

## Menswear leads in first India fashion week

NEW DELHI, INDIA: India is set to host its inaugural men's fashion week from today, Friday 11 September 2009 which observers say is a long overdue nod to a growing and lucrative market often overshadowed by women's clothes.

The event in the capital New Delhi hopes to capture the interest of India's millions of young males, many of whom have traded in traditional cotton outfits for shop-bought shirts and trousers.

Menswear currently accounts for around 80% of brand-name sales in India, according to the Fashion Design Council of India, which is organising the shows in partnership with global apparel giant Van Heusen.

Yet the two most prominent showcase events in India, Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai and Wills Lifestyle India Fashion Week in New Delhi, have previously dedicated only a tiny portion of their shows to men's clothes.

Smaller shows, such as this week's Kolkata Fashion Week in eastern India, generally follow the same trend.

"Menswear has always been the stepchild of Indian fashion," said Shaan Thadhani, a fashion buyer who runs a boutique in south Delhi.

Conventional tailored clothes will never go out of style, he said, but increased purchasing power and an influx of high-street brands had made fashion more accessible to the average Indian male.

"Most men want good clothes and they don't want to necessarily have to spend a fortune on them," said Thadhani. "Men's attitudes to fashion and to looking good have changed, and that has led to new demands."

India is only the fourth country to hold a separate men's fashion week, despite the ready-to-wear men's market being twice as big as the female sector, according to industry figures.

The reason for this, according to Van Heusen's chief operating officer Shital Mehta, is that many Indian women prefer traditional outfits such as sarees and shalwars over western clothing.

As for the men, Mehta said that the market was not yet at the designer wear stage but that Indian males were "shifting up a notch at a time."

The men's ready-to-wear market is worth around one billion dollars, and the total demand for men's apparel, including custom-made garments, is closer to US\$9.3 billion, according to a study by Technopak Advisors.

That number is expected to grow to \$13 billion by 2012.

"The market was always there for men, but it was ignored or not taken seriously," said designer Zubair Kirmani, who will be participating in the New Delhi men's fashion week.

Over the last decade, glittering shopping malls and glossy magazines such as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar have arrived in India to woo a burgeoning middle-class.

Indian designers such as Rohit Bal, Tarun Tahiliani and the duo of Rohit Gandhi & Rahul Khanna have made in-roads at home and abroad, but many men still covet international brands.

"About four years ago there was no market for men. They would come for sherwanis (traditional Indian jacket) for their weddings and that's it," said designer Siddhartha Tytler, who is also taking part in the showcase event.

"Now there's a good set of people who love shopping for menswear and want something out of the ordinary other than you Zaras and your Gaps."

The male fashion week is expected to blend contemporary ethnic and modern western styles.

Tytler said that despite building excitement, it was too early to predict what kind of impact the shows would have on sales.

"It's only once the buyers come in and place their orders that we can make a call on that. At the end of the day it is about money."

*Source: AFP*

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