

# *The local manifesto*



# Introduction

This digital booklet aims to relate local stories and promote localism in fashion, textiles and craft as India marks 75 years of independence.

Three creative practitioners based in India and the UK, worked together online through the summer of 2022 and explored common threads in their work.

Discussions revealed that Covid-19 and its lockdowns had affected their practice, forcing them to draw on local resources and networks. This booklet tells their stories, and explores theories around localism, why it is important, concluding with a joint map of what local means to the practitioners as the project is concluded.



# Contributors



Caroline Raybould

Caroline worked as a commercial fashion knitwear designer for 20 years in Italy, the USA and the UK for numerous high street and designer brands. Her commercial background is counterbalanced with an interest in craft, textiles and culture.

She has lectured for eight years on the Fashion Business and Promotion BA, with a focus in teaching and research into sustainable practice. She is interested in investigating how we can create preferable, ecological futures individually and collectively, and has recently been exploring the concept of 'designing with nature'. Her current creative practice uses video, publications and textiles.



Vaishali Verma

Vaishali is a Master's holder in Textile & Surface design from Birmingham City University, United Kingdom. Previously, bachelor's in Textile design from the National Institute of Fashion Technology, India.

Being able to experience the best of both worlds, her expressions comes from absorbing ideas from the surroundings and creating them into unique concepts. She has a mixed media approach to making surfaces and likes to experiment with different materials and techniques. As she always says "The very thing about textiles and design is that its many things but never boring."



Mala Sinha

Mala superannuated in 2020 from the Faculty of Management Studies (FMS), University of Delhi as Professor of Organizational Behavior and Communication. Post the academic innings, she created Buna'wat, which is a group of women who meet regularly to weave magic through knitting and crochet work. The women are from the less privileged class and Buna'wat gives them a platform to inculcate quality in their craft, learn new techniques and showcase their work to the discerning clientele.

Buna'wat experiments with wool, cotton, silk and organic yarns to craft chic and elegant wear and home linen, and is devoted to the cause of reviving and mainstreaming handcraft through needles and yarns. Mala is also a published poet, writer of short stories, and painter.



# Local Colour

Caroline Raybould

In the spring of 2020, we went into a lockdown in Birmingham, UK, as Covid swept the world. Set against a backdrop of climate change and mass extinction, the whole scenario had a sense of the eerie. It was a dark time in many ways, but I found some peace in the quiet of the city, there was less consumption, and life was slower. We had beautiful weather in the UK, as though the atmosphere and weather systems also slowed down.

## Lockdown Limitations

The lockdowns added limitations to my work, with no access to shops for materials, no libraries for books, and workshops closed for practice. I had to draw on the basics around me: I started working with natural dyes, from food waste, flowers, leaves and bark from my garden, local streets and parks. Upcycled cotton sheets, and remnants of cotton, viscose and wool were used for the colour experiments. I started with the simple method of solar dyeing and then moved into more complex experiments with kitchen chemistry using heat to extract colour.

## Local walks in Birmingham

Instead of street names, plants and trees became the markers on my daily journeys. I looked for new plants to bloom as the seasons changed. I noticed Tansy (for olive greens) growing in shady areas by the river and how the plant was humming with bees. The wastelands of the inner city, with their poor, sandy soils, were favoured by Goldenrod and Weld (for yellows).

A lack of connection with people due to social distancing, led to new connections with nature. The walks became essential in my daily routine, and somehow seemed to be more important than the colours gathered. I was inspired by the textile artist Wellesley-Smith (2015) who writes of the everyday places she visits as 'slow stories', suggesting that we can explore the 'uniqueness in every place' by 'using local cloth or fibres, local weeds or other plants, and local water for dyes.'

I moved on from dyeing threads into experimenting with print, first learning how to print with the plants themselves directly onto fabric, then moving on to experiment with screen-printing with the natural dyes. I then decided to develop a colour palette which was directly linked to the places I had visited on my walks in lockdown and the encounters with the wilder spaces on my city.

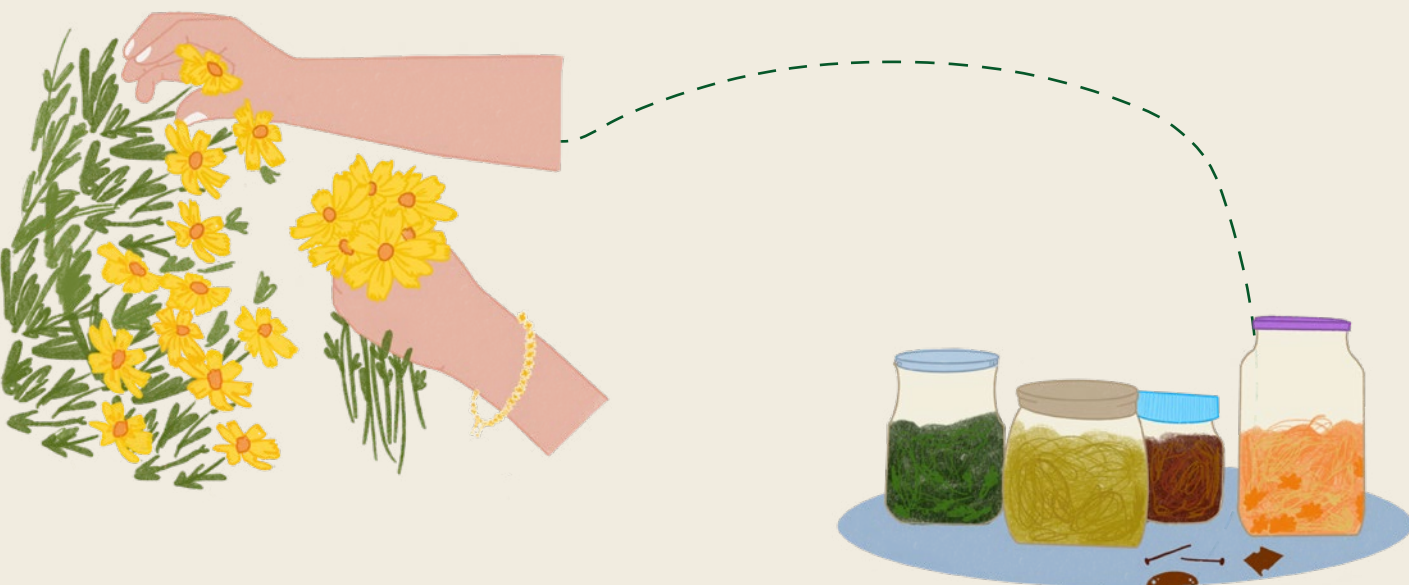
## Five Plants, 30 Colours

I gathered five dye plants from five localities: dyer's chamomile from my garden, acorns from a park, weld from a city parking lot, tansy from a community orchard, and walnut husks from a local fruit farm. The colours were modified of alum, citric acid, washing soda, copper and iron solution (using scrap found metal) to shift the tones. This gave me a palette of 30 colours. Working with these colours from these spaces seemed to connect me to the different ecologies I found there.

*"Localism favours the use of nearby resources, place-specific knowledge, community self-reliance"*

Fletcher & Tham, 2019





"I started building up a new knowledge of plants (many I had never even noticed before), learning their names, habits, soil requirements. Some plants were important to rare insects and pollinators, others "were known for their medicinal properties"



## Why is local important to me?

I am interested in new ways of designing. "Design is a practice that historically, at least in the Global North, has been aligned with progress, industry, capitalism and modernity" (Fletcher et al, 2019) yet industrialisation (not just fashion and textiles) has contributed to mass destruction on our planet, with environmental pollution, and loss in biodiversity due to disappearing habitats, as well as issues in supply chains, with workers not being paid a minimum or living wage, as global fashion production chases 'the cheap needle'. The global textile industry is one of the most polluting on earth: responsible for up to 20% of today's industrial pollution, adding 72 toxic chemicals into water systems, with 30 being permanent (Maxwell et al, 2015). Most of us don't consider the impact that synthetic dyes can have on the environment: dyeing textiles requires vast quantities of water, energy and chemicals, and where environmental standards are not stringent - toxic chemical waste may be released into local water resources. Many of us in modern day society have lost touch with nature, we rarely know the origin of the clothes or products that we buy. The synthetic colours of a mass-produced product, once so beguiling, have led to a disconnect from nature and our environment.

There is an urgent need for systemic change, and my interest in localism chimed with the proposal of Fletcher and Tham (2019), to put "earth first – before profit, before everything". Their book Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan, challenges our current economic growth model, and one of the key strategies in the book is to go local: "Localism favours the use of nearby resources, place-specific knowledge, community self-reliance... the secure rooting in the community, enables generous sharing of knowledge, skills and resources." This aspect of localism has been key to my work these last months.

I started to consider how I could put earth first. I gained a direct understanding of the chemical, environmental and ecological impacts of colours I was creating. I could adjust my processes to minimise the impacts: for example, work with low impact chemistry and colours that were kinder to skin and the planet. Processes such as solar dyeing used minimal water and heat. When foraging for plants, it needed to be done responsibly, to reduce my impact on the local ecology by taking away food for insects, pollinators and birds. Even better, I started a dye garden both at home, and also with students and colleagues at my university.

I started building up a new knowledge of plants (many I had never even noticed before), learning their names, habits, soil requirements. Some plants were important to rare insects and pollinators, others were known for their medicinal properties. Working with natural dyes over the last two years has allowed me to zoom in on the local ecology in my city, to engage with the materiality of colour and fibre, with an aim to work with, and even form a partnership with nature (Fletcher et al, 2019).

My quest for colour has been to explore a methodology that could potentially work **with** nature. It is a methodology that is slow, local, small-scale and often fugitive and unpredictable: it may not scale up for mass markets. But nevertheless, for me, it has been an important way to rethink materials and colour, and connect with the world around me.









# Glocal Kaleidoscope

Vaishali Verma

## Lockdown and Global Expedition

During the covid, I was still residing in India. We went into complete lockdown in April 2020, it brought a lot of mixed emotions as we all had to stay at home and the virus didn't seem to end after months and months of taking precautions. I feel that was a turning point in lives for most people, wearing the same clothes over and over again and not getting to eat your favourite comfort food, and doing the same things every day got monotonous at one point.

Eventually, when I started working on my projects I felt more drawn to colours, because it gave me joy just looking from afar and now that I think being cooped up in the lockdown has led me more into that direction. I felt the urge to share my joy with others, so I began to study the British culture and stumbled upon the dandy fashion and the swinging 60s.

I went to all the places to look at the fashion if it was still alive. It was not a surprise but just like me looking for fun in colours and dressing up, I found other people were doing the same thing, finding happiness in little things.

I went to a number of exhibitions and fairs, talked to experts, and referred to books, music and art from the 60s to get started. I found all the things locally, just being in the right place at the right time made all the difference.

## Why is local important to me?

I always have felt that in order to look for better things people fail to look at their surroundings and what local things have to offer. The things that surround you have a great impact on your life practices and for me growing up watching my joint family doing all the chores even sewing clothes themselves, left an impression. Being an Indian, I grew up around textiles, prints and colours so I naturally feel more drawn to colours. I try to bring my heritage values and revive them with some present goodness to achieve a unique blend. After the extreme circumstances that we are still not over yet, I felt it is only relevant for me to tap into both my locals and synergise them together.

Due to the nature of my work, I like the hand feel of fabrics and the texture, the prints, the colours and using mixed media to give the effect that is just in my head. I like to take my time with every piece and experiment with the surfaces, the weaves and a number of techniques that only got available to me when I got to the UK. I had knowledge of fabrics and technology beforehand but now I began to look at it differently for example: what happens when I mix two completely different techniques together and then print or maybe dye it at the end of the process? This is when I began to experiment and use different fabrics to achieve different textures and hand feel. Most of the time it turned out amazingly well but with some techniques that had me trying over and over again, it became a bit tricky to achieve the desired outlook.

The best part of the process is that every piece of information was sourced from local vendors, people, and local markets. Since the study is solely dedicated to British Invasion and the swinging 60s, I was able to find reliable sources and references that contributed majorly to my research and ultimately to my designs.



We want a world where fashion does not exist at all.  
“We don’t want a world where fashion is not overconsumption but freedom of expression.”

Degrowth: The Future Fashion Could Choose  
By Faith Robinson





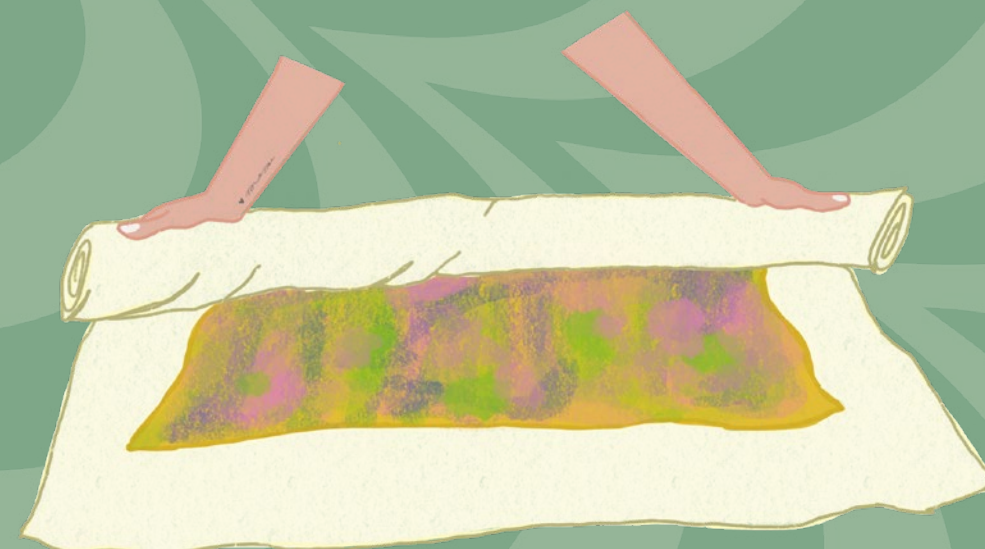
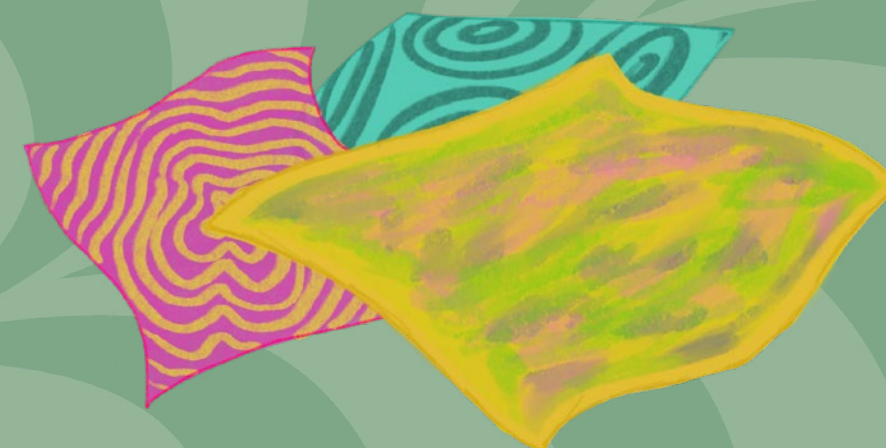
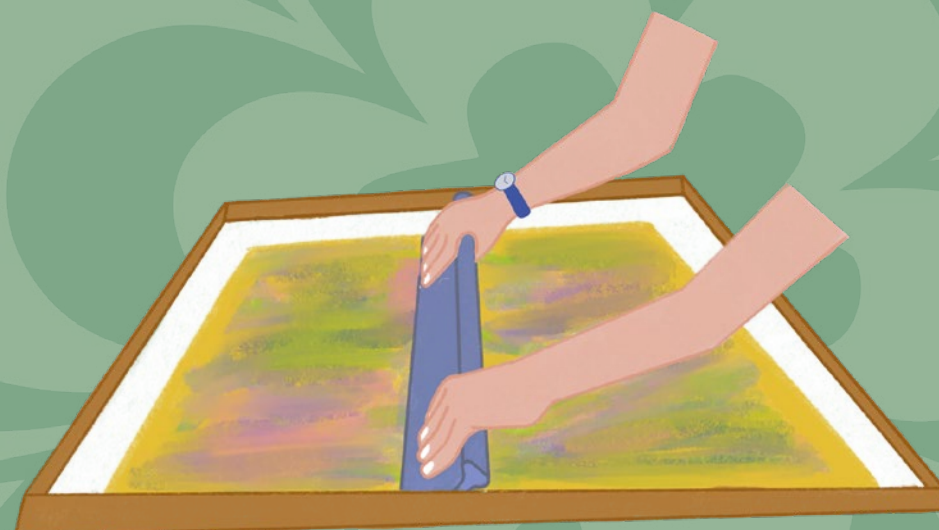


Taking inspiration from the dandy fashion, the psychedelic intense colours and the joy of being free to express yourself. The ideation is to create colourful pieces that are free from gender norms and are made to strike a conversation. The designer works with a variety of fabrics and techniques that can not be replicated as every design is handmade onto the fabric, to celebrate the unique persona.

In order to achieve the psychedelic prints organically, I work with open screen procyon dyes and paint every design by hand to achieve unique swirls and patterns that are of same family but look different.

#### How to achieve the look?

- First we mix all the dyes with water and paint onto the screen.
- When dried, we mix a gum and like normal screen printing we print onto the fabric.
- After fabric fully dries, it needs to be steamed for 3 hours for the colour that's sitting on top of the fabric to seep through.
- After steaming, we wash the fabric and it's ready; the best part is it can still be processed further but this is how I achieve the psychedelic look.









# Buna'wat

Mala Sinha

## Creating Buna'wat

'Wat' (in Buna'wat) means a Buddhist temple where people gather and meditate. Craft is meditative and at Buna'wat a group of women meet regularly and weave magic with their hands, knitting, crocheting, and doing embroidery. Each woman has her own history, life story and sense of beauty which she brings forth when working with needles and yarns, and the garment or accessory created bears her personal stamp.

The seeds of craft were planted in my mind early in life by my extended family of grandmothers and aunts who were skilled in art and crafts. The Buddhist say, the mind is a repository of seeds (Sarvabijika) in which every experience and perceptions is imprinted. The seeds remain latent and germinate when watered later in life. As a young girl I dreamed of setting up a studio workshop when I grew up, which would craft beautiful things made by hands and sold.

In 2020, I superannuated as Professor from University of Delhi and this also coincided with the onset of Covid-19 Pandemic and lockdown. The time for change had come, and the soil was ready for the germination of seeds of craft planted by my grandmother, aunts and mother. I created Buna'wat - a craft collective in January 2021."

The creation of Buna'wat was not easy. I had the infrastructure, stocks of yarns and fabric, pattern books and the best knitting and crochet tools; but I was unable to find women who would be interested in knitting, embroidery, and crochet.

Most educated women in India no longer knit, sew, and crochet. Those who know the craft are poor and have migrated from small towns and villages to urban centers where they want to work as domestic help which is lucrative. Clearly, their economic needs supersede their inclination to be involved in something refined as a craft.

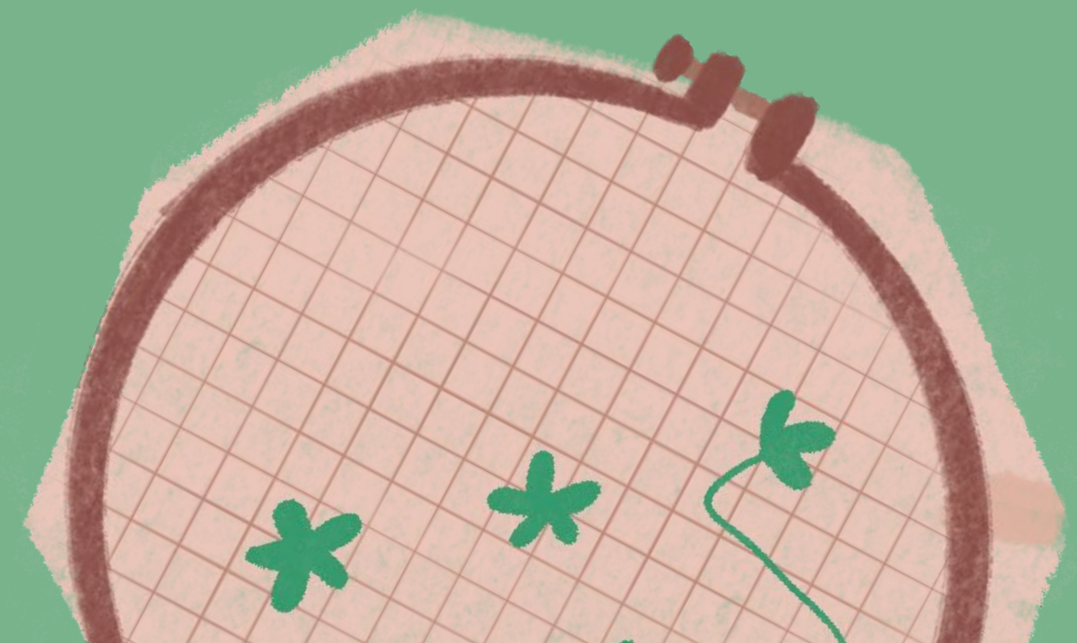
The twin principles of Localism and Virtual Localism helped me locate the initial group of craft partners for Buna'wat.

## Localism

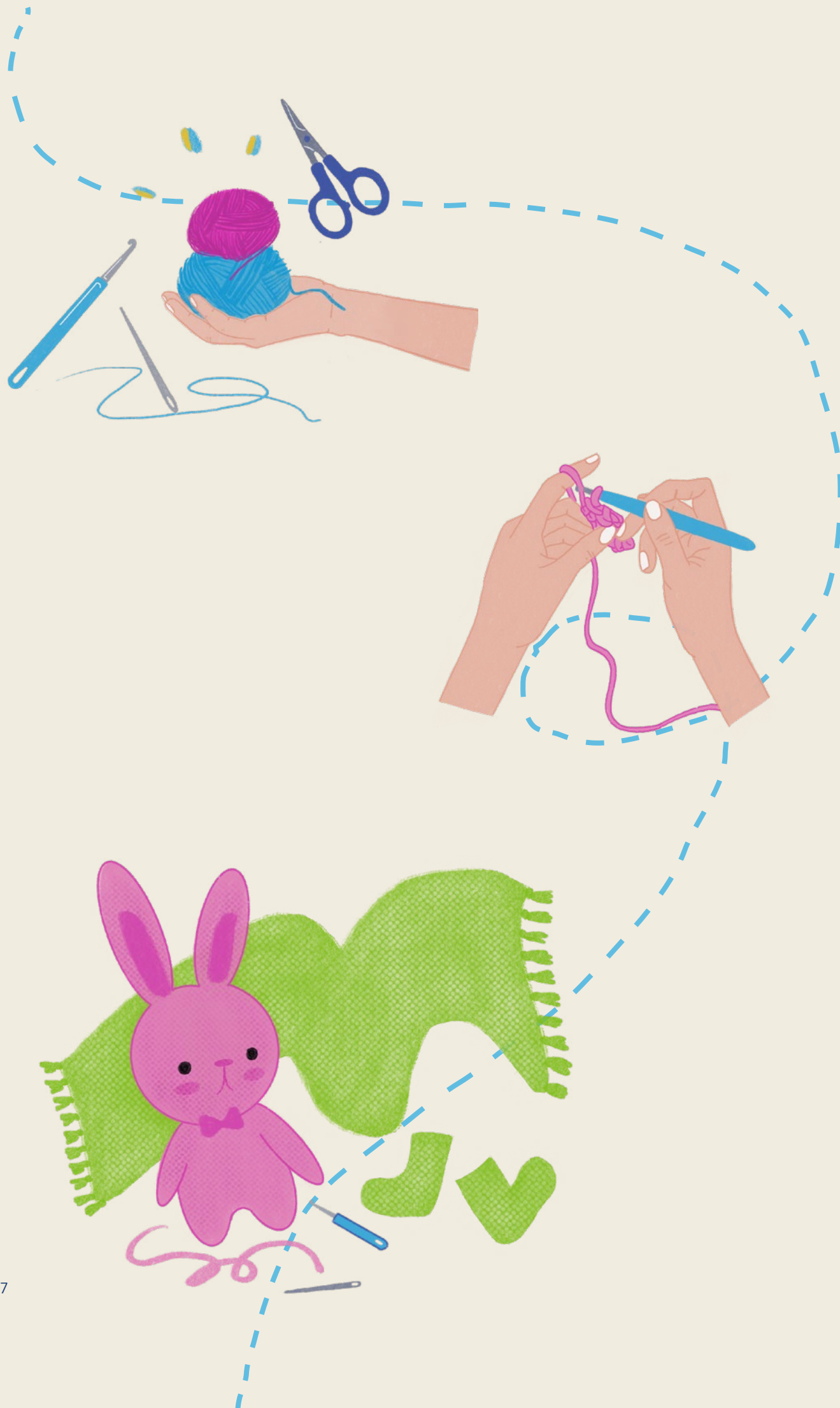
I started observing my locality closely to see who lived there and what they know. With the help of friends and neighbors, I found five women craft partners. Localism implies physical proximity, and the women could visit the craft collective regularly, despite lockdown.

All five were from the lower middle-class section of society and were willing to explore an opportunity to earn through their competencies in needlecraft. Soon Buna'wat became a hub of empathetic sharing of personal stories and knowledge among the women and the generated energy increased creative outputs and developed a sense of identity rooted in the crafts community.

*Craft had travelled across generations and grown new roots in a new soil and in a new era; having passed through a matrilineal line from grandmother to mother to her daughter.*







### Virtual Localism

There is a vast virtual global community of crafters, consisting of individuals who run craft centres, websites dedicated to crafts and learning videos that are free. I enhanced my own crochet and knitting skills through these open sources and three of my craft partners who were not literate learned from you tube tutorials. The virtual world of crafters is like a local community because of the ease with which you can connect, and due to existence of a culture of knowledge sharing among crafters. There is no competitiveness as each craft is made by hands, is unique and cannot be replicated.

### Finding a mentor

Serendipitously I discovered Mala Srikanth on Facebook who runs a remarkably successful knitting centre called 'Needles to say more' located in Ranikhet - a hill town in India. She became my senpai (mentor) and through emails and conversations on the phone she step by step guided me on practical matters of managing a craft centre, pricing of garment, fair payment to the women, sources to buy wool and so on. Mala is a good friend now. Instagram and Facebook helped me to promote the work of Buna'wat and we sold beyond our expectations in the winters of 2021.

### Craft Communities

Buna'wat is for the community and for lovers of beauty and tranquillity. It preserves tradition because all craft is an outcome of the collective consciousness of the past in the hands of the new. Unlike producing goods made by machines in factories, the craft uses hands, it is meditative and increases mindfulness.

### What does Buna'wat do?

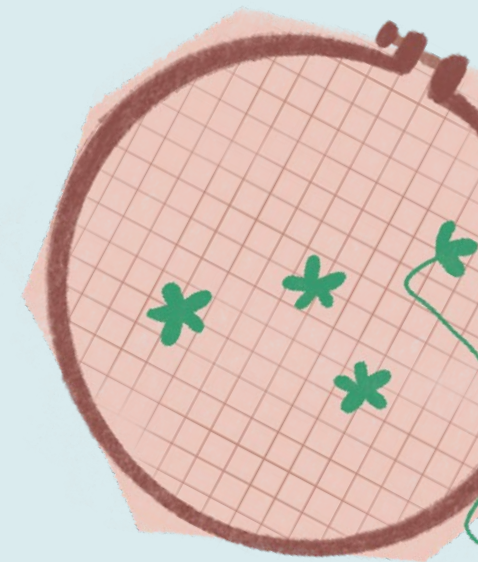
We produce the highest quality of handknitted and crochet garments, embroidered linen and amigurumi dolls. The mantra for quality is following the seven steps listed below correctly.

1. Making swatches
2. Getting a sense of color and design
3. Reading charts and design patterns
4. Learning new techniques of knitting, crocheting and embroidery
5. Seaming techniques
6. Weaving in loose yarns
7. Washing, blocking and drying fabric

Our designs are inspired by both local and global sensibilities and customized to what would look good and is preferred by the wearer. We tailor the knitted or crochet fabric for the buyer, each item discussed and conceptualised by the group of women and made by one pair of loving hands.













# Conclusion

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Three local stories enacted during the Covid 19 pandemic have shaped our vision of “The Local Manifesto” in fashion, craft and art.

Due to the barriers created by the global lockdown conditions, our learnings from the past were no longer relevant. We found it difficult to access the resources needed for our projects.

But creative expression never halts; and as we went into an incubation phase and the power of Local was revealed to us.

*Caroline* made a connection with nature when she discovered that she could make unusual and exquisite hues/ dyes from flowers and leaves that grew in her neighbourhood parks.

*Mala* made a connection with her local community when she found women for her craft collective, who could knit, crochet and embroider lived in her neighbourhood. Buna’wat continued with its work and the camaraderie and support that developed among the women in difficult times was heart-warming.

*Vaishali’s* work brought new expression of design and fashion as we emerged back, out into a changed world. She discovered local is when design, colour and patterns are not defined by gender and class but are inclusive.

# Find out more

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Illustrated by Anamika Bhandari, Instagram [@moon\\_ka\\_premi](#)

## Read & Watch

Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan. Kate Fletcher & Matildha Tham. Download here: [katefletcher.com](http://katefletcher.com)

Fashion and Craft Revolution downloaded from [fashionrevolution.org](http://fashionrevolution.org)

Videos on the Work of Needles to say more:

- [youtube.com/watch?v=jBC9ZkUbc8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=jBC9ZkUbc8)
- [ted.com/talks](https://ted.com/talks)
- [thebetterindia.com](https://thebetterindia.com)

## Bibliography

*Design and Nature: a Partnership*. Edited by Kate Fletcher, Louise St. Pierre, and Mathilda Tham. London: Routledge, 2019

*EARTH LOGIC: Fashion Action Research Plan*. Fletcher, Kate, and Mathilda Tham. London: The JJ Charitable Trust, 2019

*The State of the Apparel Sector 2015 Special Report – Water. A report for the global leadership award in sustainable apparel, the sustainable business group*. Maxwell, D. McAndrew, L. Ryan, J. 2015

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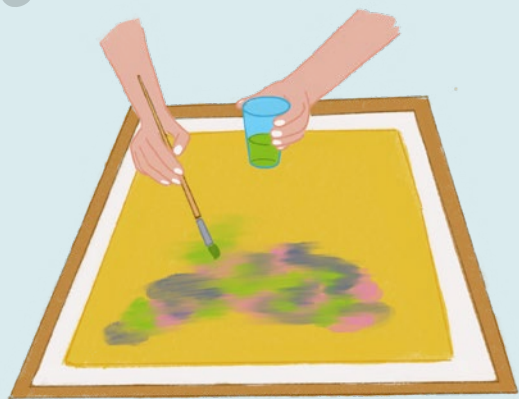


**Freedom of expression  
Art sets you free**

**Gender neutral fashion is the next revolution!**

*Craft unites community while machines divide the community  
Craft nourishes and integrates; machines impoverish and alienate  
Craft unites the mind, body and spirit; and machine fragments these*

**Craft is mindful and machines are mindless  
Craft is personal and machines are impersonal  
Craft customises and machines standardize  
Craft attracts and pull and machines sell and push**



**Local works within sustainable environmental, social limits  
Local cherishes heritage, traditions, materials and skills already in existence  
Local considers existing ecologies - nature first!**

**Local supports communities of care**

*Share and collaborate for the greater good  
What can we grow together?  
How can we work together?*

**Craft is hand made unlike machine made  
Craft is local and machines are global  
Craft is original and machine-made clones**





