

## **Diverting Denim: Screening Jeans in Bollywood**

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### **Introduction**

During a research visit to Bombay in 2008, I asked a young costume assistant, as we sat talking in a suburban Bombay coffee house, how often she had sourced jeans for films. She replied: 'Denim is big in films. Our actors are wearing denim throughout the film. They have to have jeans, unless they are wearing a suit. I cannot think of a film where we haven't used jeans, even actresses.'

There is nothing particularly striking about this statement until one considers that as recently as the late 1980s it would have been inconceivable. It is possible to watch several popular Hindi films from the 1960s and 1970s in their entirety, even those films with a reputation for being fashionable for their time, and not see a single blue jean or denim jacket.

Only with the transformation in the Indian economy of the late 1980s and 1990s did denim begin to make a more frequent and prominent appearance in Indian media.<sup>1</sup> Since then, in the midst of Bollywood's undimmed enthusiasm for spectacular costume, jeans have made a remarkable and somewhat quieter shift towards costume normativity. The increasing momentum of a consumerism that began in the 1980s has vastly expanded opportunities for, among other things, ready-made clothes consumption (Mazumdar 2007: xxi; Vedwan 2007: 665; Viridi 2003). The quickening pace of the appropriation of denim for film costume directly coincides with this phenomenon, and film remains an influential and in some cases the dominant visual source for the artefacts and practices of consumerism in the sub-continent (Mazumdar 2007: 18 and Miller, this volume).

The first part of this essay sketches shifts in the occurrence and meaning of jeans in film costuming in the tradition of the majority of film costume studies (e.g. Berry 2000; Bruzzi 1997; Dwyer 2000; Gaines and Herzog 1990; Moseley 2005; Street 2001). If jeans, as Miller and Woodward (2007) argue, are a prism through which to examine some of the anxieties associated with modernity, the 'career' of jeans in popular Hindi film elaborates and seeks to resolve the lingering anxiety about 'what to wear' that has vexed Indian consumers since colonial times (Tarlo 1996). In the

second half, I go beyond conventional analyses to show that the screen images at issue are predicated on material practices that make judicious and tactical use of brands, fakes, and copies both in Bombay and in other market places. In the subculture of Bombay media production, these practices illustrate and respond specifically to the anxieties of Bollywood stars who are the most prominent models of jeans-wearing for the Indian public. Even in Bollywood films, despite the fantastic settings which remain exotic and remote to most South Asian viewers, jeans have emerged as everyday clothing (Miller and Woodward 2007; Sassatelli this volume) that lack the existing cues to sartorial distinction associated with most Indian garments (Banerjee and Miller 2008; Tarlo 1996). Jeans on film are not like couture items that 'speak' on their own terms (e.g. Bruzzi 1997). Instead left to themselves they would 'speak' in largely uniform tones about sexuality, relationships, and personal autonomy in ways that supersede their particular use in any given narrative context. This is because they first designate their sameness and predictability (Miller and Woodward 2007: 343) – the same range of colours, the arrangement of rivets, the subtle variations on one form. But to the individuals who wear them, for whom dress is a critical signifier of their personal charisma and celebrity, all this is insufficient. In order to emphasize their own distinction (Bourdieu 1984) stars will try to display brands publicly; if they cannot, they strive for distinction through fusing their personal jeans choices with their portrayal of characters – choices that are delegated to designers and their assistants to actualize. This is a power that stars wield, which is denied to character actors, extras – even the star's double.

These brand assertions implicitly articulate the limits of Bombay's retail ecology, placing a firm constraint upon the extent to which a mere film fan can emulate the stars. Those disappointed at not looking like their film idols when they buy their clothes may feel that 'what one sees is not what one gets' but, conversely, from the point of view of the costumer, 'what one gets is not necessarily what one sees'. The game of illusion, effacement and manipulation starts long before the film hits the theatres.

### **Jeans and the Spectacular: Denim on Screen**

The film industry in Mumbai (still referred to in film circles and in this chapter as Bombay) has the distinction of being the best known nationally and globally of all the various film centres in India (Dwyer and Patel 2002: 8; Ganti 2004: 3; Mazumdar 2007: xviii; Rajadhyaksha 2003). Since its earliest years, costume has been one of the distinct visual pleasures associated with film going (Bhaumik 2005:90; Dwyer 2000; Dwyer and Patel 2002: 52; Wilkinson-Weber 2005: 143). If what is spectacular is in part what can either not be appropriated or only appropriated with considerable qualification, then jeans indeed belong next to the lavish costume displays that few Indians would dream of copying without considerable modification; as Miller

points out in his study of denim in Kannur in this volume, jeans in India remain the clothing choice of a few rather than, as in other countries of the world, the many. On the other hand, urban middle and upper classes, both male and female, and young people across an even wider social span, find it easier than ever to buy jeans now that domestic or imported (often fake) versions from elsewhere in Asia provide a range of price and quality alongside foreign high-priced labels. When these consumers judge a costume's 'wearability' as clothing, they are now making assessments of cost as much as whether it complies with social standards of attire (Berry 2000: xiv). Jeans unlike almost any other garment are thus tenuously poised between the spectacular and the mundane.

That the clothed celebrity body inspires aspiration and emulation is a widely accepted maxim, holding that clothing possibilities are imaginatively anticipated via film viewing before being actualized in shopping and wearing practice (Berry 2000; Dwyer and Patel 2002; Eckert 1990; Stacey 1994; Street 2001: 7; Wilkinson-Weber 2006). For viewers to be able to anticipate their own, comparable experiments in dress, a certain naturalism in the depiction of characters and settings is needed so that costumes can seem minimally 'wearable'. More than this, though, the materials, practices and institutions (social and ideological) to foster emulation must exist, or otherwise film viewers would not dream of 'dressing up' like their favourite actors. In India, the personal tailor or menswear store until recently had the almost exclusive ability to facilitate the customer's desire to emulate movie costumes until the relaxation of curbs on foreign imports and an exploding market in consumer goods in the 1990s (Sheikh 2007; Wilkinson-Weber 2005). From this point began a growth of new shopping practices, spaces and dress conventions. Hindi film has arguably, via its fascination with the material accoutrements of status and power, long been making the case for what Berry (2000: xiii) terms a 'symbolic economy' in which the management of appearances amounts to a complex set of moral statements about selves in class, caste, and patriarchal contexts. Film not only models (in every sense of the word) the kind of clothes that are central to these locations and experiences, but costume itself is central to the definition of occupations, lifestyles and identities that distinguish the new, globally-aware, Indian citizen, be these corporate executives, ganglords, reporters, even NASCAR (US based stock-car racing) drivers, and a host of others.<sup>2</sup>

Male Hindi movie actors – 'heroes' or stars, and some supporting or character actors – began wearing denim jeans and jackets in their films in the early to mid-1970s. By the later 1970s female film stars – 'heroines' – were doing so as well. Despite the apparent naturalism of the contexts in which jeans were worn, the wearing of denim by stars bore little resemblance to the actual reality in which the film was imaginatively located. Still comparatively scarce, and by no means shared by all the stars in the star pantheon, film uses of denim came well in advance of when jeans and jackets began to be accepted even among the middle classes, as appropriate apparel for Indian bodies.<sup>3</sup>



Jeans, when they appeared, were typically signifiers of characters exploring new forms of identity and social mobility. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that denim came into Bollywood film just as the major tropes and themes of mainstream film shifted towards a focus on subaltern subjects and the pursuit of justice, and away from romance. Theorists have associated the emergence of the action film and action heroes, chief among them the iconic star Amitabh Bachchan, with social and political upheaval in India (Ganti 2004: 32–3; Prasad 1998). Other scholars have pointed to the emergence of homoerotic subtexts in the focus on *dosti* or male relationships that overshadow heterosexual pairings (Kavi 2000; Rao 2000). Connected to both is the wearing of denim, which, in the words of Rabine and Kaiser (2006: 236), can be ‘endlessly adapted to the creation of new genders and sexualities’. Jeans, unlike suits or tailored outfits, destabilized conventional sartorial distinctions of elite versus subaltern. The star’s jeans were visually central, of course, but he – like some of the minor characters or extras played by junior artists – could well be a lower class or socially marginal character (for example, Dharmendra in denim jacket and jeans as the petty criminal turned hero of the iconic 1975 film, *Sholay*).

For men, jeans were an extension of a Western-style wardrobe (shirts and trousers for the most part), an Indian version of which was already widely in use. Jeans on women, on the other hand, were a clearly transgressive deviation from Indian styles. Anxiety about the propriety of women wearing jeans in public life has only slowly and partially given way to the preferences among the affluent – but certainly not among lower class women – for this kind of attire. As a style of clothing imported from overseas, worn by both men and women, and replete with countercultural and sexual implications, jeans exemplified the ‘un-Indian’. In addition, the way they both concealed and revealed the body, the way they were to be worn, was problematic. Unlike skirts that were rejected by many women because they boldly exposed the legs, jeans covered them, following the function, if not always the form, of existing clothing types. *Churidar* (tight-fitting trousers) and *salwar* (loose-fitting trousers) were universally regarded as suitable for women, albeit coded by their specific religious, regional, and age associations. Indeed, an advertisement for a fabric company in a 1969 *Filmfare* shows a very fair-skinned woman wearing the fabric stitched into a *kameez* (tunic-blouse), with jeans as a kind of *churidar* beneath. But wearing a long shirt over jeans, while still very popular in India, does not rule out wearing jeans with a shorter garment on top, allowing the body’s form from the knee up to the waist to be revealed, even shown off (see Sassatelli this volume). Mould-breaking heroines like Parveen Babi and Zeenat Aman pushed the boundaries in their films of the 1970s and early 1980s when they wore jeans with short or tucked-in blouses. These costume choices signalled and substantiated their playing of roles that expanded the boundaries of what defined the archetypal film heroine. To what extent their roles as fashion leaders tended to destabilize the sartorial orders of dress for ordinary men and women, and thus the hierarchies associated with them, is debatable, because very few women could emulate their styles, and for the most

part, even film heroines continued to cleave to Indian clothes (occasionally veering off into respectable professional outfits like police uniforms). In separate research among young males and females, Derné (1999: 559) and Banaji (2006) reported that jeans were counted among the types of provocative clothing that heroines only wore to 'please' the film hero. As recently as 2002, a ban on jeans among young women in Delhi universities exemplified an embattled institutional morality even as cable television was offering more and more models of the new femininity in the form of jeans-wearing by MTV India VJs (Cullity 2002: 421). In addition, until recently the threat of reprisals for female autonomy in occupation, behaviour and dress were rarely far from the surface in Hindi films, and emerged straightforwardly in B.R. Chopra's *Insaaf ke Tarazu* (1980). In this loose remake of the American film *Lipstick*, Zeenat Aman plays a model who must deal with the consequences when her rapist is found innocent of the crime. Casting Aman as a model allowed the film makers to make her non-conformist wardrobe central to her identity and in effect a party to her assault; in the rape scene, her clothes, including a pair of jeans, are metonymically disarrayed and discarded by her attacker.

The sheer increase in jeans-wearing among the middle classes in metropolises in the last five years alone surely contradict any notion that women find jeans on screen to be on the same level as attractive but 'unwearable' costumes like the revealing outfits typically worn in song and dance 'item numbers'. On the contrary, jeans now appear to be colonizing domains previously dominated by the *salwar-kameez* as the habitual dress of the youthful, fashionable, yet still socially respectable 'college girl'. This is made obvious in Madhur Bhandarkur's recent film *Fashion* (2008), about sex, betrayal, and venality in the contemporary Indian high fashion world. Having suffered some accumulated indignities from being a top model, Priyanka Chopra, as the heroine, makes a recovery in her modest home in Chandigarh, where she wears jeans as the outfit of the demure, contrite *beti* (daughter). Thus, contemporary jeans on film actresses are simultaneously body-hugging items that communicate autonomy and desirability, at the same time as they speak of pliant youth and wholesomeness, allowing for a certain multivocality in the depiction of screen heroines.

### **Bollywood Sells: Brands, Desire and Film**

The normativity of jeans on female stars represents a significant adjustment in the status of denim as film costume. However, it is on male stars that the potential of jeans to communicate assertiveness and sexuality is most developed, in arguably proportional terms to the degree that women's jeans have been 'domesticated'. Meticulously choreographed and beautifully mounted film song sequences are prime 'advertising' space for clothing commodities, where the perfected body and costume combine in motion. As the opening song for Sanjay Gadhvi's 2006 film *Dhoom 2* unfolds, the viewer is treated to full-length shots of Hrithik Roshan, a star well

known for his dancing, undulating in a pair of ripped jeans. In an even more striking example, the lengthy sequence 'Dard e Disco' ('Disco Fever'), from Farah Khan's *Om Shanti Om* (2007) features Shah Rukh Khan in no fewer than four changes of jeans (culminating in the curious – but critical from a plot point of view – choice of a refinery worker's carpenter jeans and a hard hat). Earlier in the song, Khan emerges from a pool of water wearing nothing but a pair of D&G jeans (in a scenario not unlike Ursula Andress walking out of the sea in *Dr No*).<sup>4</sup> The intent is for the viewer to admire Khan's toned physique (whose acquisition is tirelessly described in promotional material for the film) in the same way that the female star is made the object of gaze in conventional 'item numbers'.

Such unapologetic display of the body unclothed but for a pair of jeans continues into two current advertising campaigns that employ male film stars. In both cases, it is noteworthy that the copy emphasizes the highly personal nature of denim clothing (see Miller and Woodward this volume) to assure the viewer of the authenticity of their testimonials. Wrangler's recruitment of star John Abraham was part of its 'brand overhaul' to accentuate its appeal to urban youth (Kannan 2007). Abraham models Wrangler jeans in a series of electronic and print advertisements where he essays a languorous sensuality, reclining in an outdoor bathtub, riding a motorbike, stretched out shirtless in his jeans on a beach, or even posing as a pool boy. In a steamier video, he tangles with the less well-known actress Jiah Khan in her own Wrangler denims, ending up in the same bathtub only this time apparently naked (with the jeans discarded on a nearby tree branch).<sup>5</sup>

Akshay Kumar meanwhile was paid around \$1.5 million (£900,000) to take part in an extensive campaign for Levi's jeans (Joshi 2008). Its provocative signal image could be seen in late 2008 over the Levi's store in Bandra (a suburb of Bombay, home to several movie stars as well as a favourite shopping area) wherein Kumar engages the viewer with a knowing smirk while a woman reaches around to unbutton his jeans.

The campaign as a whole relentlessly alludes to Kumar's screen image of assertive sexuality, but the ads nevertheless constitute a fairly complex sexual portrayal wherein Kumar is as important for making himself available for seduction as seducing. His appearance, in other words, is enough to incite women to 'unbutton' him, a sign not just of his own carefree attitude to these sexual overtures but an entirely new message about the acceptable limits of female sexual expression. The campaign included Indian and non-Indian female models, some better known than others, but most partially concealed by the Kumar body displayed primarily for the imagined viewer, starting to attend to the fly buttons that are the distinctive design hallmark of Levi's.

For all the pleasures these song sequences and advertisements presumably provide for female viewers, and the vicarious experience of feeling desirable that they extend to heterosexual males, these are not just occasions for the celebration of straight desires (Kavi 2000: 309). Indeed, Gopinath (2000: 285) argues that song sequences



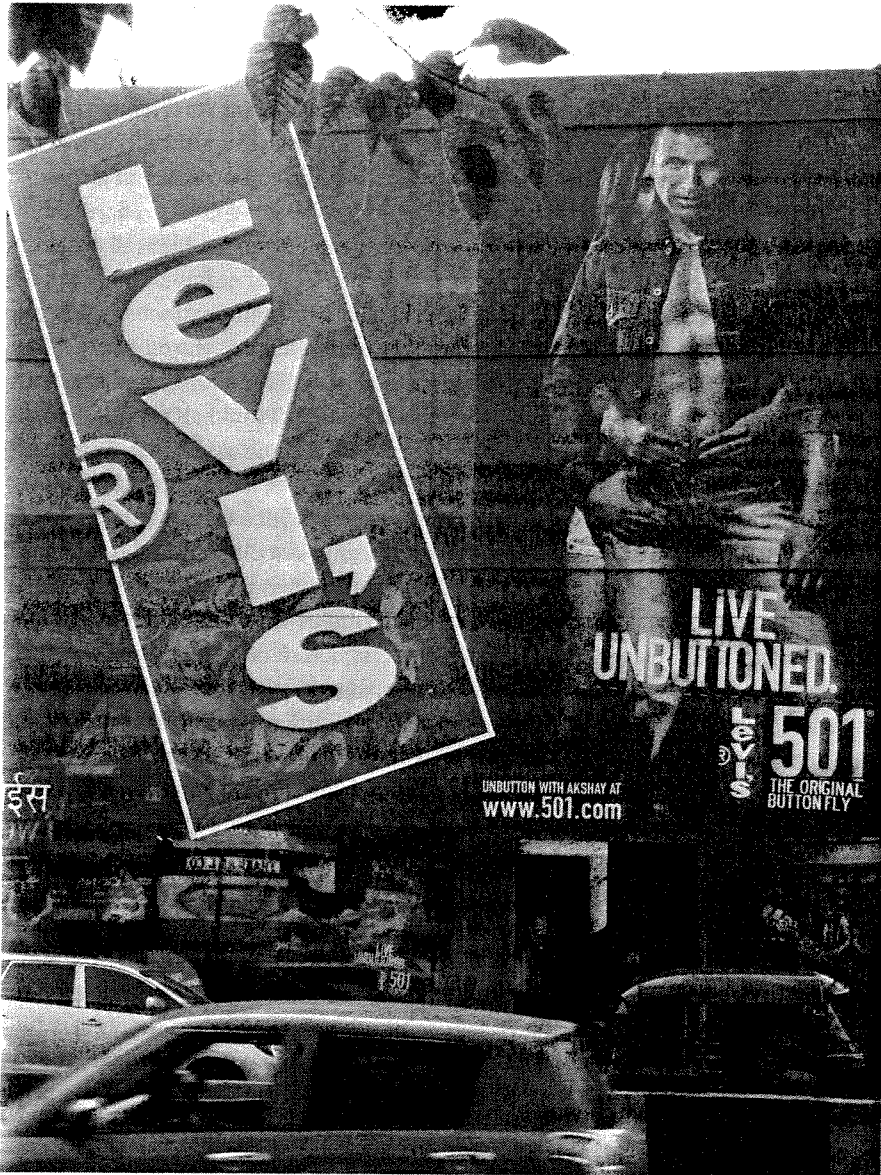


Figure 2.1. Billboard over the Levi's Jeans outlet on Linking Road, showing Akshay Kumar in one of the signature images of his Levi's advertising campaign.

– and the more extended performances that the Wrangler and Levi's campaigns include – are 'place(s) of fantasy that cannot be contained or accounted for in the rest of the narrative' in which 'queer desire emerges' (Gopinath 2000: 285), suggesting that the 'outrageous eroticism' of denim first explored by gay men in the US in the 1970s and 1980s (Rabine and Kaiser 2006: 244) has now travelled without much interference into new cultural contexts. Nevertheless, the subversiveness of new forms of heterosexual desire remain the most likely to provoke 'pushback'. To revert to the example of Akshay Kumar's Levi's campaign, there is a statement attributed to him that explains the appeal of the campaign's signature theme: 'The word unbuttoned appealed to me. Unbuttoning is not an act but an attitude.' He is also said to 'have told the brand manager that not just the physical aspect of unbuttoning but the entire campaign could be woven around the slogan live life unbuttoned or liberate yourself. The concept is about freedom.' Such an unbridled expression of rebellious autonomy went largely without comment in a jaded city like Bombay until the 2009 Lakme Fashion Show, when Kumar invited his own wife, Twinkle Khanna, to do the unbuttoning honours. All at once, one Anil P. Nayar filed suit against Mr Kumar for 'indecent display in public', an ironic accusation in light of the fact that this was the first time he was being openly unbuttoned by a woman with a legitimate claim to do so (BBC 2009). Evidently the emancipatory and erotic associations of the campaign (and by extension of jeans) are at odds with moral stances that, while ridiculed by many in the middle and upper classes, still exert influence over Indian public culture. Given the fairly explicit link between the structure of Levi's jeans and their presumed erotic function that is part of the campaign itself, the lawsuit (unresolved at the time of writing), no matter its implications for Mr Kumar, only strengthens the message about the sexual connotations of jeans, particularly when they enclose (and threaten to expose) the fetishized body of a celebrity.

### **Emulation and Creation: Jeans In and Out of Film**

In her introduction to a seminal volume on the feminist reading of film costume, Jane Gaines (1990: 17) writes that the fashion 'tie-up' in Hollywood costuming (or the translation of film costumes into 'cinema styles' offered for sale in retail establishments) 'prefigures the postmodern symptom of image-reality collusion: the real dress becomes the counterfeit to the movie fictional original.' Gaines is entirely correct to point to the complex relation of the 'real' copy with the 'authentic' image but she omits an earlier sleight of hand by which even yet another original may be co-opted to 'play' a part as a costume during the film's shooting. The pre-shooting life of costume opens up a new critical dimension on the 'ecology' of filmmaking, for ever since ready to wear clothing has been available in either the West or, more recently India, it has replaced at least in part the making of costume from raw materials. The clothing and textile elements that go into the creation of a costume are



factors of production, subject to both aesthetic and practical considerations – whether it is obtainable, whether it fits, whether it furthers the commercial and rhetorical goals of interests besides those of designer and director (for example, the actor, the advertising company, the fashion house, the brand). What one can buy for a film constrains what one can film, just as what one can buy after seeing a film constrains the extension of identity into realms that film defines. In other words, costumes are not simply the tangible outcome of a designer's imagination, but of material practices that implicate a far greater range of social actors.

What the affluent Bombay shopper can buy is the same as what the assistant costume designer or assistant director responsible for costume sees when they go 'shopping' for a film. The difference is that only one is shopping for him or herself; the other is consuming on behalf of actors whose look they must imagine in an entirely different way. From the lean times of the early 1990s, denim is now easy to find in India's metropolises. In Bombay the affluent have the luxury of the greatest choice in department stores like Shopper's Stop, where they can find entire floors filled with denim jeans, shirts and jackets. In the Bandra branch in 2008, jeans were stocked on two floors: 'Fashion wear' and 'Denims wear.' Significantly, men's and women's clothes were displayed together by label, deviating from the usual pattern in Indian wear of segregating apparel by gender. The 'Fashion wear' floor included international labels in men's and women's jeans like Guess, Esprit, Benetton, Calvin Klein and Gas. All the models in the advertisements that ringed the space – both male and female – were white, except for the inevitable Akshay Kumar, whose same Levi's ad as an almost lifesize cut-out graced the top of the staircase. Ambient music included classic rock standbys from Dire Straits and Jefferson Airplane, underscoring the American connotations that still appeared to cling to denim.

The 'Denims wear' floor displayed Indian brands including Provogue, AND (the brand belonging to designer Anita Dongre), Remanika, Vibe, and Kraus. The foreign brands on this floor were stalwarts like Wrangler, Pepe, Levi's and Lee. On the same floor was non-denim sportswear from Puma, Adidas, and Nike. On the walls this time were several more photos of Indian stars like the actress Esha Deol endorsing Provogue, but the models photographed in the foreign brands section were again overwhelmingly white. The taste for non-Indian models is apparent in magazine and newspaper advertising as well, suggesting that the associations of exoticism and superior value continue to be attached to non-Indian bodies, even as a new, young generation of attractive 'Bollywood' stars makes itself available for advertising.

Prices for jeans varied widely and showed the cachet of designer products. Thus Indian jeans in 'denim's wear' began at around Rs 850<sup>6</sup> and climbed to around Rs 1,600, whereas Wranglers, Levi's and Lee began at around Rs 1,800 and went as high as Rs 3,000. At the very top of the order were Calvin Kleins, which began at Rs 3,500 and went upwards from there. Glancing at the labels inside the foreign brand jeans showed they were generally imported from manufacturing centres in south-east Asia.



**Figure 2.2.** A section of the Lokhandwala shopping area where shops selling jeans and other off-the-rack items proliferate.

Boutiques and brand outlets for denim also punctuate the Mumbai landscape. A stretch of the Linking Road in suburban Bandra is a popular shopping district that sprouts shop fronts for Pepe Jeans, Wrangler, and Levi's. In smaller markets like Lokhandwala, another suburb of Mumbai and a favoured shopping area for middle-class consumers and film sourcers, small shops teem with shelves of sharply folded denim jeans, and salesmen pull them out and toss them on the counter one after another after in the familiar way of small retailers.

These jeans all averaged from around Rs 700 to 1,200. In these shops one finds Asian imports, Indian-made jeans and, above all, fakes, like a pair of Diesel jeans that I was told, in straightforward and only mildly apologetic tones, were knock-offs. The jeans were not a particularly good fake, with poor quality stitching and the product labels sewn in at what one can only call a 'jaunty' angle. Their cost was Rs 1,200 – obviously cheaper than real Diesel jeans (which retail for around \$250 on average in the US) although I cannot tell whether this was a good price for a fake. Far cheaper jeans come from street markets where prices drop to around Rs 200.

Despite the remarkable growth of the clothing market in Bombay, it is not regarded by designers and stylists for the biggest Bollywood productions as the place to buy clothes for leading characters and top stars. In this regard, Bombay is very different from Los Angeles, which, although not a fashion 'city' on a par with New York and Paris, is nevertheless its own fashion hub by virtue of the images of style it produces, and as a centre of textile production (Rabine and Kaiser 2006). There are also the carefully cultivated relationships in fashion and textile retail that facilitate the complex reciprocities involved in giving clothes on a 'trial' basis with the option

to return, granting permission to cart away multiple copies of single items, and so on and so forth, without which the business of making costume would grind to a halt. All these chains and connections necessitate vast numbers of cultural 'brokers' in the industry to mediate between production and shop front or fashion house, and between designers, directors, actors and so forth. More recently, Los Angeles has emerged as the key location for 'premium' jeans manufacture, where production sits cheek by jowl with the star bodies on which the apparel appears.

In comparison, Mumbai has several failings. First, there are the limitations of Mumbai as a commodity market. When costumes are bought for major characters, or if the same costume is to be worn several times in the film, with variations in wear or damage, then copies matching these states have to be obtained. In the North American industry, the costume team can either pick up several copies of a garment, or take it to a seamstress for copies to be made. In India, the first option is complicated by the fact that the stock of duplicates within a store is limited.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly a tailor can make duplicates but there may be insufficient fabric, or the actor may insist upon ready-made – not stitched – copies (see Wilkinson-Weber 2010). I have also been told that stitching is becoming a more expensive option and that ready-mades are likely to be cheaper, illustrating the impending crisis for film tailors if the global sweatshop continues to undercut them.

The second problem is that Bombay does not have the full range of designer and high-end label clothing that well-paid Bollywood stars have come to expect. Jeans today are fast becoming the daily clothing of choice among stars, corresponding to heightened awareness of and access to brand label jeans, as well as an upheaval in dress codes that now favour an entirely new aesthetic in how stars present themselves in public (and in private as well). This is most striking in the case of male stars, for whom jeans are now entirely appropriate attire in the most informal as well as formal settings, taking to the extreme the potential of denim to allow the person to both 'dress up' as well as 'dress down' (Woodward this volume).

The attachment of actors to certain kinds of clothing labels is formally incorporated into costuming practice in North America. When an actor signs a contract for a picture, his or her measurements and brand preferences are immediately communicated to the costume designer. If demands are disproportionate to the actor's relative position in the acting ranks, then they are ignored. On the other hand, the star with a sheaf of product endorsements brings not just a list of brand labels, but the physical garments themselves as 'free' costumes. Several times I have heard designers in North America mention jeans by name when they are discussing the actors' label preferences. The powerful can, and do, get almost whatever they want: 'it gets to be \$300 jeans. And all labels.' They may even ask for jeans for their friends who accompany them on set. Sometimes this is because actors blatantly 'want to take home clothes at the end of the movie' for their own personal wear after the film is over, and jeans make for more adaptable, useful articles than excessive or spectacular costumes. As a result, 'the first thing an actor tells us is what type of



jean he wears so he can take it home.' No other item of clothing is mentioned as frequently in this context, showing that jeans are uniquely positioned to span the professional and the personal, the gap between character and actor, in part because of their easy movement on and off set.

In India, stars who have long been accustomed to the personal attention of the designer, or the personal service of tailors, now construct a personal association with particular brand labels. Coming to a production with a list of brands may not yet be common practice, but because stars favour having their own personal designer for their film work, the designer is the one most likely to be entrusted with obtaining their brand preferences. Jeans are mentioned more than any other item when an actor's likes and dislikes are discussed. One actor, I was told, 'wears nothing but Calvin Klein, he wouldn't wear anything else. If I were to take Levi's to him he would throw it in my face, that he won't wear it.' In fact, 'our actors are not used to wearing Indian brands at all, if there is a tie-up with Indian brand, what do you do? You need to use Diesel brands, you never descend that far.' True, denim production goes on in India – indeed, Arvind Mills, based in Ahmedabad in the state of Gujarat was at one time the third largest manufacturer in the world of denim cloth and finished jeans in the world (as well as the 'ready-to-stitch' Ruff-n-Tuff kit for rural dwellers (Baghai et al. 1996: 47)). Many global labels are sold in India as franchised products of Arvind (McCurry 1998). There are and have been several Indian brands of jeans – Flying Machine is among the best known and oldest – and others have sprung up in recent years. All these though are regarded as inferior to non-Indian brands, even though they find endorsements from stars (for example, Provoque has been endorsed for several years by actress Esha Deol).

In fact, so stubborn is the conviction among actors (and some directors and producers) that foreign is better that combing overseas markets for clothes sourcing comes first in any big budget Hindi movie. Diesel, a favourite jean brand that is globally well regarded, cannot currently be bought in India, for example (see Yan 2004): 'For guys, they love Diesel, because it does look and fit very well. We work with Diesel quite a lot', said one designer. The speed of global commodity flows notwithstanding, designers and actors view Bombay fashion as less 'up-to-date' than European or American fashion. Top designers prefer sourcing from London or New York, but if time is scarce, Dubai or Bangkok are the next locations of choice. To quote another assistant designer: 'For women, jeans we get from Bangkok, they are probably copies but fabric is really good, they are stretch jeans, is good for all our actresses. They are well made with a good fit. Bangkok is very nice, very street, very SE Asian. All of the designers are there, DKNY, really cheaper, cheaper than Dubai.'

While the actor-as-star demands costumes that may merely masquerade as the character's clothes, as opposed to constituting them, it is important to note that the character is not played by only one person. For example, there may be a stunt double. It is highly unlikely that stunt doubles will wear costumes made to the same standard, or of the same label as the star. Sometimes different materials have to

be used to suit the rigours of the stunt, but more often it is not worth spending the same amount of money on a stunt man or woman's costume. The need for the stunt double to match the star has been only loosely approximated in Hindi films in the past, in part as a result of the exigencies of filming on tight or uncertain budgets, as well as less stringent commitment to the codes of realism by which the various manifestations of the character body should be seamlessly integrated. But in big budget films that increasingly emphasize a 'professionalized' practice in which costume is more carefully pre-planned, and the codes of realism are adhered to, a more flawless integration of these 'versions' of the character is essential. Where the designer and costumer used to go to the tailor for all duplicates, now they simply buy items like t-shirts and shirts. The same is true of jeans. Designers do not always feel confident that a tailor can perfectly render a product like jeans: 'Sometimes you make things, they don't look good. When I pick up clothes, it does look natural. Like a pair of jeans, if I make it's not going to be as good as picking it up at a store.' In other words, the capacity of a local tailor is downgraded relative to (most likely) a sweatshop worker. The same considerations are unlikely to deter the use of a tailor to make a duplicate for a stunt actor, although I have no data to determine how often this is done (using seamstresses to make duplicates of all kinds of clothing is freely acknowledged by American costume producers). In both settings, it is the star who insists on the label jeans with all of the 'branding' marks that confirm its provenience (labels, motifs, stitch pattern). In an inversion of the usual pattern in which the personalized garment is more highly valued, stars – in their desire for a brand label that differentiates a subset of manufactured jeans into an exclusive (although not singular) category – get a standardized, mass-manufactured product, while the stunt double who has a pair of jeans stitched gets a made-to-measure item.

Stitched duplicates are fakes of a kind, albeit fakes that have been integrated into film costume practice for a very long time. If designers do turn either to fakes or to cheap brands, this is not exclusive to stuntmen or junior artists. With the greater availability of ready-made clothes it is not unheard of for stars to be 'tricked' (not by designers, but by set workers like assistant directors and dressmen) into wearing fakes instead of brand label clothes, and costumers may resort to all kinds of devious practices, even sewing in false labels to convince the actor that the garment is authentic. These measures may be necessitated by either limited time or a limited budget, but the evident glee with which 'faking' stories are told speaks to the antagonism that often exists, even if below the surface, between cast and crew, and pleasure at severing the connection between star and brand that is otherwise axiomatic. In this light, demanding an overseas provenance for their jeans – whether for personal use or for wearing as a costume – may be the stars' counter-strategy to the possibility of accidentally wearing a fake. This kind of trickery depends not upon the craftiness of a local tailor, but instead the simple fact that, as Miller and Woodward point out (2007: 338) 'jeans leap from \$30 to \$230 with little instantly discernable difference in texture and style'.



## Conclusion

From the sporadic appearances of the early 1970s to the flood of images of the present, denim has become a central signifier in popular Hindi film. Disrupting the previous sartorial regimes in which men's and women's costume was sharply differentiated, jeans are worn today by both film heroes and heroines, and conform to a range of expressions and characterizations from the demure to the openly erotic. Jeans of almost all varieties – stone-washed, stretch, distressed – are by now familiar components in the presentation of actor bodies (simultaneously as a character and as a celebrity persona) as modern, desirable, free – 'unbuttoned' in the language of Levi's – and yet unashamedly Indian. In tandem with the broadening uses and meanings of denim in film costume is the sheer availability of jeans in the Indian marketplace, culminating in the past several years with the arrival of Western brand labels in urban retail outlets. At the same time, jeans have become an essential part of the actor's off-screen wardrobe, where they strive for distinction from the mass of their viewing fans by selecting expensive, foreign-bought brand labels. Overlaying for the moment Woodward's (this volume) differentiation of habitual versus non-habitual clothing on to the categories of the actor's personal versus their screen wardrobes, it becomes apparent that denim plays a similar function in both systems. Only jeans span the two categories on a recurring basis, blurring the lines between what is the actor's and what is the character's clothing. And only jeans can extend out of the intimate domain of the actor's own clothing collection to claim a presence on the set. If the actor insists upon brand label jeans, and is threatened by the use of a substitute, it is because – as elsewhere – of the unique familiarity and comfort denim has to offer in comparison to other kinds of clothing.

Film costume is thus poised between the personal and the iconic; between the demands of the label and the demands of the designer or the star (whose singularity is simultaneously supported and subverted by the label); and between the mass-manufactured brand and the devalued duplicate that is made to measure. Jeans on film may dissimulate as well as simulate, since the high-priced brand is as likely to take on the appearance of a common article as the opposite (in fact, it is more likely to do so). On set, brands masquerade as the ordinary and ordinary jeans masquerade as brands. Together they generate apparently stable, compelling images that elicit corresponding consumption acts that themselves draw on a range of material alternatives to recreate the desired 'look'. Through their consumption and acting practice, designers, their assistants, and of course actors (from stars to junior artists) serve as cultural brokers for the consuming audience, anticipating their consumption choices even as they prepare to shape them. Just as their professional equivalents did for the dissemination of the powerful image of denim via Hollywood, so they are doing in a new setting, for a new, transnational audience. Unless, however, the viewer is an affluent globetrotter (and only a very few are) the means to copy the star is removed



by means of the star claiming unattainable forms of sartorial distinction, asserting their position at the top of a starkly differentiated consumption hierarchy (Fernandes 2000).

### Acknowledgements

Research for this chapter was funded by the American Institute of Indian Studies and Washington State University Vancouver. I have benefited from comments on this article by the editors. I am also grateful to friends and colleagues who have taken photographs or otherwise reported back to me on sightings of denim in India. Finally I thank Heather Lehman for her work on preparing the photographs that illustrate this chapter.

### Notes

1. Indirect evidence comes from analysis of the ubiquity of jeans in advertisements and feature photographs in *Filmfare* magazine from 1969 to 1994. This research confirms that depictions of denim dramatically increase from 1988 onwards.
2. For representative films in which these kinds of characters appear see, for example, *Guru*, *Maqbool*, *Lakhsya* and *Ta Ra Rum Pum*.
3. The 'dungarees' defined and described in Hobson-Jobson (Yule 1903: 330–1) do not appear to be related culturally to the appearance of denim since the 1960s in India, whose visual and sartorial influence – if not necessarily manufacture and fabric – come from outside the country.
4. The same allusion is also apparent in Daniel Craig's emergence from the water in *Casino Royale*, demonstrating the evident cross-cultural appeal of transposing eroticized images of women on to male bodies.
5. Pitching for Macroman casual wear (an Indian brand), film star Hrithik Roshan appears in promotional photographs modelling one of their singlets (vest). However, the most striking part of the photograph is the tagline of the manufacturer that appears to issue from the crotch of his distressed jeans. Whether this is intentional or otherwise I am unable to tell since I have not found any more adverts for this brand.
6. The exchange rate at the time was approximately 50 rupees to the dollar, and about 77 rupees to the pound.
7. I have been told by designers in Vancouver, Canada that the US is without peer in the sheer size of the stock one can find in department stores.

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