



But naturally

It's not just boutique players that are making their presence felt in the organic apparel market; the big brands too have jumped in

What do you do with the cola bottle once you've gulped that last drop? Crush it, throw it into the nearest trash can and not give it another thought, right? While green crusaders continue their battle against plastic, apparel brands are trying, in their own way, to lessen the load on the planet: they're using waste material to make cloth that finds its way into high-fashion clothes. So, the next pair of jeans you buy from Levi's could contain eight recycled plastic bottles blended with the usual cotton. You could also pick up the brand's trucker jacket made from repurposed US military parachutes. "We're always looking for alternative sustainable fibre," says Sanjay Purohit, managing director, Levi Strauss,

South Asia. "The increasing demand for eco-friendly products has made production more cost efficient. Yarns and fabrics that utilise post-consumer recycled plastic are established in the apparel supply chain, so it doesn't even increase production time." Manufactured in the US, Levi's Waste<less denims use recycled plastic acquired from its global recycling programme and cotton sourced through the Better Cotton Initiative. The Water<less and Waste<less collections, which retail at ₹2,499 and ₹3,699, respectively, account for nearly \$1 billion of Levi's overall revenue.

Trendy Indians are increasingly seeking out eco-friendly fabrics, sustainable clothing and organic apparel: clothes made from bamboo, hemp and eucalyptus fibre, infused with healing herbs, using vegetable colours and natural dyes and, of course, organic cotton, grown from non genetically-modified seeds and without synthetic fertilisers. But this is still a tiny, tiny market. "The organised apparel market in India is only 20% of the total, which is estimated at \$45 billion in 2013. Organic apparel will account for less than 1% of the organised apparel market," says Amit Gugnani, senior vice-president, textile and apparel, Technopak. That means a market size of only around ₹540 crore, restricted

to urban, upscale customers who pay premium pricing — usually at least 1.5 times the rates of similar clothes made from regular cotton.

Still, there is growing demand for organic clothing, and start-ups and established brands alike are queuing up to cater to it. Big players such as Arrow and Van Heusen launched eco-friendly shirts in 2010, the same year that sportswear brands like Nike and Puma launched their eco-friendly collections. In 2012, Kewal Kiran Clothing launched the Water Saver range in its Killer Jeans brands, which claims to use 80% less water than its regular collection. Levi's, too, has the Water<Less range that uses 28-96% less water than regular jeans. European fashion brand Gron Stockholm is also expanding its presence in the country, with

plans to open 15-20 more stores by the end of 2014, taking its total in India to 23. "In India, sustainable fashion has started gaining popularity only recently. We have witnessed a 60-65% increase in demand since 2012," says Deepak Aggarwal, CEO, Gron Stockholm.

Well-known local brands, too, have stepped into this space. While Mumbai-based designer and owner of AND Designs, Anita Dongre launched her Grassroot line of organic clothing in 2007, Fabin-dia has the Be the Change range, Soma has Soma Organic, while Good Earth introduced the Gum-drop range of organic children's clothing in 2011. "Manufacturing this collection is more expensive because organic cotton and natural dyes are costly. It is also time consuming since the clothes are handmade by traditional craftsmen. But the very encouraging response has helped us sustain it for so many years," says Dongre. So much so that the designer plans to launch a similar collection for younger customers as well.

In addition to retail apparel biggies, local organic cotton manufacturing companies are venturing into the eco-friendly segment. Tamil Nadu-based Appachi Ecologic,

Shop for a cause

Big and small brands alike charge premium prices for organic collections

Brand	Collection	Green Factor	Range ₹
Levi's	Waste<less	Recycled plastic bottles	3,699 - 3,999
Levi's	Water<less	28-96% less water	2,499 - 4,500
Nike	Flyknit	Produces less waste	9,995 - 13,995
Gron Stockholm	Organic kidswear	Organic cotton and vegetable colours	600 - 2500
Puma	InCycle	Biodegradable T-shirts and jackets	1,999 - 3,999
AND Designs	Grassroots	Organic cotton and natural dyes	3,500 - 22,990
Appachi Ecologic	Ethicus	Organic cotton, natural dyes and ahimsa silk	2,000 - 9,000
Nino Bambino	Organic kidswear	Organic cotton and natural dyes	299 - 899
Do U Speak Green	Eco-friendly clothing	Organic cotton, recycled polyester and eucalyptus fibre	700 - 1,500

for instance, works with organic cotton farmers and weavers for its apparel brand, Ethicus. Launched in 2009, the brand offers handloom sarees, t-shirts and baby clothes made from organic cotton, natural dyes and ahimsa silk certified by the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS). It also exports yarn and garments to Japan and Europe under the Ecologic brand. Says Vijayalakshmi Nachiar, director, Ethicus, "We have seen 100% increase in sales since our inception."

The increasing awareness of green clothing has led to the launch of several brands such as No Nasties, Indigreen, Bhu:sattva and Samtana, and also tempted smaller export companies to turn their eyes to the domestic market. "We have been exporting organic apparel through our company Organic & More to western markets for over a decade. We decided to test the Indian market seeing the considerable demand here. Sales keep increasing every season," says Vickram Kumar, director, sales and marketing, Nino Bambino, which specialises in children's clothing and launched in India in January 2013. Starting with a consignment of 4,000 pieces, the brand now produces over 16,000 garments in each production cycle.

Another exporter turned domestic brand is Do U Speak Green, launched in 2010, which makes clothes from organic cotton, eucalyptus fibre and recycled polyester. Says founder Shishir Goenka, "We have been exporting eco-friendly fabrics for Western markets since 2007 and realised there is potential for such a collection in India as well. Besides, I was keen on making my small contribution towards environment sustainability."

Most new players in the green clothing line sell online to tech-savvy consumers. Nino Bambino, Gron Stockholm and Do U Speak Green's collections can be found



“We are always on the lookout for alternative sustainable fibres for our collection

—**SANJAY PUROHIT**
Managing director, Levi Strauss, South Asia

on most popular e-retail sites, but many of them are now setting up brick-and-mortar shops or tying up with local distributors in the metros as well. For instance, Nino Bambino has tied up with distributors in Mumbai, Delhi, Ranchi and Gujarat, Gron Stockholm has three franchise stores in and around Delhi, while Ethicus has tied up with 40 boutiques across India.

THE CLOTHING CONUNDRUM

It's not an easy business, though. A major issue faced by organic labels in India is establishing authenticity. Certification bodies and audit organisations sound a note of caution in this regard. "It is important to differentiate between self-declarations about water use and organic cotton and a genuine, third-party certificate," says Sumit Gupta, India representative, GOTS.

The process doesn't come cheap. Nino Bambino pays ₹2.5 lakh as annual fee for its two manufacturing units, while Do U Speak Green pays €2,000 a year. "We pay such a high price because the firms we export to compel us to comply by stringent standards," says Goenka, adding that 80% of the company's stock is still for the export market.

The bigger challenge is of price — organic clothing is by and large a premium offering, and the prices usually reflect that. While



“Manufacturing this collection is expensive and time consuming. But the response is encouraging

—**ANITA DONGRE**
Designer and owner of AND Designs

many manufacturers, including Gron Stockholm and Do U Speak Green, say they keep their prices on par with conventional cotton apparel, the fact remains that price remains a substantial hurdle, whether real or perceived. GOTS' Gupta, though, thinks there are more serious issues to be tackled: "Availability of certified organic garments and consumer awareness are bigger issues than the cost in Indian retail."

That's probably why, while large exporters such as Arvind, Gokuldas and Alok Industries all work with organic cotton, it's mainly for overseas markets. "We've been making eco-friendly apparel for over three years now, but local demand is still very low so we focus on export markets," agrees Raj Kapur, head of marketing, Arvind Mills. Perhaps the large players will be inspired by the numbers the small guys are quoting. Nino Bambino predicts a 75% increase in sales this year from ₹25 lakh in 2013 to ₹1.1 crore. Gron Stockholm says it has witnessed a 70-75% increase in sales for the summer collection this year compared with last year, and Ethicus clocked a turnover of ₹5 crore in FY13, compared with its modest beginning of ₹10 lakh back in 2009. It's a small beginning, but who knows, green may well become the new black. 