

## **The Latest Fashion: From War to Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

The interplay between sartorial expression and aesthetic taste is not new. A substantial investigation into fashion must go beyond the social and psychological notion of the dress. How about talking of clothing at an intellectual level? Why someone would have chosen a certain style or shape? In the early nineteenth century, fashion saw itself as a paradigm of modernity. As the revolutions passed, there was a leap in fashion too. With the French revolution, fashion broke the historical continuum and became trans-historical to stand as a social force. The paper focuses on how fashion as a force walked with activism, strength, and service at the Warfield. It investigates the idea of 'Utility Apparel' during a time of crisis. The paper further takes an imaginary conversation 'when the 1940s spoke to 2020s' to cast light on the possibilities of sustainable and minimalist fashion through zero waste strategies. The paper tries to investigate the background of World War II and tries to draw the gumption and resourcefulness from the frontline experiences of people to suggest a parallel in the current scenario of crisis. In the 2020s, the idea of looking fashionable might lose its momentum to an idea of fashion that survives the hardship. To buy less could be masked with to buy better. The investigation concludes itself on the note, how the idea of 'make and mend' can be a new revolution to the fashion in crisis and the semiotics of cultural diversity.

*Keywords: Independence, Culture, Society, Existence, Reality*

### **Introduction**

We hardly acknowledge the relationship between society, fashion, and colonialism. Fashion and war have a very close link concerning history and culture. There has been a diverse set of ways in which, culture, occupation, and dress are affected by the conduct of fashion, to say how we dress our bodies doesn't come independent of how it influences our existence. The radical changes and play of power can be often seen within the pursuit of fashion. The cultural histories have often kept aside the idea of the dress and written fashion as ever-

changing and ephemeral, not according to the pace and velocity that marks the change in social being.

However, the reality is, fashion is the best indicator of modernity and the most visible signifier of the twists and turns that society takes. The way, it becomes impossible to know fashion independent of its context and how it appears, it is impossible to understand the process of change within society and culture-independent of growth of fashion as a phenomenon.

Unarguably, Fashion matters more to the understanding of fashion than how history matters in the understanding of fashion. Fashion is the heart of a large Social body that locates itself in the spatial and temporal frame. To appreciate, how fashion symbolizes the social paradigms it is necessary to look into how has fashion influenced the interplay between social, political, and cultural realities because the meaning of dressed body varies ambiguously concerning the cultures.

We never had a notion of ' national dress ' as such. The colonial encounters have helped people feel and take an aesthetic pride in their dressed forms and media and to express and recognize them with what's new. For a pre literary society, we can't map and mark their socio-aesthetic codes and rules. Here fashion provides us with an accessible way of recording and transmitting the cultural legacies, though the fashion-culture intersection is just a manifestation of an awaited social process that continues its momentum.

### **Fashion and Activism**

Popular culture that occurs on global marks draws their motivation locally. Fashion borrows its speed from different cultures, identities, futures, and pasts. To say, whatever is fashioned is always in a perpetual state of flux. Fashion is always active, culturally, socially, politically, and personally. We say personal is political. What shapes our identity, socializes it too? It would be wrong to put it this way, 'western ways and consumerism has been trending from north to south. It has rather be put as, whatever and however it occurs in the West is often, reintroduced, refashioned, and reinterpreted in the local culture. What looks like an imitation is a more complex system. What looks like a reinterpretation might be a signal to the spread of cultural diversification.

The implied conclusion can be, though the adoption and interpretation of Western styles is selective and gradual, they can only be predicted at a local level. Understanding fashion as a process and how the complex forces have shaped and influenced fashion in its being should be investigated in a more sophisticated way and in association with some

serious political debates that throw light on the consequences of mass consumerism. War may appear as the most significant witness of globalization when occurs in the hybridity of culture and interdependence. until fashion is taken as a cultural signifier and an institution, the relation between fashion and war remains hidden.

### **Contextualizing War and Fashion**

There has always been a connectedness between the clothes and their wearers. Fashion trends when wearing Social relations create multiple hierarchical orders of symbolism and meaning. Until we take fashion as a mark of culture, the centrality of clothing as an identity and of making a statement will remain underrated. The changes that have occurred in heart of political and social scenarios have always affected costumes and the way they were fashioned. Sometimes the switch in fashion might have been accidental or a mere coincidence, but they have often grown out of suppression and sometimes as a disagreement with a tradition to agree with the other.

Be it, religious intervention, restrictions, intrinsic conflicts, changes in the social, political, and economic landscape, leaves an influence on clothing in multiple ways. Such tales can be passed into mythologies and folklores but fashion remains an expressive indicator of both culture and society locally and globally. A fashion is always shaped and grown in the back of a culture or the way that culture grows. What is fashioned has to be cultured in some way. The infringes of a fashioned culture have always been an indicative measure of social change.

### **Colonial Influence and Fashioned Culture**

Let us talk about the women of World War II comic strips in Australia and the United Kingdom. One can see several differences in how the heroines have responded to the events of the war. Both the characters portray the same set of values, but in a different way. Both the characters accept that fashion provides pinned values with the culture which have been exaggerated for dramatic effects. At the same time, they reflect upon how women respond during wartime, the way, responsibilities for women increased both as households and at the Warfield. The way, branding of soldiers was a visible scene at the fields, it was reflected through the comic strips which talk of the different point of views to the field. 'Wanda the war girl' is one such comic that highlights the female point of view. Wanda a female was one of the freshest representations to both field and mind. Fashion during the war was not just aesthetically provocative but emerged as a social binding too. The coming of the military uniforms is a manifestation of one such process while creating a picture of discipline, civility, and heroic valour.

The powerful uniforms appeared as the sportswear of the 19th century. The powerful signs and symbols grew readily in the background of fashion. The histories of cultural and colonial conquest argue that fashion contributes the most to the understanding of the body and its politics. It works as a communicative device that not only observes but demands a response too.

When the Indians witnessed the European warship, the sailors noticed the bodies of soldiers covered in white motifs. Be it a coincidence or imitation, the way uniforms were recognized, a feeling of identity and status was communicated and signified through body decorations. The way we dress marks both our inner and outer selves. When we dress, we convey different meanings which can be further interpreted by different people in different ways. To say, Fashion is always open to both interpretations and appreciations.

### **Fashion Fascism: A Climatic Perspective**

Fashion has always played a visual instrument in providing iconic symbolism. It has captured the imagination of time by inspiring and amusing the population worldwide. In creating a paradigm it bridges the gap between potential and actual by delivering the flexibility of artistic potential. Fashion represents a form of liberation and the values at a turning point in history in a way that it is both a contribution towards society and a mark of a fundamental change. It addresses both patriotism and identity at the same time. A growing body of literature that exists in fashion outlines fashion as a catastrophe that affirms the acceptance of aesthetic culture. At times aesthetic beauty can seductively prompt us to speak and at the same time can produce a disguising vision of the world. The idea of uniforms can be seen as both a signifying subversion and a mark of indicative progress.

The way fashion differentiates itself from the other paradigms of the time stimulates a sense of fascination and creates a room for experiments, say experimental fashion. A stylized aesthetic dress code can command both a sense of obedience and beauty. Fashion is not just about how different colours combine to represent an edgy style, it is also about sexual fetish, social and cultural landscape, and the most evident how a change is being marked. When a change takes place, It is not a sudden outbreak, there is always a process running in the background which draws influence from films, interior conflicts, politics, cultural landscape, and many more.

It is not surprising that fashion and fascism have influenced each other since the time of technological advancement. If we look at the uniformity of a Warfield, the role of rationality, technology, and fashion comes interconnected. As a consideration, the Nazi

uniform is said to signify domination, bondage, and submission. It is not entirely evident that Fashion can be seen growing on the shoulders of a culture but the way a culture embraces order and represents itself can't be seen independent of how it is fashioned. That is how we see looks inspired by popular fashion as gothic, military couture, corporate fashion, industrial fashion, etc. The war romance has often portrayed the soldiers in stylized costumes indicative of their valour, courage, and glamour. In a narrative between a love-torn society and the change that is to be born, fashion socializes itself as a catalyst. Regardless of the inner conflicts between aesthetic and social landscape fashion remains irremediable and irreplaceable.

### **The 1940s in conversation with 2020s: situating fashion in the context of the pandemic**

Whenever there is a shift in the social and political landscape, there is also a shift in what is projected and how it is being projected. Dawn Karen, a fashion psychologist, and a branding consultant say, the more we see ourselves in this situation of the pandemic, the more we become prone to evolution. What people are willing to buy can't be seen independent of what influences them to buy it. Fashion always scrambles to take a hold of 'what is new' and the new that comes from the synthesis of old that is always in a strive of becoming new.

To situate fashion in the current scenario of the pandemic we can think of a comparative analysis of the role that fashion played in the Warfield and how it upends itself in our daily life at the time of crisis.

Let us think of our smiling eyes and emphasized a smile when we mask ourselves with protective masks while stepping out of our houses. Nobody would want smudged lipstick under their face masks, a shift in beauty and upper skin decorative to the inner skin is an obvious come out. When the whole country was on lockdown, a major shift can be seen from meeting external needs to the basic requirements. The way pandemic has turbocharged the demise of high-end fashion can be seen parallel to the capacity that fashion held in the backdrop of world war II.

People who think that the fashion at the time of war has to be essentially drab must draw onto the accounts highlighting, how people bought the military surplus available after the war. The long trench coats, chino pants, pea coats, and aviator glasses, all have their roots at the Warfield.

The shift from sweeping skirts to chino trousers and presentable makeup to protective masks marks another shift in fashion called 'utility fashion'. The development of utility fashion came as required both at the Warfield and in the current context. When men went out

to fight the battles and women took the charge in factories and industries, the wide pants tied on the waist had to be replaced with comfortable buckled trousers. Here fashion did not stereotype the gender roles but a new image of liberty and freedom. The clothes made from the field waste came with an inherent spirit of liberty and rights. When women drove cars and demanded their rights, they had to demand the right comfort too. By 1947 a comfortable fashion got widespread acceptance and emerged as a necessity, the similar can be drawn in the current scenario of crisis, PPE and face masks came out of the luxury to essentials and created a fair amount of real rather than presenting themselves as a mere fashion accessory.

The future of fashion seems to be more durable and natural. What fashion would look like after the pandemic can be drawn from history, i.e.- how fashion changed and evolved in itself after the world wars. From hard pants to consumptive chic and from luxury face shields to essential face masks fashion has always transformed itself within the frame of utility.

### **Conclusion**

Fashion is less a phenomenon and more an existential condition that afflicts the entire socio-cultural landscape. To what extent our existential conditions are coloured in fashion, the portrayal of how we pattern ourselves still remains a question.

Be it a perfect romantic date, a relaxing walk, or the identifying uniform, whatever that occurs in a pattern fashions our existential condition. The more fashion seems to be embedded in consumer capitalism, the more it ties itself with individuation. From 1990s advertisement have tied the purchase of fashion with purchase of identity, that happens to be both personal and political. From an intimate dinner date to a dozen Red roses, everything can be constructed by the advertising images pushing the consumption ethos. The argument is, the transformation in the social, political, and individual system is shaped by a fundamental patterned reality, say fashion. Fashion does to the existence, what Marx did to commodities. It shows that it is shaped by social relations and institutions, which circulates it as the essence of all.

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