

Popularity of *Salwar-Kameez*

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Behenjjs are having the last laugh. So are the BTMs (behenji-turned-mods). The assault on it has been stronger than ever - from MTV- inspired western wear - but the much-derided *salwar-kameez* has finally found a slot for itself : somewhere between the housecoat and the trousers. Not very flattering, but then, when has the hardy, functional, no-fussy Punjabi been bothered by appearances.

The takeover has been slow and subtle, and women - the young, the old and the hip - are finally accepting and admitting that it's OK to be seen in a pair. You will not be branded a middle-aged matron from Punjabi Bagh or a two-plaited, conservative *kudi* with a ticket for *Gharwali Baharwali*. "Twenty years ago, it was called the Punjabi suit and was seen as a north Indian dress," says Bangalore housewife, Asha Ravindranath. "Now, it's just a *salwar-kameez*."

Five reasons why the 'Panjabi suit' rules despite the bad press, and why it suits more and more women, from Kanyakumari to Kolkata:

The 50 plus factor: You look younger. At least, your husband thinks so. "More and more middle-aged women are opting for this dress because it is supposed to be more youthful compared to the sari," says Deepa Nag Haksar, a Reader in the Philosophy department of Delhi University.

The Great Cover-up: It shows absolutely no flesh. Even the six yard sari with its tantalising glimpses gives the roadside Romeos more to look and leer at. "*Salwars* are a safer and better option for women taking public transport to work," says Anuja Beri, who works in a bank in Delhi. "You tend to catch the eye faster if you are wearing tight jeans and short tops," she adds. "The conservative air that a *salwar-kameez* conveys is also proper for offices," says stylist Denise Fernandex from Mumbai.

The Two Cs: It's comfortable, it's convenient. "It's better than a night- gown or housecoat, " says Deepa Nag Haksar. Just right for hanging out at home or trips to the market. Asha Ravindranath says she switched from saris to *salwars* a few years ago because "it has fewer accessories and takes less time to wear. A crumpled sari looks bad, but not a *salwar*. And unlike jeans, anybody, fat or slim, can wear it. It's a suit that suits all." In Mumbai, where a majority of commuters travel by train, it's definitely more convenient, agrees Fernandez.

Going Out and Up: It's one step up for those aspiring to switch from the traditional to the trendy: when you're ready to dump that sari but haven't gathered the courage to don the jeans.

"Most Bengali women living with their families have to dress traditionally at home," says Shoma Chatterjee of Calcutta. "But when they step out for a vacation - and they are

always going somewhere - then they pack in their *salwar-kameezes*. They get them made quietly during the Pujas and keep them tucked under the saris for their holidays".

Madhuri's Choice: Finally, thanks to fashion designers and Hindi movies, it is actually becoming an elegant and stylish outfit. As Nag Haksar points out: "Girls actually go shopping for, say, what Madhuri Dixit wore in *"Dil to Pagal Hai."*

And as Puja Jain, 22-year old DU student points out: "Our actresses look very trendy in salwars, don't they?" And what *dhak-dhak* Dixit wears is trendy enough for our college gals.

[Courtesy: *The Times of India*]

