



The three things that will make an impact on the Indian Fashion Industry, on the road to 2010

When I was asked for my perspective on 'the three things that will make an impact on the Indian fashion industry, on the road to 2010,' I sat back and reflected on the past fashion season where I followed the catwalks, went into the ateliers of Louis Vuitton, captured Narendra Kumar in his fittings, and spoke to Kevin Carrigan, creative director for ck Calvin Klein - but more interesting than that were my conversations with the clients - the people who keep the industry alive, experience the cutting and made-just-for-them designs.

Identifying a few trends from the chaff, the first thing that came to mind was a recent conversation with couturier Deepika Govind. It reflected the new mood that has taken hold of Indian fashion. "Before the advent of the British all we had hand-woven cloth; it was after independence that synthetic cloths started coming in. Both the government and the designers need to make an effort to create awareness among people as dumping problems have led to harmful synthetic fabrics. Though there is a consciousness of eco-fashion, there should be a revolution of thought and more focus on natural fibers," she had said.

Not long ago, ethical fashion had an image problem. Unflattering and unappealing, it was best left to eco-warriors. But there has been a definite swing over the past year. Being ethical across the clothing supply chain is no longer a preference but an environmental requisite. But just as vital to the success of sustainable clothing future is making consumers aware of the environmental impact of their 'fashion habits'. Some companies are making valuable improvements, but developments can be limited to the area most significant to that business, such as a fibre manufacturer making sustainable fibres, a dye-house using hygienic dyeing processes, a fashion house embracing green design. Yet, vital improvements can be made when considering the impact of the life cycle and the industries involved in the supply chain.

I am glad to note that couturiers behind the movement are making a difference. "Though people say that we are a young community, the Indian fashion industry has always been environmentally conscious. We gave birth to the anti-Shahtoosh campaign and we use a lot of Khadi. We just need to get our act together," stresses Malini Ramani. Fashion brands have also furrowed the green path. Marks & Spencers demonstrates that you can be both fashionable and eco-friendly; after commissioning a survey that discovered 78 per cent of shoppers wanted more information about the way products were made, the brand has launched its own fair trade line. Ethical consumerism - from buying products made from recycled or renewable sources to supporting labels that adhere to fair trade principles - is on the rise. 'Clothing with a conscience' is cool.

Reflecting on men's fashion next, I asked myself, 'What makes a man fashionable?' Is it his capacity to shell out

lacs for a three-piece suit? Could it be the fact that he has a keen eye for accessorizing? Well, while that's part of it, style is a blend of what you wear and how you carry yourself. The urban man is creating a personal form of originality, within the external limits of social conventions. Visualize a combination of both men's styles - a suit worn with a T-shirt underneath; a fine leather bomber jacket worn over a shirt and tie; a classic trench amplified in cashmere - and you get the look of today's urban Indian.

The burgeoning trend brings to mind a classic quote. "We must never confuse elegance with snobbery," said Yves St. Laurent when he was describing how he took ideas from the beat of the street and transformed them into a fashion statement. It is this seditious approach to elegance that is now being redefined. Men are now taking the classical elements of a male wardrobe and subverting them, combining the informal and the formal, the traditional and modern. They are celebrating a distinctive but grown-up sense of style - and feel contented with themselves and their personal riffs on formality.

Now let's move away from clothes. Based in Delhi, the hub of contemporary jewellery, I have always been alert to trends. Being in fashion in the jewellery world now means being ready to dare with big sizes, strong colors, and unusual combinations of materials, what jewellers call "the poor with the rich", strong contrasts between precious and mundane materials. The jewellery shows off beautiful gemstones by combining them not only with gold, but also with silver, platinum, leather, silk rope, porcelain, and steel. The material is the flesh of the item and influences the design; the precious stones and embedded diamonds make them rich. The trend in urban jewellery is veering toward cold materials and metallic finishes that are altered by technology. The favored metal is gold - white gold - and stones are uncut diamonds and blue amber.

However, contemporary jewellery designers are particularly curious and fascinated by the unknown and the new. Their passion for statement pieces and dedication to innovation fuel their classic creations. They infuse personality into a traditional item that everybody owns, and make it unique. The jewellery is bold, dramatic and elegant but never ott [over-the-top]. Individuality is the concept that guides their designs. Each necklace, ring or bracelet is as unique as the woman who will wear it. The most sought-after jewellery is an elegant statement piece for evening. The trend is very colorful and chic, reminiscent of the Venice carnival, but modern. So we have belt buckles crafted from black diamonds and rubies, Victorian designs in gold, beaded corals teamed with firoza, rock-sized diamonds set in platinum, expressive cocktail rings and even a modern shtick on classics like Hyderabad chand bali.

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