

Couture For Kids



It was 10-year-old Sahil's birthday. Even before his parents could decide a surprise party for him, Sahil surprised his parents with the idea of visiting the shopping mall to pick denim jeans "like the one Salman Khan wore in *Partner*," Himesh Reshammiya's fancy cap and the latest version of Xbox. They shopped until they dropped, ate at Pizza Hut and returned home with Gini & Jony clothes, Ruff Kids accessories and Reebok shoes. The common factor in their day's event was brand shopping.

Today's parents have enough money and make sure their children are not deprived of any luxury. The influence of western culture in terms of selecting the clothes, choosing the brands, and dressing up for the occasion is changing the perspective of children as well. In fact, exposure to various mediums of communication has made them better informed and self-conscious, resulting in kids turning independent buyers. So even before the parents get a hang over the latest in the market, children are in sync with branded products.

"More than 85 per cent of the kids coming to the store like to choose stuff for themselves; most of the times their minds are already made up and they are very clear about what they want to buy," says a staffer of a kids' garment store in Raghuleela Mall, Kandivli. It is interesting to observe young buyers. Most often,

WITH brand aware kids turning independent buyers, the children's wear industry is growing by leaps and bounds

children up to eight years like to go in for shirts with certain cartoon characters and those older, if given a choice, emulate their favourite film stars and cricketers.

"My daughter Suhani does not understand brands but she prefers bright colours and capris because she says that is 'hep'. I couldn't believe my ears when she first insisted on buying capris," laughs Suchi Singhal, a pathologist in Mumbai who often goes shopping with her four-year-old.

It has been estimated that the kids' wear market is growing at the rate of 10 per cent per annum, making it one of the fastest growing industries. Also, of the Rs 14,900 crore market for children's apparel, branded garments have managed an 8 per cent penetration. Kids' wear companies define their products as the future fashion statements of kids and young adults. While companies like Ruff Kids cater to the needs of children from 1-3 years and 4-16 years, Gini & Jony has clothes for the age group 6 months to 16 years and Raymond's Zapp! offers garments and accessories that are targeted at fashion conscious young adults between 4-12 years.

That is not all, India has always been a potential market for many western companies for years and international brands such as Barbie, Whoopi, Wind Mills, Disney and recent entrant Kanz are finding regular clients in kids. From T-shirts to capris and jackets to cargos, denim, cotton, lycra, boys and girls have options unlimited and a good buy means shelling out a minimum of Rs 700 per pair.

Keeping up with the season, manufacturers have introduced new styles

and designs. For instance, the recently launched Doodle Download collection from Barbie Clothing For Girls got innovative with hi-tech designs as scribbles, doodles and bits of code that meet pixelated, hyper-real Barbie images in a digital collage. "Given how fussy little girls can



be, it's always a challenge to bring out something that will enthrall them as well as seem sensible to their parents," opines Ashwin Shetty, CEO of Barbie Clothing For Girls.

As far as sales are concerned, the festive season is when it happens. "Sales go up from August to December and the preference is for western outfits and the demand is for party wear. Currently leggings and capris are the in thing for girls and baggies, cargos and jeans among boys," observes Dipen Chheda, partner of Joy-n-Jolly that manufactures kids' wear for 1-12 year-old girls. According to vice president, Retails of Gini & Jony, Ajay Nihalani, denims sells the most with a colour

preference of blue for boys and pink for girls. When it comes to prints girls chose flower and butterfly prints and among cartoon characters, BEN 10 has taken over Spiderman and Power Puff Girls with kids.

Thanks to shopping malls, it is easy to get various brands in one place. But since the kids' wear industry is expanding, chain of retail stores dedicated exclusively for children's wear are mushrooming. Gini & Jony are working towards introducing such retail outlets that will have international brands like United Colours of Benetton, Levi's Sykes Junior, and Reebok Juniors under one roof. Indeed the kids' wear industry has lots in store. ◀