

ANAKA NARAYANAN

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Anaka Narayanan graduated with a degree in economics from Reed College, a liberal arts institute in 2004. After two years at an economic analysis firm in New York, she moved back to Chennai, her birth city, to start a clothing label. Born in 1980, Anaka Narayanan grew up in a home with a craft-based aesthetic, where she developed a physical and emotional relationship to the hand-crafted sarees her mother wore every day.

Brass Tacks, founded in 2007, was borne out of Anaka's need to express her own identity through hand-crafted Indian textiles, tailored into constructed, well-cut pieces. Indian textiles spoke to her childhood and tailored silhouettes spoke to her wish to be seen as a progressive, modern Indian woman. Her approach towards design is part engineering and part social sciences. She combines international frameworks in tailoring quality and pattern-making with an attentiveness to how these should be adapted to the local context. For example she created a context-appropriate *standard* size chart for Indian women. Her design philosophy attends to the cultural context of urban India and specifically Brass Tacks' audience to capture the cultural spirit of the time.

In 2019, Anaka closed down Brass Tacks and moved to Delhi. Her project was to expand her design philosophy to include the craft process through making herself. She has apprenticed with weavers in Chiang Mai (Thailand), Maheshwar (Madhya Pradesh) and Chizami (Nagaland) to learn different weaving techniques. Anaka's current creative direction lies in a process-driven approach to making/ designing textiles, while simultaneously understanding and often challenging the tensions that lie between design and livelihood, preservation and innovation, commerce and craftsmanship.

EDUCATION

2004: Bachelor of Arts, Economics. Reed College, Portland, Oregon.

Thesis: *Does Civic Participation Affect School Quality?* A study on the effect of voting rates on education.

Awards: McGill Lawrence recipient for an internship at the World Bank (2002) and Walter Mintz Economics Scholarship for High Achievement (2004).

2003: Semester in University of Tübingen, Germany.

WORK

Textile Design and Research

2022- Present

Working closely with individual artisans in Maheshwar (Madhya Pradesh) and Chizami (Nagaland) to first apprentice and then develop textile prototypes. Ongoing R&D. Limited edition apparel collections.

Apparel Design and Entrepreneurship

2007 – 2019

Brass Tacks

Founded and ran a clothing label, Brass Tacks, with the goal of offering everyday apparel tailored from quality hand-crafted textiles, a void that existed in the Indian market in 2007 when Brass Tacks was founded.

The clothes were designed, prototyped and produced at the in-house workshop of Brass Tacks in Chennai. The textiles came from different clusters of India, largely handloom clusters in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, with printing and tie-dye work from Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Brass Tacks clothes were retailed through the flagship store in Chennai from 2007-2019, the online store from 2012-2019, and the Bangalore store from 2016-2018, in addition to pop-up shows in various parts of the country. Brass Tacks had third party channels for sales for in Goa, Jaipur, Mumbai, Delhi and Brooklyn (NY).

2018

Designed a collection of apparel for Fabindia, which included the design of a range of block-printed textiles in Bagru, Rajasthan, for the collection. Initial block-printing sampling was done in Bagru, over two trips, and the apparel prototypes were made at the Brass Tacks workshop in Chennai. Fabindia retailed this as a limited edition collection in their stores in 2021.

Data Analysis and Research

2004 – 2006

NERA Economic Consulting (Subsidiary of Mercer, Inc), New York.

Data analysis for law firms hired for class action lawsuits. Data collection was largely via coding depositions, and the analysis done using Microsoft Excel and Access.

Summer 2002 & Winter 2003

The World Bank, Washington D.C. & Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh

Washington DC (Summer, 2002): Designed a survey to measure social norms affecting school participation amongst children in rural India.

Hardoi, UP (Winter 2003): Along with a team, executed the survey as well as the conducted an experiment to investigate the effect of caste on school performance. The investigation was published in a paper (Hoff, Karla, and Priyanka Pandey. *"Discrimination, Social Identity, and Durable Inequalities: Economic Consequences of Social Identity"* The American Economic Review, vol. 96, 2006).

EXHIBITS, TALKS, CONFERENCES

2023

Reed College, Portland (OR).

“The conflict in making products of value”; an invited lecture at Reed College. Based on my research and weaving with artisans, my talk addressed some of the dilemmas and paradoxes in creating something of value - especially handmade- in today’s economic climate of late-stage capitalism that is conducive to low-cost mass-production.

2018

Indian Habitat Centre, Delhi

Talk and panel discussion on “Handloom consumers in the 21st century”; part of the International Conference on Public Policy and Management (August 2018), hosted by the Centre for Public Policy (CPP), Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore.

2017

Inko Centre, Chennai

“Patterned Perspectives”; an exhibit showcasing the design process of a Brass Tacks collection inspired by the botanical illustrations from the archives of the Lalbagh Botanical Gardens in Bangalore. On invitation by the Indo-Korean centre in Chennai.

WRITING

“Design by Proxy”, an essay for the Routledge Handbook of Craft and Sustainability in India, edited by Reubens, Rebecca and Kachru, Tanishka. To be published in October 2024.

“Thread of Ingenuity”, a graphic essay for Qomix, based on *The Fabric of Civilization* by Virginia Postrel. Illustrations by Antonia Banados.