

## UKIBC Case Study

# Shazia Saleem

After studying fashion in Florence and London, Shazia Saleem decided to follow her passions for contemporary western design, and India's heritage in fabrics. She set out on her own to source from entirely non-exploitative sources. A member of UKIBC's Next Generation, Shazia was nominated Designer of the Year 2008 by Asian Woman magazine. Here she relates her determination for socially conscious fashion.

### **Khadi fabrics are fundamental to your brand – what is Khadi?**

Khadi is naturally hand-spun, hand woven fabric. Mohatma Gandhi saw that each region in India continued its own speciality of Khadi. Some regions will specialise in a type of cotton weaving and others, depending on their raw materials around them, will do silk, and other natural fibres. Gandhi continued an ancient art. For centuries India produced exquisite hand-loom. Today, hardly anyone outside of India knows about that history or the current plight of weavers.

### **Did you research production for your designs personally?**

Yes. Because I speak Hindi, I like to work directly with the weavers. I give the payment directly to them, or buy from approved stores.

### **How did you find those?**

It was a case of exploring. It can be quite intimidating, going to back streets, and I do stand out. People know I'm not from there. But at the same time they're delighted to meet me and to hear about my project and what I want to do.

### **How did you go from sourcing the fabrics to creating your own production base?**

Nearly every area has its own tailor and initially I planned to make a small tailoring collective in Delhi that would grow with my business. I realised early on however that quality issues prevented that and I would have to work with factories. People won't buy just for charity's sake or because goods are fair trade. They want a dress that can be worn several times and be resilient. The factories are screened by Fair Trade Forum India, and Tara projects.

### **Once you were satisfied with the product, what were your distribution aims?**

To establish my label in Britain first, because it is my home country. Sales have doubled in the last year with online retailers and I'm seeking high street distribution. Then India,

# partnership in action

Delhi especially, because the whole hand-woven element is very well understood. There are similar brands there, but their aesthetic is very Indian. Whereas mine is very Western. My sister and friends have been chased down blocks of Manhattan by girls asking them where they got my dresses, so New York will have to be on the agenda!