



Sabya-savvy

The Snail, The Frog Princess, Sanctuary. No, they aren't titles for any fairy tale or a wildlife documentary but a few names of fashion guru Sabyasachi Mukherjee's ensembles. We get talking with him to understand how fashion designing goes beyond just the weaving of ornate fabrics.

Text: Saroni Roy

Photo: Amit Chakravarty

Many traits at a very early age made sure that Sabyasachi Mukherjee was destined to be a fashion designer. "I was always sketching Miss India-like figures behind my notebooks and report cards. I can't even begin to tell you the amount of times I have been rusticated from college and school for just unconsciously sketching. The funny part is now that I do clothes I don't sketch anymore!" he reminisces. That's also probably because his sketches and designs are all weaved into fabrics now.

Sabyasachi's formal initiation into the world of fashion took place when he got into the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Kolkata in 1996. Thereafter, he launched his first signature label in 2001. That year saw him win the Femina British Council Most Outstanding Young Designer of India Award, which took him to London for an internship with Georgina Von Etzdorf, an eclectic designer based in Salisbury. Returning home with edgier ideas, Sabyasachi started retailing at all major stores in India. In 2002, he participated at the Lakme India Fashion Week (LIFW) in New Delhi where he displayed his debut collection.

Since then he has been associated with the LIFW and his experience with it has seen not much of a difference. "It's the same hunger to do well. It's the same stress you go through each season. It is like being in school and taking the Board exams. Nobody reveals how prepared they are and the top guys pit their collection to be the worst. But finally they are the ones who come out with flying colours." Being the only Indian designer invited to showcase at the Milan Fashion Week 2004, he was also voted by *Asia Inc*, a Singapore based business magazine as one of the ten most influential Indians in Asia, along with Aishwarya Rai, Priyanka Gandhi, Sabeer Bhatia and the like. In comparison to the International Fashion Weeks, the India Fashion Week is much more cohesively organised.

He reveals, "at the International Fashion Week you have to do everything on your own – cast your own models, find your own agents, decide on your own runways, run from one city to the other looking for things. Here, everything comes in a shelf. They are lined up for you to pick." His latest collection at the LIFW 2008 was called *Sanctuary*. It is difficult to figure out what inspired Sabya to create such an eclectic ensemble. "It is inspired by farm lands, brothels, deep sea divers, body conscious clothing, bikers, romanticism, Frida Kahlo, Jackson Pollock, Paul Goddard and many more. I make fun that if

there are forty-eight outfits, there are at least five hundred inspirations put together into one collection."

Very candidly Sabyasachi chuckles, "My sister had a skirt which I had named a chicken skirt and for my collection *Sanctuary* I have lifted ideas from my sister's collection who is graduating this year." When asked what exactly he keeps in mind while designing apparel? He says, "The woman I am designing for, the place that she lives in, whether she is going to travel in a Mercedes or a bus. It could be a bohemian or a conservative woman and I know I would find her types. This time the woman is a sexual being. She is sexual mentally so there are plenty of innuendoes in the clothing in terms of shapes and its fit. It's a very dark collection."

"I always feel style is about a woman who is 5'1" and wears flats to a party."

Plenty of stress and toil goes into the making an outstanding collection each season. From deciding on an out-of-the-box idea to weaving them across through fabrics draped on the models to flaunting them on the runway and a lot more. However experienced a designer is it is not a cakewalk. "The biggest question for me is what to do? And once I know that, my problem is solved. For some days I switched off my cellphone and isolated myself because I felt I couldn't do the show! Prior to the show I had so many outfits that it was difficult to edit. I had more than forty kinds of attire," he reveals. He earned acclaim for his showing in Browns, London (a highly acclaimed fashion boutique). "A memorable incident was when Brown picked me up after the show. You go through moments of self-doubt when you're the chosen one."

Sabyasachi also has high-end home décor lines in tie-up with textile tycoon, Bombay Dyeing each season. Apart from his ensembles he also plans to launch his signature bags and shoes collection. A man with multiple facets and interests Sabyasachi has styled Bollywood costumes in films like *Black*, *Baabul* and *Laaga Chunari Mein Daag*, and would not leave even one chance to style the gorgeous Bollywood beauty Dimple Kapadia. If not a fashion designer he would have been a farmer or a carpenter. "I love working with my hands and I want to design furniture for sure. What I am also interested in is jewellery. I was a jeweller before I became a fashion designer...few people know that."

The parting shot from this high priest of fashion is interesting – "Be comfortable with yourself and who you are, and you'll always look amazing. I always feel style is about a woman who is 5'1" and wears flats to a party." □