



APPAREL / TRADE TALK

# GETTING DENIM READY

BINDU GOPAL RAO looks closer home to find out the ways in which Indian brands and manufacturers are reinventing denim, to well suit the same for the export market.

India is the second largest denim consumer in the world. Over 550 million pieces of denim apparel and over 750 million metres of denim fabric were sold in the domestic market in 2016. India is already consuming more denim than the US and EU market and it is projected that the country will consume more than 800 million pieces of denim apparel in 2021. A recent report said that three companies - Lenzing, Santoni, and Unitin introduced

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



IMAGE: HOLLYWOOD & BOLLYWOOD FASHION

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Den/IM 2.0, an innovation in athleisure that brings body-mapping technology to an already innovative pair of denim jeans. The 'I am DENIM' athleisure collection, made with stretch indigo denim on seamless circular knitting machines uses body-mapping for superior fit and performance. Closer home Indian manufacturers and designers are also doing their bit to evolve denim as a go-to fabric while making them attractive for exports as well.

#### ROUTE MAP

The evolution of denim has come a long way. Back in the 60s and 70s, one associated denim only with jeans. Brands like Levi Strauss & Co. and Guess revolutionised the use of this fabric and today almost every brand has its very own range of denim. There are a lot of new things that Indian manufacturers are doing, for example: stretch indigo denim on seamless circular knitting machines. Oxymorically, what is today a wardrobe staple, started off as being purely a functional one. "The first pair of jeans can be traced back to the California Gold Rush of the mid-19th century when a Jewish immigrant named Levi Strauss responded to the miners' needs for more sturdy trousers. However, India's rock-and-roll generation admits to having found it difficult to procure jeans, even though indigo, the dye used to make denim fabric, came from a plant indigenous to India (*Indigofera tinctoria*)", says Varsha Wadhwa, Fashion Designer and Founder of VW Design Co. Incidentally, the first international denim show in India, Denim Flexx Menn recently took place in Bengaluru. This was to encourage denim to create a platform for the Indian and International denim community to come together with an aim to consolidate the efforts of the denim industry. It was a platform where the large Indian denim industry can come together and attract the attention of the global denim community.

#### INNOVATION MATTERS

Denim is seen more as a casual fabric as opposed to a serious one. "But today, one can use embroidery on denim, use it for belts, shoes and just about anything. It has come to be known as one of the most versatile fabrics", says Sneha Mehta, Founder, Kukoon ([www.kukoonthelabel.com](http://www.kukoonthelabel.com)). Denim is gradually becoming a lifestyle product from essentially a fashion product, as it was seen since the past few years.



"Denim originated as a workwear option in the west and made its place in the fashion industry shortly after that. Now the brands are concentrating on making denim a round-the-clock wearable. Spandex, mixed with denim has made denim a lot more comfortable and wearable", says Manish Tripathi, Fashion Entrepreneur.

#### FABRIC TALK

Denim is a sturdy cotton warp-faced textile in which the weft passes under two or more warp threads. This twill weaving produces a diagonal ribbing that distinguishes it from cotton duck. The most common denim is indigo denim, in which the warp thread is dyed, while the weft thread is left white. As a result of the warp-faced twill weaving, one side of the textile is dominated by blue warp threads and the other side



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



is dominated by white weft threads. This causes blue jeans to be white on the inside. The indigo dyeing process, in which the core of the warp thread remains white, creates denim's signature fading characteristics. "The latest development in denim design, as well as the newest member of our sustainable family of products is Conetouch. In close collaboration with yarn manufacturer Unifi, our Cone 3D fabric research and development department has developed a denim fabric using a new Repreve-based yarn technology allowing for the enhanced stretch and performance of synthetic fibres while keeping an ultra-soft, natural cotton-like hand feel in order to achieve the best of both worlds in comfort stretch options for both men and women. This exclusive technology doesn't end there, however; it is also eco-friendly in that the Repreve-based yarns are made up of reconstituted polyester - each pair of jeans made with Conetouch fabric will contain on average, what used to be eight plastic bottles", says Rosy Ahluwalia, Designer Hollywood & Bollywood Fashion.

#### EXPORT THRUST

Indian manufacturers are competing with manufacturers from China and Bangladesh for their share in the international export market. From using premium quality cotton to indigenous organic dyes, Indian manufacturers are taking the standards of Indian denim to a new vertical. The global market for denim is forecasted to reach USD 64.1 billion by 2020. The Indian denim industry has shown continual growth over the years and currently, the country boasts of a denim manufacturing capacity of around 1.1 billion metres per annum. Its utilisation levels are pegged at 80-85 per cent. Asia is the largest exporter of denim. The denim market has grown exponentially over the years and has continued to do so at a constant rate. Vasundhara Mantri & Aayshya Jhunjhunwala, Co-founders, Shaadilogy.com opine, "India is an emerging denim export region owing to its quality standards, cost-effectiveness and a large pool of skilled workforce. On the domestic front, the denim wear market is driven by increasing disposable incomes, westernisation of work culture and the ensuing rise in the popularity of denim jeans as business casual wear. With the increase in globalisation, young India prefers denim as a part of their essential daily wear."

#### POLICY INITIATIVES

The textile sector, which is an important segment of the economy of the country, features on the priority list. The Indian denim market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 15 per cent to reach ₹27,200 crore in 2018 as per Technopak Advisors. Denim is one of the most versatile and staple fabric across the globe and hence has a huge scope. India is one of the key exporters of denim fabric to the world. The Government's various plans to boost industries and start-ups in the country have allowed for the numbers to soar even higher. Initiatives such as Make-In-India augur well for the development of this industry since they aim to promote innovation in the manufacturing sector and provide impetus to the sector's growth by building best-in-class manufacturing infrastructure. However, for the denim sector to benefit from the outsourcing movement away from China, India's policymakers need to formulate specific policies that cater to the segment's demands.

#### GOING GREEN

The use of organic cotton is prevalent these days to make organic denim; besides this, potato starch, natural indigo, etc are also used to manufacture organic denim. "Another innovation brought in the market is the use of Cordura denim fabric, which has been developed by using LYCRA T400 fibre as well as LYCRA fibre. This fibre offers comfort and the feel of cotton denim with long-lasting durability. Denim fabric is also manufactured using polyamide, lycra, polypropylene or with polyester and a special bonding with 100 per cent nylon net for a more lively look. This fabric is actually a mix of nylon, cotton and elastane blend yarns. A new granular softening technology is used to manufacture denim fabric these days in order to increase its productivity. The speciality



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

of this technique is that it has potentially reduced the use of water, energy, and labour required in the manufacturing process", says Ahluwalia.

#### DEMAND DRIVERS

The trend has been moving towards super stretch and soft touch in International markets, whereas in India, the knit-look is the dominating force. So a lot of super stretch and hyperflex products with excellent recovery properties denim products are making its way into the Indian market. "Globally, the denim fabric industry is growing slowly, in a low single digit, and in India, the growth depends on the source, in the range of 10-15 per cent. The Indian consumer's tastes have also changed over the years. They want new things so we are giving them variations in knit-look denim in terms of structure, stretch and colours, along with which for this season we have experimented using denim in sari-blouses, capes, stoles and more, to give an edgy look and innovation by embellishing couture-like thread embroidery and trims like paillettes, bugle beads, dabka and more. India boasts of a denim manufacturing capacity of around 1.1 billion metres per annum. Despite the impressive statistics, the Indian denim manufacturing industry contributes around five per cent to the global scenario, reflecting the overall performance of the textiles industry. Denim is the only segment of the Indian textile industry that has the potential to grow manifold. An increasing number of global denim manufacturers are looking at India as an emerging denim export region owing to its quality standards, cost-effectiveness and a large pool of skilled workforce," concludes Wadhwa. ■