

Title: Fashion and Everyday Life: Popular Culture and Identity amongst the Urban Middle Class

Key Words: fashion production, fashion consumption, fashion reproduction, popular culture, identity, urban middle class

ABSTRACT

In the neo-liberal world, fashion has become a significant medium in reshaping urban India's consumption experiences. Classical and contemporary scholars have used interdisciplinary lenses to conceptualize the fashion phenomenon. Classical sociologists have associated fashion with class leadership and conspicuous consumption respectively sometimes also relating it to urban life. At the same time fashion has been viewed as collective behaviour or as a mode of signification. It has also been associated with imitation, with social identities and as popular culture through everyday practices. Contemporary scholars are studying fashion as an embodied experience of the individuals. All these studies are concentrated in the mature markets while study of fashion in the Indian context has been limited to textiles and apparel oriented to clothing consumption, trends and markets. The study of fashion practices, as embodied experiences of consumers is a relatively recent development with limited body of work on urban India.

This study attempts to capture the ways in which fashion is used in everyday life through its production, consumption and reproduction even as it addresses these gaps in the literature on fashion in urban India. It aims to conceptualise fashion as a form of cultural production as well as an embodied experience. As an exploratory research, this work investigates the fashion practices of the urban Indian middle class. It posits fashion as a set of concepts with varied meanings, interconnected and identified as a product of the social and cultural worlds. Using the concept of the *cultural object*, clothing has been identified as the fashion object for the purpose of this study because it is most commonly associated with fashion by consumers.

Traditionally seen as female oriented, the fashion phenomenon in urban India is now attracting a larger number of male consumers and this is reflected in the study as well. To be seen as well dressed has become a social indicator for both men and women in urban India. In conclusion, the present study shows that the way the fashion industry produces, markets and distributes the fashion objects, is only one part of a big picture. These fashion objects are also a part of the embodied act of *dressing*. Fashion happens when the consumers choose fashion and the fashion object and use it in individual ways to present and represent themselves through its reproduction thus producing heterogeneous identities and a consequent popular culture. Fashion, thus provides a significant sociological vantage point to understand popular culture in the daily lives of the urban Indian middle class and its role in identity construction.

The present work uses mixed methodology due to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject of fashion. It revisits the traditional research approaches integrating theory with the field of practice in an inclusive manner. The objectives of the research have led to the methods used to collect and analyse the data. The approach in the study is constructivist in that it views fashion as cultural production and emphasises primarily on the cultural, social and institutional processes within the fashion system.