

WOMEN LOOK WEST

Is western wear truly gaining prominence in the Indian women's apparel sector? If yes, how are different brands catering to this growing need for fashionable, western attire? **Bindu Gopal Rao** finds out.

A cliché that stands true, for the major part, is that women and fashion go hand-in-hand. Today, women are more fashion conscious than ever courtesy the corporate rush. According to *Technopak*, a research firm, the western wear industry for women is growing at a phenomenal rate and as of May 2014, is estimated at a staggering ₹ 19,000-crore growing at 15.5 per cent.

Brand focus

The introduction of brands like Zara, Mango, Guess, Vero Moda and Forever 21 in the Indian market is a reflection of the growing western influence in the Indian fashion circuit. Shoppers across metropolitans are increasingly adopting western wear. "Now, many of these people (aforementioned brands) including designers also lend their works to high street brands that trickle down to the mid-segment consumer. Marc Jacobs has its own label but also designs for Louis Vuitton," says Priya Vasudevan, owner of Collage. The apparel sector being one of the major sectors in India, has also recently taken a huge leap in changing its outlook towards customers. "The previous trend from made-to-order apparels has been shifted to the ready-to-wear market. An increase in the rate of working women and celebrity influence also plays a major role in the western wear sector. The introduction of e-commerce portals has made it easier for consumers to sit and shop for their favorite luxury labels at home," explains [Nakul Bajaj, CEO of Darveys.com](#).

MAKING WESTERN CLOTHES TO SUIT INDIAN SENSIBILITIES HAS BEEN THE DIFFERENTIATING FACTOR FOR MOST BRANDS AS INDIAN WOMEN WANT CUTS THAT FLATTER THEIR CURVES AND GO FOR WHAT MAKES THEM LOOK BEST.

"Teenage girls today want to discover a style of their own. Their individual style is evolving and clothing brands do not want to be left behind," says Chandni Sinha, Co-founder, Silver Lining Image Consultants. Many brands are setting sight on India for the next wave of expansion post China. However, as global luxury names test Indian waters, they realise that India has its own indigenous cultural scene and requires a different expansion strategy altogether. "The streets of Shanghai and Beijing are awash with western wear, but Bengaluru is likely to see a fusion of East and West; perhaps, a Satya Paul or Sabyasachi sari paired with Dsquared2 jewellery and a Paul and Joe handbag. Luxury brands are trying to use local knowledge and *savoir-faire* to stake their claim in the Indian luxury market," says Vatsal Poddar, Owner, Crisp and Fervour.

When it comes to western wear, women are keen on looking fashionable while respecting their body type. "Considering the diverse demography, we have been trying to address the demands through look-driven merchandise; cuts that fit the Indian body type, one-stop wardrobe solutions, colour-coordinated products across categories – versatile merchandise – any garment can be mixed and matched with other categories," says Vinay Bhopatkar, Van Heusen.

East meets West

Making western clothes to suit Indian sensibilities has been the differentiating factor for most brands. Indian women want cuts that flatter their curves and so they go for what makes them look best. Designers too are taking extra steps to incorporate western trends for the Indian consumer. Masaba Gupta, a young fashion designer makes use of quirky print details in her Indian wear collection that would appeal to the masses. Her camera and fan print created a furore world over.

"Nikhil Thampi and Anamika Khanna, keeping in mind the Indian traditional aesthetics of an outfit, give it a western twist. Brands like Global Desi, AND, Melange and BIBA mark the entry of western trends in a very non-niche segment," says Sinha. Vaanee Bhatia, Owner, Gritstones.com





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adds, "we can never follow the western designing pattern witnessed in other countries because the Indian sensibilities are very distinct. We need to continuously alter design patterns to make it suitable for Indian customers."

Indian focus

Designers have started to really apply their creativity in this genre. "Women are getting tired of wearing tops and dresses that they see on every other person, making the contribution of designer western wear for women massive. They have

begun to create unique outfits like flared pants and embellished crop tops which cater to the needs of western wear in a woman's closet," says Himanshi Gupta, Owner, Ricco. The Indian women's wear industry has been influenced largely by Bollywood celebrities and now with Hollywood influences, the fashion industry is much closer to the retail sector.

On-screen outfits are now available in branded stores. From Louis Vuitton to Anamika Khanna's designs, fashion is accessible with not just offline stores but also a plethora of online stores. "A simple *kurti* can be transformed with a high-low hem and a

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quirky cow print or noodle strap. Recently, designer Debashri Samanta launched her eponymous label with a commercial clothing line made of hand-woven house apparels, which saw fame after Bollywood actresses like Ileana D'cruz and Alia Bhatt wore them during film promotions," says Samarпита Dasgupta, Merchandise Head, Roposo.com. Adds Narinder Singh, Managing Director, Numero Uno Clothing Ltd., "our women's wear range is inspired by both international and domestic trends and we design our garments keeping in mind the Indian body type, skin tone and even the society."

Making the cut

Keeping the Indian body type in mind, brands are ensuring they design varied sizes. Akhil Jain, Creative Director, Madame says, "Western wear the world over has the same definition. Only sizing gets localised and we cater to a big size segment right from XS to 3XL. It's a rapidly growing market wherein the organised retail is controlled only by a few national and international brands. But a major chunk is taken by unorganised markets with the goods brought in from China." There has been a transformation in opting for styles like maxi dresses, crop tops, palazzos, high-waist



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pants, silhouettes, and a lot more, making the India women more experimental today. "Indian women are constantly trying to be at par with the Western world, and the collections at Fervour are marked by the international brand calendar. Products available at Parisian boutiques can be spotted at Lavelle Road, Bengaluru for the same price," says Poddar.

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Challenge Factor

However, this segment of clothing in India is not without its set of challenges. Reaching out to towns and cities with limited access to retail stores and brands is a drawback in any form of progressive buying pattern. "The second most important challenge is sizing. For apparel manufacturers and retailers, the 'fitting' issue, especially for Indian women, is still where the money stops. Traditionally, Indians have only used draped garments where 'one size fits all'. The concept of 'stitched to fit a body' poses a huge challenge when sizing is not well-defined or accepted," says Dasgupta. Due to the scarcity of designers willing to enter the western wear market, women are only left with the option of buying from retail brands with hundreds of stores across the country selling the same designs to millions of women.

"The other challenge is their perspective. Some women are so loyal to their favourite brands that they would rather buy designs everyone buys and not spend on unique designer creations. Western wear in India is also synonymous with casual wear for women which leaves even lesser scope for designers to apply their creativity to western wear," says Gupta. "The competition is tough, so you need to be innovative as well as creative with the designs. They have to set new trends and attract consumers and fulfilling these demands is a huge challenge," says Upasna Gupta, Co-Founder, Rena Love.

No matter the challenges, the verdict is loud and clear: go ahead and give your wardrobe a Western makeover! ■

TREND ALERT

Among the new trends are sheer dresses, tube tops, deep backs, gowns, jumpsuits and maxi shirts. The crop top is also the trendiest item right now. The 50s retro look with a modern twist is the most dominant trend and is set to rule this Autumn/Winter season.

"Mid-length skirts, high-waist easy fall trousers, low-waist dresses, florals, dramatic prints and an androgynous style in corporate wear is looking to be the in-thing this 2014-15," says Sinha. "Women's denims have seen a transition from low-rise to mid-rise. Slim fit denims will continue to reign in the near future," says Singh. "Spandex garments are a rage, especially with women who are opting for more fashionable western wear like bodycon dresses, jeggings, denims and formal wear," says Anurag Rajpal, CEO and Director, American Swan. The new trends being seen in the Fall/Winter 2014 collection are trouser suits, masculine overcoats and pencil dresses with exaggerated hips to add the oomph factor this season.

