the artisans.

The process of co-creating a customised item by the artisans and users of the product while stories are shared between them establishes a context of shared knowledge for all the participants' perceptions of value. Although the products made in each of the two co-design projects are similar, and there is overlap of methodology and artisans involved, I consider them as discrete results owing to the users' different viewpoints about value creation, made evident in the outcome of the projects and discussed in Chapter Six's conclusion to the thesis.

### 5.5.1 Co-design projects one and two participants: users, facilitators, and artisans

To initiate the first two co-design projects in April 2019 I approached two Australian women, Deborah Anderson and Jane Rich, who both live in Sydney. I had previous knowledge that both Deborah and Jane have collections of pashmina embroidered shawls and recognise the intricate skill involved in creating these shawls. They had, however, no knowledge or experience of the makers of the shawls, having acquired their readymade products through vendors, mostly in Australia. After explaining the concept of co-designing directly with artisans in the Kashmir shawl community to produce their own customised shawls, both women expressed their willingness to be involved in a co-design partnership with the artisans.

Jane has a collection of pashmina *jama* shawls numbering 29 and wanted a specific green shawl as her final thirtieth. For her, as a collector, money is secondary in importance to the shawl's colour, embroidery design and overall quality. Deborah has a passion for the shawls and to her, they are a legacy to leave her children; while money is a concern, her desire to leave a shawl to each of her children overrides this constraint. The design and colour she wanted recalled a shawl she had owned and loved but accidentally ruined. The shawls they would participate in creating, part of a collection and as an inheritance respectively, will be cherished for a long time. Both women appreciate the skill of the artisans and curious to have direct contact with the artisans who were to make their shawls.

Meanwhile, to establish the two shawl projects in India, I contacted Ayaz Hakim, my brother-in-law who is also actively involved in the Kashmir shawl community and asked him to be the facilitator of the two projects in Kashmir, to liaise with the many artisans involved in making the shawls. We discussed and agreed on both our roles

in the projects to qualify that we would be facilitating the projects for PhD research and not for financial gain. Ayaz is fluent in both English and Kashmiri, an important factor as many of the artisans only speak Kashmiri, so language translation was essential for the projects to progress. As the projects would involve eighteen artisans, each specialising in a specific technique in the process of making a Kashmir shawl, Ayaz and I discussed the practicality and necessity of the two Australian users communicating with them all. We identified two key artisans, the *naqash*, or draftsman, and the *karighar*, or *sozni* embroiderer, of the shawls as the main artisans integral to the creation of these customised shawls. Ayaz then explained the co-design concept for the two projects to the *naqash*, Mohammed Yusef Bhat, and the *karighar*, Abdul Majid Ganie, and they both agreed to participate, interested in the new experience of having direct contact with people who buy their shawls.

Mohammed Yusef Bhat is a highly regarded *naqash* with a small workshop in Srinagar, Kashmir. He learnt the skill as an apprentice and now passes on his craft to apprentices working with him in his workshop. Yusef first draws the motif designs, then a woodblock carver makes woodblocks of the motifs. These woodblocks last about 20 years. They are printed onto the woven pashmina shawls with white chalk or black charcoal mixed with water and gum to create the design that the embroiderers follow. Washing removes the design print when the embroidery is complete.

Abdul Majid Ganie works from his home in Gulabagh, a village on the outskirts of Srinagar. He learnt to embroider from his neighbour, a man who supplied embroidery work to their whole village, including Majid's uncle. Majid started watching his uncle when he was in eighth grade at school, then started embroidering in tenth grade, at first just the outlines of the embroidery design. Now 48 and a master *sozni* embroiderer, he also distributes embroidery work to other embroiderers in his area, including his wife, sister-in-law and one of his daughters.

My requests for the project shawls to be made within the traditional cultural context of Kashmir shawl designs and for transparency throughout the entire design process of the projects were agreed to by all the participants. The direct involvement of the users with the artisans in co-creating the customised shawls still required remuneration for the financial sustainability of the artisans; in consequence, an authority of knowledge flows from the women, and their status as paying customers, to the artisans. Conversely, the knowledge and experience of the artisans also flows to the women. To maintain openness and transparency, I encouraged all participants to voice their viewpoints, particularly regarding their different value systems, throughout the progress of the projects.

Given the geographic and linguistic distance that inhered between the artisan and user participants in the co-design projects, my role doubled as both the researcher and facilitator. I needed to not only instigate communication between participants but, unlike in conventional co-design, I continued actively to facilitate for the duration of the projects. As the design researcher I was able to use my facilitating role to observe how the design and production processes unfolded in this specific intercultural context compared to conventional co-design processes. While at the beginning I planned to have direct contact with the artisans through fieldwork in Kashmir, after only one trip, in June 2019, when I met Yusef and Majid and commenced the projects, international border closures then meant that all further communication exchanges would be take place on digital platforms.

### 5.5.2 Video as a tool for communication between participants — storytelling to share knowledge, experiences, design processes between the users in Australia and the artisans

As a way of introducing the project participants, I videoed the Australians, Deborah and Jane, in their own homes with their existing collections of Kashmir shawls around them. Each explained their ideas and reasons for the proposed shawls. Deborah related the story of how she developed an obsession for Kashmir shawls after saving up and purchasing her first shawl and how she intends to pass them on to her children. 'I treasured it so much that I became almost addicted to them in that I felt like I was creating an artistic but also a cultural heirloom for my children' (*Video transcript 1*). She highlights the emotional connection that people feel to their handmade objects, as discussed within slow fashion and co-design theory. Here, Deborah discusses the life of her favourite shawl which was overdyed after the embroidery thread colour ran when she was caught in the rain:

'So this is a bit of a sad tale. It's about one of my favourites that's gone through a very hard life. It was a pale blush pink with pale grey and pale green embroidery on it. It was really beautiful and the moment I saw it I knew I had to have it... Amazingly this is still one of my favourites now because all the things I have done to it like putting it in heat, putting it in cold, torturing it, has made it super, super soft.' (*Video transcript 1*)

Jane recounted that she grew up surrounded by beautiful things that belonged to her mother.

'I just like to have things that are individual and beautifully done by hand because it makes them more unique and makes them more special to me, because someone has put their love and their care into them. They're more

original than things churned out by the hundreds and everybody has the same thing.' (*Video transcript 2*)

Jane has many and various collections of objects, art, and so on, but as a pragmatic personality she declared that her Kashmir shawls are her favourite collection because she can wear them, adding that

'Some are so perfect that there are no errors but others you can pick up little mistakes and that makes them a little more individual and special because you can absolutely tell that they are not made by a machine.' (*Video transcript 2*)

While some typical co-design tools, such as colour cards and photographs were employed in my projects, I also devised new approaches different to conventional paradigms of co-design to enact a framework that related to the cultural heritage of the artisans. In the introductory videos, Deborah and Jane also conveyed their input for each shawl relating to design and colour. Deborah was specific, providing colour cards and images of traditional Kashmir shawl motifs and referred to books about the designs that she had researched. She expressed why she wanted to be involved in the project and gave me the material that she had prepared to give to the artisans.

'I am really interested this time in the connection between me picking what I want instead of me picking what is readymade and being part of that process and then receiving it at the end. I really dearly hope that the people who make these know that someone like me thinks that these are the most, I get emotional about it, that these are the most treasured possessions I have.' (*Video transcript 1*)

On the other hand, Jane discussed colours for her shawl and the embroidery but bowed to the skill and experience of the artisans: 'I like them to make those really final decisions because they will know what looks best' (*Video transcript 2*). She consulted the 'Telephone' shade card that I had brought with me to suggest preferred embroidery colours and the base colour of the shawl. This shade card is commonly used in Kashmir and therefore familiar to the artisans; she also selected the motif from one of her shawls to be replicated in the project shawl, thus it was within the artisans' traditional context of shawl designs.

While Deborah was organised and confident in providing her design input to share with the artisans, Jane was more hesitant and trusted the artisans to use their design experience to make decisions. However, both women expressed their enthusiasm

for the process of designing with, instead of being designed for, made possible by their input at the beginning of the co-design projects.



Figure 5.5. Video stills of Deborah Anderson (left) and Jane Rich discussing their Kashmir shawl collections and ideas for their co-design project shawls.  
Video by Deborah Emmett.

On a field trip to Kashmir in June 2019, I accompanied Ayaz on visits to the artisans, including the weaver of the shawls. After a voiceover translation in Kashmiri was applied to the videos, provided from the transcript by Ayaz's wife, Faheen, the videos were shown on a laptop computer to *naqash* Mohammed Yusef Bhat and *sozni* embroiderer Abdul Majid Ganie. By watching and listening to the videos the artisans learnt about Deborah's and Jane's families and experiences pertaining to Kashmir shawls as they related their stories, while also learning first-hand about the users' ideas for their shawls. As I observed Yusef, Majid and Ayaz watching the videos, their reactions and acknowledgement of the content expressed by Deborah and Jane respectively emphasised to me the importance of language, both visual and verbal when proposing to co-design with intercultural participants. The video medium visually communicated to the artisan audience a basis of knowledge about Deborah and Jane, their backgrounds and environment. However, the need for verbal translation immediately became apparent. Yusef and Majid listened intently to the Kashmiri voiceover, and intimated that they both understood the project shawls' specifications according to the users' ideas from the video content, even

from the translated version. This was due to their tacit knowledge of the shawl designs and making processes. Yusef immediately found the woodblocks of the motif designs in his workshop, while Majid, after confirming the embroidery colours using the 'Telephone' shade card, said he would do three sample versions of the embroidery colours for each shawl to show Deborah and Jane.



Figure 5.6. Abdul Majid Ganie and Ayaz Hakim watch the introductory videos of Deborah Anderson and Jane Rich.  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

Storytelling is embedded in the SAY, DO, MAKE research methods and video is an effective tool to transmit the story. In *Ways to engage telling, making and enacting*, Brandt, Binder and Sanders discuss telling, making and enacting as complementary, connected activities in co-designing. In the video, Deborah and Jane 'express and share "aesthetic experiences" in the pragmatic sense of embodied experience enforced by emotion and reflection'<sup>210</sup> while the artisans' tacit knowledge and lived experiences of the design process, fundamental to the making of the shawls, comes into play as they watch and listen to the video content. Here, the storytelling goes hand-in-hand with the making of things and establishes the foundation for co-creating relationships between the participants in the co-design projects. Using video documentation was a method whereby the participants —users and artisans — could recognise their cultural differences and apprehend distinct aesthetic ideas through these visual exchanges.

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<sup>210</sup>Eva Brandt, Thomas Binder, and Elizabeth Sanders, "Tools and Techniques: Ways to Engage Telling, Making and Enacting," in *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design*, eds. Jesper Simonsen and Toni Robertson (London: Routledge, 2012), 147.

### 5.5.3 Digital connectivity for participant inclusivity in co-design projects one and two: analysis of artisanal techniques in conjunction with digital techniques

Early process development following the commencement of the two co-design projects were Ayaz taking the two hand-woven white pashmina shawls from the weaver to be dyed pale pink and green and then, the *naqash*, Yusef, printing the designs on the shawls ready for embroidering, according to Deborah's and Jane's respective specifications. Since I had returned to Australia, digital communication via WhatsApp was used to share images of the block printed designs, known as tracings, to Deborah, Jane and myself.



Figure 5.7. Wood blocks belonging to *naqash* Mohammed Yusef Bhat, and the printed designs ready to be embroidered on Jane and Deborah's shawls.

Digital photographs by Deborah Emmett and smartphone photographs by Ayaz Hakim sent via WhatsApp.

It was this time I proposed Zoom meetings to further develop relationships between the participants when, as mentioned, on 5 August 2019, the Indian government revoked a constitutional provision granting certain autonomous powers to Indian-controlled Kashmir. In anticipation of the protests and unrest of the people of Kashmir over what was already an ongoing volatile political situation, the government suspended all telecommunications and the internet in the state.

Residents remained largely cut off from the rest of the world for six months and had only limited access to digital communication technology for up to eighteen months. So, it was ironic that with the success of the co-design projects dependent on utilising digital technology for direct communication between participants, WhatsApp, Zoom and social media was suddenly no longer available to the artisans in the collaboration.

Despite this setback in the projects' planned digital interactions, the making process went forward, with the shawls given to the embroiderer, Majid, and he began some sample embroidery on the shawls using the coloured threads that had been dyed according to the colours suggested by Deborah and Jane. When the digital blackout was lifted in Kashmir, communication recommenced between the Australian and artisan participants in June 2020, although by that time the COVID-19 lockdown was enforced! Consequently, my planned fieldwork in India was cancelled, so a Zoom meeting was arranged for Deborah and Jane to meet Majid and see the samples of embroidery on their shawls. All participants were genuinely interested in meeting each other via Zoom and mutual respect was evident. However, camera jumpiness from the artisans' hand-held smartphones resulted in a lack of image clarity and given the time-consuming application and intricacy of the handcrafted techniques, progress was difficult to detect within the limits of the time the Australian participants were watching. Deborah and Majid were pleased to meet each other; Jane was having technical difficulties connecting to the meeting, so her involvement was intermittent. The need for language translation added to the confusion, although the Kashmiri facilitator, Ayaz Hakim, did his best. Further attempts at Zoom interactions between the participants were unsuccessful due to slow network speeds in Kashmir, a continuation of government intervention in the Indian state.

We then used WhatsApp and emails for Deborah, Jane and Majid to continue sharing knowledge, experiences and design progression. While an advantage of using these media was that the participants were put on an equal footing through the seclusion of technology, lack of digital expertise and device quality presented issues in visual representation of the shawls; Deborah and Jane were hesitant to make decisions, understandably because of their limited knowledge of the sampling process. For example, Deborah wrote in an email to me on 30 June 2020, 'I'm so confused, in fact I don't know what I want. I think the stencil pattern tracing is throwing me off as well as it appearing to blend into a grey/green colour scheme.' And an email from Jane on 21 November 2020 read, 'The pix I think are still deceiving as it looks washed out especially the green but it could be the flash.'

The dialogic summary of the following narrative documents the project participants' lived experiences of the design processes' sequential nature over several months.

First, several issues arising from the embroidery colour sampling for the shawls had to be resolved. Initial WhatsApp video meetings between the embroiderer, Majid, and the Australian participants were unsuccessful because Deborah and Jane were unable to discern the embroidery thread colours from the black design stencil underneath. This was exacerbated by the poor quality of images taken with Majid's cheap smartphone. A suggestion by Ayaz, our Kashmiri facilitator, eventually solved the problem. He suggested the common practice where *sozni* embroidery is done on a cheaper fabric like cotton or wool dyed the same colour as the shawl to sample different embroidery colours in a simple paisley, or similar design, without the stencil behind it; the small, embroidered piece of cloth is called *namoodache*. Majid implemented a version of this practice on the edge of the shawls, completing two combinations of embroidery colours in small freehand paisleys and leaves on the two shawls so the thread colours could be seen without the background stencil. He sent images by WhatsApp of these freehand embroidery examples to Deborah and Jane.



Figure 5.8. Freehand motifs embroidered on the edge of the shawls by Majid so Jane and Deborah could check thread colours without the block print behind.  
Smartphone photographs by Abdil Majid Ganie sent via WhatsApp.

These WhatsApp design interactions took place over several months with a final resolution in December 2020. Some changes in embroidery colours were made; cream and orange were added to Jane's shawl after Majid suggested that her

original colour palette was too limited. Jane agreed and, again, emphasised that she believed Majid would know the best thread colours and how to place them most effectively. Deborah was pleased that she could see the embroidery colours more clearly on the freehand samples and after several conversations about different pinks to be used she followed Majid's advice. Her original pink was too like the base colour of the shawl, so a darker shade of the same hue was chosen for contrast. Refining the design ideas for the two shawls continued throughout the design process in consultations between the co-design project participants assisted by the facilitators. The necessary reliance on digital-only interactions raised further issues but eventually, the strategies that emerged through negotiating the dialogic and visual processes of intercultural co-design enabled the creation of the final products

Once colour sampling is complete, the customary process in the Kashmir shawl community is that only one artisan embroiders a shawl to maintain consistency of technique. Majid embroidered Deborah's shawl because the very subtle colour palette, which made distinguishing between the threads so difficult, required his expert hand and good eyesight. Jane's shawl was embroidered by Majid's cousin, Abdul Rashid Dar, from the nearby village of Malshay Bagh Gandarbal, who is also a master *sozni* embroiderer. Completing this heavy embroidery work on the shawls took a further ten months. Despite the devastation to the Indian population, of lives and livelihoods lost to COVID-19 in 2021 and by ongoing lockdowns, the artisans' work continued since they embroidered in their homes. During this time, we received short WhatsApp videos of them embroidering but, again, the image quality was poor.

Remuneration to produce the shawls was discussed at the commencement of the projects. Because a significant aim of the co-design projects was to investigate financial sustainability for the artisans, costing of the shawls needed to be transparent and payment had to go directly to the artisans. In textile artisan communities, a middleman, usually a broker or shop owner who markets and sells the handcrafted products, pays the artisans for their work, often at a very low rate. Payment is made in stages over the time taken to complete a product. Majid explained to me that embroiderers receive between 200 and 300 rupees (AUD\$4-6, 2021) per day, an insufficient amount to support a family, adding that, 'The brokers don't give us payment even though we know the customer has paid them. Instead, they buy more pashmina fabric for themselves with our money.'

After breaking down the costs of the shawls' production for the different Kashmir shawl artisans involved in the co-design projects, the amounts were shared with Deborah and Jane. It was agreed that payment for the shawls would be made incrementally during their production, as is the customary payment model in artisan

communities. Direct payments to the artisans would, however, circumvent the need for middlemen.

Deborah's Shawl Costs		Jane's Shawl Costs	
Cost of woven shawl	\$ 182.00	Cost of woven shawl	\$ 182.00
Dyeing charges	\$ 14.50	Dyeing charges	\$ 14.50
Tracing	\$ 60.50	Tracing	\$ 85.50
Embroidery charges	\$1089.00	Embroidery charges	\$1452.00
TOTAL	\$1346.00	TOTAL	\$1734.00

\*Price in AUD

Figure 5.9. Breakdown of costing for the shawls in co-design projects one and two.

Since the Australian participants had previously bought these shawls, they were aware of the cost of such time-consuming, skilled work and expensive materials. Increasingly, proponents of handcrafted Indian textiles emphasise the need for consumers to be educated about the skill and time required to create a handcrafted textile piece and be prepared to pay the artisans well in recognition of their unique value. Again, digital technology facilitated the financial interactions between the co-design participants, with direct payments made to the artisans by Deborah and Jane through electronic bank transfers at progressive stages of the shawls' production.

#### 5.5.4 Mapping — planned and actual interactivity between the users, facilitators and artisans in co-design projects one and two

When planning co-design strategies for projects one and two within the context of the Kashmir shawl community, which exists outside of the conventional hierarchal structure of a design project, with multiple artisan stakeholders involved in creating a pashmina embroidered shawl, I needed to identify when to establish interaction between the users and the community. In consultation with Ayaz Hakim, the Kashmiri facilitator of the two projects I mapped in a diagram, as shown in Figure 5.10, the eighteen interconnected processes, including the role titles in Kashmiri of the respective artisans involved. We anticipated when user interaction would be possible and, indeed, necessary for the progress and outcome of the projects. While maintaining the co-design premise of the users having design input in the initial stages of the project, the entry of Deborah and Jane came later in the shawl-making sequence, after the weaving of the plain pashmina fabric. As discussed earlier, since the focus of their design input was on the embroidery pattern and colours for their customised *jama* and *tuki jama* shawls, we decided that Deborah's and Jane's co-design input would be most pertinent to the artisans responsible for these processes, the *naqash* and embroiderers.

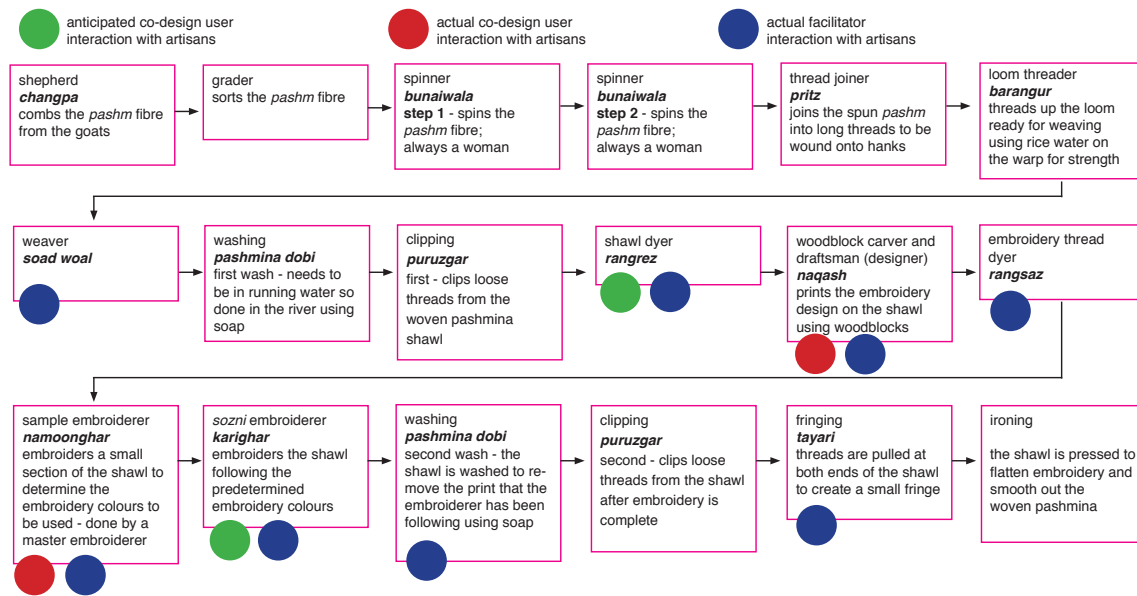


Figure 5.10. Diagram of the Kashmir shawl artisans' production processes mapping anticipated and actual interaction of co-design projects' one and two Kashmiri facilitator and user participants.

Diagram developed by Deborah Emmett

In a conventional co-design project operating within regulated, industrialised structures, the designer and/or design researcher determines an approach to bring the users into the design process at its commencement. Although it is implicit in co-design that the users' inputs are sought, control of the method remains that of the designer or design researcher who has selected it, often utilising co-design tools or probes like images and words on sheets of paper, collage, cognitive mapping and modelling. The speculative nature of these co-design methods activated at the beginning of the project means that ultimately the designer/design researcher still moderates the findings.

In co-design projects taking place within the structure of artisan communities, with multiple stakeholders involved in the making processes, abstract co-design methods are difficult to control. The design researcher and or facilitators must adapt to the contingencies of process, reassessing throughout the projects to the optimal times for user involvement rather than assuming preconceived outcomes will prevail. Within the Kashmir shawl community, a textile piece is passed from one artisan completing one process to the next; in the intercultural co-design projects, the role of the facilitator, Ayaz, acquired greater weight than anticipated, as indicated by the blue dots on the map in Figure 5.10, while the expected interactions of the Australian users (green dots on the map) were fewer than actually occurred, indicated by the red dots. Ayaz's increased involvement was partly because of the very specific requirements for the shawls occasioned by Deborah's

and Jane's requests, as, for example, the dyeing of the shawls' base colours, and also because of the disruptions caused by the normal movement of artisans within their community being restricted by COVID-19 lockdowns during course of the projects.

Although I have not included myself as the Australian facilitator in the map, my involvement also proved to be greater than I expected at the outset of the projects. This was due to the increased reliance on digital interaction between participants and the curtailment of the fieldwork in Kashmir I had originally planned before travel restrictions necessitated modifications. The poor-quality digital representations of the shawls, as described, as well as the political suppression of digital connections in Kashmir, meant that I became a conduit for communication between the participants, particularly for Deborah and Jane, throughout the projects. From the perspective of designing the method for a co-design process specific to these intercultural projects, the approach must be flexible enough to accommodate such contingencies, particularly when the exchange of knowledge is pivotal to project's progress. Mapping the course of the projects provides an overview of when exchanges occurred that I could reflect on when planning future co-design projects. Ideally, developing design strategies that require less involvement by facilitators and promote more direct exchange between the artisans and the Australian participants would be preferable.

#### 5.5.5 Conclusion: outcomes of the co-design projects one and two and their contribution to knowledge, summary of emergent co-design methods

The embroidery of the two shawls was completed in August 2021, and the two shawls were then sent for the final processes of washing, clipping, fringing and ironing. For identification of the textile pieces during these processes, the normal custom is that the initials of the middleman are stitched by hand on the shawls, and these remain there after completion. For projects one and two, we asked the embroiderers, Majid and Rashid to stitch their names onto Deborah's and Jane's shawls, so the artisans are identified for their craftwork. They wrote their names these in Urdu, as Figure 5.12 shows, since Kashmiri is not a written language. I consider this strategy is another which can strengthen the artisan-user relationship, by recognising the artisans as people as well as for their skills and increasing the empathic value of the textiles for the users who will possess them.

During the final eight months when the shawls were being embroidered, I observed that the users became disengaged from the projects, perhaps because of the length of time this slow fashion process takes, or because they were no longer actively involved in this process, and perhaps the projects had taken on lives of their own which involved only the artisans. Although occasional WhatsApp images or video

continued to be sent, as mentioned, the visual quality was often very poor. Again, I used the tool of video as a strategy to re-engage the users in the projects. I asked a Kashmiri cinematographer, Imad Ul-Rehman, to go with Ayaz to Majid's home and film Majid and Rashid working on the two shawls, and Majid's sister-in-law and daughter embroidering, as well as their house and garden. I showed the completed video to Deborah and Jane after I edited the high-quality footage Imad had shot, to create a visual slow fashion story about the artisans and their daily lives absorbed in their craft. The Australian participants acknowledged not only the skill of the artisans, but also the length of time the entire process takes. Deborah and Jane became more acquainted with the artisans' daily environment as part of their slow fashion story. They gained insight into the patience and dedication of these craftspeople following slow fashion practices, and how the artisans' work is incorporated into their home life with other family members also involved in the craft.

This connection with those who appreciate and use their craft gives the artisans confidence about future possibilities including their ability to create and interpret design, and, in turn, sustain their textile practice. Ayaz told me that both Majid and Rashid valued the opportunity of creating shawls that were planned with the user's input and where they could display their true expertise. They also appreciated the unusually transparent and direct payment procedure, as well as coming to know a little about Deborah and Jane and their shawl collections through the earlier videos. Certainly, all the participants have a story to tell about these two shawls.



*Figure 5.11. Video still of shawl embroidery artisans Majid (right) and Rashid completing Jane and Deborah's shawls at Majid's home.*

Video filmed by Imad Ul-Rehman and edited by Deborah Emmett.



Figure 5.12. Shawl embroidery artisans Rashid and Majid's signatures stitched in Urdu on the completed shawls.

Digital photographs by Deborah Emmett.

The shawls arrived in Australia in November 2021 and Deborah and Jane were eager to see the finished pieces. There was much anticipation — eighteen months had passed since their initial involvement in the projects. And at this point, the outcomes of the two projects diverged significantly from expectations. On receiving her pale pink *Tuki Jama* shawl, Deborah sent me a text message, 'My shawl is absolutely beautiful and exactly what I wanted... I love it'. Jane, meanwhile, at first responded positively to her green *Jama* shawl but then she began to remark on small embroidery variations as well as asymmetry in the shawl's design pattern (Figure 5.13). Although the colours and design used were as she had requested, what she perceived to be technical errors that can occur in and, moreover, characteristic of handcrafted processes devalued the experience for Jane. Ultimately, she refused to accept the shawl, her disaffection surprising and seemingly contrary to the sense of value she had originally ascribed to handcrafted products. By refusing the completed shawl, Jane became unaccountable for her commitment to the parameters of the co-design project.



*Figure 5.13. The asymmetrical layout of the shawl design inside the main embroidered area of the shawl (where the design meets the border section).*

Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

Through design customisation, the main aim of the two projects was to develop co-design strategies that would encourage sustainability for the Kashmir shawl community by enabling the artisans to have independent, direct contact with the users of their products. The issue of accountability becomes enmeshed with perceptions of value in this situation. Unlike in conventional co-design, where ultimately the designer or design researcher takes responsibility for the project's outcome the creation of the shawls had many different stakeholders, each artisan responsible for a particular process, but no one for the whole product. As discussed within the conceptual framework of this research, each artisan values their specific skill over the material value of the finished textile. While Jane's reaction to the handwork of her shawl revealed her expectations of high commercial grade production, albeit by hand, she was not prepared to alter her evaluation of the shawl; she valued the quality of the textile over her experience. It would seem the lived experience of designing and making together, as these two co-design projects attest, will call into question assumptions about the difference in values systems between cultures, and what their members value. Differences in value emphasis between the intercultural participants in this instance became apparent and were difficult to resolve.

Although accountability is calculated as invested in the artisan community as a whole, so even if one part of the process fails, the other parts will mobilise differently to compensate, this did not in fact happen. Discussing the outcome of the projects with Majid on my return to Kashmir in January 2022, he suggested the need for one artisan in the community to take responsibility for the whole project if co-designing to create an embroidered pashmina shawl were to succeed in this user/artisan community context.

I have been a pashmina shawl embroiderer for a long time. I know all the processes involved in making a shawl and as the embroiderer I have each shawl for the longest time as that takes the most time. I could take care of the whole shawl production right from procurement of fabric, dyeing, design discussion and tracing on the shawl, then colours and embroidery mutually agreed to the finished product including washing and clipping. I can facilitate all processes until the finished shawl is to the customer's liking and I will take responsibility for all the processes. (*Artisan interview transcript 1*)

Reflecting on Majid's response, aspects of the conceptual framework were again highlighted. The possibility of an artisan, such as Majid, with his tacit knowledge of all the processes in creating a Kashmir shawl, facilitating the entire project co-designing with the users, and being accountable for the outcome, could potentially achieve more sustainable results for the artisan community.

#### 5.6 Co-design project three: re-introduction of natural dyes in the Kashmir shawl community

The sustainability focus of co-design projects one and two in this research relates to the continuation of artisanal cultural heritage. Although the shawls were created with initial design input from the Australian users, the design and making was within the context of the Kashmir shawl community's traditional knowledge passed on through intergenerational connections or often, tacitly, by virtue of belonging to that community. The artisans mainly work in or nearby their homes and people in the local community watch and learn about the craft from an early age. When conceiving the third co-design project, I planned to build on some of the strategies used in the first two, as well as analyse perceptions about the inherent environmental sustainability of artisan communities.

Natural dyes are no longer used for pashmina fibre in Kashmir; instead, synthetic dyes are used for both woven shawls and pashmina yarn before weaving. From my observations, the use of synthetic dyes alone among the sequence of processes to create a Kashmir shawl is the only activity that can potentially cause environmental harm. In this community, as in most artisanal craft communities, natural fibres are sourced locally, technical applications use manual equipment, like handlooms, and of course, the work is done by hand.

Research into the history of Kashmir shawls confirms that natural dyes were traditionally used; these were most were locally sourced to add colour to the designs for woven *kani* shawls or embroidered shawls. Yet now there is no remnant knowledge in the artisan community of using natural dyes in Kashmir. The artisans

speak of natural pashmina shawls as pieces woven in the undyed, natural colour of the pashmina fibre that is white or beige. In global markets, there is a growing interest in textiles that are naturally dyed. The use of natural dyes, with their environmentally safe properties, is considered preferable by consumers or users who value more sustainable products with reduced environmental impact. Therefore, I conceived the third co-design project as a capstone project to re-introduce the use of natural dyes for pashmina weaving and embroidery into the Kashmir shawl community, while raising consciousness through discussions with the pashmina dyers, or *rangrez*, about their disposing of synthetic dyes that usually drain into the increasingly polluted waterways of Kashmir. Although extracting dyes from naturally occurring sources is part of the cultural heritage of the Kashmir shawl community, it no longer has a part in the context of contemporary shawl production, unlike all the other processes their making involves, such as hand-weaving and embroidery. Therefore, one aim of this capstone project was the reintegration of natural dyes into the production of shawls, which I considered an opportunity for the artisan community to reach an existing global market of consumers of these shawls. Potentially, this opportunity could not only expand their business audience, but also build on the community's creativity while keeping within its traditional cultural context.

#### 5.6.1 Background: analysis of why and when natural dyes stopped being used

Before commencing this third project, I investigated when and why natural dyes ceased being used in produce Kashmir shawl production, as well as what natural dyes were originally sourced in Kashmir. The Indian subcontinent has a long and rich history in the technology of natural dyes: by 1000BC, formulae for different dye colours were used, including indigo for blue, madder and lac for red, and myrobolam for ochre.<sup>211</sup> Dyer craftsmen in Kashmir had mystical reputations and often kept their dye formulae secret, refusing even to pass them on to the next generation. Not only did they know the dye recipe, but they understood 'the vagaries of natural conditions, soil, climate, and temperature, fixing agents and mordants, all resulting in shades that were not only unpredictable, but also infused the entire process with untold mystery and superstition.'<sup>212</sup>

When the Moguls ruled Kashmir, they introduced subtlety in the use of dyes with differing shades of colour often with symbolic meaning. The naming of the colours usually had associations with nature, for example, *fakhtai* (dove) for grey and *pistai* (pistachio) for soft green.<sup>213</sup> The colours of the palette used for Kashmir shawls were never harsh; instead, eight colours, a mix of primaries and secondaries, were

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<sup>211</sup>Rehman and Jafri, 250.

<sup>212</sup>Rehman and Jafri, 250.

<sup>213</sup>Rehman and Jafri, 250.

blended for all the shades and tints required for dyeing. Most of the dyes were developed from plants grown in Kashmir: a range of reds was derived from the roots of madder and turmeric, a dozen oranges and yellows from safflower and saffron, and brown from walnut husks. The only plant that did not grow locally in Kashmir was indigo, for the colour blue, so that was brought in from the Indian plains. Figure 5.13 provides an overview of natural dyes and their sources previously used in Kashmir.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Part Used	* Colour of Dye
Indigo	<i>Indigofera tinctoria</i>	Leaves	Shades of blue (from light to very dark)
Madder	<i>Rubia tinctorum</i>	Root	Shades of red
Cochineal	<i>Dactylopius coccus cacti</i>	Insect	Purple/blue-red
Henna	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i>	Leaves	Brownish-red
Lac	<i>Laccifer lacca</i>	Insect	Pink
Kermes	<i>Kermes ilicis</i>	Insect	Red
Safflower	<i>Carthamus tinctorius</i>	Flower head	Reddish-yellow
Saffron	<i>Crocus sativus</i>	Stigma	Yellowish-orange
Brazil wood	<i>Caesalpinia echinata</i>	Bark	Yellow
Mulberry	<i>Morus tinctoria</i>	Root/timber/leaves	Yellow
Dyers weed or larkspur	<i>Reseda luteola</i>	All parts except roots	Deep yellow
Walnut	<i>Juglans nigra</i>	Rind	Yellowish-brown
Grape	<i>Vitis species</i>	Leaves	Light yellow
Turmeric	<i>Curcuma tinctoria</i>	Roots	Yellow
Tea	<i>Thea sinensis</i>	Leaves	Light yellowish-brown
Alizarin	<i>Rhamnus alaternus</i>	Petals and seeds	Orange yellow
Sumach	<i>Cotinus coggyria</i>	Wood	Yellowish-orange
Pomegranate	<i>Punica granatum</i>	Rind	Greyish brown/black
Tanbark	<i>Lithocarpus henryi</i>	Bark/wood	Reddish-brown Dark green
Poppy	<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>	Petals/bark	Brown
Apple	<i>Malus pumila</i>	Bark	Yellowish-brown
Logwood	<i>Haematoxylum campechianum</i>	Bark/wood	Dark purple to black

Figure 5.14. Natural dye chart: the plant and insect sources of natural dyes found in Kashmir.

Source: Rehman and Jafri, *The Kashmir Shawl: From Jamavar to Paisley* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2006, 251).

The transition to the use of synthetic dyes occurred in Kashmir after the introduction of aniline dyes around 1863.<sup>214</sup> At that time, there was great demand in Europe for

<sup>214</sup>Rehman and Jafri, 94.

Kashmir shawls as a luxury fashion item, while the highly patterned designs respectively favoured by the Sikh and Dogra rulers, required many colours. The Kashmir shawl community had difficulty keeping up with the demand. The new synthetic dyes were soon available in many colours and did not need a mordant (fixing material), were inexpensive, and easy to use — the process taking just a fraction of the time that using natural dyes took. They became very popular despite the starker shades of colour and lacking the subtlety of natural dyes. Natural dyes did continue, however, to be used in Kashmir; in *Design techniques of Kashmir handloom textiles*, from 1967, Rachael Mossman noted that:

‘Vegetable matter is used for dyeing pashmina, either yarn dyed before weaving or piece dyed after the textile is complete. Lichens from the Himalayas, cultivated roots, herbs, flowers and fruits, or wild plants, may be used by the professional dyers (*rangrez*).’<sup>215</sup>

Mossman adds that synthetic dyes imported from Europe were used for sheep’s wool textiles at that time. My Kashmiri mother-in-law, Aashia Hakim, told me how previously, 30 to 40 years ago, people had sets of natural dye swatches in their homes that were used to decide colours to be dyed by the *rangrez* for custom-ordered shawls and clothing. These have now been replaced by the ‘Telephone’ shade card of synthetic dyes.

It is difficult to assess the reasons why the Kashmir shawl community no longer uses natural dyes. The dyers I have spoken with in Kashmir have no knowledge of using natural dyes; the skill has apparently been lost. After discussing this matter with people in the artisan community, the conclusion was that the demise of natural dyes coincided with the global commercialisation of pashminas in the 1990s through David Muir’s previously mentioned enterprise in Nepal, where shawls woven in a mix of silk and pashmina became widely available in all colours, all synthetically dyed. After the decline of the pashmina industry in Kashmir in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the production of traditional, hand-woven pashmina shawls had remained small, with mainly a local customer base. But with this new global demand the Kashmir shawl community responded, seeking a share of the market. This required fast production which increased implementing machine-woven techniques and the use of synthetic dyes. Although the community’s handcrafts of hand-weaving and embroidering also continued to be practised, it seems natural dyes could not compete nor indeed were warranted. Unfortunately, as a result of this lack of demand the intergenerational transferral of knowledge about the natural dyeing process became redundant. When I visited the Craft Development Institute (CDI) in

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<sup>215</sup>Rachael G. Mossman, “Design Techniques of Kashmir Handloom Textiles,” *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*, Vol. 50 (1967), 50.

Srinagar, the emphasis in protecting the crafts of the shawl community was on the pashmina fibre and hand weaving processes, as discussed earlier. There is a natural dye section within the Kashmir Carpet unit at CDI, but the dyeing is done on a very small scale.

### 5.6.2 Co-design Project Three participants: the researcher, facilitators and artisans; establishing the collaboration

The COVID-19 pandemic had stymied the fieldwork I planned in India for co-design projects one and two, and so to proceed we relied on digital communication, experiencing its benefits and constraints, as discussed. This enforced hiatus in my fieldwork was, however, to inform ways of developing and enacting co-design strategies that I had not anticipated at the outset. While I prefer to be on the ground and actively involved with the artisans, I determined that a hybrid approach of fieldwork and digital connectivity could broaden the possibilities for intercultural projects and, therefore, factored in actual engagement with artisans in Kashmir as well as digital communication for co-design project three. While planning this project, COVID-19 travel restrictions began to be eased in November 2021, restoring the opportunity to travel to India to complete the third project.

Initial research indicated that currently in Kashmir dyers in the pashmina community know of no readily available formulae or methods for using natural dyes. I then investigated sources and contacted companies in other areas of India about natural dyes produced. Many textile artisan communities in India have transitioned to synthetic dyes, but some have maintained their traditional use of natural dyes or been encouraged to resume the processes by external designers, such as Charlotte Kwon of Maiwa, one of the case studies reported in Chapter Four. From my research, I discovered that in some communities, dyes are produced using plants and other natural materials endemic to their area, but also that natural dyes are processed into a powdered form. Through shared information on social media, I located Sodhani Biotech,<sup>216</sup> a company based in Jaipur, Rajasthan that manufactures certified organic, natural dyes. Not only was this company able to supply dyes in a pre-reduced, powdered form, but also advice on how to use them. They had never tested their natural colours on pashmina fibres but had on similar sheep's wool. The dyeing behaviour of pashmina is identical to that of sheep's wool, but the uptake of dye is faster.

While engaged in this investigative research, I was simultaneously communicating via WhatsApp with Qaiser Beigh, about facilitating the third co-design project in

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<sup>216</sup>Sodhani Biotech Pvt Ltd., <http://www.naturaldyes.io>.

Kashmir. Qaiser's family have been involved in manufacturing pashminas for around forty years and are highly respected within the Kashmir shawl community. He is university educated but is now active in his family's business. Although Qaiser had no knowledge of using natural dyes, he was keen to be involved in a project that could revive a lost skill in his community. From our initial engagement, I admired his willingness to experiment with process; with no fear of failure Qaiser believed that mistakes make progress.

Although Qaiser's family work with five different dyeing workshops, he chose to ask two brothers, Shabir and Nazir Ganie, originally from the Kashmiri village of Tral, who now have a workshop in Srinagar. Shabir began working as a pashmina dyer or *rangrez* for another artisan, leaving school when he was in Year 12, and has operated his own workshop with his brother for the past ten years. Shabir and Nazir confirmed neither they nor anyone they knew in the Kashmir shawl dyeing community who use natural dyes. However, as Qaiser shared with me, unlike many of the older artisans who have become fixed in their long-standing methods of production, the brothers are young and open to innovation for their industry.

Shabir and Nazir had smartphones, so although digital communication between us was possible, sharing unfamiliar techniques in reintroducing the natural dyes would require exchanging specific information with the artisans, which meant I needed to be part of the actual making process in their workshop. Qaiser was also keen to be present and had the essential role of translator between myself and the dyers, who spoke limited English. Therefore, I consider that I have dual roles as researcher and facilitator of the researched information in co-design project three. Appreciating and valuing the aesthetic and sustainable characteristics of naturally dyed textiles puts me in simpatico relationship with the eventual users or consumers of the natural dyed pashmina shawls to be created in this co-design project.

### 5.6.3 Sharing knowledge, experiences, design processes — my engagement with the Kashmir shawl community in the dyeing process

In January 2022, I accompanied Qaiser Beigh to visit Shabir and Nazir Ganie's dyeing workshop. The facility is rudimentary, consisting in an open-sided corrugated iron shed with a concrete floor; it has a small one-room construction at the back where the brothers live. Shabir had bought the land and plans to eventually build a house for his family. The workshop is located next to a body of water that was originally a lake called Khusalsar, one of an interconnected chain of lakes that use to feed into the large Anchar Lake. Infringement into the lakes for the construction of houses and market gardens with the associated drainage of waste has resulted in the waterways becoming blocked and reduced to a limited flow of water such that Khusalsar is now a stagnant, polluted pool of water. This first visit

was in the middle of a typically harsh, cold Kashmiri winter, difficult conditions to be working out in the open. The ground is consistently wet as the dye baths are emptied after use to drain out into Khulsalsar.

A steady stream of artisans from the shawl community came to the dyer's workshop while we were there, carrying woven shawls and bundles of pashmina yarn to be dyed. I observed and listened with interest to learn about the dyeing processes performed by Shabir and Nazir. The dyeing is carried out in copper pots heated with portable gas cylinders. The pashmina shawls are dyed by hand, each piece individually. Hanks of pashmina fibre are also dyed in the same way; each hank is checked during the process to ensure that the colour has spread evenly. Immense patience and experience are required to dye the pashmina shawls and yarn, as even the smallest negligence will be reflected in the quality of the product. Only azo-free synthetic dyes are used because they are not harmful to human skin. The powdered dye is added to a weak acetic mixture of either sodium acetate or sulphuric acid and water. The pashmina is dyed at a temperature just below boiling point for nearly an hour. More water is added if the dye colour is too intense. Pashmina is exceptionally absorbent, and dyes easily and deeply. After dyeing the pashmina fabric or yarn is air dried. Shabir refers to Pantone colour cards, the Telephone shade card, or cloth swatches brought by customers for required colours. His skill and knowledge in mixing dyes to achieve specific colours is quite evident.



*Figure 5.15. Dyer artisan Shabir colour matches synthetically dyed pashmina using a Pantone colour card.*  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

At the beginning of the co-design project, Qaiser suggested we experiment with limited colours to compare methods with the dyer's existing processes. It was decided to use indigo blue from *Indigofera Tinctoria* leaves and pink from Sappan wood (*Caesalpinia Sappan*). I had purchased both natural dyes in a powdered form from Sodhani Biotech before traveling to Kashmir. The dyers were familiar with mixing dye powders, while the other materials we needed for the natural dyeing process, including lime (*chuna* in Kashmiri), alum and vinegar were already used in their workshop and available. Therefore, I considered that although we were experimenting together to develop a new organic process, the artisans were still informed by their traditional skill base. Although it would have been simpler to dye readymade woven pashmina shawls, I shared my business experience that synthetically dyed shawls faded along their folded edges when displayed in shops over time, particularly lighter colours, but this is not true of shawls woven from yarn-dyed pashmina. For that reason, we decided to commence the project only dyeing hanks of pashmina yarn with natural dyes ready for weaving. This decision necessitated dyeing one kilogram of pashmina fibre for each colour to produce sufficient for about six scarves or shawls, the quantity required by the *barangur*, the artisan who threads up the loom for weaving, because that is time-consuming work.

We followed the advice provided by Sodhani Biotech to prepare the dye baths. While the preparation for dyeing with Sappan wood was similar to the synthetic dye process, except for the addition of alum as a mordant before dyeing, preparing the indigo dye was an entirely new process for the artisans. I had earlier boiled a mixture of water and filtered banana to make a sugar syrup that was stirred into the copper dye pot filled with heated water; later, lime and indigo powder were added in equal quantities.

Nazir used one hank of pashmina to test the Sappan wood dye by dipping it a number of times in the solution to achieve the correct pink. This process was successful, although he observed that he needed to be precise with the amount of dye powder added to the dye pot. On the following day, when we dyed the prepared kilogram of pashmina hanks in the Sappan wood dye bath, we were confronted with two problems. The colour achieved earlier was difficult to replicate, and when looking at the hanks after washing, we found that the colour was unevenly spread, particularly where the twine used to hold the hanks touched the pashmina fibre (Figure 5.16). Qaiser indicated that this would result in irregular patches of colour on the woven textile.



*Figure 5.16. Nazir tests the Sappan wood dye on a hank of pashmina; and uneven patches of dye on the completed Sappan wood dyed pashmina yarn.*  
Digital photographs by Deborah Emmett.

We had left the indigo dye pot to settle overnight and were pleased that it was the correct greenish colour we required. Indigo does not require a mordant, since the blue colour occurs only after the textile is removed from the dye pot, and oxidation turns the material blue. Repeated dipping in the indigo dye pot increases the intensity of blue. In an attempt to avoid the irregular absorption of the Sappan wood dye, Shabir spread hanks of pashmina along a wooden rod and rotated them to evenly spread the dye in the indigo bath. After removing the hanks, we left them for fifteen minutes to oxidise. Again, the pashmina was turning blue unevenly, the outside of the hank becoming blue while the inner fibres remained a yellow-green; it was a concerted team effort by us all to move the hanks around to completely expose all the fibres to the air. Although some variations of blue were visible after the pashmina was washed in water mixed with vinegar for fixing, we determined that it was worth proceeding with the weaving.



*Figure 5.17. Shabir holding the indigo dyed pashmina hanks that are oxidising, turning blue, after removal from the dye vat and the pashmina yarn after drying.*  
Digital photographs by Deborah Emmett.

At the end of our first dyeing sessions with Shabir and Nazir, the indigo dyed pashmina yarn was sent to the weaver, while the Sappan wood-dyed pashmina was put aside due to the unevenness of colour coverage to be later over-dyed and repurposed. Qaiser's concern that the delicate pashmina fibre may have been weakened by the indigo dye process proved unfounded when shown to the weaver.

After I had returned to Australia, the project continued with Qaiser's sending me regular WhatsApp updates of images of the threaded loom and weaving of the indigo scarves. He shared with me the weaver's complaint that blue was constantly rubbing off onto his hands as he worked. This is a common occurrence, known as crocking, with indigo dyed textiles, but the amount of colour transferred indicated that the problem lay with the colourfastness of the pashmina yarn. Resolving this issue meant further investigation of the indigo dyeing process was needed. After a final wash on completion of their weaving, the six scarves became a lighter shade of indigo, the tonal variations that were of concern after dyeing visible but still acceptable within the aesthetic context of naturally dyed textiles.



Figure 5.18. Threaded loom with natural indigo dyed pashmina and initial scarf weaving. Smartphone photographs by Kaiser Beigh sent via WhatsApp.

#### 5.6.4 Further research, problem solving and continuation of co-design Project Three - my engagement with the Kashmir shawl community in the natural dyeing processes

Before returning to Kashmir in June 2022 to continue the co-design project with dyers Shabir and Nazir Ganie, I further researched natural dye processes, not through textbook documentation but instead, by watching video demonstrations by natural dye practitioners, mostly on the digital platform YouTube. Although information about naturally dyeing pashmina fibre was unavailable, natural dyeing of wool yarn, which fibre has similar properties was informative. In the light of working within an intercultural framework, with language differences, my research emphasis was on gaining knowledge visually, using materials that could be easily sourced and convenient to use.

Michel Garcia, botanist, chemist and natural dye expert,<sup>217</sup> has revived the use of the fructose indigo vat, known as the 1, 2, 3 reduction vat – 1 part dye, 2 parts lime and 3 parts fructose. While fruit such as bananas can be used to provide the fructose content of the vat, and we initially, Garcia's use of fructose powder cancels the need for the time-consuming process of boiling and filtering the fruit to obtain

<sup>217</sup>Michel Garcia, <https://www.michelgarcia.fr>.

fructose water. A YouTube video,<sup>218</sup> by Sarah Bellos of Stoney Creek Colors, not only showed me how to set up of a fructose indigo vat, but also revealed that massaging the fibre under the surface of the indigo dye, instead of dipping, assists to evenly spread the colour through fibre hanks, and furthermore, that washing the indigo-dyed textile repeatedly in water after the initial hot water and vinegar wash would reduce crocking — the dye rubbing off onto the weaver's hands. This information potentially provided practical solutions to the earlier problems we experienced in Kashmir.

On my return to Shabir and Nazir's workshop in mid-June, they greeted me warmly; it was evident that our earlier shared experiences in January of experimenting and making with natural dyes had formed a relationship between us. They were both enthusiastic about continuing the project but suggested the need to plan a specific timeframe for the natural dyeing, when interruptions from their regular customers would not occur. One Sunday was agreed upon, and that I would provide lunch! We made the indigo vat in readiness with the fructose and dye powders that I provided. The relatively limited lifespan of a fructose vat, compared to other types of indigo vats, is not problematic for natural dyeing in the Kashmir shawl community given the slow fashion processes of producing their handcrafted textiles; only small batches of indigo-dyed pashmina yarn would be required, and no industrial-scale dyeing. Maintaining an indigo vat in the limited space of Shabir's dye workshop with the constant bustle of customers coming and going would be impractical.

After the earlier, disappointing results with the Sappan wood-dyed pashmina yarn, I corresponded with the dye suppliers, Sodhani Biotech. It was suggested that the pH balance of the dye vat was incorrect, it should be 5 on the pH scale, so on my return visit I brought a pH testing kit to check the dye vat, something we had not done during our first attempt with Sappan wood dye. If the pH is too high (alkaline), vinegar is added to the vat and if too low (acidic), lime. Shabir and Nazir had also been thinking about the problems we encountered in January, suggesting that when we tied the pashmina hanks with twine, we make the twine loops long to move them around easily in the dye bath to avoid the earlier unevenness of the dye through the fibre. For both the indigo and Sappan wood processes, I had made precise step-by-step written notes that I left with Shabir and Nazir. Although they are hesitant to speak English, I discovered that they both can read English.

Our natural dye session this time was far more successful; again, we dyed a kilo of pashmina in each colour. We found that by massaging and moving the pashmina

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<sup>218</sup>Stony Creek Colours, "Natural Indigo Dyeing Fructose Vat How to Video," July 14, 2020, YouTube video, 27:00, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jShu-dTI\\_nE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jShu-dTI_nE).

hanks around in both the indigo and Sappan wood dye vats, the colour spread evenly through the fibre. The pH level of the Sappan wood dye vat was high when tested, so some vinegar was added, and the correct colour achieved. We speculated that Kashmir's warmer June weather also helped the dye colour develop intensity, particularly in the oxidation process needed for indigo, unlike in the extremely cold conditions of January. The indigo-dyed pashmina initially appeared very dark blue after three dips in the dye bath for five minutes and two dips for two minutes, but after 45 minutes in hot water and vinegar, then successive washes in cold water, as recommended, the colour became royal blue. Nazir suggested that to determine consistent shades of blue in the future, he could dye pashmina swatches with a progressive number of timed dips in the indigo vat to create a range of indigo blues.



*Figure 5.19. Preparing the pashmina hanks for dyeing with long pieces of twine.*  
Digital photograph by Riyaz Hakim.



*Figure 5.20. Dyed indigo hanks in successive washes to reduce crocking.*  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.



*Figure 5.21. Completed indigo and Sappan wood dyed pashmina fibre.*  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

My intention in initiating co-design project three was to reintroduce the use of natural dyes into the Kashmir shawl community in a way that could be developed and sustained, so that the community could reclaim lost knowledge and benefit from a ready market for their naturally dyed products. The other aspect of sustainability that I hoped to address, through discussion with the dyers, was the disposal of synthetic dyes; like most effluent in Kashmir, the spent dye is allowed to flow out from the workshop unchecked, polluting the waterways. This situation is unsustainable as the famous Kashmiri lakes become increasingly more contaminated. It became apparent that the dyers considered it the government's responsibility and seemed resigned to the prospect of having to move at some stage waste restrictions are enforced. Unfortunately, given the volatile political situation in Kashmir, I doubt a comprehensive government waste management program will be actioned any time soon.

#### 5.6.5 Mapping — digital and direct interactivity between the researcher/facilitator/user, Kashmiri facilitator and artisans in co-design project three

With the aim of building on the knowledge of user participant interactions documented in projects one and two, I returned to the map of Kashmir shawl artisanal processes to define a co-design strategy for engagement and exchange between artisans and users that will assist in the planning and enactment of future co-design projects. A component whose necessity became evident in a co-design project with intercultural and geographically separated stakeholders is digital communication. To determine how and when my interactions with the shawl community as researcher, facilitator and user in co-design project three would

optimally take place, before the project commenced, I was able to map, as Figure 5.23 depicts, when exchanges would benefit from my direct involvement, and when digital communication would be sufficient.

The role of facilitators from within the artisan community, who are familiar with the processes as well as having existing relationships with the artisans involved, was also pivotal to the co-design projects' proceeding. My early exchanges with Qaiser Beigh via WhatsApp enabled us to together plan designs for the products to be woven in the natural dye project. Qaiser's cautionary approach of first experimenting with limited colours proved prudent while, based on my business knowledge of the most popular purchases, I suggested having scarves, instead of shawls, woven. The minimum of six pieces requested by the *barangur* for loom threading proved not to be restrictive, due to Qaiser's relationship with the weaver. The weaver was prepared to weave weft stripes in natural undyed pashmina in some of the pieces and the others all in one colour, either indigo, or the Sappan wood dye's dusty pink. Consequently, we could broaden the range of scarf designs to be produced.

To further develop the range of scarves while keeping within the cultural context of the Kashmir shawl community, I proposed that some of the plain scarves be later embroidered on the border areas in undyed thread, either white or beige. I visited co-design project one's embroiderer, Majid Ganie, while I was in Kashmir to discuss ideas for the embroidery designs. I brought images of old Kashmiri embroidery sourced from books, and Majid showed me examples of his own work that he had embroidered in only one colour. Later I went with my brother-in-law, Ayaz Hakim, the facilitator for projects one and two, to see *naqash* Shah Nawaz Phalgroo, son of Habib Phalgroo, the master embroiderer discussed in Chapter Two. Although he looked at the designs I had sourced, he explained that each *naqash* creates his own designs that are carved into wood blocks for printing on the pashmina scarves or shawls ready for embroidery. When I noted that most of the wood block designs that I have seen used in the Kashmir shawl community are traditional compositions, Shah Nawaz reflected upon his own design process that begins with one central motif, such as a paisley shape, which he then builds the design around. We decided upon some small *buti* or flower designs, illustrated in Figure 5.22 from his collection to be printed and subsequently embroidered as border designs on two plain indigo scarves from the January dyeing session. The progress of the embroidery was shared with me via WhatsApp.



*Figure 5.22. Experimental placement of buti wood block designs on two indigo scarves ready for embroidery.*  
Digital photograph by Deborah Emmett.

Exchanging design information through digital connection and working directly with the dyers and embroiderers correlates to an anthropological approach. In co-design project three, instead of studying the artisans through observation, I am actively involved with them as a method of learning and making, and not just the researcher bringing information about the use of natural dyes to the Kashmir shawl community. Unlike conventional co-design's use of toolkits that tend to enact an imagined scenario or development of a prototype, I found that the artisans prefer hands-on experimentation, unafraid to make mistakes with materials, even the expensive pashmina fibre, as they focused on developing their skills.

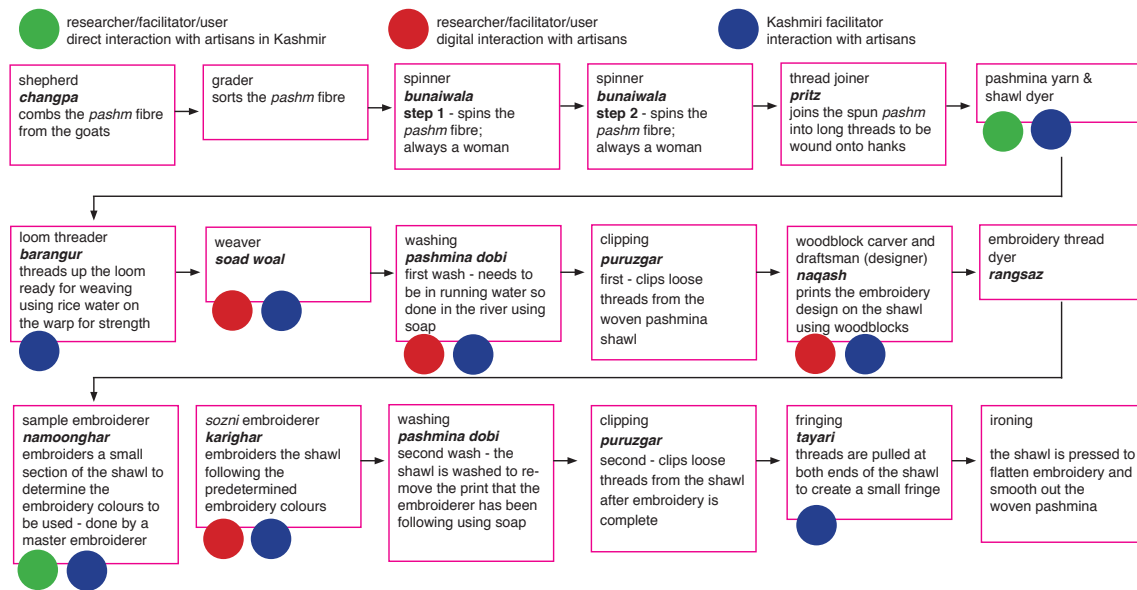


Figure 5.23. Diagram of the Kashmir shawl artisans' production processes mapping digital and direct interactions between co-design project three's Kashmiri facilitator and myself as researcher/facilitator/user.

Diagram developed by Deborah Emmett

### 5.6.6 Conclusion: outcomes of the co-design project three and its contribution to knowledge, summary of emergent co-design methods

The artisans involved in co-design project three agreed that the reintroduction of natural dyes into the handcrafted pashmina community of Kashmir is worthwhile continuing beyond the conclusion of this research. Like any slow fashion story, it will develop over time. The *rangrez*, Shabir, commented that the natural dye processes took much longer than dyeing with synthetic dyes, but believed it would become quicker as he became more familiar with the techniques. The focus on developing the natural dye techniques dominated this project diminishing the conversation about the runoff effect of synthetic dyes into the Kashmir waterways. Water management is an environmental concern in Kashmir and in future research I intend to examine initiatives underway that might be relevant to the Kashmir shawl community.

Collaboration between the project participants is necessary to refine the process, with the artisans' knowledge of dyeing pashmina fibre guiding how they can push its parameters. Watching them, I learnt that being more flexible, and less concerned about materials; to the artisans, experimenting with the process has more value — things can be redone. Thus, experimentation becomes a co-design strategy that has emerged from working in the context of an artisan community. Now that Shabir and Nazir have been provided with easy-to-use materials like the fructose and natural

dyes in powdered form, they are able to independently experiment with the natural dye techniques. In the long term, I plan to experiment with the dyers using local materials like walnuts and saffron that, traditionally, were sources of the natural dye formulae in Kashmir.

While participating in the dyeing sessions in Kashmir, I documented the artisans and their processes using video to create a visual story for sharing with them, and with potential users of the natural dyed scarves. Visual storytelling is a co-design strategy that I consider of paramount importance for communication and connectivity when working in an intercultural situation where linguistic and geographic distances apply. Part of facilitating this co-design project, and its aim of developing products that are sustainable materially, as well as financially, for the Kashmir shawl community, necessarily involves educating future users. The scarves produced using natural dyes will be expensive, compared to pashmina dyed synthetically because of the additional costs of materials and in processing time, but by telling the story behind the products, I consider that sustainability-conscious customers will be receptive.

### 5.7 [yourgoldenhands.org](http://yourgoldenhands.org) website: its twofold purpose and contribution to future co-design projects

As a stage to exhibit the textiles created in the three co-design projects of this practice-based research, I have used my background in graphic design to create a website, *yourgoldenhands.org*. The purpose of the website is twofold. First, throughout the duration of the co-design projects, I have made four videos that not only document the making processes of the shawls and interactions between the project participants but are also visual narratives about the slow fashion concept and perceptions of value with comments recorded by both the users and artisans involved. These videos are included on the website as digital presentations to promote awareness of and a curiosity towards an ongoing, sustainable outcome for the continuation of co-design projects in the Kashmir shawl community. The homepage of the website will showcase images of the completed textiles, which along with the videos, will therefore become a repository of projects one, two and three for use by the artisans, users, and future customers.

The possibilities provided by the artisans' relatively recent access to digital connectivity with a wider audience using their smartphones has enabled the intercultural co-design projects to proceed. The importance and necessitation of digital connectivity for co-designing in this research became more apparent with the global curtailment of cross-border activities that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. The second purpose of the website is its functioning as a platform for

future co-design connections between the artisans and interested user participants. Menu links on *yourgoldenhands.org* will take prospective customers to webpages where they can find more information about co-design projects as well as a form for registering their interest in being involved.

While causing some modifications to the planned *modus operandi* of the projects, using digital platforms allowed new connections and relationships to be made, as well as providing a means of finding solutions for communicating processes, which impacts future projects that, for example, use natural dyes. The increased use of digital communication and digital design platforms are key strategies for sustaining future co-design projects between geographically separated participants. While I will facilitate this platform initially, I envisage that in the future, the artisans potentially drive the digital interactions. This website will ultimately become public-facing and used as a tool to encourage future co-design opportunities for the artisans of the Kashmir shawl community. The model could be replicated for co-designing with direct user participation in other traditional textile artisan communities throughout India.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion - Critical reflection and significance of research to determine intercultural co-design strategies for the sustainable future of artisans in Indian traditional handcrafted textile communities

### 6.1 Introduction

The Prologue and Chapter One of this dissertation introduced the aims of the research and the main conceptual frameworks for developing co-design strategies appropriate to sustaining future practice for traditional textile artisan communities in India, focusing on the Kashmir shawl community as representative of these artisan communities. Apposite to the slow fashion ethos that emphasises the use of local materials, traditional craft techniques and small-scale production, the co-design projects' strategies involve the users in knowing the source of the materials and the stages of the shawl making process, with the aim of creating connection between the users and the makers. By designing together, the users and artisans created a collaborative relationship of sharing ideas, which intersects traditional design and production methods, with emergent affinities, practices and value systems discoverable only in a site- and situation-specific practice. I consider the correlation between slow fashion and co-design theory lies in a shift of focus to values that privilege developing relationships between participants, the significance of that experience being imperative to sustaining artisanal production and cultural heritage.

This research has shown that aspects of value creation become complex when they operate in an intercultural context. To analyse value creation in the three co-design projects undertaken for this research, I distinguished the outcomes by three qualities: relational value, processual value and material value which interact with the five main themes of the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter Two, namely sustainability of Indian artisanal cultural heritage, co-designing in an informal economy outside regulated, industrialised structures, roles of facilitators in co-design, digital connectivity, and differing perceptions of value.

'In the future,' Sanders and Stappers predict, 'the new co-design languages that support and facilitate the many varieties of cross-cultural communication will become highly valued.'<sup>219</sup> Here and now, the methodology for co-designing within the hierarchy of regulated, industrialised structures is most often determined by the designer and design researcher, or by someone like a 'facilitator' who assumes a mediating role between users/customers and artisans. Although Sanders and Stappers foresee that co-design will involve the collaboration of more stakeholders, including 'everyday people,' in the initial stages of a product's development, its

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<sup>219</sup>Sanders and Stappers, "Co-Creation," 16.

methods remain based in an established design culture of industry; for 'collective creativity' to emerge in design cultures and, in turn, influence world cultures, co-design strategies must communicate ways of 'helping people learn how best to function in the generative front end of the product development process.'<sup>220</sup>

This research is positioned within a domain away from conventional co-design, one where the stakeholders are from textile artisan communities embedded in the informal economy of Indian industry and society, and the users of their products, from a markedly different culture and economy, namely Australia. Therefore, the methods devised for the co-design projects had to support intercultural communication and diversity of value systems. Including users in the artisanal design process requires a co-design 'language' created using new tools and methods for designing, and avoiding the conventional assumption that co-design revolves around the designer or design researcher.

Chapter Three assessed conventional co-design methodology, which adopts the ethnographical approach of observation. There, I reasoned that an anthropological approach, with its emphasis on making *with*, and not making *for*, was more appropriate to the co-design projects constituting this research. Results from the survey of Australian collectors of Indian handcrafted textiles presented in Chapter Three, and the case study research in Chapter Four documenting contemporary collaborations between textile artisanal communities in India and designers, design students, textile companies and social enterprises, helped me to ascertain existing assumptions about artisanal craft practice, and to prepare for the three co-design projects then critically discussed in Chapter Five.

## 6.2 Relationship building: between artisans and users from different cultures; the roles of facilitators

Communication, designing and making between the participants underpinned developing the co-design strategies for the projects. However, the thought processes of the artisans and the users in the intercultural setting of this research were quite different. Therefore, their finding commonalities and productive differences through information exchange about universal interests like family composition and domestic settings, and their shared interests in textiles and craft, was a means to initiate relationships that were sustained throughout the projects. Storytelling via video was a vital component. The first videos were of Deborah Anderson and Jane Rich in their homes discussing their shawl collections and design requests for projects one and two and later, I filmed Abdul Majid Ganie at home in Kashmir, where his family work together embroidering shawls, each story

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<sup>220</sup>Sanders and Stappers, 16.

contributing to a familiarity between the participants as they learnt about each other. I used video to document the projects throughout the research initially as a visual method of intercultural sharing to offset the language differences that may inhibit relationship building.

Collectively, the videos came to form the research narrative. Video recordings also proved to be of more value to the participants than the Zoom platform. Zoom meetings became a regularly used communication mode in Australia, India, and elsewhere during the COVID-19 pandemic, so its application to extend relational contact between the artisans and Australian participants seemed beneficial. However, intermittent internet connections, the artisans' reliance on smartphone devices, and the platform's reliance on spoken language resulted in often unproductive meetings. When I returned to Kashmir in January 2022 and visited Majid, he expressed his frustration about language constraints:

'I have a disadvantage in that I can't speak English. I prefer face to face conversations with you in the presence of a Kashmiri person who can translate it to me in Kashmiri. I want to send my daughter to learn English so that you can communicate with her in English and she will translate to me in Kashmiri what exactly you want.' (*Artisan interview 1*)

Although the artisans should not be made to feel they need to speak the language of the users of their products, language differences are a real and intractable obstacle for intercultural co-design communication. Majid was pragmatic in his response, recognising that most of his customers will speak English. His practical solution, to have his daughter translate for him, expresses a desire to have greater independence in co-design collaborations while also involving his younger family members in the business of his craft.

Majid alluded to the benefits of direct contact between artisans and their customers. While that is not always possible, I consider it is the actual lived experience of co-designing within the artisan community that establishes more enduring relationships. While working with Qaiser, Shabir and Nazir on the third, natural dye project, we shared moments over chai (Indian tea) where we showed each other smartphone-captured photographs of family, homes and textiles. At the same time, we experienced together a way of learning, through observation and experimentation, about the natural dye processes as they evolved.

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the necessity of involving facilitators from within artisan communities in co-design projects. Indeed, the roles of Ayaz Hakim in projects one and two, and Qaiser Beigh in project three, were integral to the progression of the projects. Their existing relationships with other members of the Kashmir shawl community provided a sense of trust between the projects' artisan

participants, while their knowledge of specific artisanal processes was invaluable in engaging the user participants. On a practical level, the need for language translation, and their physical presence, particularly in transferring the textiles from one artisan to the next, made them a part of the methodology for the projects. My own experience as a facilitator in liaising with Deborah and Jane was more complicated than I expected; their reliance on me to mediate each design decision for their shawls suggested that in future intercultural co-design initiatives, strategies should aim to foster the greater independence of users. In facilitating the reintroduction of natural dyes in co-design project three, after my initially researching and supplying the dye materials and communicating making methods provided by Sodhani Biotech, the co-design approach was founded on strong mutual engagement between the participants in shared learning during the production process, an experiential outcome of this research which, to me, was more important than the completed textiles it produced.

### 6.3 Differing evaluation of processes and materials by the co-design project participants: analysis of artisanal processes in conjunction with digital connectivity

The title of this dissertation, *Sone athe*, is from the Kashmiri expression that translates as 'you've got golden hands' and refers to gifted artisans and their handcraft skills. Although the artisans of the Kashmir shawl community work with costly pashmina fibre, they value their skills most — the reputations of master artisans in any of the specific processes like weaving or embroidery are more highly regarded than the pashmina product made. Reflecting upon certain aspects of the projects, specifically Jane's rejection of her shawl, and the initial problems experienced by the weaver when using the indigo dyed pashmina yarn, I was faced with a conundrum that relates to the artisans' skill-based perception of value and their focus on their own process speciality. The structure of the community wherein artisans separately perform their skill in the making process then pass the textile on for the next means that no one person is responsible for its entire production. Errors remain unchecked with no artisan being accountable. Usually, a middleman controls the manufacture of pashminas and pays the artisans in instalments; if mistakes are made, he refuses to make payments. The facilitators in the co-design projects played a different role, as a nexus between the artisan community and Australian participants so the artisans could benefit from direct interactions with their customers. Again, the master embroiderer Majid proposed a solution for future intercultural co-design projects, as quoted in Chapter Five: he understands all the processes making a shawl entails, pointing out that the embroidering of the shawls is the lengthiest. On that basis, Majid suggested that he facilitate the co-design projects and take responsibility for all the processes, and knowledge exchange with

the project participants until all are mutually agreed on the design and satisfied with the outcome. This approach could potentially give greater independence to the shawl community as stakeholders in a collaboration.

A motivating aim of this research was to investigate the sustainability of the practices of artisan communities within the context of the Kashmir shawl community's production of textiles according to the familiar traditional heritage of the artisans. The emergent co-design strategies emphasised developing process solutions involving intercultural participants. This valuing of experience diverges from the aims of conventional co-design, where ideational input, elicited from the user with speculative probes and tools, is used to develop a prototype, but control of the product's creation remains with the designing team.

Digital connectivity made it possible for the Australian users to partake in the design processes of the Kashmir shawl community in co-design projects one and two. Access to smartphone technology provided options for direct communication as the basis of inclusivity with the users through the digital platforms of WhatsApp and Zoom. While enabling new ways of working, these co-design strategies also exposed the deficiencies relating to digital communication between participants, which have implications for the future sustainability of the projects. The inadequate quality of photographs showing materials and video documenting processes sent to Deborah, Jane, and me from the artisans via WhatsApp caused confusion and uncertainty for the users about the shawl designs. Assuming that most users in any similar digital-based exchange will be unfamiliar with the artisanal techniques depicted, the clarity of images is crucial. Given that digital technology will be a prerequisite to facilitating the design process for intercultural co-design projects to proceed, the artisans require better quality digital devices. I propose to provide digital tablets to the facilitators in Kashmir for documentation and communication between the artisans and users in future co-design projects.

We did eventually resolve the issues around the embroidery colours to be used for the shawl designs after studying WhatsApp images of the freehand motifs embroidered by Majid on the edge of the shawls. In future projects, however, an alternative strategy would be to courier *namoodache* — the small, embroidered pieces of pashmina made in the Kashmir shawl process tradition — with a mix of the previously discussed colour combinations to the users in Australia, or elsewhere. I believe this would enable the users to engage in the material reality of the design process, replacing the need to rely totally on digital representation of the textiles. It was evident that Deborah and Jane found this process challenging. The image of textile on a screen cannot transmit its essential tangible quality. In co-design project three, my physical presence at the dyers' workshop gave me the opportunity to participate in the making process. There, the material value of the naturally dyed

pashmina, including, for example, the nuances of colour, could be assessed directly by all the participants without having to negotiate the vagaries of its digital depiction. Vagaries notwithstanding, the use of digital communication is essential to the sustainability of intercultural co-design projects when geographic separation of participants prevails.

The strategy of mapping the artisanal processes of the Kashmir shawl community informed the optimal timing of communications between the co-design participants in this research, about which of the processes necessitated the users' interaction and which were most successful, via digital or direct channels. Indeed, the collective creativity of the co-design projects embodied in the sharing and exchange of stories and design concepts required only a few of the eighteen artisans involved in creating Kashmir shawls to interact with the user participants. The benefit of the mapping strategy will assist in planning and streamlining future co-design projects in Indian textile communities.

Documenting the steps of this research has shown that the co-design strategies developed for the projects remained emergent throughout the research, although, reflecting on how the strategies affected outcomes, I would suggest devising methods specifically for processes I consider will improve the users' experience in future intercultural co-design projects. Cultural differences will influence assumptions underlying value, and what the participants value will emerge in the co-creation process.

#### 6.4 Sustainability: future directions for co-design to sustain the cultural heritage and handcraft practices of Indian textile artisan communities

In concluding this research, I plan to initiate strategies for the continuation of co-designing between textile artisan communities in India and users of their handcrafted products globally. As advocated by Judy Frater and Ashoke Chatterjee in Chapter Four, the artisan communities must become resilient and self-reliant if their traditional craft practices are to survive and flourish. Rather than relying upon external designers and other collaborators to grow their markets, initiatives must come from within the communities. The significance of the co-design projects of this research is the direct engagement of artisans with the users of their products through which customers who value these handcrafted textiles are educated about the traditions of their designing and making while also having the opportunity to personalise the product through their own design input. Instead of makers and customers remaining faceless to each other, the project participants connected, came to know each other, and built relationships.

For these co-design projects I collaborated with Kashmiri male artisans known to my family but I am also aware of the changing social context within this community that I would like to investigate further, in particular the emerging role of women in the shawl production. Although the focus of this research on the Kashmir shawl community presents a microcosmic version of the many diverse Indian textile communities, strategies devised for communication, storytelling, designing and making between the participants could potentially be applied to such projects in other artisan communities. In future work I intend to explore how adaptable the methodology used for the three co-design projects is in a different context, including other artisanal communities, or on a greater scope involving collaborative NGOs.

Through participating in the projects, the artisans became aware of the barriers that prevent their active and direct involvement in a global market, and the subsequent benefits such exposure would bring to their economic and cultural sustainability. The artisan Majid identified the pertinence of language differences and accountability, while the project facilitators, Ayaz and Qaiser, suggested methods for experimentation within the context of their craft that could engage the users while resolving technical issues.

The contribution to knowledge made by the three co-design projects has emerged from practice: it is embodied in the experiences of the intercultural participants interacting together with sometimes surprising results. The website I developed from the projects' documentation, *yourgoldenhands.org*, showcases the co-design practices of the projects and the textiles created, but also stands as a platform for future co-design connections between the artisans and interested user participants. The website aims to encourage future co-design opportunities for the artisans of the Kashmir shawl community, a representative way forward for sustaining the practice of textile artisan communities in India, who, through access to digital connectivity, can directly reach a global audience.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 - UNSW HREA clearance letter



18-Dec-2018

Dear Associate Professor Elizabeth Williamson,

<b>Project Title</b>	Artisans, designers, and customers of handcrafted textile designs: new working models from the artisan's perspective to provide a sustainable future for traditional textile communities in India
<b>HC No</b>	HC180916
<b>Re</b>	HC180916 Notification of Ethics Approval
<b>Approval Period</b>	18-Dec-2018 - 17-Dec-2023

Thank you for submitting the above research project to the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** for ethical review. This project was considered by the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** at its meeting on **13-Dec-2018**.

I am pleased to advise you that the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** has granted ethical approval of this research project. The following condition(s) must be met before data collection commences:

**Conditions of Approval:**

N/A

**Conditions of Approval - All Projects:**

- The Chief Investigator will immediately report anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project.
- The Chief Investigator will seek approval from the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** for any modifications to the protocol or other project documents.
- The Chief Investigator will notify the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** immediately of any protocol deviation or adverse events or safety events related to the project.
- The Chief Investigator will report to the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** annually in the specified format and notify the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** when the project is completed at all sites.
- The Chief Investigator will notify the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** if the project is discontinued before the expected completion date, with reasons provided.
- The Chief Investigator will notify the **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** of his or her inability to continue as Coordinating Chief Investigator including the name of and contact information for a replacement.

The **HREAP B: Arts, Humanities & Law** Terms of Reference, Standard Operating Procedures, membership and standard forms are available from <https://research.unsw.edu.au/research-ethics-and-compliance-support-recs>.

## Appendix 2 – Survey 1

### **CUSTOMERS WHO PURCHASE AND COLLECT HANDCRAFTED TEXTILES**

Provision of name and age is the participant's choice

#### **PhD Research Study**

Why are customers who purchase artisanal, handcrafted clothing and textiles attracted to these products, for example, their attributes of natural fibres, hand-worked embroidery or printing? Or a curiosity about those traditional textile artisans who create these textiles and the skills that they have learnt.

This short survey is designed to gain an insight into why customers or users buy and collect artisanal handcrafted textiles.

1. What makes you attracted to handcrafted textiles?

Textiles are incredibly varied and reflect the culture in which they are made. So many elements make up a textile, so that I find them endlessly fascinating. I find the irregularities in hand crafted textiles charming and because they are generally made of natural fibres, the subtle variation in these, adds another layer of visual interest. I am humbled when I think about the hours of effort that go into production.

2. Are you interested in knowing about the cultural significance / history of the product?

Definitely....often this layer of meaning is not obvious immediately, so it's a great value to have this explained.

3. Are you interested to know about the techniques used to develop the product?

Yes, this helps to appreciate them

4. Are you interested in knowing about who made the product?

yes

5. Do the materials used to make the product influence your decision in purchasing it?

Well its always good to find natural materials and materials that I am unfamiliar with...I still think about a Japanese obi made of moth cocoons, I loved meeting my first yak, I am growing to love linen everything and would always favour baby alpaca to keep me warm

6. Does the cost of the product matter if you want to purchase the product?

Price is always a consideration... and prices always seem inexpensive considering the costs involved to make items and their rarity... but no-one has an unlimited budget

7. Do you have a preference in where the product was made?

I generally collect japanese and indian textiles... however this is not exclusive

8. Is the labelling with the product important in providing information about the product and does the labelling influence your decision to buy the product?

Its good to have written information from its source to keep, however its absence wouldn't be a deterrent.

9. Do you have family or friends, either now or in the past, who were involved in handcrafted textile crafts?

Yes...my mother knitted and sewed, I know many people in india who make hand crafted cloth for a living,

10. Do handcrafted textiles that you own have special meaning for you?

They remind me of people who I have met and travel experiences...they are humbling.....  
to consider how other people around the world live and older pieces remind me how  
complicated and laborious techniques used to be

11. Would you like to be involved in the design process of a handcrafted textiles? What  
expertise would you bring to the co-design process?

Yes I am already involved. Sometimes its just choosing colours that I feel will be better  
received in my clients, or sizing that is more useful. Sometimes I take an existing technique  
and adjust it to suit my designs

12. Would you like a handcrafted textile piece customised for your own use?

Yes... I always look out for different applications

13. Do you think the making of handcrafted textiles is sustainable?

Yes absolutely. I have visited many locations where hand crafted textiles are made and it  
seems to be completely sustainable. The best example that I have seen is eri silk in assam,  
india. Of course in many places people are paid very little per hour and live simpler lives  
materially.

## Appendix 3 – Survey 2

Answers for the survey:

1. Because other relatives were interested in fabric, I was, also, from an early age. Also, I first went to India in 1969 and was fascinated by the textiles I saw there.
2. I have also been very interested in the cultural significance and story of the product. I found a friend in India in 1969 who shared my interests, she took me to very interesting shops I would never have found otherwise, including ones with antique fabrics.
3. I am very interested in finding out about the techniques used. I have visited Bagru, to observe block printing.
4. Yes, I am interested in who created the product. There was a shop in Chandigarh where you could watch the craftsmen creating embroidered, appliquéd and drawn patterns on materials.
5. Yes, the materials used have a very important influence. Apart from the texture of natural fibres being more appealing, I have a severe autoimmune reaction after wearing synthetic material on a very hot day.
6. Yes, the cost of the product can have an influence- perhaps I can have a moment of transient pleasure in the shop or the gallery.
7. I do prefer the sorts of patterns, colours, techniques and fabrics from India.
8. Apart from making sure that synthetic fibre has not been used, the label is not so important to me.
9. Going back several generations in my family, there were people involved in fabrics. My great, great, great grandfather was a calico printer, his son was a textile designer and my great uncle had a textile emporium in Glasgow.
10. Yes, the handcrafted textiles I own do have a special significance for me.  
I have a kalamkari palampore that I obtained from a maharajah in India. I took it to the NGA for it to be assessed. They dated it to the early 19th century, also I found out then that the technique was kalamkari- drawn with a bamboo pen, I had always assumed that it was block printed. Also, I have two phulkaris that were embroidered by my husband's grandmother and great grandmother on each side of his family. I have other pieces that remind me of places I've been to, including block prints, Kashmiri shawls- even though I never actually made it to Kashmir. Also, I have covers of kantha work, both as recycled fabrics and embroidery from Bengal.
11. Yes, designing fabrics would be interesting. I went to both NAS and COFA, qualifying to teach Visual Arts, which I did for forty years. My favourite subject was always printmaking. Even for the HSC, my major work was printed on fabric.
12. Yes, I would like a handcrafted textile piece customised for my own use.
13. Yes, the making of handcrafted textiles is sustainable, as long as people are given adequate payment for it.

## Appendix 4 – Survey 3

### **CUSTOMERS WHO PURCHASE AND COLLECT HANDCRAFTED TEXTILES**

Provision of name and age is the participant's choice

#### **PhD Research Study**

Why are customers who purchase artisanal, handcrafted clothing and textiles attracted to these products, for example, their attributes of natural fibres, hand-worked embroidery or printing? Or a curiosity about those traditional textile artisans who create these textiles and the skills that they have learnt.

This short survey is designed to gain an insight into why customers or users buy and collect artisanal handcrafted textiles.

1. What makes you attracted to handcrafted textiles?  
I have always appreciated art and craft, especially ancient craft that have been practised since the time immemorial. The history of their craft make the product much more valuable and interesting than generic machine made product.
2. Are you interested in knowing about the cultural significance / history of the product?  
Yes.
3. Are you interested to know about the techniques used to develop the product?  
Yes.
4. Are you interested in knowing about who made the product?  
Yes.
5. Do the materials used to make the product influence your decision in purchasing it?  
Yes
6. Does the cost of the product matter if you want to purchase the product?  
Yes
7. Do you have a preference in where the product was made?  
Yes. I prefer to buy hand crafted product made in the region I originally came from, which is SEA for the purpose to support the local industry.
8. Is the labelling with the product important in providing information about the product and does the labelling influence your decision to buy the product?  
Yes
9. Do you have family or friends, either now or in the past, who were involved in handcrafted textile crafts?  
Not really, unless if the technique were used to produce art pieces count. As I have known artist using 'batik' technique to produce contemporary art, myself included.
10. Do handcrafted textiles that you own have special meaning for you?  
Yes, some of them were passed down from family members.
11. Would you like to be involved in the design process of a handcrafted textiles? What expertise would you bring to the co-design process?

I would love to learn how to weave if opportunity present itself.

12. Would you like a handcrafted textile piece customised for your own use?

Not really.

13. Do you think the making of handcrafted textiles is sustainable?

Yes, I think there are more people who appreciate exquisite handmade textile today.

## Appendix 5 – Survey 4

### **SURVEY 4 – CUSTOMERS WHO PURCHASE AND COLLECT HANDCRAFTED TEXTILES**

Provision of name and age is the participant's choice

#### **PhD Research Study**

Why are customers who purchase artisanal, handcrafted clothing and textiles attracted to these products, for example, their attributes of natural fibres, hand-worked embroidery or printing? Or a curiosity about those traditional textile artisans who create these textiles and the skills that they have learnt.

This short survey is designed to gain an insight into why customers or users buy and collect artisanal handcrafted textiles.

1. What makes you attracted to handcrafted textiles? The fact that someone made them by hand and not a machine. I especially collect older textiles rather than new. For example I have a bag made from scraps of beautiful old embroidered cloth from Myanmar.
2. Are you interested in knowing about the cultural significance / history of the product? That is not so important to me. I am pretty eclectic in what I buy. I don't focus on just one type except I do have quite a few pieces from Gujarat. I like the colours, mirror inserts.
3. Are you interested to know about the techniques used to develop the product? That is not important to me, just the overall effect. But I do prefer embroidery to batik for example so I do zoom in on a particular style. I hadn't thought of it that way. Most of my collection involves some sort of embroidery or tapestry.
4. Are you interested in knowing about who made the product? That is not so important to me. In fact I would probably be horrified if I knew that a young child suffered dreadful hours and conditions to create a piece.
5. Do the materials used to make the product influence your decision in purchasing it? Yes I prefer natural dyes but of course that is not so possible now when most dyes are synthetic. I think that is why I love older textiles.
6. Does the cost of the product matter if you want to purchase the product? Yes of course. I can't afford to buy a very expensive piece no matter how much I love it. I have a budget I need to stick to. Plus I want the product to be functional and long lasting. In 2015 I went to a Women's Refuge in Khimsar that had been set up by a philanthropist, Neela Moti. Every single item was beautifully made. I have a double sided scarf from there that I still can't believe. It has been delicately stitched on each edge and was made with obvious love, not for a cheap commercial tourist venture.
7. Do you have a preference in where the product was made? I love textiles from Asia. In particular India, Bali, Cambodia, Laos.
8. Is the labelling with the product important in providing information about the product and does the labelling influence your decision to buy the product? No most things I buy have no label at all.

9. Do you have family or friends, either now or in the past, who were involved in handcrafted textile crafts? No I don't
10. Do handcrafted textiles that you own have special meaning for you? Yes they do. I love to look at them and have them in almost every room in our house. In fact three were so faded after 40 years that I decided to buy new replacements from Udaipur Rajasthan. Ganesh Emporium. I ended up buying 5 not 3 textiles but when I returned home after a 6 week holiday there I still kept my original 3 faded and now very fragile pieces. I couldn't bear to remove them.
11. Would you like to be involved in the design process of a handcrafted textiles? What expertise would you bring to the co-design process? No I do not need to make it myself.
12. Would you like a handcrafted textile piece customised for your own use? No that is not important to me.
13. Do you think the making of handcrafted textiles is sustainable? Less and less I fear. I heard that the Rabari women in at least one village in Gijurat were instructed not to create their textiles by hand as it wastes too much time. They were asked to take their designs to a machinist

## Appendix 6 - Collaboration interview questions

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – PARTICIPANTS AND TEXTILE ARTISANS INVOLVED IN COLLABORATION CASE STUDY MODELS

1. Name and address
2. What was the project that you participated in?
3. What was your role in the project?
4. Were you sufficiently informed about the aim of the project before it began?
5. Did you have any design input into the project?
6. Did you develop any new skills in the project?
7. Do you think the project benefitted you in any way?
8. Was the project of value to the artisan community?
9. Did the project provide you with knowledge of communities or markets beyond your community?
10. What was the timing of the project?
11. Was it continuous over a certain period?
12. Was your involvement in the project part time or full time?
13. What were the outcomes of the project?
14. Is the project ongoing?

## Appendix 7 - Interview transcript 1 — NIFT - Phuhaar

### **Interview transcript - NIFT - Phuhaar Mathur 11 Feb 2019**

#### **Name and address**

I am Phuhaar Mathur from Delhi. At the moment I am working for Nicobar, a company that contemporises Indian textile designs for interiors and simple women's clothing. This is my final work placement for my course. I am studying textile design.

#### **Discuss the craft cluster project you were involved in**

The project started 12 months beforehand. Our entire class were divided into three groups and sent to different areas in India. I went to Lucknow, Baramunchi, other friends went to Bikaner and others to Murbarapur. Murbarapur has very intricate weaving, Bikaner and Baramunchi has very basic weaving. When we got back we did a huge project, we discussed how the different clusters were developing their fabrics, it is in a very bad state, their living conditions are very poor. They have little knowledge of design so they spend time making a product that will give them no profit, so they live hand to mouth. The products are unsellable. In India if you make a product with say, a particular orange it might sell but outside no one would pick it up from the racks. They have been catering for the masses instead of trying to understand how important the craft is and how they can profit from it. After one year we decided on going to Bikaner. We studied what existing things they did there and discussed other possibilities.

#### **What was your role in Bikaner?**

I was working with the weavers. I designed a woven piece that can be worn as a kurta or as a dress. I had some geometrics going on so a person of 20 to 40+ years can wear it. I brought in colour to the weaving because the artisans only use white. They weave white shawls that are then embroidered. The emphasis is on the embroidery so that is where the value is placed and where the profit goes, not to the weavers. So we wanted to add colour to the weaving so it can be sold as it is.

#### **What was your design input?**

It was their weaving technique, I introduced colour.

#### **What new skills did you learn?**

I already know how to weave on a handloom. We spend two years at NIFT learning to weave, but that's on a sample basis, in Bikaner it is on a production basis. By knowing weaving I understand the feasibility of the production. By going to Bikaner for ten days I could see the actual production working so it's not just theoretical.

#### **How did you relate your idea to the weavers?**

The weavers already belong to a khadi guild and they make pieces for them. They have never seen their products in a store, they don't know what the final product looks like. Some have been to fashion shows but what we did was show them pictures of the product concepts and so they got excited about what could be done with the end product.

#### **How did you get the weaver to do your designs?**

My weaver was very excited to introduce colour into his weaving. His children are not interested in becoming weavers but as they watched him introduce colour they got excited and said Dad we would wear this. Then he got excited as it was the first time his children had shown any interest in 23 years and were coming to his workshop. He asked if he could keep the yarn to make something for his daughter. I told him where to introduce the colour, say blue but then he would say can I repeat this and so on.

**Do you think the project was of value to the artisan community?**

Yes. They are not usually explained why they're asked to weave something but because we stayed for 10 days we could discuss the changes we wanted to make. My weaver could understand that the changes could make the final product more profitable instead of always being only white. He was giving his input and I was giving mine, it was more a co-design thing, actually. Not about the weaving technique but about the aesthetics, he had never worked with these.

**In what way did you benefit from the project?**

I learnt to value the fabric more as by going there I could see the time that goes into it.

**Tell me a little about the costing**

We used merino wool. It was around RS1800 per kg. We did the dyeing ourselves. The artisan was paid a salary of RS500 per day. That was worked out beforehand.

**How did you spend your time during the 10 days of the project?**

For the first two days we set up the loom. The weaver would work the when he had break we would take over. Then for the next eight days he used the loom weaving asking what colours needed to be introduced and where.

**Is this project ongoing for the artisans?**

We would have to get back to them after college, but they would definitely want to work with us and I want to work with them. They are getting small projects with designers. The only issue for them is their kids aren't picking it up. We need to keep going there and tell them how important it is that they stay. The weavers need us to keep going there to continue making the product. Their market is mostly for shawls so we need to show them another market.

**Who are the weavers?**

They are Hindu men. They are agricultural based weavers, they work in the fields but when there is work they stay home and weave. They learnt to weave by watching their older relatives.

**What's your plans?**

When I finish college I would like to work with the artisans.

## Appendix 8 - Interview transcript 2 – NIFT - Prakhar

### **Interview transcript - NIFT - Prakhar Chayhan 11 Feb 2019**

#### **Name and address**

I am Prakhar Chauhan from Delhi. I have always liked sketching and fine art, the NIFT Fashion Design course was mentioned to me at school. I thought I could use my sketching for textile design motif development. Now I am in the final semester, semester 8 and working for the designer Abhishek Paatni.

#### **Discuss the NIFT Craft Cluster Initiative course**

There are two modules where we do craft cluster development. The first is in the fourth semester where we go to a craft cluster and we have to document everything – the local culture, the geography and the actual craft processes. Their lifestyle and products. Then when we return to NIFT we make a written document with photographs. Anyone reading it should be able to learn about that craft cluster. We are there for 9-10 days. Then in seventh semester we go to another craft cluster for product development. In the period between we learn how we can help the artisans to become self-sufficient by developing products that are in demand in the market. Beforehand we do a research survey about the artisans' products sold in India and see why they are not selling, we find the gaps and go to the craft cluster to try to improve the products.

#### **Define the term craft cluster**

A craft cluster is in a place or village that has a specific ancestral technique of a craft that they have been doing for ages, passed down from grandparents. It is like a geographic indicator where a craft is done in a specific way only by the artisans in that location and nowhere else in India, that is termed a craft cluster.

#### **How are the craft clusters identified?**

They are mostly rural based. We are told by our faculty members because they have been in touch with different craft clusters throughout India but some are registered by geographic indicators recorded by the Indian government, they are quite famous like the Arjakh printers in Gujarat.

#### **Discuss your project with the craft cluster in Bikaner**

There are 37 students in our batch, we went to Bikaner to a self help group there, where half worked with weavers there and half worked with embroidery artisans. Bikaner has a lot of crafts that are done locally so our group was divided. We went for nine days and worked with 19 women embroidery artisans, we each had one or two artisans to work with for product development.

#### **What was your role in the project?**

Before going there we had to do market research on the products that were coming from Bikaner and sold to shops in Delhi near Connaught Place like Khadi Bhavan, Bikaner Bhavan and Bikaner House. I determined that embroidered products for men were not selling. I like wearing things that are a bit loud so I wanted to develop a product that I would wear and would sell in the market, there had to be a balance between the product being loud and too tacky. We took the theme of Panchatantra, these are ancestral tales told to us by our

grandparents. Everyone in India knows these tales, they are bedtime stories with animals in them. Each story has a moral at the end of it. We chose this theme because we knew the artisans would also know these stories. I took the story of the two-headed bird who were jealous of each other. One gave the other one poison but of course they both died as they shared the same body. The moral of the story is we need to work as a team. It's a grim story so what I did is have a motif with the two-headed bird eating fruit then instead of dying the birds separates into two [shows documentation]. I developed a shirt, I bought printed fabric and had the bird motifs embroidered on the shirt.

**Did the artisan you worked with have any input into the design?**

I told the artisan about the product and she suggested using brighter colours so the motifs would be more in contrast with the shirt fabric print. The embroidery stitch is called *katchchi*, it translates to rough. It is an easy embroidery stitch. Two other stitches were also used to fill areas in and as an outline.

**Did you learn new skills?**

The most important skill I learnt was communication. They had a way of talking and we had another way, so I had to bridge that communication gap. I talked in a way that they would understand. I cracked jokes. I was the only guy in the group and the women embroiderers were a bit scared of me. I cracked jokes and they soon knew that I was a friend.

**How did you benefit from the project?**

One was learning about the embroidery. Another was making relationships with the artisans because in the future I would like to use embroidery again, learning about the different embroidery stitches. Also the market research I did beforehand, what products sell and what don't.

**What was the value to the artisans and their community?**

We had to make products that they could replicate so in the future they could make and sell them.

**How long did the project go for?**

From start to finish three to four months. This module called 'Cluster Development Project' starts with a brief about the cluster group, then we do our research and then we are divided, some to work with woven fabrics and the others with embroidered pieces. We present our market research and design ideas before going to Bikaner. We were in Bikaner for nine days. We had time when we got back to finish the product. I put the bird stencils on running cloth and then after the embroidery was done had the shirt made.

**Is the project ongoing for the artisans?**

For some families it might be. We showed them how to make products that will sell in Delhi. They can replicate these products

**FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

*The students' initial research of different clusters is discussed and the cluster that is seen as the most in need of product development assistance is the one the students go to.*

## Appendix 9 - Interview transcript 3 - Indigene - Ruchi and Jaya

### Interview transcript - Indigene - Ruchi and Jaya 19 Jan 2019

#### Name and address

Ruchi Tripathi, co-founder of Indigene came to Delhi around 20 years ago to study from Uttar Pradesh. First under graduate study then design at NIFT. Jaya Bhatt, co-founder and partner of Indigene, originally from Maharashtra but came to Delhi for education. Studied design together at NIFT.

#### How did Indigene start?

When studying we became very inspired by the handmade techniques. We would go on field trips to villages and see the techniques. We did two graduation projects with two organisations in Rajasthan which took us into the world of handmade. We ended up working for them for a few years and that gave us a base to work with the handmade. After number of years of working for different people and organisations we wanted to start something of our own - Indigene where we could bring a number of crafts together. Usually something is woven or embroidered, only one technique is used, but we wanted to bring an amalgamation of techniques together.

#### When did Indigene start?

We started in 2011-12. We started with a wholesale model where we did a couple of collections for a customer. We also did exhibitions for a couple of years along with our wholesale orders. Then in 2016 we launched the label at the Fashion Week in Mumbai. We were already retailing in a couple of stores but that helped us to start selling the Indigene brand in other cities. We now have Indigene clothing carried by a number of designer stores who sell different designer labels and we have online sales.

#### What is your role in the business?

Ruchi: Design concepts and planning for the season we both discuss but then I take care of the sampling and production while Jaya does the front end supplying the shops.

Jaya: We discuss the design process at the beginning of the season. We both do the conceptualisation and then bifurcate.

#### What is your starting point to begin a collection?

Ruchi: It is based on the seasons. We do two collections a year – spring/summer and autumn/winter. Then we think of what is inspiring us at that time, it could be certain textures, cultural textiles or certain motifs or palette. We do research and then focus on what becomes the centre of the inspiration. We put together a mood board of colours and textures. As we are both trained textile designers we first think of the fabric to develop. This can take up to six months for sampling. We work with dedicated crafts – Ajrakh prints and Bengal weaving for the fabrics. We conceptualise the prints keeping Ajrakh in mind. We like to visit the cluster because changes can occur. It might not come out as we visualised, how it will work out when two colours are put together with the Ajrakh printing technique. We try to push the artisans to experiment a bit. Mostly we do the concepts on the computer and send it to them. Luckily the artisans are all email and WhatsApp savvy. Sometimes we

ask for swatches of textures or colours we want and they send them. They are pretty independent.

### **How did you start the connection with the artisans?**

Jaya: From our earlier work with organisations we made this base of connections with the artisans. This gave them and us confidence in working together. We had built the relationships so when we approached them to say we were starting something of our own they were happy to be part of it. The eight years of work we had done before Indigene was very fruitful that way. We work with the same partnerships always because of the question of sustainability. If you move from one craft group to another in the next season it is not sustainable. We stay with the embroidery women in Delhi, Ajrakh printers and Bengal weaving.

Ruchi: For garment stitching we work with a local group of women, a livelihood program in Nizamuddin. They do our stitching from season to season. These women were trained by the organisation but we push them skill development. They were only trained in making basic garments like kurtas and tops but now they can do pintucks, pleating and jackets. It's like training on the job.

### **Do the artisans have any design input?**

Jaya: Particularly with the printers they will say if something is not possible. They say we can do a sample but don't expect it in production. The weavers will use their expertise to say if something is possible or not particularly for production – a few hundred meters. In printing we will tweak the colours if the printer says it won't work. In embroidery the women will say the stitch is too tight or loose etc so we come to some agreement, a compromise.

Ruchi: An artisan group, like the 15-20 embroidery women are used to doing things in a certain way. If one season one type of embroidery or motif is used, they take a while to get used to a new motif the next season. There is a time process for them to adjust to a new technique even though it may be only five new stitches.

### **What is the timing involved for a collection?**

Six months to a year from the concept to planning to getting things developed. We are already thinking of 2020. We get muddled as there is so much overlap.

### **Is your work of value to the artisans?**

Jaya: If they didn't value what they do they wouldn't continue working with us. It is a constant struggle for us as our intention is to keep engaging them throughout the year. It depends on the market, if we are selling it means more work for the artisans, it is a constant cycle.

Ruchi: We want to keep things going as we have put such effort into Indigene. The printers are medium to large scale business so they probably wouldn't worry if we stopped working with us but the embroidery women's group and the Nizamuddin garment stitchers are almost wholly dependent on Indigene work. There are periods during the year when there is a lot of work and then dull periods and they ask when will there be more orders. As the work is of high quality and detailed they get well paid for their work.

Jaya: It is great for home-based artisans like the embroiderers as they can be at home but also earn money for their work.

**How do you see Indigene in 5 years time?**

Jaya: Grow more. We have just started to explore the international market. Working towards making our online market grow for domestic and international buyers. And keep our relationships with our artisan groups.

Ruchi: We want to market more. If our retailers expand, we expand and there is more work for the artisans. It is all interconnected.

**Your customer base is people wanting the handmade. Is this a growing market?**

Ruchi: People like the artisan made fabrics. They like heavy embroidery. We tell the story about our products on social media regularly. We have a series called Indie Made on our Instagram where we explain how a craft is done, or talk about an artisan, basically discuss the back end of the product, the whole process.

Jaya: It is important to educate the customer. People want to know why the price is high so it is important that they know the story behind the product. It is not machine made, not fast fashion. It is something they can keep for a long time.

**Is the interest more from Indian or international customers?**

Jaya: Both. There is now more awareness from Indian customers. When you grow up seeing crafts around you like hand printing you don't value it so much. But when labels like ours tell the story about how it is made, the process and the artisans who made it there is a consciousness about it.

Ruchi: In social media the whole story is put out there which can be reassuring for the customers.

Jaya: The whole of India is flooded with fast fashion, international labels. But people still want to hear the handmade story.

Ruchi: It is niche group because of the higher prices it is not accessible to everyone. A large part of the population follows fast fashion and big brands. It is niche and a loyal community and a growing community.

## Appendix 10 - Interview transcript 4 - Indigene - Geeta

### Interview transcript - Indigene - Geeta 19 Jan 2019

#### **Name and address**

My name is Geeta and I live in Delhi on rent (rental property). I am from UP (Uttar Pradesh) but came to Delhi for my livelihood.

#### **What was the project that you participated in?**

I embroider for Indigene. Raji ji gets work from Indigene and then distributes to the embroiderers.

#### **Where did you learn to embroider?**

My mother did this embroidery and I learnt by watching her. Raji ji has also taught me what to do.

#### **What type of embroidery is it?**

It's called *Katcha* meaning non-permanent thread. It is done in UP for domestic use for bed linen, bedspreads and on dress suits.

#### **When did you start doing this embroidery?**

I started when I was 18-19. My mother didn't do this embroidery for a business but for home use. I started this way but then started embroidering commercially for Indigene to make a livelihood.

#### **Where and how long each day do you do this work?**

I work at home and embroider for 5-7 hours per day as well as do home duties.

#### **Do you meet with the other embroiderers?**

Yes at Delhi.

#### **How is project explained to you?**

Raji ji's wife is an expert embroiderer and she makes the sample for Indigene. Then I am shown what to do after seeing the sample. Raji ji also explains what the embroidered fabric piece is going to be made into like a jacket.

#### **Have you learnt new skills?**

I am open to doing whatever is required. Sometimes new designs and at other times repeated embroidery designs from before. Fabrics change, embroidery patterns change but I like doing the new things.

#### **Do you think the work benefits you in any way?**

Definitely the work helps my family providing extra income.

#### **Is the work continuous?**

The work is continuous but when a new sample is being developed we have to spend time learning about it so we lose 5-6 days during that time.

**How do you start new designs?**

The design is brought from Ruchi and Jaya on paper by Raji ji. Then copied onto fabric where the sample is embroidered by Raji ji's wife with the different colours. If it's complicated I come to watch Raji ji's wife make the sample or it is brought to me. I just have to know the thread thickness and colour.

**Do you know who buys this clothing?**

No Ruchi and Jaya know. I don't know who they supply.

**Are the other embroiderers for UP?**

Yes

**How long do you want to continue this work?**

I want to continue as long as my eyesight permits or if my children tell me to stop. If I stop they will continue the work. I have five children, two daughters and they already do the embroidery. One is eighteen and she does the same embroidery as me. She is studying commerce as well.

**Will she continue to embroider?**

Maybe not if she gets a Government job but as long as she is in the home she will continue to embroider.

**Do you find any of this work difficult?**

No (Geeta looks through all the sample clothing on the rack to show that she can do it all).

## Appendix 11 - Interview transcript 5 – Jaipur Rugs – Shanti (weaver's friend), Aful, Shanti (head weaver)

Interview transcript - Jaipur Rugs 25 Jan 2019

### JAIPUR RUGS

**Shanti – Bunkar Sakhi (weaver's friend) at Manpura Machedi**

#### **Name and address**

Shanti, I am the daughter-in-law of this house, I have lived here for 18 years but was originally from Malpura village.

#### **What is your role at Jaipur Rugs?**

I was originally a weaver but for the last four years I have been a *Bunkar Sakhi* weaver's friend. I help the weavers, talk to the weavers about quality.

#### **How did you learn to weave?**

Before marriage I had two looms in my village and I watched my neighbours weave on those looms and learnt from them to weave.

#### **Have you developed new skills since working for Jaipur Rugs?**

Since working for Jaipur Rugs I have learnt everything new. Not weaving but how to communicate with other people and how to understand them. Before marriage I only studied to second standard and after marriage I forgot everything and just stayed at home. I did not even have the confidence to come out of my house to visit my neighbours. I forgot how to weave so when I became *Bunkar Sakhi* I had a lot of fear. I did not know about the carpet world, I did not know how to speak to people. I feared the weavers would think I knew nothing about weaving and would not accept me. How as *Bunkar Sakhi* would the weavers trust me as I knew little about weaving. There was a big skill gap, knowledge gap, I lacked confidence. I couldn't even dial a phone number. I went to the JRF (Jaipur Rugs Foundation) school here and learnt to read and write and other skills and gained confidence. I learnt how to communicate.

[Jasleen added that now she addresses the media when they come to the village]

#### **Do you want your children to be weavers?**

I have not thought about it as they are too young, 7 & 9. I just want them to be educated. They can decide what interests them after education.

**Aful – Branch Manager**

#### **Name and address**

Aful and I am from Udaipura village.

#### **What is your role at Jaipur Rugs?**

I am branch manager, for four years.

**What do you do in that role?**

I take care of the weavers. If there is a shortage of yarn I get it for the weavers, I distribute the work, I connect with JRF for education programs and I arrange that timely payments are given to the weavers. I am the bridging gap between Jaipur Rugs headquarters and the weavers. I have a team of three quality supervisors and three *Bunkar Sakhis*.

**When a rug is completed do you arrange to get it to the headquarters?**

Yes, I arrange for a driver and boys to come to the village and take it to headquarters.

**How do you communicate with the weavers?**

I look after 52 villages of weavers. I travel to the villages by motor bike or phone the *Bunkar Sakhis*. If they have some difficulty I then go to the village and work out the problem practically.

**What was your training?**

I was taken by NK sir around the whole company and he said to me that he recognised that I was a magnet to the other weavers and connected to them with empathy. He told me to focus on this talent of my character. Before that I was a weaver for 14 years.

**Who did you learn weaving from?**

I learnt from my auntie. I was a weaver but then four years ago I was made the branch manager.

**Do you ever design rugs?**

No, I never make the maps for the rug designs.

**Shanti – Head Weaver****Name and how long have you been in this village?**

Shanti. When I married I went to my husband's village but there was no work at all, no weaving so my husband and I decided to return to my ancestral home with my children in this village.

**How did you learn to weave?**

My brothers weaved and, also I learnt from women neighbours.

**Were they working for Jaipur Rugs?**

No, they worked for others.

**I understand you are the head weaver in this village, how did you get in that role?**

When I was here I was working in construction as a labourer with my 3 month old daughter on my back. I wanted to leave that work. This was ten years ago. I heard that a man, a branch manager for Jaipur Rugs was looking for weavers in the area. When I contacted him he was not confident about my weaving skills so he said I won't give you a loom unless you have premises where the loom will be kept safe. I took a loan of 10000 rupees and built a shed and then invited the man to see if that was to the right standard. He said it was fine so I started with two looms and eight weavers. No weaving was being done at that time so I

was the first. Now there are 120 weavers in the village. I now have six looms and 25 weavers, I did have 30 but some come and go.

**Do you make Jaipur Rugs Artisan Designed Originals carpets or the Jaipur Rug designs?**

I make both.

**When you make the Artisan Designed Originals where do you get the ideas from?**

I get design ideas from inside and outside my home. From the wall bricks, the cow dung patterns on the floor, patterns on saris, leaves, flowers.

**How many hours a day do you weave?**

We weave eight hours a day, 15 if there is urgent work. We weave six days a week, if we feel like it we weave as well on Sunday.

**Do you value this work?**

Very much.

**Does it support your family?**

My husband doesn't work so my weaving supports the whole family.

**Would you like your children to be weavers?**

In the school holidays they are learning the skill by watching me.

## Appendix 12 - Video transcript 1 – Deborah

### Video transcript 1 - Deborah

I would like to talk to you about a passion of mine which is my shawls. I originally heard about them and saw one through a friend of mine and I was just blown away by the craftsmanship and detail and how anyone could make that. So I saved up for a really long time and got my first one. I treasured it so much that I became almost addicted to them in that I felt like I was creating an artistic but also a cultural heirloom for my children. I have three adult children and a grandson that my husband and I are raising so that's like having four so I started to buy more because I wanted each my children to have one. I have two sons, a daughter and a grandson, so I hoped that everybody would when I die will be able to have one of these.

So this is a bit of a sad tale. It's about one of my favourites that's gone through a very hard life. It was a pale blush pink with pale grey and pale green embroidery on it. It was really beautiful and the moment I saw it I knew I had to have it. And I was wearing it one day inside and then I went out and it was raining when I ran to the car. It was unfortunate as the pale grey thread had run out as black, it wasn't a pale colour, it was through it in a number of places. I ended up having to dye it this darker colour, unfortunately it dyed all the embroidery the same colour but you can still see the contrast which is fine. Amazingly this is one of my favourites now because all the things I have done to it like putting it in hot heat, putting it in cold, torturing it, has made it super, super soft. It does have a few little holes but I don't care. And this is my comfort one now because I don't think this is as special as these ones because I have spoilt it a bit. This is the one that I allow myself to wear to bed when it's cold, when I'm sick, when I feel miserable, or when I've had enough of the world and I take to my bed this is my comforter. It makes me feel like I am in the lap of luxury so it's a joy for me.

So in regards to the shawl I am going to get made, in some ways I am replacing my very pale pink one that's very different now but I'm moving away from that pattern and moving towards a paisley or mango pattern. I do have a picture of something I would like. I have picked my colours from charts I got at the hardware store. I want it to be a very pale pink and the embroidery colours to be a pale green, a deeper pink for contrast, a pale grey and I would also like a cream, a rich buttery cream, almost like a pale lemony colour to contrast with the pale pink. I think it will stand out as an embroidery colour but also keeping in with that muted pale palette. For the shawl, I have printed off a picture of one I really quite like but around the trim where the border is I would like much more intense, greater embroidery so that will be a stand out. So yes, in some ways I am recreating the colour theme that I loved so much but I am going with a different pattern with that. I suppose what I would really love, in my dreams, I don't know if it is really possible, but when my shawl is completed I would love to go over there and meet the people who make these amazing garments because that would tie everything up for me because I can't imagine how anybody has the patience and the skill to make these. It is beyond me. When I wear them out people think they are not real. These are just digital printed, they are made on a machine.'

I think they are amazing and I'm interested in the people and the life that the people lead behind these. I read books about where they come from and books about the shawl.

I am really interested this time in the connection between me picking what I want instead of me picking what is readymade and being part of that process and then receiving it at the end. I really dearly hope that the people who make these that someone like me thinks that these are the most, I get emotional about it, that these are the most treasured possessions I have.

## Appendix 13 - Video transcript 2 – Jane

### Video transcript 2 - Jane

I just like to have things that are individual and beautifully done by hand because it makes them more unique and makes them more special to me because someone has put their love and their care into them and they're more original than things churned out by the hundreds and everybody has the same thing.

For sure this is one of my most favourite and useful collections because I wear them. With our climate I can only wear them in winter. I tend to wear them to special occasions or the more simple designs I might wear just going out for the day.

Some are so perfect that there are no errors but others you can pick up little mistakes and that makes them a little more individual and special because you can absolutely tell that they are not made by a machine.

This is an amazing one because it is completely covered in embroidery and the back side is as perfect as the front side. Sometimes this is too much embroidery you lose the pattern.

My mother did like beautiful things so I was surrounded by beautiful things growing up. But it is something that I could never do so I can't believe that someone can sit there and produce that.

For the base colour, we will leave it up to the artisans, but my preference is either 220 or 151. They will know better which will go with the embroidery. I want the earthy colours here for the embroidery with some dark browns coming through. He can even put some of these colours through if he likes. Say from 230 to 240 or 248 to 253. But again they will know what will look nicer with the greens.

I want some of the green to show through so you get an effect like this with the green coming through in the background and then the colours of the embroidery, the earthy colours. And I quite like this pattern so I'm going to check if I have this pattern and if I don't have this pattern I think it would look very nice.

To make it a bit different to this one we're going to put a different border on and maybe the border could be more leaves or some sort of leaf pattern down here.

I like them to make those really final decisions because they will know what looks best.

## Appendix 14 - Artisan interview transcript 1 - Majid

### Artisan interview transcript - Majid

1. I enjoyed working with you, the pink shawl I embroidered myself so I could get the benefits and I got those.
2. I have a disadvantage in that I can't speak English. I would prefer face to face conversations with you in the presence of a Kashmiri person who could translate it to me in Kashmiri. I liked working on the shawl as it was safe for me as you shared responsibility of the colour combinations which I liked. I am always open to either carry on your colour combinations or work with you to give my inputs about colour combinations which we can co-design.
3. The brokers don't give us payment even though we know the customer has paid them. Instead they buy more pashmina fabric for themselves with our money, that is why I prefer to work with you so that you can directly deposit payment in our bank account once the shawl is finished and the shawl is to your satisfaction.
4. I want to send my daughter to learn English so that you can communicate with her in English and she will translate to me in Kashmiri what exactly you want.

#### **Question: What is the best way to co-design a shawl with you?**

I have been a pashmina shawl embroiderer for a long time. I know all the processes involved in making a shawl and as the embroiderer I have each shawl for the longest time as that takes the most time. I could take care of the whole shawl production right from procurement of fabric, dyeing, design discussion and tracing on the shawl, then colours and embroidery mutually agreed, to the finished product including washing and clipping. I can facilitate all processes to the finished shawl is to your liking and I will take responsibility for all the processes.