CHAPTER - 11

"The origins of clothing are not practical. They are mystical and erotic. The primitive man in the wolf-pelt was not keeping dry; he was saying: "Look what I killed. Aren't I the best?"

- Katharine Hamnett

It is this need to be always in the limelight which has provoked many a designer to come up with a unique fashion statement and signature that ascribes to his or her ideology of how one must wear ones persona vis-à-vis clothes and accessories to suit every occasion, time and clime. This chapter is an enumeration of the characteristic signatures of various designers and how fashion statements are adhered to by a large range of clientele in the world of fashion.

India is a land of color and diverse cultures, so obvious in the varied dresses that adorn its people. Indian dressing styles, with a wide choice of textures and styles are marked by many variations, both socio-cultural and regional. The many hued sari draped gracefully in different styles, brightly mirrored cholis, colorful lehagas and the traditional salwar-kameez have all fascinated many a traveler to India as well as the international market. Creativity, color tones and the ethnic vibrancy of the people give a special connotation to fashion terminology of India. Designers here are absolutely in consonance with the world of clothing, lending a unique blend of the traditional with the modern and giving today's dress wear a presence typically now. Whether it is termed fusion or a mingling of the East with the West or even an interface of the folk and the contemporary – they seem to have gripped the fashion centre stage.
Indian dressing styles are marked by many variations, both religious and regional with a wide choice of textures and styles. The Indian woman or the Indian man, like their counterparts, elsewhere in the world, knows how to adopt and adapt styles easily. Indian forms of garments from Kashmir to Kanyakumari have a distinctive identity that has been adopted in part or in toto by design pundits within the country.

The sari, simple, understated yet supremely elegant is increasingly becoming a fashion statement in urban India. One of the most commonly worn traditional dresses, it is essentially a rectangular cloth measuring about five and a half meters, though in Maharashtra, women traditionally wear the nine meters sari which is passed through the legs and tucked in at the back. The sari comes in a profusion of colors, textures and designs, determined largely by the region. As a multi-piece garment, the sari is dependant upon the fall and drape of the inner skirt or petticoat while the choli or blouse in itself is a fashion statement depending upon its cut and embellishment. There are several ways of draping a sari, which is first wound around the waist, before being pleated several times at the centre and tucked into the waistband. The remaining part of the sari which is richly woven, embroidered or embellished is called the pallu which is

Plate: 76

Van Heusen

Photo shoot featured in Marie Claire.
then pleated again and draped across the left shoulder to fall gracefully behind. Many of the wearers of the sari have turned the wearing and draping of the pallu into a veritable art. There are regional variations, like in Gujarat, the pallu comes from the back, and drapes across the front over the right shoulder. In Coorg the pleats of the sari are at the back of the sari. The Marwar sari is draped to show off the elaborate pallu and the typical airhostess form of wearing the sari is with the pallu neatly pleated and pinned at the shoulder. The sari is worn with a tight-fitting choli or blouse. The style, length, surface ornamentation of the choli varies according to fashion trends and from region to region.

The Indian designer’s take on Indianization of western wear where a dupatta like scarf is combined with a trouser suit or slacks combination. This scarf seems wholly relevant to women in India. It has more of a cutting edge than other Indian attire, however formal. Teamed imaginatively, it can be dressed up or down with minimal accessories. This multi-piece garment then emerges with a look that is softer and more fluid.

Designer Designs
First - a fashion is approved by others.
Then - it is copied because of competition.
Finally - it is replaced as it becomes commonplace and has ceased to fulfill its function of being distinctive.

A look at some of the contemporary collections of prominent Indian designers becomes necessary here to be able to assess the state of the fashion world in the country and the consciousness of the society in general.

Mumbai’s Shahab Durazi, whom the cognoscenti consider the pantsuit mogul, says, “The trouser suit is for women who dress down. It is individualistic and if worn well, makes a very effective statement. More and more women are taking to the trouser suit. It offers them a different option compared to the traditional outfits; it allows them to experiment with shape and textures, and to wear the same silhouette in different ways. You can accessorize and
individualize the trouser suit to give it a personal touch. At the moment," he continues, "the suit is slim, with a lean silhouette. The shoulders are not too structured - they're soft - and the sleeves are slim and long. It is softly tapered around the waist with slim or bootleg trousers." When it comes to color, designer Shahab Durazi plumps for vibrant fuchsia and reds, glamorous colors for the evening and for daywear, gray chestnut brown and beige, all sedate colors. "If it is not worn properly, it borders on dowdiness and a lot of women fear that."

Talking of color and texture, MonaPali opts for black "because it gives a very official look. We have added some bright colorful trimmings to our black trousers, woven with twisted colorful inserts as the season spells color. Our suits are for the woman in full control of her body and her mind."

Slim silhouettes are enhanced by body skimming, sensual fabrics like silk, velvet and net tissue in Anju Modi’s celebration of accentuated femininity besides imparting a romantic mood to her collections through soft, pastel colors like pink and green delicately embroidered and inset with precious stones and Swarovski crystals. Layering and asymmetrical cuts achieve a more contemporary look.

A flair for color, print and embroidery comes through in Azeem Khan’s collections. Colors range from lemon-yellow to black to shades of brown. Prints highlighted with crystals, silk embossing, embroidery and caviar beads, silver thread woven into the fabric and draped over transparent, spaghetti string strapped, satin inner-wear: all these are the signature collections of the day – a mix and match of yesterday today and tomorrow as also a balance between the raw practicality of the West with the sensual felinity of the woman of the East.

A case in-point are the ideas of Anamika Khanna where texturization, color and versatility characterize her collections. Her georgette dresses are layered, or enhanced with surface ornamentation virtually inspired by a spider’s web. The dresses can be teamed with a scarf or worn with pants. For example a traditionally embroidered zardosi lehenga is given a multi-piece global appeal
by matching it with classy boots and a heavily embellished bustier. In a similar vein are the works of Ashish Soni whence the silhouettes of the collection are kept simple with slight variances on hemlines and necklines. Luscious velvets are combined with light, airy fabrics like silk, tissue and satin which have had their richness added to through gold dabka embroidery and silver baroque work which can be seen adorning the hemlines of multi-pieces.

Another personal statement that is a combination of attitude, comfort, and a foray into the unconventional is Aki Narula's collection that characterizes style, comfort and vibrancy. The silhouettes are straight, and the range comprises bias cut tunics, cigarette pants, sexy blouses, wrap pyjamas, suede dresses and turtleneck coats. Surface treatments such as hand tucking, patchwork and crease detailing are used. The color palette ranges from ivory, sand and mango to fuschia, aubergine, apple and coral giving a chic look to the quality of lounging.

Then there is the work of Ashima and Leena Singh which celebrates the traditional Indian spirit of royal opulence with zardosi and Swarovski crystal work, sequins and shaded thread work. The fabrics used range from velvets, brocades, tissues, crepes and satins to georgettes and organzas. The colours are rich and deep with purples, burgundys and maroons carrying forward the mood of luxury. Similarly Abha Dalmia blends traditional designs with new, trendy colors. Her bridal range uses a palette of sunny colors and earthy tones with blended fabrics like silk, organza and tissue.

Among the more established names is that of Tarun Tahiliani who creates beauty time and time again with his attention-grabbing designs which are a fine blend of texture, color and silhouette. His collections dazzle the voyeur with bright Indian colors - jewel red, burgundy and gold while all the time these stunning bejeweled designs are an ode to the female form.

A bridal trousseau, extravagant in its choice of fabric and embroidery is the hallmark of the work of Shantanu Goenka. A brushed metal silk sari is...
teamed with a faded bandh-gala choli. A draped faded stole worked in authentic Kashmiri tilla embroidery completes the bridal look. For a brighter effect, an iris pink lehenga embroidered with silver zardosi and Swarovski crystals and a net, embroidered dupatta are put together. On the other hand inspired by the traditional bridal trousseaus from different parts of India and combined with a freshness of design worked in indigenous vegetable dyes and embroidery the clothes of Ritu Kumar are easily spotted. There are her signature designs where there is a gheru-coloured lehenga, reminiscent of the vegetable dyes of Barmer, while alongside is the long, knee-length kurta which is styled like the costumes worn by the Lohar community of the desert regions. Here stylized marigold motifs are used as buties. Another piece is a lilac lehenga matched with a short, crop choli with matching dupatta. Silver embroidery on the buties is reflective of the Rajasthani and Gujarati traditions. The colors used through the collection are deep maroon, aubergine, red and gold – all symbolize prosperity and fertility.

In the creations of Poonam Bhagat embroidery seems to make its appearance everywhere. Either as finely embroidered jaal in gold thread on an ivory kurta or highlighting the borders of a burgundy angarkha in spun tussar. Embellishments come in the form of sequins or stars scattered on a pleated blue silk shirt.

A sharp contrast to the heavy royalty of the above designers is the wispy collection of Wendell Rodricks with a steady and delightful rhythm to it. It is the brain child of a designer who believes in a gentle flow of fabric that skims sensually and lightly over body contours. The skirts follow symmetrical panels and use tucks and cuts to drape together in the natural flow of the fabric. These ensembles are accentuated with fitting bustiers, cholis and halter tops intricately worked with beads and crystals, embroidery and zardosi to obtain a truly stunning effect. Maintaining a steady interest in the passionate and virtually raving about his ideas of beauty and its seduction are the clothes of Suneet Varma. The clothes are clean in their silhouettes and chic when worn. Straight lined tunics with interesting detailing, narrow capri pants, off shoulder
lace ensembles and textured embroideries create an unexpected element of delicacy and surprise. This sensuality permeates the collection of Savio Jon. He teams up the language of touch with beauty by working with sexy leathers, crisp organzas and satiny silks in a wide range of earthy colors that blend in with flesh tones. Pastels, bandhanis and animal prints create a fusion of the natural, the wild and the understatedly elegant.

For the collection of Rocky S the mood is striking and stark all at once, with a smattering of sequins to add that extra sparkle to a festive evening. The mood is set by metallic shades of blues, blacks and whites, very simply held up around the neck or bust line and draping the upper torso with comfort and ease.

A marked vibrancy of hue and color exemplify the tone and spirit of Ritu Beri's collection. The range of stylization extends from contemporary designs on exquisitely woven antique silks to bright floral sequences in vivid colors on a hand-painted skirt. The essence of her collection is a flamboyant belief in celebrating color and feeling, texture and elegance, juxtaposing the old with the contemporary, the vibrant with the sedate and the individual with the contextual trend. Celebrating the feminine in complementary clothing is the high point of Rina Dhaka's collection. It is femininity at it's best with all it's overpoweringly feline forms and slinky silhouettes at centre-stage. Asymmetrical cuts and tapering waist lines show the female figure off to advantage with a subtle blend of colors painted across a spectrum of rose, beige and mauve dappled with gold and glitter, subtle accessories like ties and scarves adding sexiness to the line.

The garments of Rohit Gandhi and Rahul Khanna have been designed for women who covet elegance, style and want to be seen. The silhouette is slim and chic and the emphasis is on fabrics, cuts and a lot of detailing rather than embellishments. Keeping in mind comfort and the Indian climate, twisted yarns, blended wool, viscose crepes, light weight suede and new age stretch performance fabrics have been used. The color palette is very neutral with
subtle dashes of color. Aqua and gun-metal grays merge into beige and tone-on-tone colors. Pinks, raven black and white are strongly accentuated.

Plate: 66

Rohit Gandhi and Rahul Khanna

Photo shoot featured in FNL

A modern flavour characterizes the collection of Rajesh Pratap Singh. Solid colors like red, black and white are spread lavishly - on pants, bustier and jackets combinations. Geometric shapes give a ‘70’s feel to blue hipsters and two-way zippered light fabric jackets which are contemporized with slightly flared sleeves and texturization of the fabric. Leather comes on strong in his lengthened jackets, shortened skirts and halter tops. In contrast is Raghuvendra Rathore’s collection that offers a mix of textures, fabrics, colors and cuts. The sixties inspired jacket lengths are cut close to the shoulders and body. Sheer tops are paired with novelty skirts; snug jackets are worn over bias or asymmetrically cut dresses. The variety of separates gives the wearer a unique individuality when cleverly mixed together.
Simplicity defines Kiran Uttam Ghosh’s collection. The many layered look has been replaced by a gentle single layer, straight slim silhouettes and flowing fabrics like georgette. The embroidery, while essential, is not overdone and weaves its way through a color palette of pinks, greens, grays and beiges. Then also Puja Nayyar’s simple designs are complemented with sharply contoured, precisely matched yet neat and intricate texturing. The emphasis is on technique. A detailed wrap skirt is combined with a stylised upper wrap cut from a specially constructed fabric (a combination of contrasting textures among other design techniques). Shimmery chiffon wraps are combined with capris and are worn with a finely detailed blouse. Also a tie-up blouse which has been jazzed up by criss-cross of broken lines makes for an eye-catching ensemble. Monisha Bajaj also show cases her collections based on the symbolism of woman coming into the age of love, light and energy – veritably the Aquarian age. There’s an intimate play of soft, body-skimming georgette with pastel shades or fiery colours and floral embroidery. Layering achieves a soft, flowing edge.

Designs that fuse together the two worlds of the modern and the conventional are visible in Pria Kataria’s work. Modernity, symbolized by Western ideas, is depicted in her choice of colours and fabrics. The romanticism of a bygone era comes through in the choice of ethnic embroidery. Colour is big in her ranges of earthy tones and pastels, bright shades of blue
and even fuschia. Metallic shades of gold, bronze and rust act as highlights and dual-coloured fluid fabrics like georgette, chiffon, crepe and silk are her favourites. The silhouette is streamlined, slim and elongated and sensually skims across the body. Her special attention to draping and pleating as an essential part of the garment give a graceful movement and emphasis to the silhouette.

Passion, vulnerability, seduction and innocence - the essence of femininity are the underlying theme of Payal Jain’s collections. The collection runs the gamut. Ivory silk jacquard, embroidered with pearls and worn with a satin underskirt brings out the emotive passions. Gold French lace tunic, a gold Charmeuse / camisole and pants create a soft, slender silhouette – presenting the vulnerable side of the femme fatale. Black organza camisole embroidered with sprakling glass beads for that extra seduction effect. And innocence exemplified by a delicately interwoven peach and gold kurti that drapes over a voluminous georgette skirt. These are some of the designs created by her which have been success stories in the world of fashion in India. In a similar vein is the work of Nahid Merchant. His collection is often a play of color, line and form. Georgette and silk are painted and embroidered with abstract lines. A halter tunic, teamed with a raw silk scarf, and embroidered with criss-cross lines. As a case in point the spaces of a sarong, demarcated by embroidered lines are made more distinct with various colors.

Nikki Mahajan wades through an endless maze of antique embroidery weaves that emblazon the lavishly cut ghagras and lehengas to recreate an old world charm. A brocade, jamavar and self embossed silk lehenga embellished with crystals, gilt wire work and badla. The blouse is encrusted with rainbow coloured diamante and raised dabka work, while the dupatta is pure silk net with floral jaal and diamante. Indian traditional crafts like hand block prints, gilt wire work and coloured stones form a rich tapestry on tissue and silk. This in turn has been painstakingly worked with real gold zari work which criss-crosses the fabric to give a three-dimensional effect. Shades of pink are used together in a lehenga worked with gota and patti work. Pure gold, leaf-shaped motifs
border the lehenga. It is teamed with a jacket of Benaras tanchoi worn over a tissue blouse.

Gauzy, light fabrics like organdie, chiffon, crepe and tissue are subtly embellished in simple chikan work and tone-one-tone zardosi by the designer duo Meera and Muzaffar Ali. Floral motifs and delicate silver buties emphasize the soft, pretty look dominated by clean, unfussy lines and pale shades. Another duo, the husband-wife team of Manju and Bobby Grover creates designs that emphasize wearable chic. Their garments, are an East-West fusion which is practical, elegant, and sensual. The duo works with international motifs like Gothic, European, Renaissance as well as traditional Indian embroideries. Embellishments are minimal and in this Indo-West collection 'The essence of India', they have worked with tribal art that is reflected in their use of rustic and rich, vibrant colours and embroidery.

Plate: 78

Manju and Bobby Grover

Photo shoot featured in ELLE girl.

A statement of opulence and extravaganza of gold and silver, the richness of silk and antique temple fabrics, bright colours, buties and brocade as exemplified in Manish Arora’s styling which virtually combines the grandeur of an era gone by with comfort and attitude that are contemporary mend sets. The use of tinsel with traditional embroidery and the teaming up of
bra tops and T-shirts with ghagras and lehengas has given his collections a quirky quixotic touch.

A collection that aesthetically balances notice-me colors with elegant silhouettes is that of Krishna Mehta’s. Deep burgundy, olive, fuschia and violet colors dance together in the motifs and embroidery. Determined to have fun with her collections, Krishna Mehta teases the eye with lace, seduces with chiffons, tulles and embellishments and exotic lame. In the antique collection, naughty bright vermillion and scarlet pop up from gold and bronze French laces.

Jatin Kochhar favours shades of green which suffuse this collection. The emphasis is on detailing Swarovski metal component transfers which add just that wee bit of a hint of essential glimmer. Shine is left up to the fabric that does it proud – satin. Hand painted dual colored net falls well when draped as a sari or dupatta, or worn as a kurta or a kaftan over a naughty-and-nice satin bikini inner and pants. J.J Vallaya also caters to the ultra-feminine and ultra-chic women who wear their sensuality on their sleeve. Fluid fabrics like organza, crepe and georgette curve around contours, enhancing, not exaggerating. Colors-fresh and delicate, in tones of pink and green, soften clean lines and embroidery like tilla, twisted resham, French knots, crystals and zari are worked subtly into the designs.

The mood of David Abraham and Rakesh Thakore’s collection is soft, light and very feminine. The shapes are simple and offer easy separates in crushed light-weight silks and cotton voiles. Fabrics are lightly layered and textured. The colour palette ranges from pale pastels like ice blue, pale blush to bright reds and pinks that deepen to inky black. Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla’s collections feature several lines, each equally intricate, delicate and beautiful. ‘Fiza’ is a delicate mesh of pure silk threads in traditional motifs; then there is ‘Floral Corsage’ which comprises fragile silk, sequins and beads worked into symmetrical flower motifs; the ‘Agra’-tendrils are woven across entire lengths of fabric in Persian patterns much like the ‘Chikan’ and ‘Phulkari’
lines. The 'Shikargah' is inspired by hunting scenes, while the 'Beaded line' is a specially developed pret-a-porter.

Suneet Varma is a designer who believes that human beings are susceptible to being seduced every moment. The seduction of love, beauty and art has transcended the centuries and as a couturier, he unleashes the seduction of art itself on beautiful clothes. Sheer pants, richly embroidered but not detracting from the seductive element, they may be studded with silver sequins and be in a subtle hint of colour lending the garment a raw energy.

Plate: 79

Suneet Varma

Photo shoot featured in ELLE girl.

Sharbari Dutta’s mystical weaves blend Oriental designs with the motifs of ancient Rajasthani warriors. The fabrics are traditional silks like tussars and heavy South silks, that are worked over with zardosi, kantha and intricate silk thread embroidery. The cuts and styling rejuvenate the angarkha and flaired styles that team up very well with dhotis, pyjamas and formal trousers. The color palette sticks to earthy colors in deep hues. In an open declaration for maleness Shobhna and Vijay Arora take the credit. Sheer fabrics and stitching details are used to enhance the sensuousness of shirts and kurtas that
showcase the sensitive side of male sexuality. They are often teamed with three-quarter cargo pants, drawstring pants and churidars. This mood is taken a step further with Rohit Bal's ideas of carefully careless attitudinal statements in fashion. Comfortable, cool and light fabrics mark his collection with its penchant for glass nyons, quilted linen and faux-leather. The essence is cool and suave using delicate quilting and smocking techniques, adding a softer, gentler touch to the ensembles. Slight embellishments across the belt, neck and hip lines in crystal, faux-fur trims and patchwork quilting team up with clean lines and body-hugging cuts to accentuate the luxuriousness of the garment.

On the other hand Ravi Bajaj's easy going fabrics that are light-weight and no fuss, with a good flow and fall, coordinate richness and elegance with comfort and ease. The shirt lines are straight and trousers pleatless, with fabrics and textures juxtaposed to accentuate the busy without business attitude of the easy-going, comfortably off male who has arrived in the world. His clothes exude an intense masculinity and a comfortable sense of individual style.

Plate : 80

Ashish Soni

Photo shoot featured in FNL

Sensuous evening wear for men that plays with the depth of black is what Lalit Jalan's creations are about. The fabrics are light and skim the body with a juxtaposition of translucency and heaviness. The embroidery, whether light or heavily accentuated with zari, adds an element of grandeur to the ensemble. Ashish Soni takes inspirations from folk silhouettes and makes ready to wear outfits in the most contemporary style. Hemant Tivedi has an individualistic penchant for playing with textures and fabrics, colors and styles.
and this has been a part of his quest to make clothing feel as good from the ‘inside’ as from the ‘outside’. And to obtain this effect he draws inspiration from ancient texts and tomes like the Ayurveda and the Kamasutra as well as other manifestations of art like the ancient paintings. This is evident in the wide range of forms and styles - from the playful fluid trousers and crystal camisoles to regal gowns and dresses.

Gitanjali Kashyap brought pink into season virtually with its varied hues that have a different appearance in each fabric and texture. Even denim and glitz are worked against satin and chiffon and teamed with a ‘60s style of embroidery to create bright and eye-catching casual wear. On the other hand Anjana Bhargav’s hallmark is the use of accessories on garments. Her designs bring the patterns and skills of the ancient arts into the rhythm of modern life. The accent is always on comfort and affordability. Anjana has made a mark in the corporate sector by designing uniforms for lead hotels of the country. Anita Dongre’s work is a tasteful combination of Indian creative crafts with simple styles and clean western cuts. She started out designing ethnic Indian wear under the label Masque and subsequently began retailing to stores in London, Vancouver, Singapore and Dubai. In 1999, she began to create a western womenswear label as well. Her couture label is called ‘Anita Dongre’.

Anju Modi is a designer whose work reflects the practical experience of working in rural India’s handloom sector. She specializes in work with vegetable dyes, pattern making and weaving. Anju reaches her customers through her own atelier ‘Anjuman’ as well as a supply of garments to other fashion stores in India. Similarly Aparna Chandra’s trademark is originality. Her signature style is flawless cuts and an obsessive attention to detail with funky results. Sexy yet understated, her clothes are extremely wearable. Aparna maintains that she designs clothes she could wear herself. Thus, her creations seem to be more about the wearer than about themselves.

The highlight of Ashish Pandey’s designs is the subtle surface ornamentation done on natural fabrics, particularly silk. Reflective of a
fascination for the Mughal era, his lavish embroidery motifs are inspired by monuments and museum artefacts. A NIFT graduate, Ashish’s collections are mainly Indian outfits but he does include some Indo-Western wear.

Jatin Kochhar believes in simplicity with absolutely clean and defined lines. His collections are generally fusion lines reflecting ethnicity in universal designs. He lays major emphasis on a basic design, which can be worn both casually as well as formally by changing the accessories. He is unique in that he has not had formal education in fashion design. ‘Cue’ by Rohit Gandhi & Rahul Khanna celebrates style and simplicity in clothing. They started off as independent designers. The foundation of their collections has always been straight-line clothing. Retaining basic elements of style and quality, they have successfully catered to an increasing demand for western wear in India.

A training spell under British designer Jasper Conran has given Kiran Uttam Ghosh’s clothes an added edge today. The look is understated, with shaped silhouettes based on draping. She retails her ‘Kimono’ label from Ffolio in Bangalore, Ogaan in Delhi and Ensemble in Mumbai, among other stores in India and England. Lina’s lable ‘Linarika’ is about Indian semi-formals and fusion co-ordinates. The fusion lines available through stores like Melange in Mumbai, Ffolio in Bangalore and Chennai and Kaaya in New Delhi are some of them.

Mandira Wirk trained at the Pearl Academy of Fashion as well as the London College of Fashion and has had exposure to fashion weeks all over the world. Her collections are about the twin forces of seduction and simplicity together. Her themes range from women in love to the peasant woman. Featuring vibrant colours and luxurious fabrics, her lines are for the chic working woman.

The husband-wife team comprising Lalit and Sunita Jalan retails from ‘Hunar’, the first ever store for ethnic men’s wear in Kolkata. Among their inspirations was the designing of an exclusive male trousseau line. Subtle
colours are their trademark. Sombre tones of creams, peaches, browns, mauves and greens create a soothing effect that combines well with their abstract essence.

Malini Ramani describes her style as ‘Rockstar meets Indian Princess’ with the underpinnings of the Bohemian, vibrant and downright sexy, meeting the regality of royal raiment. Malini’s clothes have established her as a trendsetter. Her company ‘Gimara’ exports accessories to the US, France, Italy and the UK. The label can be seen at prestigious stores such as Searle, Bloomingdales, Barneys, Lansing, Betsey Johnson and Stuart Weitzman.

With a collection that defined attitude, his clothes are funky and colourful. A student of NIFT, Manish Arora bagged the Most Creative Student of the year award in 1994, his graduating year. With visualization as his forte, Manish styles for various celebrities and glossy magazines. Similarly the designs that roll out of the Manju and Bobby Grover Studio are practical and sensual at once. A symphony of the West merging with the East, the collection is international in its colour palette and design ethos. They work with Gothic and European Renaissance motifs, highlighting embroidery with solid pastel colours. Hand painting is a special forte of this couple.

After a decade of upgrading the craft of Lucknow and Kotwara, Meera & Muzaffar Ali have brought back to life the old traditions of centuries bygone. The ‘Kotwara’ label extends from innovations in Indian and western forms innovations using techniques of chikan, zardozi, tukdi and applique with hand detailing. The result is a style of its own which is both avant-garde and traditional.

Nahid, on the other hand, likes experimenting with Indo-western silhouettes. Well-defined cuts and immaculate embellishments are her hallmark. Known for her fusion lines that are free flowing, she creates designs with unusual colour combination. Pure colours like pink, peach, blue, red,
white, beige and black are her style. She takes inspiration from painters like Paul Klee and Mark Rohtko.

Most fabrics used in Payal Jain’s collection are unique. Working with diverse fabrics like silk, cotton, wool and linen, she endeavours to experiment and to create something different. She produces striking, unorthodox prints done manually with natural vegetable dyes. Eco-friendly accessories like jewellery scarves, shoes and hats are another hallmark of her work.

Niki Mahajan’s efforts include an endeavour to retain connection with crafts at the grassroots. Working with artisans from various states and with tribals, Niki created a fabric called ‘Reeds’, which is made by splitting grass and treating it with natural elements. Niki specialises in trousseau as well as Pret, with intricate handwork. Taking the concept further Pria’s collections focus on hand embroideries of different cultures, eras and parts of India. Her creations are mainly indo-western lines for cosmopolitan women. She uses materials such as georgette, chiffon and cotton and has an affinity for vibrant colours like burgundy, red and bronze.

Hailing from the Jodhpur family, Raghavendra Rathore brings forth the sensibilities of Rajasthan to modern fashion design. He has also worked with prominent Manhattan labels including Donna Karan, Bill Blass and Oscar de le Renta. This exposure enabled him to refine his design knowledge before setting up his own label, ‘Rathore’ in India.

For Ranna Gill, designing is a journey taking you through various hues and crystallising into a final product. The appearance of her garments overwhelms with their strong aesthetic and uncluttered themes. Graduating from NIFT, Ranna went on to the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. She also worked with Donna Karan and the women’s wear division of ‘Polo’ Ralph Lauren in New York.
Rina Dhaka admits she’s a dreamer, a visual person, for whom image have always been more important than words. She is best known for her theme collections sheer trousers, crochet, stretch jersey, woollens and spider web motifs. Rina Dhaka emphasises silhouettes and is willing to take risks.

Ritu Kumar seems to have pioneered the term ‘fashion’ in the Indian context, demonstrating that handmade products can be as glamorous as those made by machines. Her forte is traditional clothes that draw heavily on the versatile and rich textile and embroidery heritage of India and remain classics of their kind, ‘Costumes and Textiles of Royal India’, a book by Ritu was published by Christi’s.

Fame rests lightly but with certainty on Rohit Bal, whom Time magazine profiled as ‘India’s Master of fabric and fantasy’. Enthralled in design as an art form, he draws upon history, fantasy and folklore to create his masterpieces. Fashion pundits credit him with setting the trend for every season, recognising him as one who has understood the psyche of the consumer. Born in Muzaffargarh in Pakistan, Satya Paul came to India after its Partition. His designs are versatile, playing with elements of designs and fabrics from all over the world. One of his contributions to design has been questioning the way we
wear and perceive the sari and salwar kameez by changing the very form and drape of it.

Sabyasachi Mukherjee describes his design philosophy as imperfection of the human hand. He enjoys mismatching colours, fabrics and textures. Deserts, gypsies, prostitutes and antique textiles have been an inspiration for this Kolkata designer, who believes that clothes should be an extension of one’s intellect. The duo designers Shantanu and Nikhil have always emphasized on Indian ethnic garments that exude vibrancy and confidence. Their label called ‘Shantanu & Nikhil’ has an eye on the young and trendy Indian garments market. Saluting the new age of power dressing at work and elegant chic socially, in a short span of three years, these two have a series of signature stores to their credit.

**Plate: 82**

**Shantanu and Nikhil**

Photo shoot featured in ELLE

Another duo Swapan and Seema pay their tribute to Indian designer wear on the runway through a strong blend of both - the classical and the contemporary. Their collections are a visual mix of trendy colours with fusion embroidery. Their themes draw inspiration from a legacy of rich Indian craftsmanship and global inspirations.
Trends in Urban Dressing

What the French call haute couture is easily the elaborate and most individually done up Indian wedding trousseau. Besides what is usually belittled as pret’-a-porter’ is actually the rip-off of high street fashion. The fashion revolution is upon us. It is in the all-purpose shopping plazas where labels are now affordable, and it is in the usually staid living rooms where it has made inroads from the often-raunchy ramps. All this is because of the communications and electronic boom in the present century. Much of this is due to the television and media’s extensive coverage. The reach of the tele-networks into the various levels of Indian homes has become the far-reaching and extensive platform for airing the fashion consciousness of the people. Typical and atypical roles of women in various walks of life are ascribed on the basis of their dressing sense and the kind of appearance or presence they portray on the television.

It has transformed designers from compulsive huggers, underwear flashers, flashbulb-seekers and Page 3 frequenters to seemingly corporate-savvy brand-builders. It is a midway appeal between the all-pervasive influence of Bollywood as well as the world of the successful glitterati. Most of all, it has expanded the tiny world of trendspotters into a growing band of the converted fashion divas. At any given time the fashion conscious woman will know when the Ethnic kurtis are out, saucy T-shirts are in; billowy skirts are in and those hot narrow pants of the yesteryears are absolutely not. The fashion statements of every year are looked forward to and adhered to with a rare enthusiasm and devotion found in an increasingly large tribe of the fashion world. Bright colours are passe, White is always right, black is seductive; platforms are off, pointed boots are on: animal prints are dead, stripes are rocking. Then there are also the trends for the hipsters, the midriff show enthusiasts and the bosomy look. Often one has to match the body to the wardrobe rather than the other way around.
A young entrant in the field of fashion who is experimenting with micro appliqués with a touch of Kashmiri embroideries in his creations, calls his label “Bounipun”. His experimentation has produced a unique range that explores textiles and textures while rooting his work in the aesthetics and functionalism of traditional Kashmiri Art work. According to him, he lets his “clothes do the talking”.

Indian Fashion on the World Market

The more than Rs 180 crore worth fashion industry—comparable to the global figure of $3.5 billion—is ensuring the expansion of the branded apparel retail business to Rs 19,000 crore, whether it be Be, the Raymond’s eight stores nationwide, or the Pantaloons’ 4,000 sq.m. multi-designer store in Mumbai. It is all the more visible in the speed with which the “look” of a particular fashion statement gets taken up in the metros and the slower moving towns alike. The Bunty-Bubli outfits mooted by bolllywood became a niche item within a few days of the promos hitting the small screens. Similarly it is the look promoted by the high priestesses of fashion that are lapped up by the hoi ploi by fair means or foul as witnessed in the works of the multitude of established and not so established designers who display their collections at the fashion

Plate : 83
Zubair Kirmani

Photo shoot featured in FNL.
"That's what trend forecasting is about," says Anshu Arora Sen, who retails at Be: nationwide as well as at Selfridges in London. "Everyone said military chic would be hot this year and everybody wants their collections to sell. So what if everybody ends up looking like everybody else".

Designers, who had once upon a time relied on a handful of matronly regulars, are now looking beyond them. The dynamics of the fashion world has never been so serious. Vinod Kaul, Executive Director of the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), says the Lakme' India Fashion Week made Rs 20 crore from contracts with stores such as Selfridges and Sanskrit in Hong Kong.

If on the one hand fashion is about authoritarianism—because it must be acknowledged that after all, 20 per cent of the global industry is controlled by a few majors, but alongside it is also about democracy. And that is quite evident in the recent ramp-to-street transitions. Rocky S' denims which ruled the ramp last year disappeared while Monisha Jaising's kurtis lasted long enough while even corsets enjoyed an extended run with divas of Bollywood. Then the sporting of broad belts and chandelier earrings gave the scavengers of flea markets reason to rejoice. While trends are about uniformity, fashion is almost always about choice. So if Rohit Bal's slim linen / khadi / voile pants are too slim for the average Indian man, he will not buy them. Or if the asymmetrical skirt, which style meisters insist has to be worn, looks odd on the average big-hipped Indian woman, it will not enjoy much patronage.

It is clear, however, that the number of buyers is steadily growing. Take Ranna Gill's store in Delhi where a group of trendy 20-somethings is looking at her skirts and tees. Close behind is a rack of belts, bags and other accessories. The sight doesn't fail to thrill Gill, even though the purchases are small. "Two years ago, I knew everyone who bought my clothes—it was the same 200 people season after season. But now just about anyone wears my clothes." Hemant Trevedi is in the same happy frame of mind. "Even the man with the
comb in his pocket wants to look good. We are becoming helping hands for them," he says.

Men's garments are seeing a growth of over 35 per cent as compared to women's wear which is growing at 20 per cent every season. This change amply exemplifies that it is not only the big names that are the ones who sell. While JJ Valaya and Tarun Tahiliani, whose turnovers are estimated to be in crores, and are still the kings of the Indian fashion scenes, it is the younger designers who discovered prêt almost at about the same time as prêt discovered them. The likes of Delhi-based Ravi Bajaj, Mumbai-based Priyadarshini Rao and Sabyasachi have seen their businesses increasing by almost 25 to 50 per cent within a year. "The 50 pieces I had crafted are considered masterpieces," says Sabyasachi, with no trace of irony. Satya Paul, the design house which caters to mid-market mamas and their daughters, sets targets in crores of rupees every year. Everyone has not only a silhouette but also a corporate blueprint. Even Sabyasachi says, "I am already in all the domestic stores I would like to be. Now getting a job from a foreign design house would be good. I would get to learn so much."

Plate: 84

Ravi Bajaj

Photo shoot featured in ELLE girl.

As the Indian market opens up to foreign retail houses it would need to address certain glaring problems. How can India sell to the West a sensibility it has
already squeezed dry, whether it is Jean Paul Gaultier or Tom Ford for Gucci? The danger is that even as Indian designers are unable to cash in on their cultural specificity, the domestic market may fall to foreign labels like Mango and Marks and Spencer—they may be overpriced but they still have a value attached to them. But the Fashion Design Council of India is still optimistic and is looking at the possible geometric increase in exports as quotas are lifted. "Today, fashion anarchy exists in India. With a trend forecasting agency operational in the domestic market, things will improve," says Kaul.

According to patrician Raghavendra Rathore, "It is Indian fashion's break ... We are moving from a cottage industry to a corporate one. If we don't change now, we never will."

SHARP SILHOUETTES

Chaitanya Rao, a young designer from Madras, who has specialised in Western wear and trouser suits for women in particular, says, "Trouser suits are still associated with a corporate image, and there is a post-feminist hangover with this type of dressing that was once seen as a symbol of male power and dominance.

"I think there is a great future for the trouser suit; the use of long jackets with trousers helps to cover the hips and can work well for women who might have trouble carrying off the classic trouser suit combination." Chaitanya says, "The trend today is to use more synthetics, and polynosic trousers are a big favourite as they are virtually crush-resistant. I personally love working with linen, but you need a certain lifestyle just to support the linen you wear! Lycra blends are a comfortable and versatile option." Bangalore's Sujit Mukherjee has been quietly designing the most elegant of jackets and trousers for a number of fashion conscious women, for years now. He says, of the t-suit, "It is very relevant, scoring high on comfort, linear lines and practicality, especially for working women. It's great for the evenings as well."
For Sujit the ideal wearer is one who sees the inherent advantages of the outfit; they are the women, in his opinion, who wear the t-suit with most grace. He doesn't accept that the t-suit may have its limitations. "Actually," he says, "the possibilities are endless. Linen, hand-woven silk and wool are trendy and classic fabrics; as for colour, I'd say black, charcoal, deep olive and Bordeaux for the night. Salmon, peach, camel and rhubarb for the day."

After having worked as a design consultant to the likes of Armani, Blu Marine, Harrods and Tommy Hilfiger, Katie Padget is in India to lend her touch to various men's brands in the Raymond group. She believes there is room in the market for some new and interesting styles. Her designs fill a gap as exemplified in the Parx collection. On the Indian man's dressing style, she comments, "This is a very interesting culture. What we've found out from a survey is that the contemporary Indian man is very aware due to media exposure. Men dress well when they're aware of the world and are more successful. They want to be attractive to women; this is of course an assumption, the guy may not be. But now it's simply not about wearing what's traditional… the same old suit or a tie... It's about wearing things which express the way he feels about himself, which makes him feel good, comfortable... gives a feeling of confidence... It's about expressing yourself and making a statement about the way you feel." Here's a set of sartorial advice.

While men dress in such a way that they look different from everybody else it is quite a task as men are all wearing virtually similar attire. They don the same sort of shirts and trousers, even the same culturally or traditionally ascribed and accepted colour combinations. When men wear their clothes they are not accustomed to thinking about the message they want to send out. Many a designer considers the fact that if men want to present a feeling of being confident they ought to what makes you feel confident. If one sticks to one basic colour, one's wardrobe will always look the same appear boring. Yet even men who are prone to radical thinking and are loathe to experiment with too many colours can make additions to their wardrobe to present a 'with it' look. Thus once they have decided upon the colours that suit them most men can
experiment with shades and tones of the same to keep their staid outlook and yet maintain an aura of being differently and well dressed at the same time.

Lead designers of the country believe that if a man is confident enough, he should be able to carry off any colour and they always encourage men to experiment with the colours once they have managed to identify the colours which suit them. Most often men are a little uptight about this because they think that this is a very feminine thing to do. But the fashion pundits applaud the average Indian male to be aware, be experimental and have fun with it. They extol them to try two different looks and see how people react to their appearance and come with the observation that looking stylish is really not all that difficult.

The domestic market largely caters to Mumbai, Delhi, Punjab and Kolkata. The summer collections include leisure, formal and semi-formals in cottons, mercerized to get the necessary sheen, which makes all the difference when the garment is worn. They supply to high-class retail stores and their garments grace the shelves of the best stores worldwide. Sear’s Roebuck, Arrow of USA and Calvin Klein, among others, are some of the best-known names they cater to. Quality standards are very high and exacting. Indian fashion has attained a new high in this century.

The other countries in the reckoning in the export market are Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Philippines and Malaysia. China has always been a big competitor. Italians are, of course, the world leaders in the business of fashion.

Delhi’s Monisha Bajaj has this to say: "I design pantsuits depending on the season. In winter, one gets adventurous with rich tones like red and blues, but in summer, I stick to pastels. Black and gray are my all-time favourites." She says her t-suits are normally tailor-made from samples and photographs. However, she is very particular about the fit. "Being a comfortable outfit, the suit can camouflage what a woman wants to hide. For example, a straight-line jacket can conceal a slight stomach bulge. But the fit has to be fabulous —
preferably tailor-made for you, otherwise it kills the effect and the wearer looks shabby."

The field of fashion technology has caught the fancy of many a creative person and with the ongoing trends in the global fashion world there is sure to be a burgeoning of fashion designers, style divas, icons, public figures and the glitarratti of the glamour world. There have been moves to create fashion hubs, design centres, fashion arts and the latest is the nationwide move to bring fashion to the forefront in terms of visibility. This is being foisted by the creation of fashion parks which will be the hot houses of the world of garment creativity. This is the here and now of the multi-piece garment that has moved over the annals of time to gain pride of place among the pundits of the global stylized dressing scenario.
List of Illustrations