

Eastern Promises

China gets a ringside view of Indian fashion at a show in Shanghai

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IT felt strange to be at a Sabyasachi Mukherjee fashion show where the only guest wearing a Sabya creation was his mother. But then, there isn't much else you can expect when the crowd, which eagerly flocked to view the Indian designer's creations, knows nothing about him beyond what they've seen.

Mukherjee, along with fellow designers Nikasha Tawadey and Anand Kabra, showcased Indian fashion at the opening of the Asian Fashion Blooming (AFB) show in Shanghai on May 13. The show is a special segment of the ongoing Shanghai Expo and seeks to bring together the best of fashion in the region. Besides Indian designers, it includes fashion from regions like Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan

Kabra is all praise for the smoothness with which the show was organised. "Their attention to detail is really amazing," he says after the show. "I'm really impressed by how particular they are about the smallest thing when organising an event of this scale." Fashion head of IMG India, Sujal Shah, is also impressed by the scale of the event. He says, "It's been a crazy day backstage, but look at all the work that has been put in. I don't think I've seen anything quite like this before," he says, gesturing towards a giant screen that is looping montages from ramp shows of the participating designers.

There's no denying that here, the participating Indian designers are hardly celebrities. Unlike in India, going backstage proves to be a childishly simple affair. Even the seating arrangement is quite distinct. Back in India, the front row will find fashion editors and personal friends of the designers, but in Shanghai,

China's fashion capital, government officials line the first row.

The show opens with hundreds of butterflies being released onto the catwalk. Not something that you'd find on more orthodox catwalks around the world, but given that in the year of the Expo, the butterfly is something of an official motif, the gesture seems appropriate. (Regrettably, many of the creatures end up being trampled by the models walking the runway.) The clothes that the designers show are from their collection at the last Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai held in March this year.

India may have opened the show, but Indian fashion, despite the strides it



has made at home and in the western markets, is still a sealed book for the average Chinese. That is probably why someone asked Tawadey whether the kind of clothes she showed on the ramp is what people in India wear on a daily basis.

But the designers admit that China could



(Clockwise from above) Designs by Mukherjee; Tawadey; Kabra

prove to be a valuable market. "I won't say that I know exactly what the market is like over here," says Tawadey, "but so far, what I've seen is interesting and I definitely think there is space for Indian fashion here. I look forward to doing some market research."

But given that a local reporter was overheard asking an Indian guest how the sari works, it seems safe to say that it'll be some time before Indian fashion can make an impression on China.