



Sharbari Datta flanked by supermodels at ITC Sonar, Kolkata. The show was choreographed by Prasad Biddapa.

Crusading couturier

SINCE the 1990s, Sharbari Datta has been a name to reckon with in the Indian fashion industry and she would have you know that "creating gorgeous pieces is *not* the work of a fashion designer, but a tailor". Introducing ethnic chic to the male wardrobe, which otherwise is considered rather staid, she continues to stand apart from the run-of-the-mill designer. But the road to success hasn't been a bed of roses for this Kolkata-based creator.

What started off as an experimental attempt to showcase ingenious work has paid off for Sharbari Datta, write shraman banerjee and shreyosi chakraborty

When she showcased her first collection of embroidered and coloured *dbotis* back in the '90s, she was taken aback to see the mixed response. While the embroidered ones flew off the racks, the coloured ones stayed untouched. "Men were apprehensive about wearing coloured *dbotis*, thinking it would resemble a sari and make them look feminine," she says.

It was only after a prolonged

Neeraj in a red and white ensemble in raw silk with appliqué work done in aari.



wait of five years and a successful show under her belt, with Milind Suman sporting the coloured *dboti*, that Indian men finally accepted the new trend. Datta spontaneously draws her designs directly on the material, which makes each one exclusive because of the assurance of no repetition. Visit her place and you won't fail to notice the beautiful artifacts carefully handpicked from different corners of the world. She is equally selective when it comes to her designs and her sources of inspiration lie in Hindu mythology, folk art, Egyptian murals and Asian calligraphy, all of which she reinvents with a jauntily artistry so as not to rob the traditional feel of its charm. Her specially skilled weavers then braid the designs on the material and bring them to life.

Her elite clientele features the likes of industrialist Vijay Mallya and former cricketers Ravi Shastri and Rahul Dravid. Former union minister Praful Patel and quizmaster and Trinamul Congress MP Derek O'Brien are also fond of Datta's designs. She makes use of a variety of materials that include raw silk, khadi and Tussar. "The dhoti is draped differently all



Saurav and Sharad sport a collection created from pure silk with surface ornamentation done in motifs of old Kolkata. The black and white attire has a tribal motif.

across the country and even in various other parts of South Asia. Therefore, I use designs that would be relevant to Asia, rather than limit them to Bengal," she explains.

Datta recently attended the Guwahati fashion week, where her innovative creations were warmly welcomed, and she is quick to

Rajat sports a Datta jacket with denims fusion for the North-east India Fashion Weekend 2015. The surface ornamentation is done with appliqué work and aari and the fabric is pure silk with different tones on dye.



point out that she does not believe in labelling her designs in terms of creating a "winter" or "wedding" collection and so on. "I do not work that way — fashion designers do. I feel this to be a contrived way of working." Though she designed Abhishek Bachchan's wedding trousseau, it was done on request.

Asked why she had not as yet opened a chain of fashion stores, she said, "If someone likes my work, they have to come and visit my house." She works from home and one cannot fail to appreciate the feel of the old Bengali aristocratic *baitbakkhana* that has been recreated there.

Shayan Munshi sports a pure silk jacket with Oriental motifs and ornamentation done in aari work from the Sarbari Datta collection at the 20th celebration of her work at ITC Sonar Kolkata.



What started off as an experimental attempt to showcase ingenious work has paid off and Datta is now well known in the fashion business. Her works occupy space in the closets of the who's who of the country and having completed 25 glorious years in the industry, the trendsetter has no regrets.

Neeraj in a gold and turquoise collection. The fabric used is pure silk with tribal motifs done in aari work.

