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## *Fashion Postmodern Culture and Identity*

Fashion is among the most creative and important industry in the world. Fashion is a subject that periodically rediscovers it and it is fascinating in its dynamics of humanities and social sciences. Social thinkers over time have treated the fashion industry as a window for social change and social class. Fashion has been viewed to embody characteristics representing modernity and culture. Fashion is a fascinating study for anyone interested in culture. For centuries individuals or societies have used clothes and other body adornment as a form of nonverbal communication to indicate occupation, rank, gender, sexual availability, locality, class, wealth. What you wear, how you wear it, and why you wear it, depends on time and place.

Some sociologists argue that it is hard to fathom a social life be it in arts, sciences, politics, entertainment, academia, business, law or morality without exhibiting elements of fashion in one way or another. Society tend to flock to styles, ideas, methods and practices that appear new and exciting to them, and after a period of time, the intensity of the fascination diminishes when newer ones emerge. The need and desire to be in fashion is manifested mostly in dressing. Fashion in its literal sense is a term coined for a generally adopted style or design in shoes, accessories, clothing etc. (Christopher Breward, 2003). This is characterized by a pull of the society's or individual's continuity and the also the push to adopt new innovations.

When speaking of fashion, people usually tend to generalize the term to merely clothing but in fact, fashion goes far beyond that. According to Kratz et al (1998), fashion can be defined as a cultural phenomenon as it is concerned with meanings and symbols, thus is an instantaneous mode of direct, visual communication. Fashion enables us to make statements about ourselves and

our identities, with the use of clothes, accessories and/or other physical items, enabling us to visually communicate who we are, who we'd like to be, what kind of social group we belong to and who we are most likely not to be associated with. "Fashion also has to do with hair styles, make up, accessories... and can include items that have nothing at all to do with clothes" (Kratz et al, 1998: 195). Similarly, clothing has to do with other things apart from fashion like functionality, practicality and protection. Thus, sex, gender and sexual orientation are probably the first three judgments one can form about another individual. The wearer visually communicates this information, by either confirming or subverting the conventional norms of fashion and dress that are culturally constructed by society.

However, today it has a much deeper, intrinsic meaning as the famous French designer, Coco Chanel (1883-1971) puts it, "Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street; fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening." It has, since time immemorial, been the foremost form of self-expression, self-definition and a reflection of one's personality. It is a product of social, cultural and climatic forces that inhibit societies. Before the 19th century clothing was tailor made to suit the needs of each individual (Roland Barthes, 1990). However, at the advent of the 20th century, the idea of standardized clothing became more popular as sewing and stitching technologies became widespread and the world moved into the era of industrialization (Roland Barthes, 1990). It was then precisely that the fashion industry was born; henceforth the concept of fashion came into existence. A typical fashion cycle looks like the following: The introduction marks the beginning of a new style, trend whereas the rise marks a gain in popularity and familiarity. Culmination is the highest point or peak of the trend and decline marks the end of a style or trend. The graph shows that the peak of elitist fashion was reached in 1980's marked by the influx of synthetic fibers such as Lycra, Spandex, and viscose. It was this year that fashion became highly correlated with performance and was used as a status symbol as well as a symbol of art and professionalism.



Fashion is the style and custom prevalent at a given time. To some it's an art form, to others it's like a part of their culture and religion but to most it is a method of utilizing cloth to show or hide something about themselves. Fashion can be used to serve as an extension of one's own personality or to disguise one's own true self. One of the major points here is, how does art, culture and industry, the three aspects of life, relate to fashion? The English dictionary states that, art is a human skill opposed to nature or the use of the imagination to express ideas or feelings. There are various for and against argument on whether fashion is an art form. One view that favors the argument is, art is a visual medium whose creators respond to the same stimuli as painters and sculptors and like art, it involves immense creativity as well as mastery of technique and materials. The view against it is, artists supposedly are not concerned with selling, and they are consumed with creating works of art, not producing a collection for regularly scheduled showings (Rhodes, 2003). Culture on the other hand is basically an 'intellectual development' at a certain time and a certain place and refers to certain human behavior and activities that conclude to significance and importance whereas; industry is a segment of economy, concerned with the production of goods and service. It is an essential component of most societies and fashion is a huge contributor to it. The major fashion cities have continuous competition between each other and due to their different strategies become known as the 'cultural industries'. The history of costume, Barthes (1983) says, has a general epistemological value. By 'history of costume', he means a socio-semiotic reading of the phenomenon of clothing as an articulate language through which it is possible to analyze a culture, as system and process, institution and individual act, expressive reserve and significant order. The nature of fashion, however, constantly changes and focuses on newness, or the illusion of something new which means that signs and symbols are transient. According to Woodruffe-Burton "fashion is a visual commentary on the excess of a postmodern culture, the perfect foil for a world of fragmented and commensurate identities and personage, offering a dynamic procession of free floating signs and symbolic exchanges.

There are several reasons for one to feel the need to express their identity and these mainly revolve around issues of social status, economic class, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity, religious condition, recreation and individualism. With the creative use of fashion, individuals are able to either confirm or subvert several of these facts about their identities, consequently transmitting culturally coded, visual messages about themselves. In simpler words and according to Bennett (2005), the fashioned body is a lateralization of the wearer's character, taste, sexual preference, economic status, educational achievement and so on. George Simmel and Thorstein Veblen are two important 19th century sociologists when looking at fashion as an expression of

social status and economic class. Simmel's work suggests that fashion has to do with wider issues of power and status, and is a visual statement of wealth. With the use of fashionable items, "individuals demonstrated their membership to a particular social group, and their distance from groups who held a lower social position" (Bennett, 2005: 100). Similarly, Veblen explains through his theory of conspicuous consumption that by consuming fashionable goods, individuals not only showed awareness about social trends but also collectively expressed wealth and good taste, thus forming an internal bond with individuals in the same social strata and distancing themselves from others who could not afford the same – mainly, the working class. The people in other classes who consciously follow the fashion do so because it is the fashion and not because of the separate prestige of the elite group. The fashion dies not because it has been discarded by the elite group but because it gives way to a new model more consonant with developing taste. The fashion mechanism appears not in response to a need of class differentiation and class emulation but in response to a wish to be in fashion, to be abreast of what has good standing, to express...]

A cultural analysis of fashion is essential in understanding the dynamic shift in trends over time. Unlike the trickle-down theory by Georg Simmel in 1904 which did not observe fashion first-hand, the Blumer's collective selection theory gives attention to the whole process of meaning to society with focus on practices that are contemporary. An observation is made from the above two theories that fashion setters are the ones who mainly benefit from the intertwined relationship whereas followers benefit a little bit. Blumer asks fellow sociologists to take seriously the topic of fashion. He argues that this is so because fashion is more than clothing. Fashion is natural as it did not appear to society that in history as fashion but achievements that were up-to-date. He further states that fashion is important socially because where it operates be it in philosophy, business or science, it assumes a central position. Blumer asserts that fashion is a behavior that is rational. Fashion has its respectability because people respond to its character that is of distinction and propriety.

The twentieth century, which is characterized by industrialization and urbanization, brought the rise of the women's movements for rights, winning the vote, taking the higher positions in society by women, and the transformation in the daily life of females, in general. In fact, the last century world events, such as growing of civilization, world wars, the rapidly rise of feminine equal rights caused the image of women to change profoundly. Globalization has a wide role to play worldwide. It has left back its footprints at every sphere of life. Not only in India, but the interchange of world views and ideas has resulted in a major transformation of the lifestyle and living standard of people globally. Globalization encompasses a range of social, political, and economic changes worldwide. Over



the centuries global integration has seen a dramatic increase, world has become more interdependent as lots of unprecedented changes like in art, culture, fashion, communication, transportations and computer technology has given rise to a new form of living and ethnic, cultural rights, traditions and languages are no longer deterring factors to enter in a far away nation and rising chance to integrate with different ethnic groups. In brief, Globalization is the increase in the interdependence, connectivity and integration on a global level linking with the social, cultural, political, technological, economic and ecological levels.

Globalization not only strengthened the nexus by demolishing walls that has separated us long time back and has controlled our natural identity of being fellow human beings with a better knowledge of each other's need. Globalization works as a force of nature, a phenomenon without bounds or alternatives. Citizens' both ordinary and elite people from global can work together to shape best alternate futures and a new can be build with cooperation, solidarity and respect for our common planetary environment

The western culture is cultivating a grand love affair with the distinctive fashion style in India. Along with Indian music and spirituality, Indian clothing is seeing a huge impact on main stream identities of western style and culture. Due to this, changes occurred in the dressing style of Indians, which even led to the fusion of Indian and western dresses. Wearing kurtis on jeans, spaghetti with saris are the examples showing the effect of western culture on Indian. This emerging trend relates to the changing face of Indian fashion Industry is growing at a rapid pace with international developments, such as the India Fashion Week gaining popularity and annual shows by fashion designers held in major cities of India. There are victories of a number of Indian beauty queens in International events such as Miss World and Miss Universe contests which have made Indian models recognized worldwide. Fashion designers such as Ritu Kumar, Ritu Beri, Sabyasachi, Rina Dhaka, Rohit Bal, Muzaffar Ali, Satya Paul, Abraham and Thakore, Tarun Tahiliani, JJ Valaya and Manish Malhotra are some of the well known fashion designers in India. The work of Indian designers is highly appreciated all over the world. It gives me immense joy to see how the world is embracing Indian fashion and craftsmanship. At Anthropology, a popular US retail store and e-commerce platform, you will regularly find clothes by Indian designers who are creating contemporary fashion for a non-Indian audience. Here you will find designs by Ranna Gill, Rohit Gandhi and Rahul Khanna applying Indian craftsmanship to non-Indian silhouettes. Western brands are also coming to participate in Indian fashion weeks, as they see a lot of potential in our market. In Indian culture, the body is invested with various meanings and reflected in its rich sculptural tradition decorating the body is yet another way of conveying

meaning and personality. Fashion is forever changing, but as for Indian fashion, it appears to have vastly changed over the last decade or so. Designers are bolder, creating interesting pieces. People generally love the delicate embroidery alongside the bold prints. This board will contain outfits; I feel are mixing the East with the West.

I think every person's dressing style and view in taste is unique, like a fingerprint and a personality. They don't necessarily have to relate but can also be closely related. It is a universal phenomenon that dressing/clothing has an effect on the personality of an individual. One's attire/dressing is said to be an important part of the personality representation as it gives the first impression on the others. It has been evident through the studies that the mood has an inborn reflex with respect to the dressing preferences and fashion. Other factors related to the clothing for e.g. emotions, situations, education of a person, design, print, quality of fabric, color can influence mood.

On top of all this the power of the media to represent and construct the world rests in the hands of a few western corporate interests. All these social and cultural forces of the media have the ability to change cultural and political values in a totalitarian fashion. Of course, the season's fashions are directed by top designers in Paris, Milan, London and New York but with the changing face of post modernity, people are now more aware of alternative fashions available to best communicate themselves. Due to this, the consumption of fashion can be seen as an act of cultural production as people ascribe fashion goods with meanings and symbols, thus leading to the constant construction and reproduction of the male and female image and other identities that exist, thereby communicating this information in individual ways. The new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion.

Dress is, in part, frequently in large part, about cultural capital; it often serves political designs; it consorts with hegemonic norms and domination; its regulating force incites mainly conformity but sometimes resistance. To adopt a style (or uniform) is to choose a socioeconomic milieu and a future. Furthermore, the manufacture and maintenance of clothing involve domestic economies and various trades and guilds. Of all the major industries thriving during (post) modernity, fashion is most readily associated with the distinctive dynamics of (late) capitalist political economy, namely commodity fetishism; conspicuous consumption; planned obsolescence; class



envy; standardization and specialty markets; sweatshops, unionization, and professionalization; possessive individualism; commercialization of art and culture; globalization of production; broad ecological destruction (via dyestuffs); advertising, mass media, and spectacle; black market and gray market distribution; caption, exploitation, excessive profits; and critical vanguards as well as a range of other contradictory tendencies of (post)modern culture.

Aesthetic criteria play an essential part in clothing design and evaluation. However much they shift, there are finely calibrated touchstones, standards, and ideals for beauty. Whether at court or on the street, in the marketplace or at the mall, in the past or the present, dress exhibits both theatrical and performative dimensions. Fashion is typically staged in motion. Moreover, fashion's substances, particularly fabric, texture, design, color, and drape, highlight its materiality, which, significantly, opens onto long, intertwined histories of costuming and textile crafting. Every item of dress, no matter how humble, dignified, frivolous, or vanguard, occupies space in fashion archives and the history of aesthetics.

Self-decoration is part of self-constitution, body image, and identity formation. To look in the mirror is to glimpse the embodied self, but through normative grids related to nakedness and dress. We may be too thin, too fat, too short, and too tall; out of proportion here or there; in need of this or that enhancement (amplification, reduction, alteration). To stare at the body is to envisage the self through the internalized gaze of others inhabiting subjectivity. Fashion mixes socially conditioned fantasy with self-fashioning.

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