

India's Fashion Bloggers:

The Uber-Chic Online Stylists

BY PRITI SALIAN

Fashion bloggers are a new breed of couturiers who believe in dressing women with real bodies and turning them into divas.

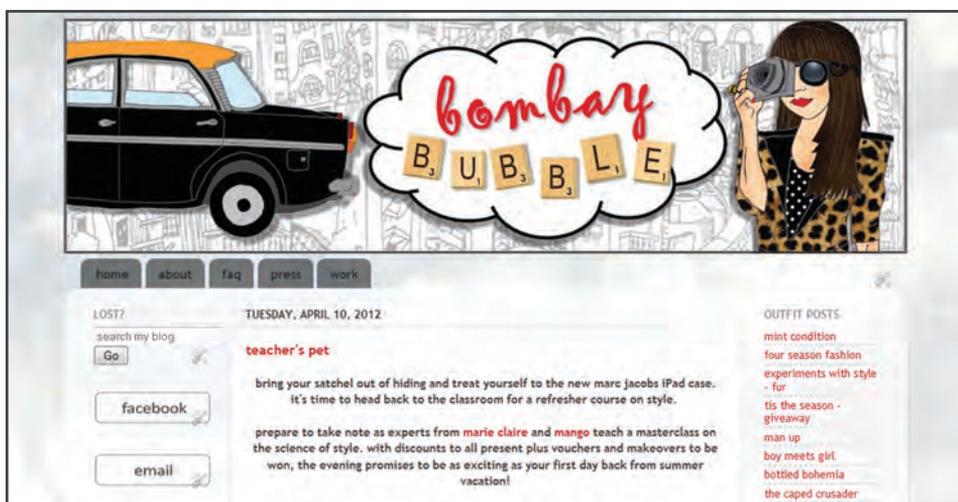
They're the stylists, designers and the fashion writers of today. Their fashion statements are informal and often peppered with their day-to-day experiences. But, to them, fashion isn't just about wrapping up a skinny model in feathers or fur – it stands for dressing up the girl next door in a very real way. Meet the new brigade of Indian fashion bloggers who are taking the country by storm and influencing the choices of their readers. Their strength? They tone down the intimidation that is traditionally attached to fashion and styling.

Inspirations and Reason

When you love clothes and have some experience with styling, blogging strikes a desirable chord. "A blog seemed perfect to express our personal style and professional work as it was user-friendly and easy on the pocket," say Jasleen Kaur Gupta and Sonu Bohra, two close friends who share a common bond and liking for fashion. They have been blogging on the Fashion Bombay (fashion-bombay.com) since September 2009. For Akanksha Redhu who authors akanksharedhu.com, what "started off as a scrapbook of a newbie fashion designer has now turned into a glimpse of my life." There are others like Manou, a fashion photographer for whom blogging is all about his experience with people on the streets. This National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT)-educated fashion designer blogs and documents his street-style photography at "Wearabout" (wearabout.wordpress.com), which has been called a "thinking man's blog" by *The Economic Times*, a leading Indian newspaper. Payal and Priyanka call their blog "High Heel Confidential" (highheelconfidential.com), a 'desi-centric' fashion blog that talks not only about Bollywood, but also all things desi pertaining to style and fashion. Find them scrutinizing celeb styles and commenting on their fashion faux-pas on their blog.



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The Connecting Factor

“The reason why fashion blogs are gaining popularity is because people can relate to what bloggers talk about,” says Aastha Atray of “Indian Summer” (indiansummer-aastha.blogspot.in) fame whose blog concentrates on Indian styles as much as on Western. Most fashion bloggers are a breed of twenty-somethings with not-so-perfect bodies. They may not be ardent fans of top brands, but they are women who deal with “real issues like body flaws, budget constraints and social stigma and still manage to look their best,” says Anushka Hajela, who says her blog bombaybubble.com is her “personal style file and culminative style journal.” A blogger may be found buying and wearing clothes from street markets as much as from Zara or Debenhams. “We attempt cheaper ways to come up with the same look that a branded product can give,” adds Aastha. She says this is the one area the fashion glossies miss. “Magazines are pretty and glossy but even with a real life, real people section, they use professional stylists and models with perfect bodies to don the look,” adds Lesly Lobeni, who posts at lazymanxcat.blogspot.in.

A reader may not always be able to identify with that.

Fashion blogs are accessible without a cost rider, which adds to their popularity.

Unlike fashion glossies, blogs are dialogue initiators where readers can participate, query about styles and trends, ask where to buy an item and even send their pictures to ask for an opinion on how they could dress based on their body type. It is an encyclopedia of sorts for the uninitiated but very enthusiastic generation that wants to dress well and looks up to the blogger as an expert who can offer timely help.

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making an informed decision before sporting a trend is essential to avoid a potential mishap.

An Asset, For Sure

If you thought fashion blogging was just a creative outlet or a means of income based on the number of hits, read ahead. From having bagged writing gigs and styling assignments, to having an online shop, Indian fashion bloggers have done it all. Gia Kashyap, who blogs at giasaysthat.com, earned work as a columnist for a leading newspaper through her blog. Incidentally, she also sells dresses stitched by local designers via her blog, and is working on having her online boutique soon. Jasleen and Sonu promote their fashion venture JSo Style through their blog, with which they offer fashion consultancy and professional styling services for editorials, advertisements and personal portfolios. They are also expert personal shoppers and offer complete wardrobe solutions. Bangalore-based Ruhi and Faiza Sheikh through their blog “Republic of Chic” (republicofchic.in) discuss easy-to-follow DIY projects and take orders for custom-made clothes. Aastha even organized a garage sale to sell some of her branded clothes from her burgeoning wardrobe. Readers came asking for dresses they saw on her blog and contributed to the success of the sale. Smrithi runs small campaigns and advertisements for brands and reviews their products that earn her extra cash. There are times when bloggers collaborate with brands, cover events for them or do posts on their collections, but it’s strictly for the ones they like, because they’re a fiercely independent tribe that refuses to be influenced by anyone. If they’re lucky, they get a gift voucher from the brand for their work and at times even some dough.

Fashion blogs are liberating for the South Asian woman. “We turn dressing into an exciting task rather than a mundane chore for every woman,” say Jasleen and Sonu. But are they a threat to fashion glossies? Nah! Says Neena Haridas, editor at *Marie Claire India*, “It is equivalent to saying that television can bring down the popularity of newspapers.” Each has its own niche and readership. “People turn to fashion magazines for the authenticity they offer on fashion,” adds Annu Iyer, publishing editor and fashion director at *RTW magazine*. ä

Trends Versus Personal Style

Most bloggers discuss trends but admit that they don’t follow them all the time. Smrithi Rao, blogger at vintageobsession.com, feels “it is important to have a sense of personal touch and style in what you wear and the rest just follows.” That said, “Fashion Bombay” reviews and highlights a brand’s forte from an editorial perspective. And if you see a trend report with a thorough dissection on Anushka’s blog, it is because she believes that