

# DENIM DIARIES!

Bindu Gopal Rao studies the arrival and the evolution of denims in the Indian market.

Denim Jeans were originally designed for the working classes. Today, they have become a part of the fashion garments space. Jeans, as a fabric, originated in the city of Genoa, Italy, in the form of cotton corduroy. They arrived in the United States in the late 18th century and in India, the initial bit of influence was seen in the 1930s when tourists were seen sporting jeans on Indian soil. Denims for the Indian market were initially imported from western countries and were accessible and available only to upper and upper middle classes of the society. The first jeans were manufactured in India in 1995. They have evolved from being worn on special occasions or outings to being worn on an everyday basis. "Denims in India were introduced as the best gear for men, which was rigid and long-lasting. Later on, denims were adapted by women and then kids. The most renowned styles in denims were straight-leg and wide-leg (known as bell bottoms), which stayed for almost five years in India," says Sanjeev Mukhija, Founder, Breakbounce.

## LOOKING BACK

Denim was born in early 90's in India. Wearing comfort, style statement, toughness of the fabric, were a few of the many characteristics which helped the fabric gain popularity amongst the masses in a short span and in no time, denim has grown from its tag of 'utility fabric' to 'fashion fabric'. In the initial year, denim was mostly considered as a fabric for men, with limited options in colours, styles, fabrics and the like. "Today, denim does not mean jeans only but it is equally popular amongst women and kids and has become a universal fabric. Denim, today, means a multitude of things—skirts, jackets,



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bags, accessories and even shoes! The age group which considers denim as fashion wear is 16 to 28 but denim is equally popular amongst elderly people, as well. The high profile jeans culture is finally here and urban youngsters, particularly, are lapping them up as soon as they appear on shop-shelves. Indian denim is constantly scaling new heights. It is successfully competing with the other brands which are popular abroad and has carved a niche for itself in the world market by catering to international standards. No fabric has been as hard sold by its manufacturers as denim has and it is not surprising to read of overnight successes in the readymade garment business with denim as the base fabric," says Deepak Chiripal, CEO, Nandan Denim Ltd. Over 50 per cent of denim is produced in India, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. With such high levels of production and manufacturing, Denim has been the trendiest and most worn fabric amongst Indians. "From Jackets and dungarees in the late 70s and early 80s to bell bottoms and pencil fits and jeggings in the modern days, it has evolved from just another cloth to one's best comfort clothing. This fabric never goes out of fashion and, like they say, history repeats itself—denims always have their way of making a comeback in the Indian market

either in a new avatar or like the ones used in 70s and 80s, with a little modification here and there," opine Ashish Gurnani and Aashray Thatai, Co-founders, PostFold.

## WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS

Denim is a versatile fabric that can be worn for any occasion. "For example, fine, unwashed denim is so elegant that can be worn for an evening event, if clubbed/accessorised well. At the same time, washed or worn out denims can be worn on treks or outings with friends. Subcultures are fading because of globalisation. Hence, we tend to mix and match everything together. The same pair of denims can be worn with high heels or boots for an evening party or as club wear and with slippers or sandals when going to college or for a day outing. To sum it up, the same pair of denims can be used for different occasions if accessorised properly. At the same time, denims nowadays come in so many styles, that one can have a different one for different occasions," says Vito Dell'Erba, Creative Director, Future Lifestyle Fashions.

## TREND CHECK

Denims have been evolving with the infusion of technology. Originally, it was a fabric used for

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work wear. It entered into music subcultures in 50s and developed in the subsequent decades and never left. It was inspired by rockers, punk rock and grunge, in the earlier days. "Today, denims are available in various prints, designs, washes, etc. They are available in paint splashes, prints, enzyme washes, stone washes, laser prints, to name a few. Also, the textile has undergone changes. We are developing denims in jacquards, stretched fabrics, shiny materials, mercerised, lightweight and compact materials," opines Dell'Erba.

Environmental hazards of wet processing have been a major concern for the industry for the last few years. Naturally, sustainable production is a key. "Lesser the water, lesser the chemicals/dyes/auxiliaries. Hence, we have been constantly working on methods and recipes to curb consumption of water. Until five years back, we used around 110 litres of water per jeans



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to create the desired wash look, and today, we are at 65 litres, and there is a lot more to save. Since all our processes are engineered in cold processes, we do not need thermal energy for any wash processes, thus generating the carbon credits. Spykar uses non-hazardous chemicals in all the processes and avoid any RSL (Restricted Substance List) chemicals. All our vendors (manufacturing plants) have ETPs (Effluent Treatment Plants), and release the effluents in accordance with the norms of local pollution boards," says Sidhartha Wilson, Denim head, Spykar Lifestyle Pvt Ltd. "A lot of patchwork on denims, boyfriend fits and dungarees, jackets and caps, have been the trends seen so far in the past couple of years."

"Raver jeans, mini denim skirts, lighter shades 70s flare and ankle cropped jeans, are some of the ongoing fall 2016 trends. Extreme acid washes, ripped surfaces, plaid patchwork; to the sweeping silhouettes, to the overload of studded embellishments, are the new basics this season," say Ashish and Aashray.

**TECH STORY**

Random bleach through cloth bits dipped in Potassium Permanganate/ Sodium Hypochlorite to give a vibrant fading look to the jeans is being used. "Ozone(O<sup>3</sup>) Gas Fading is used to conserve water and avoid polluting chemicals.



**THE DENIM LOOK BOOK**

- Fits: At the moment boyfriend fits, boot-cut and high-waist denims are in, super slim will never go out of style because it reflects the body consciousness generation of today.
- Treatment and Washes: Laser-cuts, glitters, paint prints, distressed, stone and enzyme wash. After the overdone and over-exaggerated washes, authentic old school washes are making a comeback.
- Fabrics: Stretch, lycra, tencel, jacquard.
- Application and accessorise: Patches, pins, chains and charms.

Water-based processes are circumvented. Laser engraving on jeans for design/artwork marking or to create a vintage look has become fashionable. In dyeing methods, we have cold exhaust and surface dyeing systems that help the carbon credits as there is zero energy consumption. Technology is available in which water is no longer the media to reach chemicals and dyes into the substrates, but the bubbles or foam are in use,” says Wilson.

**MARKET OUTLOOK**  
 The Indian denim market is growing annually at about 18 per cent against the global average of three to five per cent. Currently, the installed denim capacity in India is 1.2-1.3 billion metres per annum. Assuming that this growth rate continues, India would need two billion metres of denim fabric to feed its rising fabric appetite.

Per capita consumption of denim is at 0.3-0.4 pairs of jeans in comparison to two pairs in China and eight to nine pairs in UK/US, signifying an immense growth opportunity. According to Deepak Chiripal, CEO, Nandan Denim Ltd, “The retail revolution in India is fuelling the growth of the denim fabric in India, taking it to Tier I, II, III towns and cities. Consumers have begun to understand that denim offers value for money, fashion and style quotient, while maintaining versatility in the products. Denim is becoming a staple product for every wardrobe, despite India having one of the lowest per capita consumption in a world that offers far more opportunities. Top 10 cities of India (with eight to nine per cent of the total population) contribute almost 50 per cent of the denim consumption in the country while the rest of the country contributes the remaining, so, the growth potential is huge. Almost 85 per cent of the market is dominated by the men’s fraternity with an insignificant 10 per cent contribution from the female segment while kids segment contributes to five per cent of the market.” Growth drivers for denim in India stem from the fact that more than 65 per cent of the population in India is less than 35 years of age and the per capita consumption of denim is at 0.3 pairs per person in India, in comparison to two pairs in China and 8/9 pairs in UK/US, signifying immense growth opportunity. 85 per cent of consumption is from the men’s segment whereas nine per cent from women and six per cent from the kids segment. The change in this demographic offers huge growth opportunities. ■