

# STATE OF THE FIELD IN CONVERSATION

Deepshikha Kalsi & Sarah Scaturro

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#### **Abstract**

The professional conservation of fashion is a relatively recent global phenomenon, emerging over the past half century. A vibrant sub-discipline of textile conservation, fashion conservation fluidly straddles dress chemistry, museology, fashion history, and contemporary fashion practice, and its techniques vary depending on cultural origins and training of the practitioner. This interview between two conservators, Deepshikha Kalsi, who owns the art conservation consultancy Textile Conservation Studio, and Sarah Scaturro, Eric and Jane Nord Chief Conservator at the Cleveland Museum of Art, locates the preservation of dress and textiles in India within the country's own unique textile and museological traditions. Based in Delhi, Kalsi is one of the few professionally-trained textile conservators practicing within India today. Drawing upon a wide-range of local and international experiences, in this interview Kalsi and Scaturro discuss her specialized work and training, the history of textile conservation in India, and how fashion is conceived in her country with regards to the primacy of the textile as well as how that understanding impacts her conservation work.

Deepshikha Kalsi owns an art conservation consultancy that specialized in textiles. Based in Delhi, Deepshikha is one of the few practicing textile conservators working within India today. We wanted to speak to Deepshikha about her work and training, the history of textile conservation in India, and how fashion is conceived in the country with regards to the primacy of the textile and how that understanding might impact her work.

**SARAH**

This is Sarah Scaturro talking with Deepshikha, on October 11, 2021 at 9:04 AM Eastern Standard Time. What time is it in India right now?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

It's about 6:35pm.

**SARAH**

I love how it's also a half hour change.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Same!

**SARAH**

It's very interesting! So, let's just get started. Deepshikha, I was wondering, how did you find out about the field of conservation? And why did you go into it, and why textiles and fashion in particular?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

It was while studying a Bachelors of Fine Arts, in my final, fourth year of graduation. Post the winter break, I realized that the paintings that were kept in my college storage had developed mold.

**SARAH**

Oh my gosh.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes, I was quite intrigued as to why this happened? So I spoke to my Professor, Mr. Sanjeev Soni, who had taught us the subject "Methods and Materials," and he is the one who actually introduced me to the words "art conservation."

**SARAH**

Really!

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes; for me, it was always ecological conservation and I wasn't aware of the concept of art conservation. My Professor (Mr. Sanjeev Soni) further encouraged me to go to the museum and look for a conservator; incidentally, our art college was in the same compound as the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh. When I went to the museum and spoke to one of the conservators there, he told me that he was a chemist. Back in the days (the year that I am referring to is 1999), being a chemist was a desirable qualification to become an art conservator. He shared more about the field and that got me inspired. So I pursued the Masters in Art Conservation from the National Museum Institute, New Delhi in the year 2000.

**SARAH**

Okay, so there was a conservation program then. Was it a Master's degree?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes, yes.

**SARAH**

Is that one of the only programs in India to train for art conservation?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

At that point in time that was the only program, but currently there are lots of other institutes that offer degrees and diplomas. And the course duration is typically three months to two years.

**SARAH**

Okay. And what's the difference between a degree and a diploma?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Diploma programmes are usually short-term as compared to the degree programmes.

**SARAH**

So, when you studied were you studying painting conservation or object conservation? Or textiles?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

While studying, we were given a general well-rounded exposure to all the aspects of art conservation. It helped groom me to address problems in artifacts of varied mediums, and since the Institute was within the National Museum, we got the opportunity to do practicals in the National Museum Conservation Laboratory. At this stage I learned to darn from the darners working at the National Museum. Darning was the first introduction to practical textile conservation. After I graduated I became associated with INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), where the focus was largely on paper and painting conservation. While working there for four years, we also got a few textile objects to work upon. Hence, if it was a painted textile, it would be treated more as a painting and if it wasn't painted and there were any tears/splits, then a traditional textile darning would be called upon to address it. However, there were no professional textile conservators till the year 2010 in India.

**SARAH**

Really?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes.

**SARAH**

So it wasn't a special field. I find it interesting about painted textiles, how the primacy of the effort is on the paint, not the textile.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

It was perhaps because painted textiles in India are primarily tempera paintings on textiles as a primary support, so they are closer to canvas paintings, with the exception of resist/mordant and dye painted textiles. Indian textile paintings are as diverse as our country itself.

For any surface to receive paint it is important to seal the pores/weave of the fabric with a layer of ground/primer to facilitate brush movement. The density and coarseness of fabric varies across the region, as does the choice of binding medium/primer. The selection of materials to prepare and prime the textile support is Indigenous to the region. For example in North, for thangka paintings: yak glue is used in the primer; in West, for Phad and Pichwai paintings, gum acacia is used; and in Patachitra paintings from down South, tamarind seed gum is used to prepare the fabric support.

Since one can't stitch through the paint layer without causing apparent damage, the painted textiles are closer to paintings. But unlike canvas paintings, where the fabric (linen, cotton, hemp, etc.) primarily acts as a rigid support that is mostly stretched onto a strainer or a stretcher, most of the Indian painted textiles were perhaps painted on textiles, keeping in mind the very nature of the textile! Its flexibility! Thus most of them were painted and rolled and carried around as scroll for the purpose of storytelling! Except for the Pichwais, which were used as a backdrop curtain and later mostly placed folded. So here the flexibility of the textile as primary support is as important as the paint layer. Another common practice earlier was to remove the fabric mounts of a thangka painting and simply frame the inner painted textile.

If we step back into history and trace the origins of professional textile conservation in India in the twentieth century, one of the earliest documented textile conservation reports is from the year 1957 by Mr. T. R. Gairola, who helped establish the National Museum Conservation Laboratory in 1957. He published a report in *Ancient India*, conserving an eighth-century printed silk, that was pasted on silk with starch paste infused with sodium arsenate. This method of pasting textiles has been followed well into the early twenty-first century as well. We come across numerous early textiles in our museum pasted on paper/fabric lined with paper, for example, an early eighteenth-century Mughal sash that was recently displayed in the "Pra-Kashi" exhibition held at the National Museum in 2019.

### **SARAH**

Do you think this is because they were Indian textiles? I haven't seen many textiles that were historically pasted onto paper, although there are early treatments in the United States, where some textiles are pasted on or glued onto board.

### **DEEPSHIKHA**

To answer this, one has to be cognizant of India's past geopolitical environment/dynamics, our recent freedom from British rule and India's changing priorities on developing its economy first. What we see as a continued conservation practice stems from the legacy systems. So perhaps the Indian conservators were following/taking inspiration from what they had observed, in the previous conservation treatment of the textiles from the Stein Collection that were conserved in the British Museum in the early 1920s and is presently housed at the National Museum, Delhi.

**SARAH**

At the British Museum?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes, at the British Museum. And when you look at their notes you'll find reference to John Joshua, who treated, mounted and restored textiles. And also Mr. Little John (paintings conservator) and Miss Winters, who was an embroiderer from the Royal College of Arts. These people worked on the conservation of textiles that were excavated by Stein and many of these were pasted on paper, some pasted on silk and then further pasted on paper.

**SARAH**

Yeah, that's a really special story and how did you find out about this? You've trained in both the UK and India and can you tell me about how those experiences were?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

In 2018, I got the opportunity to study with the textile historian Rahul Jain and linguist Vinay Singh, the textiles from the Aurel Stein Collection (200 BCE onwards) in the Central Asian Department at the National Museum, New Delhi. It was during the technical examination studying the weave structures that we realised that most of them couldn't be examined from the reverse as they had been pasted/lined. This made me realize that these were probably the earliest professionally conserved textiles and thus I began to look deeper. I am in the process of writing a paper on the subject, trying to connect dots with regards to the history of textile conservation in India.

To my earlier point, since there were no professional textile conservators in India, I pursued an internship with the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) quite rigorously from 2005 to 2010. Finally, this opportunity materialised in the year 2010 during one of their workshops in India where we met and it set the tone for my exciting textile conservation journey, with the first internship in the year 2011 for six months. This was followed by an opportunity to work on the "Fabric of India" exhibition at the V&A in 2015, which then got me interested to take up another extensive internship but this time at the Abegg Stiftung, Switzerland in 2017. What stood apart at the Abegg was their attention to details and research methodologies. Their approach inspired me to take up the Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Anciens (CIETA) course.

My ten years of experience as a paper and paintings conservator in India, helped me understand the importance and need for a professional textile conservator, thus I took on the pursuit seriously. My internships gave me an insight and above all, hands-on experience in conserving textiles and costumes, and the practical experience contributed significantly to projects undertaken back in India. Many of the treatments were carried out for the time and this was essentially possible only because of the internships and the continued support from V&A, Abegg-Stiftung, and CIETA.

**SARAH**

OK, OK, so you've also taken the CIETA course. So this is a really comprehensive, wonderful training! At the Abegg, how long were you there to train or visit?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

In Abegg, about five months.

**SARAH**

Five months! This is amazing. Yeah, because they don't really do a lot of exhibitions, so it is all technical study and research, whereas the V&A is very exhibition-driven.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Having trained at the V&A helped to build a strong foundation and I was able to take full advantage of being at the Abegg. It was exciting to be part of two opposite worlds, one which continued to have multiple exhibitions in diverse themes in a year as compared to the Abegg, which spent significant time on researching an object for an exhibition. It was challenging yet exciting to be part of such dynamic worlds.

**SARAH**

You seem very unique in that I don't know if many conservators around the world have had your breadth of experience in different countries.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

That's very kind of you to say, however learning is a continuous process and there is so much more which is yet to be explored. I do wish to get familiar with the approach followed in the US.

**SARAH**

You had mentioned you learned darning. And is this something that you would still do having now been trained in in the UK and in Switzerland?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Having learned that the conservation stitches are only used to stabilize and support the textile without being invasive in nature, I adapted using them, but India still has darners working in the leading museums in the country.

**SARAH**

That's interesting that they're still called darners.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes. The darners are still darning the collections in the museums. But it is only when they cannot darn some textile that's extremely fragile and fragmentary that it's pasted and lined. But at present lining is not so popular. The traditional painted textiles are usually lined using starch paste and in rare cases Beva (a conservation-grade adhesive) is used.

**SARAH**

Okay. How interesting — it's almost like lining a Western painted canvas, you know, it's interesting the overlap.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

The overlap has probably existed since the beginning of textile conservation as a profession. Being a paper and paintings conservator has helped see the transition and evolution. Let me share another example of an eighth-century embroidered textile from the Stein Collection at the National Museum, which was conserved at the British Museum in the 1920's. Unlike the other fragments that were pasted, this embroidered textile fragment was stitched onto a silk support. The silk support was further stitched onto a linen fabric. This linen fabric was stretched on a board with strings running zigzag, similar to the manner in which early canvas paintings were stretched. Clearly, it was one treatment where both a painting conservator and an embroiderer had collaborated to arrive at this solution.

I would also like to share a recent treatment that we undertook at my studio, where the silk was so fragile. It was a Chinese Dragon Robe. To support it, we dyed the silk crepe with Lanaset dyes in desired hue and got Beva adhesive airbrushed by the car painters, as they have the steadiest hands and got excellent results. The Robe was lined with these materials, and we further carried out laid and couching support stitches.



**SARAH**

That's really great. Um, so, I think we've talked a lot about your training, and we have a question about whether India or Europe are pedagogically or theoretically different or similar. Do you find the general goals and approaches in India now to be similar to what you've learned in the West?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

It's evolving; the goals are similar but the practical approach is different, which could be because of numerous reasons, like infrastructure, available talent, resources, repositories, and grants. But due to the exposure from internships abroad, professionals are now reworking at the structures. It's an uphill task, but we continue to take strides!

**SARAH**

And do you think that there's an approach of conservation in India that really should be taught, and exported to the West?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

When we talk about sustainability, then a big "Yes!" It works not just in our everyday wear, but also heirloom pieces that exist in every Indian household, which holds a lot of cultural reverence and pride. Our darners are perhaps the finest in the world and people also get creative while repurposing the old textiles.

India also traces its sustainability roots in history. Let me narrate a very interesting anecdote that dates from 400 BCE, which will help join the dots. This tale has been recorded in the Buddhist religious text *Vinay Pitaka*. A monk approached a king for 2000 pieces of kevaras (fabric). The king was surprised with the request but was explained by the monk as to how they will be using the requested fabric quantity. Some would be used in daily wear, while the rest would be kept aside for mending in the future, and while they continue using the original. When these become unusable/unavailable, they can be repurposed to make sitting mats and further repurposed into foot mats. And as they approach the end of their life cycle, then the fibres would be beaten and added to the mortar of the walls to strengthen them! So I hope it relates...

**SARAH**

No it does, it does! My mind's really thinking — this is amazing.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

In fact, even in the sixteenth century in Europe there are references to mending, of nuns embroidering manuscripts to preserve them. Beautiful organic embroideries.

**SARAH**

This is really interesting. I was wondering, to your work with fashion designers, are you incorporating that similar kind of emphasis on sustainability, or do they have that already?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

At present there is no collaboration happening between the fashion designers and the textile conservators. Textile conservation in India is still in its nascent stages, and even the fashion industry is getting more organized. The “Fabric of India” exhibition at the V&A museum held in 2015 was perhaps the first platform to showcase the collective body of work of Indian fashion designers in a museum. Hence the designers are becoming aware of their legacy and few have started archiving their works and creating appropriate storage systems. The designers and conservators are yet to meet at a common platform. With regards to sustainability, the designers are conscious of maintaining their collection and mostly rely on traditional approaches. For example, they would call in a danner to address the tears/splits, or when they can't remove a stain, they would address it creatively by embroidering over it, and so on. Some designers are happy to take back their pieces and help repurpose their own creation or the heirloom textiles as well.

If you talk about conserving fashion pieces then any costume that we work on is part of a fashion statement from that particular period. Every period/region had defined preferences for weaves, patterns, choice of material, and customisations for the wearer. The worldview was always cosmopolitan as the trade routes had a significant role. Perhaps the fashion houses have roots in the ateliers patronised by the royals courts before they established themselves as independent brands. Although the fashion designers and fashion houses gained recognition from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, if we look back in history there are instances of weavers/weaving workshops incorporating their names in the woven textile. Known examples would be first millennium Chinese figured silk textiles and the famous sixteenth-century Safavid textile designer Ghiyath al-Din Ali. In the recent past, since the early twentieth century, Indian royal women were known as fashionistas and inspired fashion trends in India before the birth of the Indian fashion industry in the 1980s. It would be interesting to study the role of Indian royals in supporting the growth of international fashion houses.

So the coining of the term “fashion,” I think it’s a very Western thing. Although it was probably in the fourteenth century that the term was first used, it’s only in the last two centuries that it has been recognized as we address it today. But the impact of fashion has always been global.

**SARAH**

Agreed. Fashion is everywhere.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

When we are working on historical textiles, one is working on fashion costumes. But apart from the “Fabric of India” exhibition, where I got the opportunity to help mount and drape the works of Indian fashion designers, I am yet to work with fashion designers in India. Although I have now been approached by a few fashion institutes in India to introduce their students to the concept of textile conservation. So, we are certainly progressing in that direction.

**SARAH**

Do you call yourself a fashion or textile conservator?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

I am art and textile conservator, specializing in textiles, paper, and paintings. Being versatile has helped me sustain myself.

**SARAH**

So let’s go back to that. Even in India the paper and paintings are paid more than textiles?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Absolutely! The difference probably stems from the art market, as generally the paintings and paper objects are valued more than the textiles. Although there is no comparison in the number of hours spent in conserving a textile as compared to paper and paintings. A simple example would be loss of colour in a painting and in a textile (hole). Whereas the painting conservator would mix colours/pigments in appropriate medium and retouch the loss, a textile conservator has to spend hours preparing the dyes, weighing the fabric, working out the depth of shade, measuring the dyes and additives precisely, continuous stirring and maintaining the requisite temperature for the dye to be absorbed by the textile, and hoping all along to achieve the desired colour!

**SARAH**

And nobody will pay that much money for a textile to be conserved, right?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes. But I would also like to mention a client who was initially concerned about the conservation cost, as she had bought the textile object at a similar price from an auction, but was benevolent to double the original quotation when she saw the work and number of hours spent in conserving the object.

**SARAH**

Oh, that's wonderful.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Initially when I was trying to establish myself and create a network I did conserve a lot of textiles at a very low cost, however things are changing now. I've taken a handful of clients who understand and value the skill and are willing to pay for it.

**SARAH**

So they recognize the value of your expertise, and they pay you accordingly.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

They do.

**SARAH**

That's great. I do have a question about you starting your own company rather than working in a museum. Are there museum jobs for this kind of work in India?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

When I started off, darners were primarily employed in the leading museums to address textile conservation concerns. Even till last year the National Museum had taken out an advertisement for taking in two darners for textile conservation, which is an irony. However, the scenario is now changing.

**SARAH**

So I have a question then, if darners are the ones doing the work, what's their training and handcraft?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

It gets passed from one generation to the other. However, not everyone is equally skilled. This is a dying art and needs a lot of support.

**SARAH**

Generational apprenticeship of craft.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

Yes.

**SARAH**

As a textile conservator, do you feel okay that these museums are hiring darners instead of conservators? How do you feel?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

I don't feel happy about that because the fact is that the textile conservator's job is not just limited to stitching.

**SARAH**

Yes.

**DEEPSHIKHA**

There's so much more that the textile conservator brings to the table. The serious collectors realize that. I had the opportunity to mount and conserve the last two private exhibitions held at the National Museum with regards to textiles. The collector, the curator, the exhibition designer, and the lighting designer, everyone was part of the team from the conceptualizing stage, strategizing the display as per the condition of the object, evaluating the mounting options in the best interest of the object. It brings out the best without being caught in administrative work. On the other hand, the darning is only expected to darn and stitch the object. Therefore, I think this approach needs to change.

**SARAH**

Do you think it will?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

It will. Because I can already see it happening as they do realise that there's a need to look at conserving textiles beyond darning.

**SARAH**

What do you think of the distinction between textile and fashion that Western museums make? And similarly, the emphasis on Western clothing as fashion and non-Western clothing as dress/textile/ethnic/material culture or some other term?

**DEEPSHIKHA**

It is time to revisit and readjust the lenses through which fashion is perceived. The study of fashion has primarily been Western-centric and it needs to be more inclusive. It would be rewarding to review the field beyond the tunnel vision, integrating and recognizing the primacy of textiles from non-Western regions.

Indian history is resplendent with visual references in the form of sculptures, manuscripts, murals, and reliefs portraying in detail the prevalent ensemble preferences of a given period. The moment we re-examine, we come across both unstitched and stitched representations. The popular belief that the stitched garment was introduced during the Mughal period is due to lack of study in the field. India has been a land of cultural exchange since ancient times, whether in the form of trade or invasions. The foreign influxes have been assimilated and like every other art form, evolved with time.

Evaluating fashion through the stitched garments is very limiting. In fact, a saree, that is part of the Indian tradition, a flat textile woven on the loom, is perhaps the most advanced form of tailoring achieved on the loom! With precise mathematical application by the Naqshband (pattern maker) and the weaver, a garment is achieved that suits all body types!

Its ingenious; the number of warps density differs as per the perceived drape (it is generally higher in the area that falls towards the ground). Many times, due consideration is given to the material (silk, cotton, gold thread, etc.) used to weave the portion that is tucked inside at navel, wrapped around the body, and forms the pleats. Typically, the density/weight of the wefts is higher, or the material of the wefts is varied in the pallav (the trail) as per the desired drape. It's one of the most graceful ensembles, timeless and sustainable. The choice of patterns, surface ornamentation, colour, etc. are governed not just by the customs/occasion but also by the prevalent trends. It can be styled in over hundred different ways and new mediums; styles keep evolving as the following generations continue to respond, reinvent, and experiment. Satya Paul revolutionized the art of saree draping with his innovative interventions in the 1980s that are still being revisited in various manifestations.

One of the opening display pieces at the “Fabric of India” exhibition was the handwoven double ikat houndstooth saree designed by ABRAHAM & THAKORE. This garment was acquired by the V&A for their permanent collection. The Indian weavers were familiar with the houndstooth pattern since the 1860s but A&T’s use of the iconic pattern made famous by Christian Dior in the 1940s inspired youth wanting to associate with this very fashionable reinterpretation of the saree.

Other interesting examples would be the work of designers Rimzim Dadu and Hemang Agarwal, who are now both experimenting with creating metallic sarees. Rimzim Dadu is using hair-thin steel wires for customising sarees, wherein the metal wires are stitched to create the ensemble. Hemang Agarwal, on the other hand, has applied his understanding of the looms, weave patterns, and metal threads for weaving sarees on the loom in both the warp and weft direction. Both are distinct; Rimzim’s are more structured, whereas Hemang’s are more fluid, and they drape beautifully. Rimzim had in the past designed a Jamdani saree with silicone as yarns that is presently in the collection of Deviart Foundation, New Delhi. The designers transcended the medium, stitched/wove to design a garment. Now would it be called a textile, an art work or a fashion statement? Is it that only when a Western fashion house like Hermès designs a saree, it attains the status of couture? Irrespective, one day a fashion conservator would be addressing the material concerns.

Textiles in all its manifestations are an integral part of fashion, lending its materiality completely to be transformed in any given time period and zone. It’s only with inclusivity that we will see beyond the pre-conceived colonial academic discourses, that we will be able to appreciate the layers that form the very foundation of the history of fashion.

### **SARAH**

This is a wonderful overview of Indian fashion! I had no idea that the weave structure of saree fabrics are altered with consideration to how they are placed on the body, so thank you for teaching me that. I have one last question: what do you think of how Western museums present Indian fashion?

### **DEEPSHIKHA**

To begin with I would say, I am grateful that the Western museums are presenting Indian fashion (as it’s presently perceived), because none of the museums in India have dedicated a gallery to the same. The textiles collection at the National Museum, Delhi is part of the Decorative Arts Collection; this itself needs to be addressed.

The “Fabric of India” exhibition in 2015, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, was perhaps the first ever exhibition that recognized the work of contemporary Indian designers. Co-Curator Divia Patel gave Indian fashion a global platform in the field of museology. Another landmark exhibition that acknowledged India’s contribution was “India: Fashion’s Muse” at the Phoenix Art Museum in 2020. So there is a momentum, stimulating interest at the global level to revisit Indian fashion. Most recently “The Orientalists of Haute Couture: Lecoanet Hemant” exhibition at the Lace and Fashion Museum in Calais in 2022 is a very promising development. These exhibitions also mark a shift from exhibitions romanticizing the Maharajahs and the courtly splendour synonymous with India. The ripple effect could inspire serious scholarship needed in the field.

A much desirable step would be moving beyond embedded assumptions, creating an environment for a pluralistic view and integration of Indian fashion through the ages in global fashion history.



## Afterword

**BY DEEPSHIKHA KALSI**

Indian Textiles — in fabric, weave, embroidery, or design have museological standing in the world whether in museum collections or in the fashion community. However, the irony is that Indians themselves had not been able to witness the grandeur, the continuity, and impact of its rich textile traditions through exhibitions. The well-known connoisseur and curator Martand Singh made India and the world aware of its textile legacy through the seven Vishwakarma exhibitions (1981–1991), *Costumes of Royal India* (1985), *Earth and Sky* (1987), *Khadi: Fabric of Freedom* (2002). These exhibitions were held at national and international museums across the world. He was one of the founding members of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), the organization responsible for training first generation professional conservators in India. The story that began with him, finally gained momentum with iconic exhibitions like the “Pra-Kashi: Silk, Gold & Silver From The City Of Light” at the National Museum (2019) in New Delhi that represented the full range of luxury silks that were manufactured historically from the beginning of the first millennium using the taquete, samite, lampas, extended samite, brocaded double weave, damask, velvet and voided velvet, created on the drawlooms at the ASHA Workshop in the ancient city of Varanasi. The Indian public finally had the opportunity to see the expansive contribution of Indian textile and fashion to the world. Another recent note-worthy exhibition was “When Indian Flowers Bloomed In Distant Lands” at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (2023) in Mumbai, presenting the master works of trade textiles 1250-1850 in the Tapi Collection. Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) further contributed with their Fashion X series of events. The Museum of Art and Photography (MAP) followed suit by opening their museum space for walk-in visitors albeit with a small but growing textile collection. The latest entrance is “India in Fashion” that recognises the impact of Indian dress, textiles, and craft on the international fashion sensibilities since the eighteenth century and also tracing the birth and development of the contemporary Indian fashion community. This exhibition is showcased at the newly opened Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) (2023) in Mumbai. Cumulatively, these exhibitions are and have been instrumental in bringing the fashion and conservation community together, laying the foundation for the role of a fashion conservator in India!

## Author Bio



Deepshikha Kalsi, founder of the Textile Conservation Studio, New Delhi, is an independent art conservator.

Trained in textile conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Abegg Stiftung, Bern, and Cieta, Lyon, she is currently the assistant coordinator of the Textile Working Group of the Committee for Conservation of the International Council of Museums. Deepshikha serves as visiting faculty at the National Museum Institute, New Delhi, and has worked with museums, private collections, and institutions, including the National Museum, New Delhi, the Mehrangarh Museum, Jodhpur, the Indian Museum, Kolkata, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, New Delhi and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Deepshikha has an upcoming volume on the study of *Ancient Textile Fragments* from the Stein Collection, co-authored with Rahul Jain, to be published by the National Museum, New Delhi, and has contributed to Handbook of Museum Textiles and the journals: *North American Textile Conservation Conference* and *Indian Association for the Study of Conservation of Cultural Property*. Her research and work has been supported by the Nehru Trust, the Charles Wallace India Trust, the Simon Digby Trust, and the Bonita Trust.

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## Author Bio



Sarah Scaturro is a textile and fashion conservator, curator, and historian.

She is currently the Eric and Jane Nord Chief Conservator at the Cleveland Museum of Art and previously was the head conservator of the Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art and the textile conservator and assistant curator of fashion at the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. Sarah has curated six exhibitions including “Cycles of Life: The Four Seasons Tapestries” at the Cleveland Museum of Art, “The Secret Life of Textiles: Synthetic Materials” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and “Ethics + Aesthetics = Sustainable Fashion” at Pratt Manhattan Gallery. She has contributed to numerous publications including *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body, & Culture*; *Russian Fashion Theory*; *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*; *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*; *the Victorian Review*; and many others. Sarah is currently completing her doctoral dissertation on the history of fashion conservation at Bard Graduate Center. Her academic work has been supported by The Center for Craft, The Foundation for the Advancement in Conservation, The Costume Society of America, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, and her professional conservation work has been supported by The Kress Foundation, The Mellon Foundation, The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution, among many others.

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