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What is the state of the fashion and apparel industry in India? Where does it stand globally?

Indian Domestic branded garment/couture – prêt fashion wear are concerned, the market size has leapfrogged from around 150-200 Cr. In early 90^s to almost Rs 50,000 to Rs 60,000 Cr. with considerable expansion happening every year though there has been a slow down; despite the slowdown there is a CAGR of 12-15%.

Indian Fashion industry has completed a quarter of a century if you go by the formal world of fashion opening the doors from 1988 with the setting up of NIFT. Out of the Rs 50,000 to Rs 60,000 Cr. branded garment industry, the designer segment continues to be relatively small with about Rs 4,000-Rs 5,000 Cr. i.e. 10% of the market with bridal and ethnic wear dominating the scene. Most of the designer-wear brands without bridal wear would be running into losses but the prêt fashions at affordable prices especially youth dominated fashions are galloping in mindshare and market share. With the entry of FDI in retail, there is an increased attention by established designers to design affordable fashion goods. Retailers like Westside and Benetton have tied-up with leading designers to expand the premium segment of co-branded designer-wear.

What have been the key innovations in the industry in the last few years?

One of the key innovations in the industry is related to denim wears and cult brands like 'Mufti' are doing well. Contoured and slim fit garments have been the main staple of men's garments. In terms of other innovations, there has been lot of mixed fabric usage like 'knits' and 'woven' or print on woven etc. Prints have even found their way even in couture as recent Milan fashion week indicates.

What are some of the major challenges for the sector?

The major challenges of the sector include limited fabric choice available in India. Fabric sourcing depends heavily on Hong Kong, Taiwan, China etc. The same is the case with trims and embellishments. The Indian fashions tend to sell only in festive seasons or in marriage linked seasons and other seasons are slack.

What strategies can help fashion and apparel industry to get a competitive edge? How can academia and government aid in this?

The Fashion and Apparel industry needs to certainly cut-down the cycle time from concept to consumer. Fast fashions have become a reality. Novelty and new store fits demand great deal of innovation. Brands like Zara and Mango have redefined young fashion and the new age design sensibilities. The leading stockists of designer-wear were like Melange, Aza, Kimaya, Ogan etc. are moving to consignment system with designers instead of all cash deals. Working capital is short with designers and most of them do not get a decent return even after they tie-up with retailers. The Government has set-up revolving incubation fund of Rs.10 Cr. to help product designers to become entrepreneurs. For the fashion industry, by way of venture capital or incubation, nothing has been done by the Government to help the fashion designers to conceptualise products / brands and to become “designpreneurs”. Indian fashion has now big opportunities to influence the global fashion because of 500 million plus youth in the country with median age of 27.

With the business environment changing at a fast pace, what skill sets are essential for potential job-seekers in the industry?

The generations of designers and merchandisers trained in NIFT and other institutions from 1988-2000 require to completely change their tool sets with digital pattern making, digital merchandising and use of social digital marketing, e-tailing etc. These skill sets along with ability to ‘tell a story’ built around collections will determine their success as designers. There is need for more deep-dive research for developing innovations and about the target groups seeking specific lifestyle or cult brands.

What does the future holds for apparel and fashion industry? Geographically, where do you see the maximum growth and employment opportunities in this sector (metros/small cities)?

The future of apparel and fashion industry is very bright as the per capita consumption of ready to wear apparel is still very low in India i.e. it is about 1 or two trousers per capita and 0.03 per capita when it comes to jeans against 7-8 pieces in other countries or even up to 15 in developed economies. There is huge scope in wearable, affordable fashion. As apparel manufacturing and retailing find their way into Tier I / II / III cities, the markets would further open up with close linkages between manufacturing and domestic markets. However, the media, designer and fashion retailer ‘golden triangle’ is still weak in our country and here a lot of work needs to be done by FDC I/Lakme Fashion Week etc.

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