

Influence of bollywood on fashion and film



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Film, Fashion, and Beyond: The Influence of Bollywood.

The relationship between the world of fashion and the world of cinema is complex and intertwined. Film allows us the opportunity to escape for a few hours into lives that are not our own—lives that may be, in fact, quite different from our own. In a similar vein, fashion gives us the opportunity to re-invent ourselves by constructing our external appearance to accommodate the shift in self-image. These shifts in image often reflect the icons we admire in the movies. Perhaps we cannot *become* them, but we can become *like* them. One way in which we do this by following their lead: by adopting the distinctive fashion styles associated with them. Sometimes, this can be something simple, such as buying a new pair of designer jeans. At other times, this can mean embracing a culture that may be foreign to us. This is how Hindi styles have begun to take hold in mainstream fashion.

The latest word in film—and in fashion—is ‘Bollywood’. Bollywood is used informally to refer to the film industry in India. It was coined as a shortened form of ‘Bombay’ plus ‘Hollywood’. Bombay’s name has since changed to Mumbai, but the name ‘Bollywood’ is here to stay—as is the industry: ‘The film industry in Bombay. . . is the biggest in the world. It makes almost double the number of movies and sells a billion more tickets each year than Hollywood’ (Boyk 2004).

The influences of Bollywood are ubiquitous; they can be seen in everything from haute couture fashion to music, often blurring the line between high and low art. In addition, the popularity of Bollywood movies has led to a high

demand for the kinds of clothing worn on the big screen. Traditional Hindi dress has become a sought-after commodity all over the world.

The fact that Indian-style clothing has become so in-demand is quite a contrast to years past. Until Indian films became popular, western clothes were the preferred attire, and they dominated the fashion world. Western-style clothing was most often what was worn in movies, and mainstream culture responded to that. Hindi garments, on the other hand, were considered unattractive and out-of-date. This began to change when Mumbai-based movies began to receive acclaim. The stars of these movies wore Indian garments, and this made Hindi-style clothing seem glamorous. ' Bollywood fashions are no longer regarded as gaudy or unstylish, because there's top talent working behind the scenes' (Melwani 2005).

This is a clear example that demonstrates the power of celebrities. Many celebrities are idolized by their fans. Because of this exalted status, the clothing they wear takes on positive associations. Thus, fans who admire them will naturally want to emulate them. They do this by using the same products the stars endorse. At times celebrities will publicly endorse a product, by appearing in a magazine advertisement or a commercial. At other times, however, they do not need to make an effort to sell the product or style of clothing. The mere fact that they are wearing or using it is considered by many to be endorsement enough. Each time one of these stars appears in a film, the clothing they wear becomes a desired commodity. This includes accessories, footwear, and jewelry. In addition, the way they wear the garment can become a trend in itself. For example, if they

do something different or daring, chances are that this, too, will be copied by their fans.

In fact, it has been asserted that ' each film is a brand in itself, and as each film releases we have a fresh new brand of fashion and lifestyle products pushing fashion among the masses' (Bansal 2005).

It seems clear that the film industry is closely intertwined with the world of fashion. ' After all, selling fashion products is a perception game. While the product needs to be inherently good and wearable, the aspiration value comes from its association with a leading personality who the masses idolise and look up to' (Bansal 2005). It is through the subliminal—and not so subliminal messages of film that we grew accustomed to designer names like ' Tommy Hilfiger' or ' Fubu'. The increasing popularity of Hindi films has had a similar effect on our likes and dislikes, as the fashions associated with them have become highly marketable.

The most popular role models of Bollywood include such superstars as Bipasha Basu, Madhu Sapre, Katrina Kaif, Dino Morea, and John Abraham The movies themselves are popular for a variety of reasons. First of all, they are usually entertaining, with compelling scenery and appealing musical backgrounds. In addition, they are the types of movies that allow viewers to escape from their own lives and be wrapped up with what is on the screen. Generally they have a plot line that is some variation on the ' rags-to-riches' theme. There is usually some sort of romance, and of course, the boy always gets the girl in Bollywood. These movies also have an appeal that reaches all

ages as well as all ethnicities—perhaps because most people like a happy ending.

However, Bollywood films may appeal to young Indians on a deeper level. The actors who star in them are true role models, because the films mirror issues that are specific to them: ' Increasingly these films are about the schizophrenic worlds that contemporary young Indians live in, the worlds of airplanes, blended cultures and the east-west embrace' (Melwani 2005). Thus, young people recognize and respond to this. They, too, want to be strong and independent. They express their admiration by modeling themselves after their icons; in addition, they tacitly express their aspirations by emulating the very people who embody them.

The explosion of Bollywood fashion has also increased cultural knowledge, as new terms for specific garments filter into other languages. The *sari* (also spelled ' *saree* ') is an unstitched piece of cloth that is draped around a woman's body; this, of course, the most well known. Other words have cropped up as well, such as *salwar-kameez* and *dupatta*. The *salwar-kameez* refers to a women's suit that usually consists of a *kameez* (tunic), a *salwar* (pair of loose pants), and a *dupatta* (matching scarf worn in various ways). These garments, traditionally worn by women of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, are now becoming globally known.

In fact, the fashion world within India itself has undergone a transformation. According to fashion designer Ritu Kumar, ' in India, the fashion scenario was in confusion as it was a turbulent period of conflicting ideologies, when the consciousness of an Indian national identity was beginning to find political

expression and the struggle for Indian independence was getting momentum'. Fashion trends prior to Bollywood were dictated by higher echelons of society. This, in turn, was strongly influenced by the British. In addition, the body image of the femme fatale of Hindi women has undergone a similar transformation. Formerly 'voluptuous' and 'wide-hipped', a new standard has become the rule. The desirable image is now sleek and slim: 'the high visibility of the indigenous fashion industry also changed the look of the screen siren and shaped a new body image' (Rao 2003). The influence of film has played a huge role in changing that.

Film clearly has a symbiotic relationship with fashion. What is shown on the silver screen often makes its way into our own lives on some level. There are a number of dynamics at work here. As Entwistle has asserted, 'dress is tied up to social life in more than one way: it is produced out of economic, political, technological conditions as well as conditions shaped by social, cultural, aesthetic ideas' (2000: 111).

The link between cinema and mainstream fashion is easily apparent. What is seen on the silver screen by movie viewers one day, will often end up being a popular commodity the next. Movies provide an outlet for viewers—a chance to step out of their own lives and into the lives of other—usually glamorous—people. Fashion does this in a similar way, allowing its adherents the freedom to 're-invent' themselves. Often, the selves they try to emulate are those of the icons they admire in film; therefore it seems natural that they emulate the style of dress of those they consider role models. As Joanne Entwistle has so aptly stated it, 'fashion opens up possibilities for framing the self, however temporarily' (2000: 139).

The establishment of the Indian cinema also proved to be the strongest influence on the fashion in the decade. Due to the western influence, the use of angarkhas, choghas and jamas diminished considerably by this time, although the ceremonial pagri, safa and topi were widespread as ever.

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