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**CULTURAL  
MASH-UPS AND  
EVOLUTION**

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**20** YEARS OF ATTITUDE

COLLECTOR'S EDITION



Sonam Kapoor in *Dolly Ki Doli*



Anushka Sharma in *Matru Ki Bijlee Ka Mandola*

## NERVE CINEMA

# COSTUME REMIX

*Bridal wear coupled with sports shoes, chiffon saris teamed with trench coats, jeans paired with Kashmiri jackets.... Today, heroines are flaunting quirky styles and experimenting with unconventional dressing on screen, observes Alpana Chowdhury*

**A**rrey abhi toh party shuru hui hai...  
Party chalegi till six in the morning...  
Jimmy Choo ki noke pe rakkhi duniya saari hai....

Sonam Kapoor, dancing to this outrageous number in *Khoobsurat*, is unconventional, bold and *bindaas*. Now if that is a mash-up sentence, can it be avoided? How else can you describe a girl who wears silk dhoti pants with a crop top, jacket,

orange sneakers and lots of funky roadside trinkets, breaking free with a song like this? As Mili Chakravarty, a physiotherapist in a stuffy, royal household, Sonam is a misfit, out to shake its inmates up. And, caring two hoots about what others think, she wears freaky combinations that reflect her fun-loving spirit. Karuna Laungani, who styled Sonam's look in this 2014 film, did so with complete abandon, combining Western labels like Zara, Mango and Adidas with Indian designers like Anupama Dayal and

Karishma Shahani. And, in the process, set new trends for today's break-free generation.

In *Dolly Ki Doli*, Sonam once again plays an unconventional role, that of a con woman duping guys into marriage and then burgling their houses. While escaping with her loot, she teams elaborate bridal costumes with leather jackets and laced-up sports shoes. Comfort and convenience score over coyness.

Increasingly, heroines are unshackling themselves from



Akshay Kumar in Boss

**WITH STORIES TODAY BEING WRITTEN AROUND CHARACTERS WHO DARE TO BE DIFFERENT, MORE AND MORE DIRECTORS ARE GOING OFF THE FORMULA PATH, PROJECTING REAL MEN AND WOMEN. SO, INSTEAD OF JUST DOING FASHION DESIGN, COSTUME DESIGNERS ARE TAKING CARE TO DRESS THEIR ACTORS ACCORDING TO CHARACTER.**

traditional mores, and simpering leading ladies in *kanjeevarams* are becoming passé. Playing liberated, bold or avant-garde characters, the Sonams, Kareenas, Anushkas, Kanganas, Deepikas et al toss together clothes that project their attitudes, often opting for quirky mixes of global and Indian styles.

One of the first to assert herself as an uninhibited youngster was Kareena Kapoor, as Geet in *Jab We Met*. Geet literally runs away from anything that curbs her freedom, and her comfortable *patiala* salwar and loose T-shirt symbolise her carefree, care-a-damn attitude towards rules and regulations like nothing else could.

Anushka Sharma, on the other hand, cocks a sizzling snook at morality when she wears the skimpiest

of shorts and a red bra under a transparent white blouse as Bijlee, in *Matru Ki Bijlee Ka Mandola*. If the shorts and red bra are not cheeky enough, she has a tattoo in Hindi on her *kamar*, which says, “*Dekho magar pyar se*”. Branded shorts cross-pollinated with desi truckers’ language?!

Kangana Ranaut, too, in *Tanu Weds Manu Returns*, is out to shock and break rules any which way. As a bohemian export from Kanpur trying to settle down in London, she wears exquisite chiffon saris with Oxford shoes and a long trench coat! No pashmina shawls for this free-spirited wife of a sober Indian doctor. Bored to death with her English suburban life, she dumps her husband in a mental asylum and returns to India to give full

vent to her freedom. Her wardrobe now becomes even more quaint... London style married to Indian ethnic. Exotic, rustic weaves with Western silhouettes, knitted jumpers with digitally-printed dhoti pants, suede and denim jackets with salwars... Tanu’s clothes reflect her pan-continent life. Reza Shariffi, who put together her hybrid wardrobe points out, “I had designed her clothes for her earlier film, *Tanu Weds Manu*, as well. In that film too, she enjoyed breaking rules and her clothes reflected her attitude when she combined yardage from different Indian states, like phulkari and *bandhini*, in an unusual manner. In the sequel, she returns to India after living in London for a few years. But being the enfant terrible that she is, she does not conform to either English



Kangana Ranaut in Queen

***KANGANA, WHO HAS A SHARP DESIGN SENSE WHEN IT COMES TO HER PERSONAL WARDROBE, DARED TO 'DRESS DOWN' AS RANI IN QUEEN, QUITE UNSELFCONSCIOUSLY HIP-HOPPING ALL OVER PARIS IN LAJPAT NAGAR KURTIS AND JEANS.***

dress codes or small-town Indian styles. Tanu mixes and matches clothes of both countries in a manner typically her own."

Kangana, who has a sharp design sense when it comes to her personal wardrobe, dared to 'dress down' as Rani in *Queen*, quite unselfconsciously hip-hopping all over Paris in Lajpat Nagar kurtis and jeans, a common street-wear combination in India. Bold in her choice of films, the actress had the confidence to carry off a major part of the film dressed as a commoner from Dilli, becoming in the process a role model for middle-class girls challenging middle-class values.

Manoshi Nath and Rushi Sharma, new-age designers, explain how they turned Kangana into Rani. "Growing up

in Delhi, we had seen many a Rani in the girls' colleges and polytechnics of the city. While being the quintessential homely, middle-class girl who must have a college degree, Rani fits into college life by wearing misshapen kurtis and denim pedal pushers or rosette-embroidered jeans which she thinks are 'trendy'. We enjoyed throwing denim, acid-washed jackets, and hand-knitted cardigans over the kurtis to complete the 'Rani' look."

They add, "Kangana, being from a small town in Himachal Pradesh, identified with the look instantly and carried it off comfortably. When a girl like Rani defiantly goes on a single honeymoon to Paris, she doesn't realise that she sticks out like a sore thumb in this stylish city. So, when she

later buys short Parisian dresses, she naively wears them with her jeans! However, Kangana looked absolutely gorgeous in this fusion by default."

With stories today being written around characters who dare to be different, more and more directors are going off the formula path, projecting real men and women. So, instead of just doing fashion design, costume designers are taking care to dress their actors according to character. When Deepika Padukone, playing a London-returned, conservation architect in Imtiaz Ali's *Love Aaj Kal*, slips out of her work overalls, she gets into comfortable jeans and ethnic bling that reflect her state of mind. A well-travelled career woman, she lets her hair down by wearing



Saif Ali Khan in *Aarakshan*



Ranbir Kapoor in *Rockstar*

globally-influenced, casual chic.

As early as 2004, when Farhan Akhtar made *Lakshya*, he cast Preity Zinta as a regular Delhi University student. Unlike the dolled-up look of earlier heroines who went to college like they were dressed for a wedding, Preity wore gathered skirts, made of cotton Indian yardage, with *kurtis*. Campus couture in Delhi is usually an arty mix of Western trends and Indian ethnic, and Preity dressed accordingly.

This combination was to be seen again in *Fanaa* where Kajol and her group of friends wore embroidered *kurtis* and skirts made from vibrant Indian fabrics. Aamir Khan, who played a flirtatious tourist guide in Delhi, wore bright printed Indian shirts with jeans and crushed mulmul scarves that complemented his audacious behaviour.

Quite unlike him, male students on the Delhi campus, especially those with Marxist leanings, are partial to long, khadi *kurtas* with well-worn, branded jeans, a combination that Saif Ali Khan sported in Prakash Jha's *Aarakshan*. Wearing cotton *kurtas*, jeans and a rough, cotton scarf carelessly draped around his neck,

Khan made for delicious eye candy, of the intellectual kind.

Two years later, designer Komal Shahani gave Akshay Kumar an interesting global-desi look in *Boss*. "He plays a flamboyant *dada* from the rough-tough terrains of Haryana, so I designed stylish, long *kurtas* and jeans with bright-coloured linen jackets for him. For an additional, edgy effect I engraved BOSS on his knuckle dusters," narrates Shahani. Who said *dadas* cannot make style statements?

And, of course, a film like *Rockstar* demanded a fusion of global fashions. When Janardhan becomes Jordan, an international singer, he combines elements of Western, Indian and Middle Eastern couture. Banging away on his guitar, bellowing the *Naadaan Parindey* song before hysterical fans in Europe, Ranbir Kapoor wears voluminous *salwars* with a gold-braided jacket, and an Air Force-style cap on shoulder-length hair. Rebellious and grungy, Jordan is a far cry from the earlier Hindi film rock stars who shone in silver pants. Jordan's lady love, played by Nargis Fakhri, a rich girl from Kashmir, is styled in jeans teamed with gorgeous Kashmiri jackets

and embroidered shawls wrapped like scarves.

With globalisation, all aspects of Hindi films have become entertaining mash-ups. From the scripts and lyrics to characters and clothes, there is a seamless combination of various languages and styles that reflect today's multifaceted Indian. Characters mouth coarse Hindi phrases and English terminology in the same breath, youngsters swing to Yo Yo Honey Singh's *Chaar Botal Vodka*, and costume departments rise to the occasion to reflect this new mishmash.

But long before Ranbir and his ilk were toggled up in fusion clothing, his grandfather, Raj Kapoor, epitomised the ultimate global desi when he sang: *Mera joota hai Japani, Yeh patloon Inglistani, Sar pe laal topi Rusi, Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani*. Can any designer today better tramp Raju's iconic wardrobe, stitched in a tiny shop called *Stylo*, set up in the then fashionable district of Flora Fountain by a Chandu Gopalani who escaped to Bombay from Karachi just before Partition tore the country asunder? **V**

# ENGLISH VINGLISH

*Moving away from stringent grammatical rules in a post-modern world, people are speaking in numerous tongues and urban dictionaries are freely embracing the unstructured lingo of the youth*

“Aap poora time door khula rakhenga toh AC kharaab hoenga!” scolds a fellow fitness gym

member to the lady bathroom attendant. The poor attendant looks like she's stepped fresh off the boat, straight from the heartland of Hindistan, and this Mumbaii Hindi is a freakish aberration of language that she is unable to comprehend. She looks frightened, but I wonder if she's more afraid of the bossy lady or her atrocious Hindi. She nods confusedly, and retreats into the bathroom.

As I get onto the treadmill, I think about Mumbai's relationship with Hindi. Mumbaikars are infamous for their Hindi. The elite cannot speak a decent sentence without peppering it with English words, and everyone else seems to be caricatured by the rest of India as speaking *tapori* Hindi. Much like the *taporis* (Mumbai's outlaws) who popularised it, this type of Hindi is too cool to concern itself with inconvenient language laws of 'stree-ling' and 'pull-ling' and mixes Marathi and Hindi to create a scandalous language that makes purists cringe.

In today's age, encountering pure languages has become increasingly tough. There may be some Hindi-speaking belts where the language is still found close to its original form,

but tongue-twisters like *dhumrapan-dandika* or *lohapathagamini* have been abandoned for their easier English equivalents, 'cigarette' and 'train', respectively.

In a global economy where people are constantly travelling, a confluence of influences is inevitable. With the advent of technology, we are facing a time when rules have disintegrated, and no one spells in the same manner anymore. Mobile phones and Internet have brought about their own colourful, shorthand type of texting language. Today's youth is primarily concerned with getting their point across. Armed with Snapchat, Instagram and their phone cameras, language is no longer necessary for communication. Who has the attention span to communicate through wordy sentences when you could sum it up in a picture?

India, in all its advertising glory of 'Unity in Diversity', shines out as a country with over 122 major languages and 1,599 other languages, of which Hindi and English are considered the two official languages of the country. The Constitution refrains from calling Hindi the national language because, in this diverse Subcontinent, to give Hindi that kind of prominence would be to ignore the large southern part that lies completely disconnected from Hindi.

If language is a powerful carrier of culture and history, then this North-South language divide serves as an indicator of how separate these two halves feel with respect to their cultures. A common misnomer in the North is to refer to all South Indians as Madrasis: a single, undifferentiated mass of people that are nothing like 'us'. And the South seems to dismiss most northerners as being 'Hindis'; not a very envious title to have when visiting. With the southern states having their own separate languages, English serves as a unifying factor between these parts, but mostly with the elite, as the common man still doesn't have fluency.

India's relationship with English has been one fraught with years of contentious history. Being the language of the coloniser, it was first enforced upon us, as something to be celebrated and revered. Our colonial masters knew that to enslave a race, they had to crush the confidence of its people. They broke us down by making us associate shame with our own indigenous ways, leading us to believe that everything that was theirs was better. The Christian missionaries were funded by the British government to establish English-medium schools all over the country, and through these schools, they educated us about their religion, language, technology,

history and literary works. We grew up believing that our religions were ritualistic, our languages primitive, our handmade goods impractical, and our attire unmodern.

A Kenyan author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, has spoken of his experience as a student growing up in a colony of the British. He studied in a Christian missionary school and was meted out corporal punishment for speaking in his local language. You were taught to hate your own tongue and your culture. If identity is intertwined around language, when you take away someone's language, you leave them confused about who they are.

I grew up in the 1980s and 1990s. I was enrolled in a convent school since they were regarded as being the best in India. Thiong'o's words resonated strongly with me because years after the British had left we were still nursing a post-Raj hangover. Although we weren't hit in school for speaking our mother tongue, the shame was subtly passed on. The girls who spoke Hindi or a regional language, even privately, were ostracised as being 'vernisi' (vernaculars) by the cooler English-speaking crowd. Although India became free, our minds were still shackled by the Anglophilia that the British had instilled in us.

All through school, I remember being taught the canons of literature (all British) like Shakespeare and Wordsworth. Although I enjoyed their works, I could never relate to the (mental and physical) landscapes that they described. During Hindi class, we read Premchand's stories, which didn't gel with my urban, modern sensibility either. That's why when Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was given to us as prescribed reading in college, it was a life-changing experience for me. As I devoured each page, I felt that someone was finally talking about my surroundings in a language that was mine!

Rushdie was one of the first writers to break the mould by writing novels in Hinglish: a language colloquially spoken by a large urban, English-speaking population. Till then, we had read novels about India written by British authors in such a 'propah' sipping-a-spot-of-tea-in-the-garden-with-my-stiff-upper-lip manner that you couldn't really find true India in their writings. Rushdie changed all of this by writing in an English that depicted India with all its excesses and paradoxes. He made the story relevant with a 'chutneyfied' English; one spiced with Hindi at regular intervals. Till then it had been the Raj writing about us, but Rushdie grabbed that power from the British and radically decided to write in our voice.

Some people may believe that we are losing our culture by speaking in such mixed tongues but in a post-modern world, where there are no stringent demarcations (black or white), everything falls somewhere in between. People are comfortable moving away from strict language rules and exploring words. Our urban dictionaries no longer only accept vocabulary put out by the literati as legitimate, but are forced to embrace the unstructured lingo of the youth. After all, in this FOMO generation, you wouldn't want to be caught MIA because you were too uptight to accept some slang, yo? **V**

—NIDHI MUNDHRA

