

Behind the Spotlight: Lessons from Lakmé Fashion Week

The transition from academic training to industry exposure is a defining moment for any design student. That transition became tangible for me while volunteering at Lakmé Fashion Week, an opportunity facilitated through Footwear Design and Development Institute (FDDI) in collaboration with the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI). It marked a shift from studying fashion as a discipline to experiencing it as a living, operational ecosystem.

I am Tanishka, a third-year Fashion Design student at FDDI. Over two years of academic training, I had engaged with design development, trend analysis, and garment construction in a structured environment. Lakmé Fashion Week provided the practical context for these learnings, revealing how concepts translate into collections, brand narratives, and consumer-facing platforms.

The five-day experience unfolded at a demanding pace. The scale of operations required adaptability, attention to detail, and an understanding of how creative and logistical systems intersect. Designers, models, buyers, students, technicians, and consumers operated within a tightly coordinated framework, offering a real-time view of how the industry functions under pressure. While intense, the environment underscored the level of precision and collaboration required to execute a fashion week successfully.

From a learning perspective, the role extended beyond assigned tasks. As a student volunteer, there was an implicit responsibility to observe critically—how designers express identity through silhouettes and materials, how collections are positioned within the market, and how runway presentations can influence broader industry trends. The experience reinforced an important lesson: design exists within cultural, commercial, and operational contexts, not in isolation.



A key highlight was witnessing runway shows up close. On the opening day, The Boy's Club featured Country Made, Dhruv Vaish, Sahil Aneja, and Vivek Karunakaran, alongside Kartik Research—a label I had previously studied as an academic case study. Seeing a collection transition from analysis on paper to movement on the runway provided valuable insight into scale, styling, and audience response. Subsequent presentations by Payal Pratap, segments of Rahul Mishra's show, Line Out Line by Deepit Chugh, JAJAABOR, TRUNE by Prasoon Sharma, Bhumika Sharma, and Ritika Mirchandani highlighted the diversity of contemporary Indian fashion, ranging from craft-led narratives to experimental design languages.

Equally instructive was working across designer stalls and backstage coordination, particularly with the teams of Ritu Kumar, Anurag Mishra, & Shruti Sancheti. My longest engagement was at the Ritu Kumar stall, where I interacted directly with customers. Assisting clients with selection based on fit, occasion, and personal style brought into focus the importance of customer understanding and commercial sensibility. Unlike the imagined consumer in classroom exercises, here the audience was immediate and discerning, requiring clear communication of design intent in real time. Brief exposure backstage offered another dimension of learning. The controlled urgency, teamwork, and discipline behind the scenes highlighted the operational rigour that supports creative output.

Ultimately, Lakmé Fashion Week offered more than volunteer experience. It provided clarity—about industry expectations, professional conduct, and the importance of perspective beyond one's own design viewpoint. Opportunities enabled by institutions like FDDI and FDCI play a crucial role in bridging education and industry, preparing students to engage meaningfully with the realities of fashion practice.

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AI AND DEATH OF CRITICAL THINKING

Here's something you might not want to hear: humans and apes have almost the same DNA. You can train both to follow instructions, respond to cues, and perform tasks. So what changed? How did one group of primates grow to 8.1 billion, build cities, write constitutions, and invent democracy, while the others stayed in the trees?

The easy answer is resources. Or opposable thumbs. Or fire. But none of that fully explains the gap. I'd argue the real answer is something far less visible: spatial awareness, paired with critical thinking. The ability to model a problem in your head, question the obvious answer, and reason your way to a better one. This is what eventually let us outperform every other species and eventually gifted us federalism, democracy, and everything we'd point to as the definition of a good human society.

Here's what might make you uneasy: this difference isn't something you can see. It won't show up on an X-ray, and you can't point to it like a muscle or a language you know. It's the hidden force behind every opinion, every moral choice, and every decision about who you are and how you act. That's why it's so easy to lose without realising it, and that's what this piece is about.

As Socrates once said, critical thinking is not just thinking.

It is the deliberate, often uncomfortable act of scratching beneath the surface of a belief, a claim, or a decision to see what actually holds it up. It is the discipline of reflectively questioning common beliefs and explanations, of carefully separating what is reasonable and logical from what merely feels true — because it flatters our ego, serves our interests, or is simply easier to accept than to interrogate.

Take away everything else— the tools, the technology, the institutions, and this is the one capacity that got us here.

Which raises the real question of this piece: what happens when human beings abandon the tool that got us here.

Imagine you walk into a shop for a pair of leather shoes. Thinking here picks the pair that looks good and fits the budget. But critical thinking (what kind of leather this is, how it was sourced, whether the tannery treats its workers fairly, whether the price reflects the quality or just the brand name stitched onto the tongue) is what makes the purchase truly memorable. It gets stitched into the small, invisible decisions that make up a life.

Tragically, in the last few years, a quieter shift has happened. We went from sitting with a problem, cross-referencing sources, weighing conflicting accounts, tolerating the discomfort of not knowing yet. To a single prompt and a confident paragraph of output. convenient sure, but it cost us the friction of learning.

