

DIOR FALL
2023

(Above) Maria Grazia Chiuri thinks this embroidered jacket looks like a Bollywood cinema poster, emblazoned with the luxury brand name and logo. L'Union Fait La Force, which translates to Strength Through Unity. PIC/GETTY IMAGES
(Right) Kanjeevaram on the Dior Instagram: "I am interested in contemporary women. Rekha ji, for me, is so fascinating with a cool sense of tradition. She has an incredible energy; I would like to have that energy," said Chiuri, creative director of women's lines at Christian Dior about meeting veteran Indian actor, Rekha

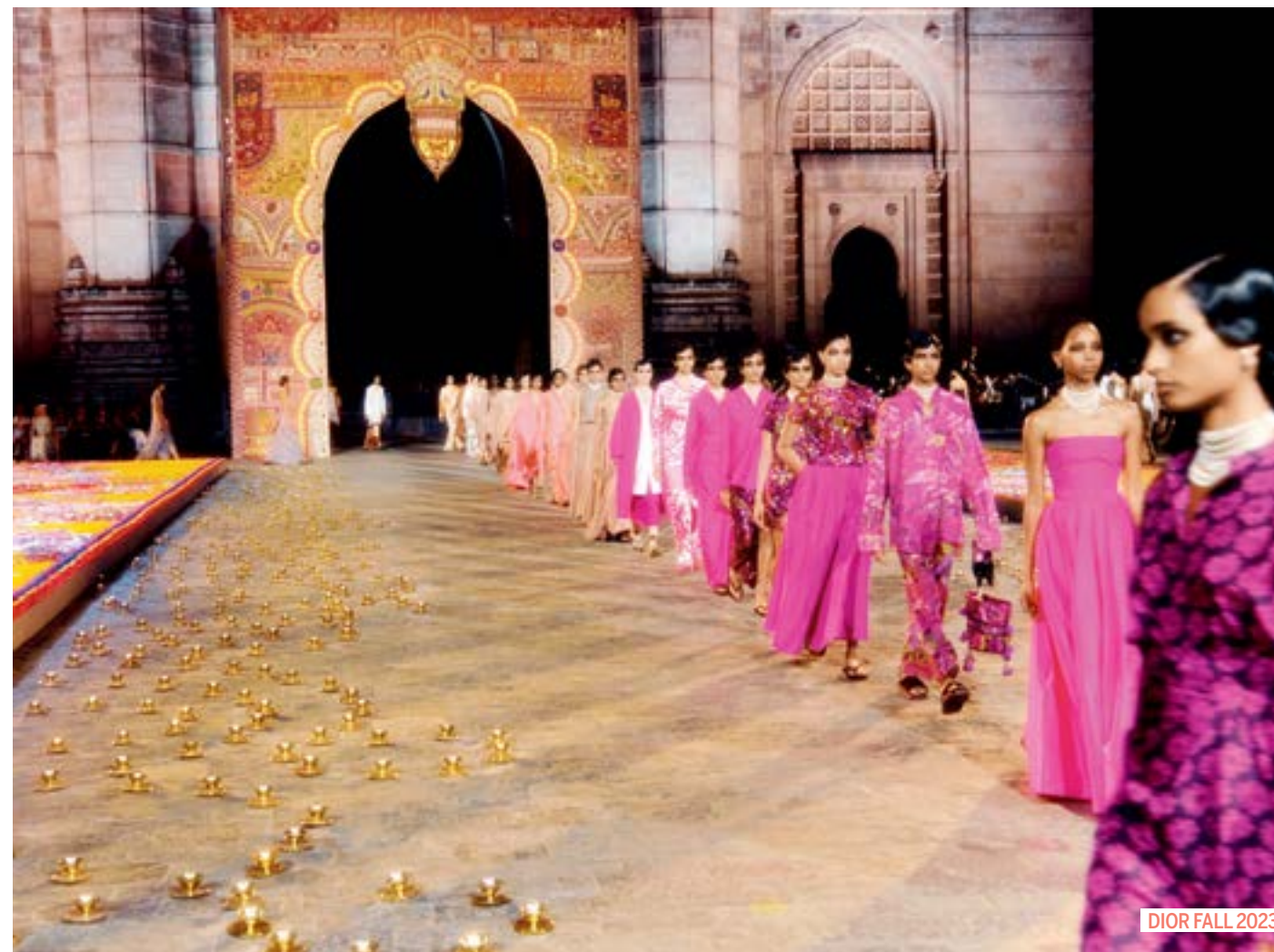
An ode to the shakti of craft

Female energy was the fuel driving the Dior Fall 2023 show last week that celebrated silai, bunai and Bollywood. What's not to like?

SHWETA SHIWARE

If someone had stood in front of the Gateway of India last Thursday night and asked no one in particular, "Where are the guys?", they wouldn't have been wrong.

It was an evening that belonged to women. From Christian Dior's creative director of women's collections Maria Grazia Chiuri, who collaborated with Karishma Swali, creative director of Chanakya International



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and Chanakya School of Craft, to the hundreds of female artisans whose deft handiwork was celebrated in the glamorous setting of a fashion show to the unmatched Rekha, who made heads turn in a Kanjeevaram even as the rest of the celeb crowd chose to serenade haute couture... the women were front and centre.

The cast of models—all women again—walked under the canopy of the Toran, a 46-foot tall site-specific archway made from Indian embroi-

dero into an LED-diya lit trail lined with floor panels of flowers to imitate rangoli designs. Guests sat on carved wooden diwans plumped with cushions to watch models step out in pearl chokers and velvet flatforms to the rhythm of one of India's finest female tabla maestros, Anuradha Pal. The scenes from the Dior Fall 2023 show captured the essence of India's heritage, both architectural and artistic. "I am very emotional to realise this show in Mumbai," Chiuri told

a few journalists during an interaction. "It is a dream that we have had for a long time. It is so important to celebrate the culture, creativity that is this country."

That an Italian woman, the first incidentally, to ever head Dior in 75 years, was saying as a pointer to a collection that came from a place of exchanges and crossovers. French minimalism waved namaste to plurality of ancestral Indian artisanship in saree-inspired skirts and

kurta-referenced tunics and shirts that came together to remind us of the kurta-lungi combo that is a sartorial staple in most Indian states. The evening coats, boleros and draped dresses carried the quintessential Chiuri approach of functionalism and clean lines; at other times, they came embellished with updated zardozi, applique, mirrorwork or in chintz. We thought that the stream-

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At the after-party celebrations, Maria Grazia Chiuri, dressed in trademark black—culottes and kurta—offset by kohl-eyes, heavy rings on several fingers, slipped in and out of Kolhapuri flats as she got comfortable on the floor surrounded by her team. We can tell she favours comfort over corsetry

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lined collarless shirts borrowed from the men's wardrobes, and the iconic Christian Dior Bar jacket reimagined with a Nehru collar, came across as potent weapons, whether for the boardroom or the boudoir.

Starting with "We Should All Be Feminists" (the title of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Ted talk) written across a "couture" T-shirt that marked her first collection on the Dior Spring 2017 catwalk, Chiuri continues to smash fashion's glass ceiling with a good set of intentions, finding inspiration in the work of female painters, writers and collaborators.

Chiuri's familiarity and connection with India dates back three decades when she would develop embroideries with Indian haute couture specialists to watch models step out in pearl chokers and velvet flatforms to the rhythm of one of India's finest female tabla maestros, Anuradha Pal. The scenes from the Dior Fall 2023 show captured the essence of India's heritage, both architectural and artistic. "I am very emotional to realise this show in Mumbai," Chiuri told

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and craft techniques to bring a new language that is fragile yet contemporary."

In this collection, Chiuri proved that high fashion can fly without compromising on credit and respect. The silks, we were informed, had been woven according to hallowed traditions that stay alive to this day in Tamil Nadu. Indian handiwork, this time, was not a nameless, faceless service that couture brands across the world have hired. The artisans and embroiderers were collaborators, and with this event's symposium-style messaging Chiuri possibly addressed the industry's red-flag issue of cultural property. But it also prodded us to reflect on the freeing possibilities of a scaled-down silhouette with maximum louche elegance. At the after-party, Chiuri, dressed in trademark black—culottes and kurta—offset by kohl-eyes, heavy rings on several fingers, slipped in and out of Kolhapuri flats as she got comfortable on the floor surrounded by her team. We can tell she favours comfort over corsetry.

Chiuri's can-do women are practical looking and their wardrobe is designed with an uncomplicated sense of tradition and contemporary freshness; not necessarily for drawing the eye. "I like it that every woman can transform things for herself. Each of us can wear every piece in a different way. You can mix daywear and evening wear," she had told Vogue Runway when discussing this collection.

To bring this collection of ensembles alive, Chiuri dipped into Dior's archives which revealed photos of former artistic director Marc Bohan along with a group of models arriving for shows to Mumbai and Delhi on an Air India flight in April 1962, to initiate a conversation between France and India. At Thursday's show, a colour block sequence dedicated to silks—in shades of green, yellow, pink and purple—stood as a sanguine homage to Bohan.

shweta.shiware@mid-day.com

Book me up online

A viral Twitter conversation recently asked the vital question: What is the Indian version of Goodreads? It may still be niche, but there are a few book lovers trying to offer you the same space for desi reads

YUSRA HUSAIN

PRAKRUTI Maniar was baffled when she was handed over English translations of the poetic verses of Gulzar and Harivansh Rai Bachchan's iconic Hindi poem Madhushala during her Masters in English literature at Mithibai College back in 2017. The course module was to learn about Indian literature and Maniar chose to read the text in the original script itself. "Surprisingly, I too had not thought of Indian literature outside of English," says the 29-year-old, adding, "because growing up in the 1990s meant having a command over English was a functional, economical and aspirational need. This came at the cost of uprooting and disassociating from our mother tongues."

But that thought kept troubling Maniar. In the first year of her MA in digital humanities at Chicago's Loyola University, the Malad West resident started work on a research paper titled Creating a Database of Indian Literature: Theory and Practice. This came from a realisation that the definition of Indian literature was highly westernised, looked at from an American and European perspective and did not feature Indian authors, women authors or regional language books even in a simple Google search. The language lover converted her words into a website, Purple Pencil Project (PPP), and hopes to make it the Indian Goodreads giving desi authors, the languages and indie publishers a deserving space and voice.

"Goodreads, unfortunately, is not favourable for marginalised voices outside of America and Europe. Our works don't even figure

in the top five books in English or in the best romantic works," says the 29-year-old. Maniar co-founded PPP in 2019, and since then, she has some 360 book reviews and a running tally of 600 essays, all around literature produced in India and by Indians. With two contractual editors on board and about 25 freelance reviewers of which about five to 10 are regular ones, Maniar invites not just professional, but any and everyone to review a vernacular language book. "We have a vetting process to meet editorial standards of course and essentials for a book review are pre-informed to the reviewer," she says.

Apart from original book reviews, Maniar is also in the stage of migrating book data into a digital library. "Just like Goodreads, we want people to get a host of books by Indian authors and those published by smaller publishing houses, just by keying in a genre, like thriller, romance, sci-fi on our platform," says the young entrepreneur who has a running excel sheet of more than 1,000 books. The task, however, is a daunting one, as it requires manual feeding in of data which comes with problems of finance and human resources.

Writers Melon (WM) took off

Goodreads, unfortunately, is not favourable for marginalised voices outside of America and Europe. Our works don't even figure in the top five books in English or in the best romantic works

Prakruti Maniar, Purple Pencil Project



Prakruti Maniar, 29, co-founded Purple Pencil Project in 2019 while pursuing her Masters in Chicago. The platform has 360 original book reviews and 600 essays. Maniar is also building a digital library. PIC/SATEJ SHINDE



Leonard Fernandes and Queenie Rodrigues, co-founders of Goa-based The Dogears Bookshop

more than a decade ago in 2009 when Priyanka Purkayastha was still living in Mumbai. The now Germany-based book lover tells us, "I believed in the accessibility of literature and books and wanted to build an online community." Around 500 book reviews have gone up the website since. The team of four to five, work virtually. "How WM works is simple. Content is created around three main pillars: books, authors and writing and the key element is to inspire members to read more."

She explains, "We use our community to generate honest and unbiased reviews for just released books. So one can find the books we are offering for review, apply for free review copies and if they are selected they receive the book and can upload the reviews online across platforms, including our website. We also believe that reading a full book, reviewing it, providing feedback and critique takes time and effort, so we also remunerate our reviewers by reward points in cash and badges." For established authors and books selected by the team, the review program is free. "For new authors," she says, "we have a marketing fee that sustains the community. So far we have kept the community free from any kind of ads from other brands."

Co-owner of Goa-based Dogears Bookshop and self-publishing firm Cinnamon Teal Leonard Fernandes, believes Goodreads, an Amazon-backed company, is "susceptible to manipulation as it is not an independent entity." "It is not tuned for the Indian scenario. The largest language selling in India is Hindi not English. Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi and Bengali too have a huge readership, but in the absence of an independently curated platform, many of these authors are losing out on visibility."

Fernandes believes a reader telling another of his ilk about a good book holds more weightage than a publisher doing so. He mentions that Goodreads cannot include books when the book data is not publicly available, which is the case not only with many Indian language books, but also with many books by indie presses. "Also, publishers not bothering to update the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) impacts a book's global visibility," he says.

yusra.husain@mid-day.com