

IN VOGUE

# Modest fashion hitting the high street

**KASHMIRA GANDER**

**F**lick through the racks in a high street store and you'll notice that wrist-length sleeves and high necks have appeared on dresses, hems are a little longer, and corsets are showcased beneath plain polo necks and crisp, white shirts on manequins.

And it's all thanks to the rise of something called modest-wear. As the name suggests, modest-wear is clothing that conceals rather than accentuates the shape of the body. Recently, mainstream brands have found themselves playing catch-up to appeal to women who dress modestly for religious and cultural reasons, including Muslims, Jews and Christians.

This has collided with the natural fashion cycle which has ushered in long, flowing and loose-fitting clothing as an antithesis to the boundary-pushing, revealing outfits that were in vogue a decade ago. Reina Lewis, professor of cultural studies at the London College of Fashion and author of *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures*, has been studying modest looks since the mid-2000s.

In the past two seasons in particular she has noticed modest fashions. Skinny jeans have been ditched in favour of wide-legged trousers and other androgynous looks that feed off the popularity of brands like *Commes des Garçons*. And as Nigella Lawson showed when she stepped into the sea in a bikini in 2016, sometimes women just don't want to show flesh regardless of their beliefs.

At the same time, Muslim fashion designers and influencers in the UK and Jewish and Christians in the US are filling gaps that they have spotted in the market, using social media to gain influence and set up online stores. Factor in brands attempting to appear more

**The rise of religious style tribes, androgyny and the fashion cycle has made concealing your body cool**

"woke" to appeal to millennial consumers in an uncomfortable political climate — just think of the inclusion of a hijabi photographer in that widely panned Pepsi ad — and it's no wonder that modesty is now mainstream.

"Today, individuality is celebrated and again social media has been a key platform for people to express their individuality," says Altaf Alim, the co-founder commercial director of Aab, a modest fashion brand that launched in 2007. Years ago it was very difficult to find clothing that was both suitably modest but also on trend. Now, Aab is working with the Debenhams — the first major UK department store to sell Muslim clothing. Recently, their swim wear collection sold out within days of going online.

What was available was either frumpy or boring and this is really how the industry came about. It's fair to say it started out as a cottage industry with designers making dresses with a modest silhouette but with personality. Today there is lots of choice from independent designers' right through to the high street. Consumer choice is always a good thing.

But, some will ask, isn't this all a bit oppressive? Neither Lewis nor Alim

agree that that is the case. There are still plenty of revealing clothes in stores, and Alim stresses that Aab isn't trying to replace those outfits. The collision of modest fashion designers attempting to appeal to a wider audience while mainstream brands are trying to appear more inclusive has somewhat put to bed this question, argues Alim.

"Ironically this is no longer an argument any more as all the mainstream designers are championing modest fashion as the 'go to' look. It's all very en vogue at the moment. However in the earlier days you always wanted to be careful when talking about modest fashion so as to be sure that you weren't implying that any other fashion was immodest," said Alim.

Simi Polonsky who founded *The Frock NYC*, an orthodox Jewish fashion brand, with her sister agrees. "I feel that society is slowly taking a turn in that they are focusing less on the nuances of a modest woman's specific dressing guidelines and honing in on the truth behind the modest movement."

Alim says she's had "so many" responses from women who say Aab dresses have

given them a renewed sense of confidence, adding, "we want our brand to be inclusive of everyone be they faith or non-faith."

That's all well and good, but it would of course be naive to ignore the fact that modest clothing is another way to market towards consumers from Muslim-majority countries with young populations and many, many petrol dollars. That might explain why the movement has mothballed so fast.

From a dearth of stylish modest clothing, in the space of a year or so, London hosted its first Modest Fashion Week, Uniqlo teamed up with fashion design Hana Tajima to release a collection of hijabs, DKNY, Oscar de la Renta, Tommy Hilfiger, have all tested the water by releasing one-off collections during Ramadan and Eid.

Lewis also warns that the commercialisations of grassroots trends aren't always entirely positive for the respective groups. She points to the members of the LGBT community who worry that the recognition of the "pink pound" in the past two decades has sanitised the civil rights movement, as major corporations sponsor pride parades and release themed products.

But for women who have felt ignored by the mainstream for decades, modesty as a movement is an exciting new frontier in fashion. "Modesty is about an attitude, it is all-inclusive to any woman from any faith, background or age who chooses to take a stand in how they present themselves," says Polonsky. Seeing that there is a strength and respect in that, is changing the perceptions surrounding modesty, and a modest woman in general.

The Independent



GOURMET CORNER

# Traditional & vibrant

**Chingari restaurant in Park Plaza, New Delhi, serves some of the most authentic North Indian cuisines in a peaceful ambience**

**RAKESH KUMAR**

**W**hen it comes to taste, nothing can beat Indian food. Whether it is Chinese, European cuisine or American delicacies, they are no match when Indian food is served. Therefore, every hotel, from high-end to medium budget ones, has dedicated some space to serve only Indian food. Chingari, a restaurant in Park Plaza, New Delhi, falls in this same league as it offers only Indian delicacies. Therefore, when got a review request, we didn't take long to say yes. Located in Shahadra, Chingari has mastered some of the best Indian cuisines. Our visit was fixed for early dinner but thanks to the Delhi traffic, by the time we reached the restaurant, it was about to close. VIP movement and a festival the next day really added to our woes. What compensated for our long haul in the city traffic was the smiling face of chef and his team, who waited for us beyond their duty hours and served us an exquisitely-crafted meal.

As the name, Chingari, suggests, the ambience of the restaurant is completely traditional and vibrant, unlike many, which are quirky and chaotic. The seating arrangement is quite cozy and comfortable. One corner of the restau-

rant is dedicated to live music, where two performers could be seen singing and playing instruments. They played light music, mainly in Hindi.

Coming to dining, executive chef Devinder Kumar informed that Chingari focuses on North Indian preparations, cooked exceptionally. Every day the restaurant prepares different dishes in both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Once we had settled down, the first thing we were served was a welcome drink — Pineapple Panna. It was refreshing and gave that much needed respite after navigating bad traffic. Along with the drink they also served *Khasta rotis* with three different chutneys.

Soon the starters made their appearance, in the form of a platter. In vegetarian they served *Atishi Paneer Tikka*, *Soya Malai Tikka* and *Makai Pyaz ki Seekh* and in non-vegetarian platter it was *Fish Tikka*, *Jalandhari Seekh* and *Murgh Malai Tikka*. Along with the snacks one could try their famous fruit punch. In the vegetarian segment, *Makai Pyaz ki Sheekh* was the clear winner, while *Soya Malai Tikka* also tasted well but one could avoid *Atishi Paneer Tikka* as it is a little heavy. In the non-vegetarian platter, *Murgh Malai Tikka* really tasted well, followed by *Fish Tikka* and *Jalandhari Seekh*. Personally, I would rec-



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Cost: Rs 2,200 for two people (approx.)

ommend the non-vegetarian platter along with the fruit punch.

After the satiating experience, it was time to try the main course. When it comes to those, the restaurant is the best both in terms of taste and presentation. They take time not only in preparing the dishes but also crafting them. Since we were among the last diners they didn't take much time to serve — it seems they had already prepared the best for us.

We were served *Murgh Makhaniwala*, *Nihari Gosht* and *Biryani* along with assorted breads in the non-vegetarian segment while in the vegetarian it was *Paneer Khurchan*, *Dal Makhani* and *Khumb ke Pyaz*. The presentation of *Nihari Ghost* was quite impressive and compelled us to take out our mobile phones to capture it. Both the *Nihari Ghost* and *Biryani* were out of the world. When asked about the secret behind the taste of the delicious *Biryani* and *Nihari Ghost*, the chef informed that they had hired some cooks from Lucknow, who are ancestrally linked to the Nawabs and Mughals.

In the vegetarian portion, *Dal Makhani* and *Khumb ke Pyaz* are must-have dishes. By the time we finished with the main course, the chef served the dessert. But we were in no mood to change the taste, after such a hearty main course. But the chef insisted and assured us that their desserts were equally good. We were served *Mawe ka Samosa*, *Badam ka Halwa* and home-made *Kulfi* -- not even a small bite was left on the plate. At the end, it was a lovely dining experience, highly recommended for those who want to try traditional flavours of Indian cuisine.



Vegetable Kebab Platter



Chocolate Milk Shake



Murg Makhani



Tawa Paneer

