A first-person account of the launch of Tarun Tahiliani’s new menswear label Tasva with ABFRL, on the banks of the Ganges

The designer talks about the new label and his upcoming collections

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Varanasi’s Darbhanga Ghat, a two-minute walk from the more popular Dashashwamedh ghat, is home to Brijrama Palace Heritage Hotel, a 210-year-old structure which was formerly a royal residence. One of the oldest buildings in the city, and boasting traditional Maratha architecture, it was the ideal setting for the launch of designer Tarun Tahiliani’s and Aditya Birla Fashion Retail Limited’s (ABFRL) menswear label Tasva, which is an extension of the celebrated couturier’s ‘India Modern’ aesthetic but at much more access-ible price points.
Sailing along
In early 2021, when we first learned about his collaboration with ABFRL, the designer spoke to us about the scale of this new venture, about reaching a wider audience and how working within the framework of a corporate set-up was an eye-opener. As we disembarked from our boat — the only way the hotel is accessible for travellers — ascended the stairs to the hotel and made our way to the terrace overlooking the Ganges, we got our first glimpse of what Tarun had spoken to us about all those months ago. For, milling around the open space along with select press and the designer himself was a troupe of male models all dressed in ensembles from the new label — a palette of elegant neutrals where details like aari, resham, dori embroidery and exquisite Benarasi brocade served to enhance and not overpower the sherwanis, bundis, kurtas and achkans. It took us a few seconds to realise that it was part of the showcase and that we were in fact participating in it rather than being quiet spectators.
“I wanted it to be informal and for everyone to get a closer view of the clothes, and touch and feel the fabrics,” said Tarun, sipping on a kulhad of hot masala chai, the weak winter sun shining above the placid grey river. This was one of four fashion presentations that were planned for the rest of the evening. As the day progressed, we were witness to a curated selection of Tasva’s most exquisite garments, each showcase seamlessly woven into the carefully planned evening which included a viewing of the aarti on the ghats, a sit-down dinner in the courtyard and dessert and coffee on the rooftop.

**Number game**

“There are multiple different styles, and colourways and six different sizes in each style. During our meetings, when the ABFRL team talks about the numbers, I sometimes start to feel ill. Those numbers make my head spin. So, it’s really about economies of scale and the Aditya Birla team are experts at that,” explains Tarun, adding, “When it came to fabrics, I said I would not work with 100 per cent polyester. That was non-negotiable. And they agreed but we had to use factory-made fabric to make it viable economically.”
What Tarun says he didn’t change is the technical details and his aesthetic. “What I kept the same is my eye — the colours, the little details such as a tuck in the sleeves, the zero-point collar which allows the wearer to move their head without hurting their Adam’s apple, or the way a kurta should have ease, how it fits on the shoulder, the way the jacket hangs on the wearer, the ease of the churidar and the comfort of a trouser. If I don’t pay attention to these details, then I’m doing it wrong,” he shares. The collection includes minimalistic open-collar kurtas, kurta and bundi sets, mojaris, pocket squares and brooches in addition to the sherwanis, bandhgalas, and achkans. The inclusion of stoles is testament to Tarun’s affinity for and expertise over draping, and the pleated detailing elevates the pieces to a level of elegance that is hard to find within these price brackets “They are made in factories, where they churn out 4,000 trousers a day. They have an assembly line. That same product when made at my studio will sell at four times the cost because each piece is cut by hand. The only machines we use are sewing machines and steaming irons,” he says.

Looking forward
In addition to its e-store going live, Tasva has opened its doors in Malleswaram, Bengaluru and Thane, Maharashtra. Outlets in Delhi, Indore and Hyderabad are expected to open in the next few months, depending on the COVID-19 restrictions. At the same time, Tarun is also busy with a ready-to-wear collection. “I miss RTW, so I’m excited to be working on a new line. There’s so much more you can do with a simple t-shirt, trousers and accessories. You can style it how you like and really showcase your personality. Whereas with occasion wear, you are restricted to the garment itself,” says Tarun in conclusion.

Rs.1,599 upwards. At Malleswaram